Sustainable Successful Teacher Induction: From Praxis to Practice

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This research was partially funded through a grant from the McDowell Foundation. However, the points of view and opinions expressed in project documents are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

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Abstract

Although there are a variety of teacher induction programs throughout schools in Saskatchewan, there continue to be issues regarding consistency, motivation and delivery among the programs. Recent reform in schools of education have revealed a need to develop more coherent teacher education programs and ones that are more closely linked to schools. Induction must be considered a collaborative process; therefore, schools of education and school divisions must work together to develop collaborative and sustainable teacher induction models that enhance, rather than add to, the work already being done in schools.

The purpose of this study was to advance the findings from a previous study conducted in 2008-09 that determined the professional learning community (PLC) model is, along with possessing other attributes, an effective model for teacher induction (Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota, & Pesenti, 2009). Specifically, the purpose of this second study was to apply the findings from the previous study to explore the sustainability of teacher induction for any school, considering the variances in school leadership and culture. The action research methodology included organizing pre-service, interning, beginning, and experienced teachers in learning communities, and to expand the model to two school sites. The three major themes found were that the PLC provided a sustained opportunity for learning at various stages of teacher development; the structure and goals of the PLC affected participants’ motivation and ability to learn and to mentor; and the model’s potential and sustainability are directly and integrally related to leadership, both at the school and at the university levels.

Beginning teachers have a substantial task ahead of them. Not only must they adjust to the demands of the profession, but they must also learn the culture and expectations in their schools, adapt their teaching to suit individual student needs and school goals, and become contributing members of the larger system and community. Many beginning teachers report an inability to cope and describe feeling isolated and overwhelmed by the demands of the profession (O’Neill, 2004; Rogers & Babinski, 2002). Many beginning teachers often feel isolated due to a sense of lack of support or from the apparent lack of resources (Ramsey, 2000). These feelings and attitudes are critical because the early experiences of beginning teachers set the norms and standards that guide them for the rest of their careers (McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Moir & Gless, 2001).

The process of teacher induction describes how a teaching culture educates or acculturates its new members to the profession (Wong, 2002). We know that effective teacher induction will “bridge the gap that occurs when interns leave their teacher preparation programs and move into classroom responsibility, providing . . . access to best practices and resources beyond the classroom” (Carroll, 2005, p. 204). Teacher induction, however, is often considered synonymous with mentorship. Even though Wong (2003) emphasized that mentorship is not the same as induction, many induction programs still draw on mentorship activities, such as the apprenticeship model (Hargreaves, 1998), where an expert teacher passes on knowledge and skills to a protégé. The apprenticeship model is, however, largely insufficient as it does not recognize the existing skills and knowledge of the new teacher, and it prevents the influx
of new strategies and approaches to teaching and learning (Rippon & Martin, 2006). Along with this, apprenticeship models continue to be criticized for their tendency to reinforce the status quo rather than promote collaborative inquiry to improve teaching and learning (Cho, Barrett, Solomon, Portelli, & Mujawamariya, 2009). As Howe (2008) stated, it is often the experienced teachers who can potentially learn so much from student or novice teachers.

Although not present in every school division, beginning teacher induction programs in Saskatchewan are largely based on formal mentorship programs where beginning teachers are assigned a mentor (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009). In those school divisions where no formal mentorship programs exist, beginning teachers are left to find their own mentors, or to navigate the early years without.

Over the past few years, new mentorship models have been developed, such as the collaborative apprenticeship model, where increased collaboration ensures that knowledge travels both from the mentor to the apprentice, and vice versa (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006). Models such as this emphasize that teacher learning happens best in a situated context rather than through workshops where learning is to happen outside the school. Although this research suggests that there are numerous benefits for both mentor and beginning teacher based on collaborative efforts, these models of mentorship falsely assume that mentors would be engaged in helping and have the skills to help the beginning teacher.

Wong (2003) argued that teacher induction, not synonymous with mentorship, should not be considered a one-on-one practice, where one teacher is concerned with the development of one inductee. Rather, induction must be considered “a collaborative process, one that organizes the expertise of educators within the shared values of a culture” (Wong, 2003, p. 2). Mentorship, then, could be one of the processes within induction, as beginning teachers learn from multiple mentors in the school.
Recent reform in schools of education has revealed a need to develop more coherent teacher education programs and ones that are more closely linked to schools as a means to “facilitate both the breadth and depth deemed necessary to successful induction into teaching” (Cho et al., 2009, p. 126). This creates a challenge, however, if this link is not done in line with work already happening in the schools. Therefore, schools of education and school divisions must work together to develop collaborative and sustainable teacher induction models that enhance, rather than add to, the work already being done in schools. More specifically, “effective induction must incorporate new teachers into a professional learning community, emphasizing from the start relationships with colleagues and establishing support for continued growth and learning” (Carroll, 2005, p. 200). From their study on Saskatchewan beginning teachers, Hellsten et al. (2009) reported:

What is needed is an environment where a group of mentors surround an inductee, rather than just a single mentor as suggested by the apprenticeship model. Assuming that one person has the knowledge to induct a newcomer may create a situation where a beginning teacher (BT) defers to the mentor and feels compelled to become just like the mentor. Allowing the BT to learn from a variety of mentors creates an opportunity for learning, discernment and dialogue. This situation is beneficial not only for the BT, but also for the experienced teachers as well. (p. 719)

In a previous study supported by the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation, which explored the impact of the professional learning community (PLC) as a vehicle for effective teacher induction, it was discovered, using the correlates of effective mentorship (Salinitri, 2005), that the PLC is an effective mentorship model. Since it affects the learning of teacher candidates, interns, and first-year teachers, it was also established that the learning community construct is an effective induction model as well. Also discovered was that the professional learning community model enhanced not only the learning of inductees, but also the learning of experienced teachers. The constructivist environment allowed the beginning teachers to learn at their own rates, sometimes as the novice and sometimes from a more experienced perspective. Since the construct is not linear, as per traditional learning models, beginning teachers were not constrained by a learning progression that may not have matched their own. This study was designed to allow for the reciprocal exchange of knowledge between experienced, beginning, interning, and pre-service teachers.

On the heels of this previous study, a second study was conducted to determine the sustainability of this model of teacher induction through the professional learning community. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to advance the findings from the first study done in 2008-09 that determined that the professional learning community model is, along with possessing other attributes, an effective model for teacher induction (Prytula at al., 2009). The purpose of this second study was to apply the findings from the previous study to determine a sustainable process of teacher induction for any school considering the variances in school leadership and culture. It was theorized that this study would: 1) create a potential sustainable model or process for effective teacher induction; 2) explore the impact of school culture and leadership style on the model’s success and sustainability; 3) involve more teachers in action research; 4)
explore the impact of teacher candidates as new interns in a mentorship role for the new teacher candidates; 5) advance the professional learning of inductees and experienced teachers through the professional learning community model as a means to engage in collaboration, reflection, and teacher learning; and 6) illustrate a process that may create a cycle of intern demand among partnership schools.

In its first year, the study explored the notion as to whether or not a PLC could effectively create a culture of mentorship. Involving teacher candidates (cohorts in schools), interns, and first year teachers, the model exceeded that of a mentorship model by creating a process of induction, where continuous learning could happen over a number of years for not only the inductees, but for the experienced teachers as well.

To determine the model’s potential sustainability in its second year, the study was expanded to include two sites: one school with new leadership (but the same teachers and interns from the first year of the study), and the other school with leadership and staff who were entirely new to the model. As a result, some teachers who were involved in the study in its first year were still in the same school for the second year, and three teacher candidates from the study in its first year were interns in the second year. Two of the interns were placed in the continuing school, and one was placed in the new school.

Expanding the study to two sites was instrumental in studying its sustainability, considering the variables of leadership style or school culture. It was theorized that the professional learning community culture would have a greater impact than leadership style, as “(t)he deployment of one year’s supporters in the professional development of the following year’s would ensure the cumulative development of a body of knowledge and expertise and prevent the yearly re-invention of the wheel” (O’Brien & Christie, 2005, p. 200). It was thought that once teachers identified that it is within the collaborative culture that they are challenged, the old culture of isolated teaching would make way for the new culture, reducing the dependency of the success of the process on leadership.

The specific objectives of the study included:

• To organize pre-service, interning, beginning, and experienced teachers in learning communities in order to take maximum advantage of mentorship through communities of practice.

• To expand the model to two schools, studying its sustainability independent of the variables of leadership style or school culture.

• To involve pre-service teachers from last year’s study as interns this year, as mentors to the pre-service teachers coming in.

• To involve multiple teachers and teacher candidates as action researchers, continuing to contribute to the benefits that action research brings to the teaching profession.

• To provide a sustainable induction process or model for the reciprocal inductee and experienced teacher learning based through communities of practice.
Two elementary schools (one PreK-Grade 8 and the other K-Grade 8) partnered with the University of Saskatchewan to share a College of Education cohort of 30 teacher candidates. Teacher candidates from the cohort participated in their student teaching in one of the two schools (15 students in each school). Along with this, three interns were placed between the two schools in the fall of 2009 and, along with undergoing their internship requirements, were to mentor (informally) the cohort teacher candidates throughout the study. Third, there was at least one beginning teacher in each school, which created the opportunity to study teacher induction and mentorship through communities of practice at different teaching stages, in different environments and teaching cultures, and with different leadership.

The method of study was action research at the school level. Data for the first interviews were collected from 15 teacher candidates (eight from one school and seven from the other); three interns (two from one school and one from the other); and eight beginning teachers (five at one school and three at the other). Data for the second interviews were collected from nine teacher candidates (two from one school and seven from the other); three interns (two from one school and one from the other); and eight beginning teachers (five at one school and three at the other). The change in this number was due to teacher candidates dropping from the study—all from the same school. Data for the focus groups were collected from two focus group sessions (one at each school). Teachers involved in the learning communities were the researchers and consisted of teachers involved in last year’s study, as well as teachers new to the action research process. The three interns, who were teacher candidates involved in the first year’s cohort, were to mentor (informally) the new teacher candidates in this study. Each participant was interviewed at the midpoint in the first term, at the midpoint in the second term, and was asked to complete a final reflection question at the end of the year. Each school was also involved in a voluntary focus group to collect further data on the cohort project and learning community process. Interview data was first analyzed for themes, and then through focus group interpretation panels. The purpose of the interpretation panels (Noonan, 2002) was to gain either affirmation or further insight into participant learning as individuals in the panels had an opportunity to interpret the data as they saw it, and explain it as it affected their learning. Questions for the data collection instruments were adapted from the *Becoming a Teacher* survey questions, learning community theory, and the *Towards Successful Teacher Induction* study (Frytula et al., 2009). The data collection instruments are included in the Appendix.
Data Analysis

Following the semi-structured interview transcriptions for both interviews and both focus group sessions, data were analyzed for themes. There were three major themes discovered, each containing subthemes. Three major themes were found:

- The PLC provided a sustained opportunity for learning at various stages of teacher development.
- The structure and goals of the PLC affected participants’ motivation and ability to learn and to mentor.
- The model’s potential and sustainability are directly and integrally related to leadership, both at the school and at the university levels.

Each theme will be elaborated upon using data from the interviews, focus group sessions, and final reflections.

**Theme 1: The PLC Provided a Sustained Opportunity for Learning at Various Stages of Development**

The opportunity for learning theme consists of several subthemes. The subthemes have been gleaned from comments that repeatedly appeared throughout the data. Each subtheme is supported by at least one citation that provides depth and context to the subtheme.

The PLC created a sustained opportunity for collaboration that did not appear to exist elsewhere in the participants’ induction experience. Participants in the study reported that they perceived the PLC provided them with not only the time to discuss problems with teaching and learning, but also the opportunity to collaboratively find solutions that worked toward solving the problems. Finding these solutions, they felt, would not be possible without the PLC. One intern noted:

> I think (in) schools that don't have PLCs it's more isolated and you don't have that relationship with the staff that you might have with a PLC. Maybe the relationship with the staff is to just discuss your weekend, which is fine and you need that too, but it's not the learning that happens when you can talk professionally.

This collaborative learning was significant as it moved away from staffroom socialization to that of professional collaboration. The intern continued:

> I think (in) schools that don't have PLCs it’s more isolated and you don't have that relationship with the staff that you might have with a PLC. Maybe the relationship with the staff is to just discuss your weekend, which is fine and you need that too, but it's not the learning that happens when you can talk professionally.

One teacher candidate commented on the collaborative culture of the PLC, noting that these expectations, created by the culture of the PLC, affected her learning. Not only was there an opportunity for these conversations to exist anywhere in the school, but it appeared that it became a widespread cultural professional expectation within the school:

> It’s kind of the expected conversation when you have a PLC and when you have it at that set-out time. Then it’s going to happen a lot more often anyways. In the hallways, or after school, or at recess, or whatever,
you’re going to continue those conversations. And that’s going to increase learning for everyone: students, staff, teachers and whoever.

In the second and final data collection stages, several participants noted that this type of collaborative work achieved through the PLC would not be possible through any other area of a teacher’s work. The following comment was from an intern who noted the value of idea generation: “Some of the things that you learn through the PLC you would not have the opportunity to learn anywhere else. Like the generation of ideas you can use in the classroom is the most beneficial.”

A second subtheme gleaned from the study was that the PLC offered a sustained opportunity to bridge gaps in learning, at all stages and in multiple areas. One intern commented that assessment was an area that she felt underprepared for as she began her internship, but that the PLC system, as she termed it, made her stronger. She said:

Through the PLC, I was able to get a grasp of reading and writing assessments, so an area of weakness of my own was propped up until I was comfortable enough with it myself. The lesson for me here was that a system of professional support in a building can, and does, make everyone in the building better.

This comment from a beginning teacher, who felt that his placement did not match his area of expertise, indicates that the PLC bridged a gap in his learning between what he learned at university and what he needed to know in his position as a teacher. From his perspective:

Hiring practices that do not aim to put the best people in the best situations leave many challenges within the schools, and these challenges must then be addressed by the staffs in the school. One of the ways to address those challenges is through PLCs.

The PLC allowed him to become familiar with expectations and strategies suitable for the grade level position that he attained, and made his transition to the profession much easier. The following comment from a teacher candidate describes that her perspectives of teaching and learning shifted throughout her experience. “My knowledge of PLCs has changed as a result of my participation within them for the past year. I understand the importance of collaboration within the school and the potential benefit of consolidated school-wide initiatives.”

Beginning teachers in the school also experienced this cognitive shift. One admitted:

Once you have been involved in an effective PLC and have seen the results, you can’t help but be on board. The learning and professional development for all breeds a confidence and a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that is amazing and makes you want more.

The last subtheme belonging to opportunity for learning is the opportunity for reciprocal learning and transferable learning. Participants in the study reported that the learning in the PLC was not unidirectional. That is, they felt that what they learned through their schooling or experiences had a place in the school and that they felt invited to bring it in through the PLC, whether they were teacher candidates, interns, or beginning teachers. One intern said she brought the knowledge that she learned at one school as a Teacher Candidate (TC) to her new school in which she was interning.

Participants also realized a transferability of this knowledge. To add detail, one intern commented that even though she may not be hired to teach in the school
in which she interned, she valued the PLC and she hoped that she could bring what she learned about the experience to the school in which she would be hired.

Since I have been doing it, I think that I would really like to bring this into (my) system. Bring it in to the next school that I’m at. I guess it’s what I know, and I think that it’s very good and I think that it’s also a really great way to induct teacher candidates. It was a good experience for me for sure, and I think that it would benefit others.

One teacher commented on a similar hope for transferability. She said “this is a model that would positively affect any staff, and I would make efforts to implement, in some way, in any building I go to in the future.”

Teachers valued the time and process of the PLC and, through it, were able to share knowledge and to develop ideas across different levels of experience, reciprocally and transformationally. Participants also felt that these opportunities to learn would have not existed at all without the PLC structure. Unfortunately, when the structure was not consistent and was not focused on student learning, participants were quick to lose interest, as the PLC held very little meaning for them.

**Theme 2: The structure and goals of the PLC affected participants’ motivation and ability to learn and to mentor**

The second theme that emerged from the study is related to the structure and goals of the PLC. This theme includes that the structure or lack of structure affected the participants’ motivation as well as their ability to mentor and to learn with one another.

This section has two subthemes. The first is related to the actual structure of the PLC (designated time and place for meeting and collaboration) and the second is related to the work done within the PLC (concrete goals that were set relating to student learning). Some of the findings from this theme were drawn from comments that the participants made regarding how they would have preferred the PLC to be structured, or what they felt was necessary within that structure.

The actual structure of the PLC had a direct impact on its effectiveness for all participants. A teacher in the study revealed an understanding that the structure of the PLC allowed her and her colleagues time to learn. From her experience, she felt that she had time to focus on this work that would not have otherwise been set aside without the PLC.

The PLC is the time made available for us to address our Learning Improvement Plan (LIP) goals. Having dedicated times to address these areas ensures that we cannot get caught up in the tedium of our everyday tasks and that we, as individuals and staff, remain focused on our larger goals.

Realizing that the PLC had a positive effect on their learning, participants had many ideas regarding how the PLCs could be structured in the school to further their learning. Many of these comments are included below, not to saturate the reader, but to share the idea that members of the PLC saw how the PLC affected or could affect their learning as they wanted not to dismiss them, but rather use them in other or more ways. This teacher candidate expressed a need to experience it more often:

I would like it to be more frequent. Once a week. Honestly, I’d like it every Friday or mid-week, every Wednesday. It’s not a huge chunk of your day. You meet for an hour, over a lunch period or even an hour after school. I would love for it to be once a week.
A similar comment was made by another participant:

I would like PLCs to be more frequent, shorter, and more concise in their objective. For example, a meeting would be held once every two weeks for no more than 20-30 minutes. This way, ideas are not lost between meetings, and teachers are held accountable for what is discussed at the meeting. Two weeks also allow teachers enough time to go back to their classroom and try a particular strategy.

Another participant commented regarding time preferences, indicating a desire to ensure that learning takes place. “I think that PLCs should occur weekly or bi-weekly for at least 45 minutes. This allows for more discussion and learning to occur without getting cut off by time constraints.” This teacher saw another way that PLCs would enhance his work:

We have a Grade 5-8 PLC, so there’s that connection between what happens in Grade 5 to Grade 6, to 7, to 8. So teachers aren’t re-teaching. But it would also be beneficial if they were supplemented with more grade-alike PLCs within a larger partnership of schools.

Last, this participant shared that not only did the PLC need to occur for a sustained amount of time, but participants needed to be willing to share, either within the school or beyond the school:

Without a sufficient amount of time, it doesn’t really benefit people. And I hope that teachers would be willing to share and I think you have to be comfortable and open with your staff members in order for a PLC to run well. I also think it is important that we do a couple PLC things that are outside of the school such as meeting with other teachers in the north end that are grade-specific to us and we can bounce ideas off one another.

The second subtheme is related to the work done within the PLC and emerged from comments that participants made regarding the specificity of goals and the focus of the work of the PLC. This intern identified the potential strength of the PLC when all educators were focused on one common goal:

There is no doubt that when all participants in the PLC are focused on common goals centering around student learning, PLCs are very effective. I believe that an effective PLC is very valuable. The PLC has the power to effect change within a school, among teachers and in student learning.

Another teacher emphasized that it is the focused goal of the PLC that makes the difference. She said that the PLC needs “cohesive goals for a year and possibly several years, working towards an area of student learning.” Having experienced different PLCs, an experienced teacher stated:

I have come to realize the importance of making the PLC a priority within the school. A focus on student learning is key in order for all in a school to be on board. Active participation by all stakeholders is also important to keep the momentum of the PLC.

There was recognition by one of the teacher candidates that the PLC structure offered something more than what was offered for educators in other schools. She said, “all teachers need to know what your goal is and how you’re going to get it done and everyone needs to be working together. I don’t think that happens (in other schools) as good as it needs to happen.” For the interns and teacher candidates, it was vital for them to feel connected and involved within the PLC. If they did not see how it would impact their growth as a professional, they were not motivated, or even willing, to participate within the PLC. If a TC or intern was willing to participate in
the PLC, it was a result of their feeling connected to the PLC, and seeing the results of their contribution. Participants, however, experienced frustration when the PLC goals and agenda were not a consistent focal point. They expressed a need for time and consistency in order for the PLC process to work: “Meetings were very time-pressed. Other issues were taking time away from actual PLC business. Soon many TCs stopped coming to meetings because they didn’t feel like they were contributing or learning much.” This lack of focus had an impact on participant motivation.

The beginning of the year started out strong with a lot of serious pedagogical thinking occurring. However, as we progressed into the first couple of months there was a shift in our focus. I felt that our data collection, analysis, and resulting plans kind of fell to the wayside. We slowly met less and less in our PLC groups. We began to discuss staff meeting-type issues for the entire PLC allotted time. This trend continued. This was an area of difficulty for me as I began to lose interest in the PLC.

A similar concern surfaced in the contributions made by another participant: “The meetings seemed more like staff meetings, disseminating information rather than focusing on student learning” and another commented:

Many times the PLC focused on other goals rather than our LIP goals. I realize this happens on occasion; however, it seems to happen quite a lot. The half hour has turned into 20 minutes: not nearly enough time to have an effective PLC.

The participants knew what they needed in order for the process to work. As one intern stated: “[We need] consistency, having a common goal.”

Participants’ learning and motivation were directly related to the structure and goals of the PLC. The structure needed to allow for a time and place to meet and to collaborate. Without it, discussions were underdeveloped and participants could not move ideas or initiatives forward. Along with this, the goals of the PLC needed to be specific and needed to be focused on student learning. Without specific goals, participants could not see the relevance of the PLC, but with specific student learning-related goals, they felt satisfaction from working toward them and achieving results.

**Theme 3: The model’s potential and sustainability are directly and integrally related to leadership, both at the school and at the university levels**

The leadership in the school emerged as the initial key factor for member motivation and success. This leadership influenced almost all members as they were motivated to participate, to engage in the discussions, and were eager to put into practice the goals and strategies that were of central focus. The participants noticed this phenomenon and commented, “I would say that most of the PLC comes from admin and that they have the majority of the work in the PLCs. This benefits the staff by telling us what’s worked and which direction to go.” An intern commented “[school leaders] need to know how to set school goals centred on student learning. Administration needs to set the PLC as a priority.” Some commented that the administration of the school was chiefly in charge of the initiative, thus its success depended on the influence of that leadership:

The most enlightening thing for me was not a method or a new idea that came from the PLC; instead I learned how important it is for a staff to be able to adapt to a new leader and how much influence the principal/administration has on the way the staff communicates, thinks, and operates.
School leadership was central to maintaining the focus of the PLC. The professional learning that took place during and in between PLC sessions became tangible to many participants as a result of strong leadership, allowing for the members to engage in the PLC process.

In instances when the PLC attempted to function without any leadership, the overall mechanics and impact of the PLC seemed to begin to disintegrate. A beginning teacher said, “Before I liked to think that the administration didn’t influence the PLC, that all teachers and all participants came to consensus. But this year I realized that there needs to be a leader.” This directly impacted the structure, momentum and willingness of the participants to actively engage in the PLC, alluding to the concept that leadership, in combination with realistic goals that benefitted the students, is linked to the overall success of the PLC. Without leadership and realistic goals, teachers are not likely to fully commit to the PLC process. One intern shared a discussion that she had with other classmates who hadn’t all had the experience of being involved in a successful PLC:

There were two, maybe three, students who had positive experiences with PLCs which was interesting to me. Every other student was like, “they don’t work, nobody wants to do it, we don’t want to come, it’s a waste of time, we don’t do it,” and I was thinking, “no way, that’s not how it is,” but then I was thinking of how that would make sense too in some aspects, if you don’t have the leadership, or you don’t have the goals, or you don’t understand what you’re supposed to be doing. Certain teachers don’t feel like it’s worth their time. And maybe that is the case so that’s what’s changed. I think it takes a lot more work to have a successful PLC than I had originally thought as a third year TC. “Oh yeah, this is wonderful.” It takes a lot of work.

Some participants stated the leadership of the PLC had to exist not only through administration, but also within the PLC members themselves: the members were expected to assume a leadership role. The concept of distributed leadership among PLC members appeared to set the PLC up for success, suggesting that the overall structure of distributed leadership within the PLC affected the learning and motivation that occurred. The following excerpts describe this sentiment:

- I don’t think it should be the principal all the time because then you’re only learning what the principal wants you to learn or the administration or whoever it is . . . and then maybe you can respect the teachers, too, who are doing that work if you know how much work it took to get there. And I think it benefits you when you’re doing the work but also the students and the rest of the staff as well.
- In order for change to be effected, there needs to be deeper reflection. The PLC needs to be a priority within the school. Leadership should be shared.
- The teachers do the primary work in the PLC. The administration facilitates and encourages, but the ideas, implementation, and process are driven by the teachers.

Through the data collection phases, it became apparent that leadership through both administration and the teacher membership had the potential to directly influence the implementation, functioning, overall success, and sustainability of the PLC in either a positive or negative manner.

Participants saw the need for leadership to set the student learning PLC goals as a priority which, as they saw it, were largely determined by the administration at the school. These leaders had shared their knowledge of the structure and functioning
of the PLC and were able to lead other educators through goal setting and keeping the PLC work a priority. However, the success of the PLC was affected not only by leadership at the school, but also by leadership at the university through the cohort partnership. Some participants clearly stated that greater leadership and initiative needed to come from the partnership: “These are symptoms of a bigger problem. The university needs to provide leadership with this.” A beginning teacher noticed some issues early on in the second term of the study: “In term two, there was a scheduling conflict with a university class, so even more TCs dropped out of the PLC.” This teacher continued to say that the focus on the PLC by all parties needs to be a priority not just within the school, but at the university as well. “We need a stronger commitment from the university to have the TCs in the school.”

Teachers within the PLC expressed their desire to have additional leadership provided at the university level, not just in terms of direction and guidance, but also in terms of consistency: “I wasn’t sure what the expectations were from the university. We had expectations last year, but not this year.” Teachers strongly believed that support and guidance from the university impacted the extent to which the TCs and interns actively engaged within the PLC. In order to have a successful, sustainable experience, not all aspects could be left to the schools to complete. The university needed to place emphasis in the process to ensure that the cohort induction project was beneficial for all members, and so that it could be consistent for all, from year to year: “Last year we knew what they had to do. This year, we didn’t know.” Along with this, the structure needs to be determined. One beginning teacher noted, “last year, the professor [instructor] observed the TCs so they were more accountable. This year, there was no professor [instructor] observation.” One teacher added, “Consistency was a big problem this year compared to last year. We set aside time for planning and it was difficult when the TCs would not show.”

Because of a lack of involvement, there was a general feeling that the teachers were left to determine how the teacher candidates would learn throughout the process, and that the university was not invested in the partnership process.

Because of the inconsistency in attendance, when the TCs came for their full week of teaching, we didn’t see a plan in advance and there was no school time for post-conferencing. I didn’t have a guide for assessment so I looked at the stuff I had from the University of Regina and I used that.

In order to achieve success within the framework of the PLC, it appeared that some leadership from the university was required.

The commitment from the college supervisor was inconsistent. She was around for the first semester but absent for the second. The steering committee meetings that were held last year [in the first year of the study] would have been helpful this year but there were none.

PLC leadership is required for success. Participants in the study reported that although the teachers in the PLC are working toward the goal, school leadership and direction are required to steer the work. Not only is leadership at the school a necessary component, but since this PLC also included the purposes of induction, leadership at the university is also required. Without the workings of a communicative, collaborative partnership, teachers at the school lacked direction in terms of the inductees’ learning. In order for this model to be a success, all must be committed.
Findings

The purpose of this study was to advance the findings from the first study done in 2008-09 that determined that the professional learning community model is, along with possessing other attributes (Prytula et al., 2009), an effective model for teacher induction. The main purpose of conducting this second study was to apply the findings from the previous study to determine a sustainable process of teacher induction for any school, considering the variances in school leadership and culture.

This study has produced the following findings, which are linked to one another and affect one another:

- The PLC provides a sustained opportunity for learning at various stages of development (from the teacher candidate stage to the first years of teaching). Therefore, the professional learning community model continues to be an efficient and successful process for effective mentorship and induction. However:
  - The structure and goals of the professional learning community play an integral role in the success of the PLC model for teacher induction, as both the structure and goals affect participants’ motivation and ability to learn and to mentor.
  - The model’s potential and sustainability are directly and integrally related to leadership, both at the school and at the university levels, and this leadership can either enhance or inhibit the proper functioning of the learning community model for effective teacher induction.
Discussion

As found in the first year of the study, the professional learning community is an effective model for teacher induction from the pre-service stages to the beginning years of teaching. These two years of research have also shown that it is an effective model for teacher learning beyond the induction stages, as it allows for continuous and reciprocal learning and knowledge sharing. This finding is significant in that previous literature and research have shown that “components of teacher induction do not independently influence beginning teachers’ learning and teaching practice. The quality of influence is dependent on social, cultural, and organizational contexts of schools where such components are situated” (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008, p. 18), and that induction without focus on pedagogy and criteria, such as national standards, is largely ineffective. Learning communities provide this focus, thus induction practices situated within a professional learning community increase the likelihood that effective and consistent induction can take place. Similar to what was found through the work of Moir and Hanson (2009), the collegial, collaborative learning community that developed through their learning community mentorship project was vital to the success of their program, and it improved the practice of the mentors and teachers. Along with that, the learning community culture spread from the mentors working at the university to the teachers working in the schools, to the administration and support staff.

Because the professional learning community model is an effective model for teacher learning and induction, it is not possible, nor practical, to claim that an effective model for teacher induction has been created from this study, as it already exists. Rather, it can be said that an effective model for teacher learning, as is, has been applied for teacher induction. This model has also been shown to be effective at many stages of teacher learning, especially at the induction stages, which, of course, span many years from the pre-service stage to the first few years of teaching. This is especially effective for the eclectic environment of teaching and learning in schools, since effective teacher induction does not require that a new model be learned and applied, rather just that an existing model be effectively applied.

Participants made reference to the effective application of the professional learning community model. Many references were made by both experienced and new teachers to the need for learning community structure and for clear, effective goals. If the structure and goals were present, participants valued the process and it directly contributed to the effectiveness of their work. If the structure and goals were not present, participants quickly lost motivation and interest in the learning community. This was especially evident as several of the teacher candidates dropped out of the research project in one of the schools that struggled with the effective implementation of the model until later in the year. It was reported that the model had no meaning for them; therefore, they did not want to spend any time on it. In the school in which the PLC was thriving, however, these new participants reported that it positively impacted their learning and that they hoped to take the process to the schools in which they would work next.

In terms of structure, participants were looking for time to collaborate. If the PLC time was minimized or not placed as a first priority, it lost its impact and the teachers had not enough time to discuss, to collaborate, to plan, and to make decisions. Participants also were quick to make the distinction between professional learning community discussions and typical staff meeting items.
They reported that when staff meeting items took priority, it was not possible to do the work of the PLC, thus all membership lost interest and motivation.

Participants also commented on the goals of the PLC. These educators wanted goals focused on student learning that allowed them to share ideas and strategies that they could try in their classrooms, learn from, and discuss at following meetings. Without such goals, the process was not useful and, again, interest fell by the wayside. Some participants also mentioned that the university needed to understand the school goals so that the teacher candidates could maximize their learning through applying as much of their work toward these goals as possible. Without the interest and buy-in from the university, the work was disjointed and the teacher candidates could not be as fully involved as possible.

Last, school culture and leadership style have, and will continue to have, a significant effect on the professional learning community model for effective teacher induction. It was also discovered, however, that not only do school culture and leadership style impact the success of the model, but so do the university culture and leadership style, specifically related to that of the cohort project. Throughout this study, participants found success when certain elements were in place; that is, when the leadership in the school fostered and promoted the learning community development and environment. Through the learning community, newcomers began to develop a sense of what it meant to be a teacher, while more experienced teachers were able to mentor newcomers through meaningful goal-setting and practice. Participants also noted several helpful elements from the university partnership. They made mention of effective professor or instructor collaboration and supervision, the provision of direction, and the effective use of steering committees to guide the work and to ensure that the efforts went smoothly. A teacher induction model such as this requires an authentic partnership with both partners committing to the work.

In more challenging instances, participants expressed concerns regarding the need for leadership both at the school and at the university in order for the model to work, not only for teacher induction, but also for teacher learning. Participants who had experienced more than one year of the study noted that leadership priorities both at the school and at the university impacted the success of the model, while new participants noted that without specific direction and consistency from the university, the work was challenging. Participants shared concerns of sustainability regarding the university partnership. Their concerns stemmed from an expressed need for collaboration and direction. Without a more direct and concerted effort, teachers at the school felt that they could not meet the needs of the teacher candidates and were left guessing as to what their learning needs were. They mentioned that the model had the potential to be sustainable if leadership was distributed to the teachers within the model because they knew what they needed to work on and had the desire to work on it together. This distributed leadership, however, did not imply sole leadership but, rather, shared leadership. Like with professional learning communities, if teachers are given direction, but also the freedom and time to collaborate and to learn together, they learn from one another and become more confident through the support from the group. This learning, then, is spread to all learners in the model, be it experienced teachers or newcomers to the group.

Several additional positive outcomes came about as a result of this work. First, the interns in this study acted as mentors to the teacher candidates. They were there to show them the ropes and to explain facets of the school that they learned the year prior. This served to enhance the teacher candidates’ experiences and enhanced the mentorship potential of this model. As in the first year, this model
also continued to create intern demand in the schools in which teacher candidates served. That is, several teachers who worked with teacher candidates requested them as interns for next year. This serves a great purpose to both university and schools, as having a natural fit reduces the stress of trying to find placements for interns and serves to erode the problem of mentor/mentee compatibility that has plagued the apprenticeship model of induction for years.

Finally, through action research projects such as this, where teachers can be involved in action research, several more teachers were involved this year compared to last, increasing the knowledge of theory in practice in schools. Having the opportunity and support to conduct action research like this impacts teachers’ work and creates a snowball effect that is likely to influence their work for years.
Sustainability

Although the professional learning community has been shown to be an effective model for teacher learning and for teacher induction, it becomes largely valuable when effective PLCs move from existing in pockets of schools to existing in all schools. Although PLCs are already well researched for their capacity and potential to improve teaching and learning, PLCs need to have a level of commitment on the part of all stakeholders. Administrators need to have a belief in the effectiveness of the PLC model and it needs to be a priority. PLCs must have a vision centred around improving student learning, members of PLCs need to feel connected with each other, and they must work towards common goals. Members should also feel they have valuable knowledge and experience to share with others. They should be inspired to be active participants in the PLC. In order for this model to work as an effective induction model, there must be buy-in on the part of the College of Education and the instructors involved with the cohorts. A component of the university class must focus on the school’s learning goals. All of these pieces must exist through a collaborative working relationship between the university and the schools, which is largely inconsistent at this time.

As one participant stated, “I believe that if all are on board and believe in the power of the PLC, it is sustainable. With participants being actively involved, and goals being student-centred, PLCs can effect change.”
The purpose in this second study was to apply the findings from the previous study to determine a sustainable process of teacher induction for any school, considering the variances in school leadership and culture. The professional learning community is a model that can provide sustainable, successful teacher induction in the schools studied. It is imperative, however, that the structure of the PLC allows for a consistent time and place for teacher learning, and that the goals are centred on student learning. It is also imperative that leadership at both the school and the university places a priority on the development and work in the PLC.

Further research is required into the state of PLCs in the field of education. As one participant noted, effective PLCs do not appear to be the norm. Further research into the state of PLCs is required to determine whether or not teacher induction through PLCs will be inhibited by a lack of leadership understanding of the concept and/or the cultivation of effective PLCs. Long-term research must continue to happen within these phenomena so the uncertainties in developing learning communities for teacher induction can be a certain part of the new paradigm in teaching and learning.

Implications for practice include ensuring that those schools in which this project is being considered have PLCs that are consistently practiced in terms of time and space, and that are focused on student learning goals. It is also critical that improved communication and collaboration exist between the schools and the universities, and that one institution does not absolve responsibility for the students’ learning onto another. As a result of this study, we have found that because the PLC provides a sustained opportunity for learning at various stages of development, leaders at both the university and school levels must invest and commit to the learning community process within teacher education classes, within the day-to-day operation of the schools, and between each other. Because the structure and goals of the PLC affect participants’ motivation and ability to mentor, leaders at the school must invest in and commit to the learning community process in their schools to allow motivation and mentorship to occur. Because the model’s potential and sustainability are directly and integrally related to leadership, both at the school and at the university levels, school and university leadership must be present, actively involved, shared, and distributed in order for this process to be consistent, successful, and sustainable. This involves practices such as developing authentic partnerships where communication is frequent and reciprocal, scheduling to meet each other’s needs, and a letting go of the ours-theirs ideology.

This research has shown that there is significant potential for improved teaching and learning through teacher induction through communities of practice. It is time for schools and universities to respond to that potential and to take advantage of the professional learning community as a sustainable model for teacher induction in Saskatchewan, as well as a model that can make significant improvements to teaching and learning in Saskatchewan.

We often hear about pockets of success in schools. One school develops an idea that shapes the work of their staff and that staff moves the idea to success. This is admirable. The problem, however, is that these pockets of success remain just that: pockets. As with other initiatives, once there is a change in leadership or substantial changes in staff, the success is not sustainable, and the initiative fades.
into the background. To say that this is a tragedy is not correct, for oftentimes lost initiatives are replaced with even better ones, but it is a tragedy when the initiative is one that improves teacher learning and student learning, and the lost initiative is not replaced with another equal or better one, resulting in moving the school back to operating at status quo.

Wagner et al. (2006) noted that although some isolated schools have figured out how to achieve success within their high-stakes environments, their successes are like “random acts of excellence” (p. 10) for which a system of sustainability has not yet been developed. We must develop those systems of sustainability and, as we often do, we must turn to multiple school leaders to pave the way to an effective, consistent, and sustainable system of teacher induction.


Prytula, M., Makahonuk, C., Pesenti, M., & Syrota, N. (2008). *Toward successful teacher induction through communities of practice.* Poster session presented at Learning from Practice, Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, Saskatoon, SK.


PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. Please describe your identity as a teacher at this point in the year. (Example: What kind of teacher are you? How do you see yourself as a professional? etc.)

B. What are your strengths?

C. What do you consider to be your areas of weakness?

D. What do you know about teaching?

E. What do you need to learn?

F. Where/how will you learn that?

G. What will you be like as a teacher in the classroom? What does that look like?

H. What will you be like as a teacher outside of the classroom? What does that look like?

I. What is a Professional Learning Community? What do you expect from your PLC?
SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please describe your identity as a teacher at this point in the year. What is your primary purpose(s) as a professional?

2. Describe the strengths that you have discovered about yourself as a professional and answer:
   a) how you came to the realization of this/these strength(s)
   b) how this/these strength(s) have affected your work or the work done by others in the school.

3. Describe the area(s) of weakness that you have discovered about yourself as a professional and answer:
   a) how you came to the realization of this/these weakness(es)
   b) how you are working to improve upon this/these weakness(es).

4. What is a professional learning community?

5. What do you expect from the PLC to which you belong?

6. What aspects of the PLC are the most important to you?

7. What aspects of the PLC would you like to change?

8. How are schools that operate with PLCs different than schools that operate without them?

9. Describe whether or not your knowledge of professional learning communities has changed throughout this year and if it has, how it has changed.

10. Describe some of the learning that you have achieved through your PLC.

11. Considering the learning that you achieved, if not for the PLC, where else could you have learned what you did? How would you have learned it?

12. Who does the primary work in the PLCs? Who does this work benefit? How?
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (SEMI-STRUCTURED)

1. Please comment on the processes of the learning community this year.
2. What works well with the PLC and project?
3. What aspects of the PLC and project would you like to change?
4. Is this process valuable for other schools? Why?
5. What do you need in terms of support to make this work?
6. What would other schools need to do/know in order to make this work?
7. Is this sustainable? Why or why not?
8. How has the PLC/project benefitted the students in this school?
9. How is this school that operates with a PLC different than schools that operate without one?
10. Describe whether or not your knowledge of professional learning communities and/or this project has changed throughout this year and if it has, how it has changed.
**Final Reflection Question**

Please write a reflection regarding your experiences at____________________ School. Please include experiences that you felt were enlightening, those that you felt were difficult, as well as your thoughts about these experiences. What have you learned? What will you use from this experience in the future? What else would have been beneficial? Please feel free to add any other thoughts that you may have.