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Let God Lead

Literacy. Leadership and early childhood centers. Music in the classroom. Collaboration in the workplace. Developing consensus toward working together. Overall, the articles in this issue have something for almost everyone. And when you add the columns and book reviews, the diversity of this issue broadens even further.

Thinking about the shelter-in-place order that leaders at every level of the government are giving in response to the coronavirus, this issue may be just what our readership needs. It's a good time to read an article outside of your field. It's a good time to think about educational issues that don't cross your own professional path every day. It's a good time to consider the face of education from the perspective of another professional in a different corner of the educational enterprise.

It's even a good time to learn something new. To master a craft or an artistic endeavor. To try new recipes for family meals. Maybe to try cooking for the first time ever. To do a little woodworking. To master a face-to-face virtual environment in order to communicate with family and colleagues.

I personally am leading Zoom meetings for the first time this week. It's my new preference for connecting with extended family. Tonight I'm talking with a nephew and niece. I'm setting a goal of zooming with two grandchildren each week. I can finish the job in a month before I need to start all over again. Maybe I want to do more than two a week!

I am grateful for Concordia University Chicago and that we implemented online learning and teaching more than a decade ago. It's probably the reason for the spectacular growth in our graduate programs, both at the master's and doctoral levels.

So what is Covid-19 causing you to do differently? How are you communicating with the students in your classrooms? Has the use of Zoom, or something like it, entered into your thinking and into your planning for implementation? How are you keeping in touch with your youth group? Have you thought about talking to a couple of leaders within that group to get a crash course on the technology that the kids are using today? You don't want to make the mistake of using a form of communication technology that your youth would regard as "so

yesterday.” How are you staying in touch with the leaders in your department? In your school? In your congregation? Have you developed a schedule or a rhythm of communication with colleagues who are usually just a few steps down the hall when you want a brief chat? Are you keeping that “brief chat” mentality going, now that the coronavirus is dictating our lives?

My personal challenge has been to remember that God knew about Covid-19 long before it appeared on our radar. Long before we were all, in a sense, quarantined to our homes. God had determined that there is something for you and me to learn in all of this. Patience? Creativity? Ways to alleviate anxiety? Long-distance ministry and job performance?

We have all experienced and grown from the experience of online worship services in the past weeks. But have you thought about online Bible study? Online small groups? Online parent discussion groups? Online implementation of the small-group discussions you regularly have in your face-to-face classroom? Online mentoring of students who are struggling in your class? What about taking three of your most able and articulate students and pairing them, one on one, with those strugglers in your class? They have a number of options for meeting virtually and they would each learn from the experience.

As I write this, I am thinking about having a conversation with God about this coronavirus experience. Part of this conversation will involve asking a number of questions, such as...

- What am I, personally and specifically, to learn from this quarantine?
- Why the whole world, God? Are we supposed to learn more about our fellow humans in other parts of the world?
- How can I help my neighbor who is frightened and afraid to even answer the telephone?
- What were you thinking, God? This virus is not just an inconvenience. It’s a deadly and unwelcome guest in far too many homes.
- What are we as a culture going to do differently from this time forward because of what we are learning from this illness and from this quarantine?

And conversations with God always need time for listening to his side of things. That’s how we learn from struggles and hardship. So I need to make time to listen to God as he comforts me, teaches me, and encourages me. I need to make plenty of time for listening if I am to learn from it.

Be still. Ten times God tells us, through various biblical writers, to “*be still.*” The classic communication of that stillness order is in Psalm 46:10. *Be still and know that I am God.* Sometimes that stillness order is just what I

need. A reminder to let God lead. A reminder that God is the director of my orchestra and that I have to wait for his downbeat before I get to make a sound.

God *is* in charge. We will survive. We need to be listening. To God. To government authorities. To health-care professionals. And when we are done listening, this is a good time to read the *Journal*. Enjoy. **LEJ**

Supporting the Temporal, Social, and Physical Environments of Young Children

By Annette VanAken

*Editor's Note: This article is taken from the article, *The Temporal, Social, and Physical Environment as Applications of the Whole Child Tenets in Early Childhood*, as originally published in the *Illinois ASCD Journal*, the Winter 2019 issue. It is reprinted with permission.*

Long before children enter formal schooling they develop literacy skills that will support their ability to read conventionally. In fact, researchers suggest there is a significant relationship between these early literacy skills and later reading (Missal et al., 2007). Skills such as alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency, comprehension, writing, language, and vocabulary development often take center stage in some form within early childhood through secondary settings.

Although all of these skills play a role in reading acquisition, two skills: language and vocabulary development, are prevalent in the young child's life beginning at birth. These skills develop rapidly during the early years when brain plasticity is greatest and are influenced by changes within the body, by experiences, and by the external environment (Kolb & Gibb, 2011). Unfortunately, due to the varied experiences and environments children are exposed to, there are many discrepancies among children's language and vocabulary development, which influence later reading success (Neuman & Wright, 2013).

Relevance of Early Language and Vocabulary Development

Within early learning settings, educators typically discuss language development in terms of receptive and expressive language. Receptive language refers to the individual's ability to understand what is being said, which begins before the production of words, which is known as expressive language. However, receptive and expressive language do not function alone, they rely on the individual's ability to learn how to use and understand the meanings of new words (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) making vocabulary a critical component of language development.

From birth, children are learning the underlying concepts of language. Young infants' sense of sound is well developed, helping them to differentiate between

the noises they hear. As they listen to the world around them, they are able to distinguish between environmental and speech sounds. Thus, using sensory experiences in their environment, they develop their receptive and expressive language skills. And while the infant may not be able to mimic speech because they lack muscle coordination, they begin to experiment with sounds (Deiner, 2009). In addition, young infants are able to use a simple form of expressive language in nonverbal and verbal ways to communicate their wants and needs. As they listen to and engage with the people in their environment, they continue to develop their language skills and build vocabulary. For the mobile infant, a major component of language and vocabulary development includes learning the meaning of words (Deiner, 2009), as they begin to use one-word utterances, while toddlers begin to use two-word phrases. It is important to note that although the young child's expressive language may seem minimal, their receptive language is much more advanced. They can actually understand the meaning of many more words than they can use (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The importance of language development during the early years is not only of interest to parents, caregivers, and educators, but has captured the attention of neuroscience research. Critical periods, or windows when brain plasticity is high, allow experiences and the environment to have an exceptionally high influence on brain development (Sale, Berardi, & Maffei, 2016). Most relevant for this discussion is the time from birth to age 4 when plasticity is high and language development is in its critical period (Sale, Berardi, & Maffei, 2016). This early window of opportunity creates an increased urgency for providing parents, caregivers, and educators with information on how to support healthy environments and experiences which encourage language development. Research suggests that successful readers need to have a store of about 6,000 root words by grade two (Deiner, 2009) meaning that the typically 7 year old needs to have learned about 857 new root words per year. Therefore, there is no time to waste if we do not want children to be in jeopardy of entering school with substantial disparities in language and vocabulary knowledge, which shows up as lasting deficits in later reading success (Catts, Hogan, & Fey, 2003).

Environment and Experience: Why Should We Care?

Young children's brains are equipped and ready for language at birth (Bredekamp, 2017) and while there are inherited factors that influence the architecture of the brain, there are non-inherited environmental factors and experiences that have the power to change gene expression, thus altering the infant's neuro structures (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). In other words, environmental factors and experiences have the power to change the brain's architecture. While some of these changes are temporary, some leave "chemical signatures" that result in lasting change in gene expression.

Therefore, given the understanding that the critical period for language development is from birth to 4 years of age, and there is an understanding that the brain is highly responsive to early environments and experiences, we must continue to seek opportunities to provide all children with developmentally appropriate opportunities to increase their chances of future reading success.

Environments and The Whole Child

As highlighted above, key to the young child's language and vocabulary growth is their environment and the experiences within it. This aligns well with our mission to approach education with a whole-child perspective. It also requires a conceptual understanding of what it means to provide environments and experiences that are safe, promote healthy beginnings, and engage, support, and challenge language and vocabulary development in young children.

However, first it is important to develop a deeper understanding of the three types of environments relevant to the young child's development. These are the temporal, social, and physical environments. In general, the temporal environment is concerned with the daily schedule, routines, and activities for the child, while the social environment encompasses the social interactions the child has with other individuals, and the physical environment focuses on the objects and space within the child's environment.

When considering the temporal environment, the responsible adult should think about the timing, sequence, length of the schedule and routines. More specifically within the schedule the parents, caregivers, and educators should think about when the child gets up, arrives at daycare or preschool, play time, mealtime, naptime, both small-scale and large-scale activities, the transitions that connect them, as well as bedtime. When planning routines, the responsible adult should consider how to make routines consistent. Some routines include, diapering or bathroom time, getting up in the morning and going to bed, naptime, mealtime, dismissal/leaving home, and arrival/coming home. Additionally, the activities and experiences should be developmentally appropriate in content and length of time. Studies indicate that predictable schedules, routines, and smooth transitions create a sense of security, support the child's understanding of the world around them, and help them adjust to new situations. This sense of security can prevent challenging behaviors (Bredekamp, 2017; IRIS Center, 2019).

The social environment, while focused on interaction with others, is additionally influenced by the temporal and physical environments that support these interactions. The adults within the child's environment play key roles in the degree of positive social interactions, not only because they plan the temporal and physical environments, but they also provide significant guidance and modeling of appropriate social behaviors within daily experiences.

When considering the physical environment, it is important to include not only the space, layout of the furnishings, and materials available for the young child, but the organization and accessibility of the environment. The type of space design, materials, and organization literally communicate to the child what is acceptable (Bredekamp, 2017). For example, crowded, unkempt spaces signal chaos and will influence the child's behavior. Wide open spaces invite children to run and play loudly.

Connecting these early-learning environments, language and vocabulary experiences, and the goal of educating the whole child is not difficult. Although experiences can be provided that align with the healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged tenets within each type of environment, a few will be highlighted, along with examples to get you thinking.

Supporting the Whole Child

The power of the temporal environment should not be overlooked. Children feel safe when schedules, routines, and transitions provide them with predictability and consistency, and with a bit of flexibility. Establishing patterns that children can anticipate lessens stress and increases their comfort, while building essential relationships between them and their caregivers. In addition, these are great opportunities to talk to children, interpret their body language, provide simple information and directions, as well as ask questions.

Within the social environment, engagements abound. Parents, caregivers, and educators are gifted with the opportunity to actively engage, support, and scaffold the language and vocabulary of children as they play with peers. In addition, children are engaged in their learning environment as they share, express their feelings, role play, and explore. Adults play a critical role in supporting each child's language while challenging them to use language to express themselves and listen to others. Through daily conversations and social interactions, children learn how to use language, as well as how to receive it.

The physical environment provides the opportunity to not only support healthy bodies, but a language- and literature-rich space also supports healthy brain development. However, be careful, as young children can be easily overwhelmed and overstimulated. So, early childhood educators and caregivers should be mindful to not fill the wall, ceiling, and floor spaces with things that are not child created, not useful for children, or items that do not support the adults' ability to track important information.

It is evident that language and vocabulary are significant components of the individual's development and future reading success. It is also clear that waiting until the child enters formal schooling to think about how we might foster vocabulary, as well as expressive and receptive language development can

leave some children with deficits when compared to their typical peers. Children need to feel supported and safe. Through environments and experiences that are nurturing, caregivers can build trusting relationships and increase the likelihood that children will communicate and listen.

Table 1

<p style="text-align: center;">Examples of Promoting Language and Vocabulary Development within the Environment</p>		
<p>Temporal Environment (schedules, routines, transitions, and activities)</p>	<p>Social Environment (social interactions with others)</p>	<p>Physical Environment (space, furnishing, and materials)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During routines such as diapering, talk to the infant and toddler, explain what you are doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge emotions you observe and provide a label for these emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange areas that allow the children to explore, and describe or have them describe what they are doing and seeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read simple board books, altering reading tone, demonstrating different expressive voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage child to use their words to explain how they feel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide materials of interest and materials that encourage conversations such as dolls, blocks, and dress up clothes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look through books, find and repeat rich words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret and translate a child’s babbling, facial expressions, and actions into words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide areas where children can display treasures they find during outdoor expeditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide simple instructions before and during routines and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a serve-and-return format to communicate with young infants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a cozy space for reading
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk children through established routines such as: bedtime, mealtime, and naptime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate in small units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide various types of print materials

Table 1 (cont.)

<p style="text-align: center;">Examples of Promoting Language and Vocabulary Development within the Environment</p>		
<p>Temporal Environment (schedules, routines, transitions, and activities)</p>	<p>Social Environment (social interactions with others)</p>	<p>Physical Environment (space, furnishing, and materials)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing songs to support specific transitions such as clean up, washing hands, mealtime, and naptime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing, rhyme, and provide rhythms together one on one, in small groups, or larger groups; allow young children to join or leave as they want 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Label the room for toddlers and preschoolers, ask them to help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide simple information before changes in activities occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate pitch to emphasize important words and sounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up obstacle course that follows a pattern from a song or story such as <i>Bear Hunt</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point to objects in books, name and describe them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With infants, play games such as peekaboo, hand-clapping, bouncing games, games that involve pointing and gesturing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply a space where they can engage in dramatic play
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask infant and toddler to bring you different objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with children, guiding sometimes and following other times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange experiences that multiple children can participate in, with materials that require sharing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play games that identify body parts or objects in the room like I Spy and Head, Shoulder, Knees, and Toes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help children wait and listen to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide low-hanging, acrylic mirrors

Table 1 (cont.)

Examples of Promoting Language and Vocabulary Development within the Environment		
Temporal Environment (schedules, routines, transitions, and activities)	Social Environment (social interactions with others)	Physical Environment (space, furnishing, and materials)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play simple repetitive games	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To show understanding and model appropriate syntax, repeat child's ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supply various types of materials that children can write, color, and create with
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow a basic schedule of daily main experiences such as indoor, outdoor, naptime, snack time, mealtime, and bedtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask children "I wonder..." questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make books and other reading materials accessible to children in floor baskets or low shelves

Next Steps

Establishing authentic, meaningful, language-rich environments and experiences will get us one step closer to preparing children to be future readers. As James Britton recognized decades ago, talk is the foundation for building literacy learning (Britton, 1992). As instructional teams and leaders, caregivers and teachers, let's ask ourselves, in what ways are we addressing the whole child in early childhood. As a support, Table 1 provides examples to guide and give ideas to colleagues and parents. Remember one key take-away: talk to, play with, listen to, and enjoy young children. These activities are crucial to promote child development throughout the temporal, social, and physical environments.

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The Perceptions of High School Personnel and Their Experiences of Professional Learning Communities

By James L. Davis III, Paul Sims, L Arthur Safer,
Lydia Manning and Rebecca Hornberger

Editor's Note: This article has its basis in the dissertation in Educational Leadership that the first author completed in 2019. His co-authors also served as his dissertation committee.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, there has been a tremendous shift toward the professional development of teachers (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Consequently, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have become a common practice in schools across America. Although there is no collective definition, research has shown extensive international agreement that a PLC is a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their pedagogy in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way, operating as a collective enterprise (King & Newmann, 2001; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002). PLCs, when operated correctly, can increase student achievement and growth (DuFour, 2004, 2007; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many 2006). However, research is lacking on the perceptions of high school personnel and their experiences of PLCs (Vescio et al., 2008). According to Mullen (2009), a PLC should facilitate a mutually-respectful shared-decision-making process, between administrators and teachers—both seasoned veterans and new hires.

Pioneer researchers DuFour (2004, 2007), Hord (1997, 2006), and Senge (1990), all of whom are prominent canvassers of PLCs, found that collaboration should be developed to influence professional practice. Very little research has been conducted about the perceptions of high school personnel and their experiences in PLCs. To find out exactly how high school personnel handle themselves within PLCs, this study investigated their perceptions and experiences regarding PLCs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how, and in what ways, high school personnel perceive their experiences in PLCs. Data provided a baseline of teacher perceptions and highlighted areas where improvement can take place.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative, grounded-theory study:

R1: How do teachers perceive and experience PLCs in high school contexts?

R2: How are teachers' practices shaped by PLCs?

R3: What role do PLCs play in shaping teaching culture in a high school setting?

Review of the Literature

In the United States, school reform efforts have followed a predictable pattern launching various improvement initiatives, only to be overshadowed by criticism, confusion, and complaints (DuFour, 2007). There has been a tremendous shift toward the professional development of teachers over the last twenty years (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Consequently, PLCs have become a common practice in schools across America. It is important to note that PLCs are not all alike, but rather provide suggested approaches or processes intended on improvement. Scholarly definitions do vary from one to another, as a result there is no collective universal definition for a professional learning community (Stoll et al., 2006; Williams, Brien, Sprague, & Sullivan, 2008). There is, however, no shortage of an array of interpretations from scholars in the field and their explanations of a PLC. What researchers can agree upon is that a PLC is a collaborative effort, where personnel can meet and collaborate on their best practices to achieve more than they would have working alone (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

More recently, there has been an immense shift toward Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) becoming a common practice in schools across America. Although there is no collective definition within the body of research, there is extensive international agreement that a PLC is a “group of people sharing and critically interrogating their pedagogy in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way operating as a collective enterprise” (Toole & Louis, 2002, p. 222-223). Research has found that when operated correctly, PLCs can increase student achievement and growth (DuFour, 2004, 2006 & 2007).

With this new shift in teacher professional development, Vescio et al. (2008), acknowledged PLCs have “identified the ability to analyze and reflect on practice and to engage in productive discussions of teaching and learning as crucial to the effectiveness of teacher groups” (p. 59). PLCs have an unambiguous purpose in education where groups of teachers meet regularly to review student learning data, collaborate, inquire collectively, complete professional development, modify instruction, and review student results

(DuFour et al, 2006). PLCs have a specific purpose, seeking various means of improvement; however, teachers at times may feel isolated due to various school extenuating circumstances such as school culture, schedule, or environment (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Lacking, however, is research on personnel and in what ways they perceive their experiences in PLCs.

Districts throughout the United States are moving to a more collaborative approach in an effort to impact school and instructional improvement. PLCs have illustrated that they are most effective when they are focused on the advancement of teachers and the overall success of their students (Stoll, et al., 2006). A PLC is a powerful and profound way to affect school change. Initiating and creating the aforementioned concepts requires dedication and hard work. “When educators do the hard work necessary to implement these principles, their collective ability to help all students learn will rise. If they failed to demonstrate the discipline to initiate and sustain this work, then their school is unlikely to become more effective, even if those within it claim to be a professional learning community. The rise or fall of a professional learning community concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school, the commitment and persistence of the educators within it” (DuFour, 2004, p. 6).

Collaboration is the fundamental element of what a PLC is founded upon and must include all members of the teaching personnel (Kruse, 1996). Within this collaborative culture, personnel will focus on reflecting and sharing best practices, creating positive and continuous results, and focus on the responsibilities of student learning and success (Vescio et al., 2006; DuFour et al., 2006; Reichstetter, 2006). Hord and Sommers (2008) also added that during collaboration among teaching personnel, shared practices are focused on the overall improvement of the teaching and learning practice among educators. Collectively, teaching personnel who participate in PLCs must be willing to openly reflect on their personal practices for the betterment of their professional development (Kruse, 1996).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

More recently, there have been many publications written on PLCs as a means to establish collegial change in schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullen, 2004; Hord, 2006; Senge, 2000). The theory is that teachers work together in a continuous process of collaborative inquiry and data-driven research to ultimately achieve better results for their students (DuFour et al., 2006). However, with each scholar, there are differing understandings of how PLCs conduct themselves. This study investigated the potential for other factors such as perceptions of high school personnel and their experiences in PLCs. The

conceptual framework for this study began with the history of the PLC and its origins and examined how PLCs emerged into what they are today. A specific focus on attributes and structures of a PLC was incorporated, concluding with the overall advantages of PLCs. These characteristics are vital in explaining the PLC process and its functionality.

This research revolved around two areas: (a) perceptions of high school personnel and their experiences of PLCs, and (b) PLC operational standards/expectations. The conceptual framework identified how, and in what ways, high school personnel perceive their experiences in PLCs. Foundational theories used for this study focused on the underpinning theories of what a PLC is and what characteristics define them to determine a definition of what a PLC is and what its functions actually are. Pioneer researchers DuFour (2004, 2007), Hord (1997, 2006), and Senge (1990), found that collaboration should be developed to influence professional practice. This practice has been implemented throughout schools across America as an improvement initiative, most commonly applied through rubrics, checklists, and district-created diagrams. Although these procedures are relatively common, this brings up a number of questions such as perceptions of personnel and overall staff experiences in relation to PLCs.

Methodology

The strategy selected for this research was a qualitative design. Creswell (2012) observed that qualitative research is needed when exploring the phenomenon of perspective. It was not known how and in what ways high school personnel perceive their experiences in PLCs. Implementing a qualitative research design was a valuable strategy in obtaining high school personnel overall perceptions.

Since it was unknown how and in what ways high school personnel perceived their experiences in PLCs, a grounded theory approach was used to study participants. Grounded theory design “is systematic, qualitative procedures that researchers use to generate a general explanation (grounded in the views of participants, called a grounded theory) that explains a process, action, or interaction among people” (Creswell, 2012, p. 21). For this research, the data were analyzed using Dedoose, a cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative research with text, photos, audio, videos, spreadsheet data, and more to investigate how and in what ways high school personnel perceive their experiences in PLCs. Participants for this study were selected from two Midwestern schools at random with an anticipated sample of 20 participants. Individual interviews were conducted with the participants.

Sample Demographics

The secondary schools used in this study are located in an urban district in the Midwestern United States. This study was conducted at two midwestern schools. The overall district enrollment is just over 21,000 students and employs just under 3,000 teaching professionals as seen in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1

District Demographics	
Number of Students	21,180
Number of Full-Time Personnel	2,799
Number of Schools	45
Elementary Schools	28
Middle Schools	8
High Schools	9

Table 2

Student Demographics	
Females	10,379
Males	10,801
Black	46.5%
White	32%
Hispanic	4.5%
Multiracial	8%
Asian	8.4%
American Indian	0.6%

The district is one of the state's largest and most diverse, encapsulating over 50 square miles in an urban city, with a population of 21,000 high school and elementary students. Of that population of students, two high schools were selected for this research, with a population of 1,450. These two high schools were referred to as: School A and School B. Likewise, participant names were referred to as: Participant A1, Participant A2, etc., from School A; and Participant B1, Participant B2, etc. from School B. Participation was completely voluntary with an anticipated sample of 20 participants. Upon completion of this research study, 18 individual interviews were conducted due to saturation. A total of ten participants were interviewed at School A and 8 at School B. Participation in this research project was strictly voluntary and participants were able to choose not

to participate or withdraw at any time without adverse consequences or concerns for retribution.

Table 3

Interview Totals	
Total Participants	18 participants
School A	10 participants
School B	8 participants
Male	4 participants
Female	14 participants
Mean Years of Service	18 years of service
Departments Represented	English Language Arts – 4 participants Math – 4 participants Career Education – 3 participants Special Education – 2 participants Science – 2 participants Fine Arts – 1 participant Foreign Language – 1 participant History– 1 participant

As illustrated in Table 3 above, there were 18 participants overall, 10 from School A and 8 from School B. Out of the 18 participants, there were 14 females and 4 males. A review of the departments represented shows the wide array of teachers interviewed.

Table 4

Interview Demographics			
Location/ Participant Number	Gender	Subject/Department Taught	Years of Service
A1	Female	SPED English 12	33
A2	Female	English 11	14
A3	Female	Career Ed.	20
A4	Female	English 12	26
A5	Female	English 10	6
A6	Female	Environmental Science	6
A7	Female	English 9	13
A8	Female	Career Ed.	38
A9	Male	Math 12	24
A10	Female	Math 9	15

Table 4 (Cont.)

Interview Demographics			
Location/ Participant Number	Gender	Subject/Department Taught	Years of Service
B1	Female	Math 9	25
B2	Male	Math 12	30
B3	Male	Fine Arts	1
B4	Female	Spanish	5
B5	Female	SPED English 9	4
B6	Female	Career Ed.	25
B7	Female	History	27
B8	Female	Chemistry	15

As seen in Table 4 Interview Demographics, subjects represented include the following: English Language Arts, Math, Career Education, Special Education, Science, and Fine Arts, Foreign Language and History. Overall the 18 participants' years of service range from one year to 38 years, with a mean of 18 years. On March 14, 2019, a focus group was established. A total of five of the eighteen teachers participated in the focus group as seen in Table 5 Focus Groups Totals.

Table 5

Focus Group Totals	
Total Participants:	5 participants (from the original 18 individual interview pool)
School A:	3 participants
School B:	2 participants
Male:	0 participants
Female:	5 participants
Mean Years of Service:	19.5 years of service
Departments Represented	Participant A2 – English 11 Participant A5 – English 10 Participant A8 – Career Education Participant B6 – Career Education Participant B8 – Chemistry

Results

The three research questions selected were answered by high school teachers. An interview schedule was designed to guide the process while providing participants an insight to the questioning. The individual interviews with teachers consisted of 15 semi-structured, open-ended questions and the focus group was comprised of two questions, which aligned to the research theme; the perceptions of high school personnel and their experiences of professional learning communities. The researcher developed three interview questions and one focus group question to answer the study's first research question, "How do teachers experience high school professional learning communities?" The researcher also created three interview questions and one focus group question to answer the study's second research question, "How are teacher's practices shaped by professional learning communities?" To answer the study's third research question, the researcher created four interview questions to answer, "What role does a professional learning community play in shaping the teaching culture in the high school setting?" The arrangement of these questions in correlation to the research questions outlined a framework for the remaining findings and themes.

Table 6

Research Questions Coupled with Individual and Focus Group Interviews	
Research Question #1 How do teachers perceive and experience Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in high school contexts?	Interview Question #1 How do teachers perceive and experience PLCs in high school contexts?
	Interview Question #2: What is your overall experience with high school PLCs?
	Interview Question #6: What are some of the challenges you faced within a PLC?
	Focus Group Question #1: How do you experience PLCs overall?
Research Question #2 How are teachers' practices shaped by PLCs?	Interview Question #3 How are your practices shaped by PLCs?
	Interview Question #5: Who and what are your greatest resources within a PLC?
	Interview Question #7: Who do you turn to in the time of need?
	Focus Group Question #2: Explain how best practices from PLCs shaped your teaching in the classroom?

Table 6 (Cont.)

Research Questions Coupled with Individual and Focus Group Interviews	
Research Question #3 What role do PLCs play in shaping teaching culture in a high school setting?	Interview Question #4 What role do PLCs play in shaping the teaching culture in your school?
	Interview Question #8: Are the master class schedules created to accommodate common planning to meet amongst grade-level/subject matter teams?
	Interview Question #12: Do you consider yourself an active leader within the PLC process?
	Focus Group Question #13: Is everyone in your PLC an active participant?

The research uncovered four emergent themes: Directional, Relational, Procedural, and Structural in relation to high school personnel and their perceptions and experiences of professional learning communities. Within these themes a great amount of information emerged which thoroughly explained both the perceptions and experiences of the PLC process. A brief synopsis of these themes as well as their findings are highlighted below:

Theme One: Directional

Teachers’ shared their personal perceptions of the directional leadership of their PLCs. These experiences came from weekly PLC meetings and included perceptions of PLCs, the general leadership within their PLCs, the administrator’s role, and the overall effectiveness of the PLC. The interviews exposed positive perceptions concerning PLCs working best when facilitated by teachers and being useful when run correctly. The Five-Step process, or form, was perceived as an accountability piece but often times with a negative connotation. Negative perceptions included inconsistency within PLCs, overwhelming data expectations and requirements within the Five-Step. At times, perceptions indicated the belief that PLCs were being used as an evaluative tool. Leadership within the PLC among fellow teachers included a lack of direction and/or understanding of their role within the PLC. Teachers also reported that they collaborate collectively as a team when participating in PLC and work best when there is a facilitator or teacher leading the meeting. The administrator’s role appeared to have transmogrified from a leadership role to a more observant or supportive role over the years, whereas the Five-Step took the place of accountability. Teachers did experience administrators more as in an evaluative role within this process, noting they feel that they are being watched/observed by the administration when they are present in PLC meetings. As evidenced in Table 7 Theme One: Directional Synopsis.

Table 7

Theme One: Directional Synopsis	
Perceptions of PLCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Useful when run correctly• Best when facilitated by a teacher• Five-step serves as an accountable piece• Inconsistent direction from upper administration• Overwhelming data requirements (Five-step)• Used an evaluative tool
Leadership within PLCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of direction or role in PLC (restrictions)• Collaborates collectively as a team• Works best with team facilitator or team led
Administrators Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serves an observation role• Accountability piece to the Five-step• Evaluative tool

Theme Two: Relational

The second theme that emerged was a relational component. Participants shared their experiences within collaboration, communication and collegiality. Interviews revealed that when collaborating sharing commonalities, formative assessments and feedback enhanced the teaching practices by creating a cohesive teaching environment. Additionally, reflecting on one another’s work made change for the better. Within communication, it was most effective when there was a facilitator and those who participated regularly communicated most effectively. Building relationships with fellow colleagues also enhanced communication. Mixed messages and inconsistencies also surfaced, due in large part to directives from upper administration, to building administration, to the academic coach and then to the PLC team. Excessive paperwork required by the Five-Step also was expressed and called for an agenda to be more effective. Collegiality revealed numerous personality clashes and differences in ideologies due in most part to mixed subject and grade levels in PLCs. Table 8 – Theme Two: Relational Synopsis provides a complete summary of Theme Two below.

Table 8

Theme Two: Relational Synopsis	
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share commonalties• Pre/post assessments• Formative/Summative assessments• Feedback• Reflection• Cohesive teaching/best practices
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Best with facilitator or teacher leader• Build relationships with colleagues• Mixed messages• Inconsistencies• Five-step too much paperwork• Need an agenda
Collegiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clash in personalities• Differing ideologies• Mixed subject and grade levels

Theme Three: Procedural

The third emergent theme was procedural. Participants shared the operational experiences of PLCs and the Five-step form and how they perceived them to be time consuming, while at the same time affecting their pedagogy within the classroom. Interview data revealed numerous inconsistencies with the Five-Step form, beginning with varying forms and mixed messages as to what needs to be completed, resulting in continual change. Procedurally, the Five-Step is the governing document and a requirement within PLCs. however it is referred to by teachers as irrelevant and not beneficial. The Five-Step has been alluded to as subjective and convoluted – easily mistaken with multiple interpretations. Furthermore, the Five-Step has been described as tedious and time consuming – taking additional time before and after school, as well as over the weekends to keep up to date. Pedagogically speaking, teachers shared pre and post assessments, formative and summative assessments and reviewed mastery goals and targets. Their experiences included sharing strategies from the classroom and assessments to enhance their overall teaching practices. Table 9 Theme Three: Procedural Synopsis below provides a synopsis of Theme Three.

Table 9

Theme Three: Procedural Synopsis	
Five-step Process (form)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Varying forms• Continual change• Mixed messages• Serves as a guide• Compliance piece• Subjective and convoluted• Limits meaningful discussion (due to paperwork)
Time Consuming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Five-step is tedious• Requires excessive data compilation• Updating of the form requires time spent before and after school and on the weekend
Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre/post assessments• Formative and summative assessments• Shared strategies from the classroom• Enhances teaching practices

Theme Four: Structural

The final theme that emerged was a structural component. Participants shared their feelings on PLC meeting times, the Five-Step form, contractual responsibilities and upper administrative directives. In the previous three themes, both School A and School B comparably aligned themselves. However, in theme four, School A and School B differed in PLC meeting times. Participants at School A indicated that they meet weekly for one class period, approximately 25-50 minutes. Whereas those at School B meet biweekly, alternating between PLC time and team time for 50 minutes. Participants shared their experiences with the Five-Step and said that it served as an accountability piece that assists the team in meeting their goals. The interviews also revealed that meeting weekly in PLCs is a contractual requirement. However, some believe there is considerable impetus from upper administration on the directive and implementation of PLCs. It is also important to note that the participants who were observed reported receiving numerous mixed messages from upper administration on down, which, in turn, translated to multiple interpretations of the actual PLC process and its expectations. Table 10 Theme Four: Structural Synopsis below highlights a complete summary of Theme Four.

Table 10

Theme Four: Structural Synopsis	
PLC Meeting Times	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School A: weekly for approximately 25-50 minutes• School B: biweekly for 50 minutes – alternating between PLC time and team time
Five-step	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accountability• Leads to goals and bigger picture• Compliance piece• Can be competitive and judgmental among fellow colleagues
Contractual Administrative Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contractual requirement• Push from upper administration• Mixed messages• Multiple interpretations from upper administration, building administration, and coach

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how, and in what ways, high school personnel perceived their experiences in PLCs. How do teachers experience high school PLCs? How are teachers’ practices shaped by PLCs? How, and in what ways, do high school personnel perceive their experiences in PLCs? PLCs have received credibility within the scope of supporting and improving teacher awareness and competencies leading to greater teacher efficacy for meeting students’ requisites (Rosenholtz 1989, Hord 1997, Donaldson 2008, Cohen et al. 2009, Drago-Severson 2012). The research was crafted to provide a baseline of teacher perceptions and to highlight areas where improvement could take place by using a purposeful convenience sampling to obtain the best insight and understanding of how, and in what ways, high school personnel perceived their experiences in PLCs.

Interview questions implemented for this study were originated and supported by the literature on Professional Learning Communities associated with teacher perceptions and experiences. In total, fifteen interview questions were created. Six introductory questions focused on research question one, and how teachers perceived and experienced PLCs in their high school contexts. Four questions investigated research question two, to explore how teachers’ practices were shaped by PLCs. Five questions on how PLCs shape teaching culture in the high school setting investigated research question three. Collectively, the

fifteen questions for teachers were harmonious with the three research questions created by the researcher and implemented during the one-on-one interviews. All questions supported the findings of this study on how, and in what ways, high school personnel perceive their experiences in PLCs.

Results of this study revealed that teachers are torn between their overall perceptions of PLCs, finding them both positive and negative. Seven of the eighteen teachers interviewed identified PLCs, as an effective means to collaboration, where, when run correctly (specifically teacher driven), they can produce positive outcomes. On the contrary, eleven teachers found PLCs to be negative, citing that they were a waste of time and convoluted, with endless paperwork. Leadership within PLCs was perceived by teachers as positive overall where teachers take on a leadership role in facilitating the meeting.

The research study revealed teachers' operational experiences of PLCs, the Five-Step form, meeting times, contractual responsibilities and directive from upper administration. Interview data overwhelmingly revealed numerous inconsistencies with the Five-Step form. Furthermore the study revealed teachers' relational experiences of PLCs, sharing experiences of collaboration, communication and collegiality. Research has exposed that participant experiences with collaborating, sharing commonalities, formative assessments and feedback enriched their overall teaching practices, producing a cohesive teaching environment. Communication was also an area of concern of those teachers interviewed. Teachers reported receiving mixed messages and inconsistencies in large part due to directives filtered down from upper administration, to building administration, to the academic coach, and then to the PLC team.

In conclusion, all the research questions supported the findings of this study on how, and in what ways, high school personnel perceived their experiences in PLCs.

Implications of the Research

From this study the following practical implications have emerged and are hereafter summarized. The first and foremost implication is that there needs to be a clear and concise directive communicating from the top down to address the misconceptions and expectations of a PLC within the district. Participants shared that they are not sure if they were on the same page or clearly knew what was expected from the district or administration.

Presently, teachers are overwhelmed and have expressed their concern with numerous initiatives that involve countless hours before and after work involving the PLC process. According to teachers interviewed, the Five-Step form created by the district to record progress in PLCs was convoluted, citing differing Five-Step forms with various interpretations making it unclear as to which one to

use. The Five-Step form as a compliance piece was often times referred to with a negative connotation including inconsistency within PLCs, overwhelming data expectations, and overall requirements within the Five-step.

A second implication for this study is the need for a single Five-Step form that is uniform and tailored to incorporate the directive of the administration. A single streamlined document would create a more unified staff working toward a common goal, while at the same time working together to close the achievement gap and address priority school designation from the state. Pedagogically speaking, teachers share pre and post assessments, formative and summative assessments, and review mastery goals and targets. Their experiences included sharing strategies from the classroom and assessments to enhance their overall teaching practices. Incorporating a streamlined Five-Step to further enhance this process would only continue to benefit the teachers with whom they work.

In order to increase student achievement and staff collaboration through PLCs, implementing a clear and concise communication directive and a streamlined Five-Step form throughout the district is essential. DuFour et al. (2008) underscored that “educators must acknowledge that often, the primary cause for our inaction has been conflict from within rather than the opposition of external forces” (p. 429). Specifically focusing on communication and a streamlined Five-Step process can assist on keeping teachers and administrators on the same page. As a result, PLCs will produce the results that both parties strive for, and together their aspirations, experiences, and motivations will prosper according to transformational leadership theory.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research design incorporated a qualitative study that explored how, and in what ways, high school personnel perceive and experience PLCs. Implementing a phenomenological methodology and using basic grounded theory, the researcher was able to explore participant perceptions and overall experiences of PLCs. Data collected from this study can further assist school districts and administrators who have a vested interest in PLCs as part of their school improvement process and universities that study or focus on professional learning communities. The researcher felt participants were vigilant in their reactions, perhaps in fear that the district would retaliate or know who said what. As a result of the researcher’s observation, this study should be replicated in urban high schools outside of the district, where the researcher is not employed to eliminate any underlying fears of retribution.

Additional research on the PLC process concerning the four emergent themes of this study: directional, relational, procedural and structural in relationship to high school personnel and their perceptions and experiences of PLCs would also

provide valuable information. Continued research in these four themes could cohesively detail the perceptions of high school teachers and their experiences in PLCs and continue to explain these observations and understandings of the PLC process. These new findings could also help in further assisting universities, administrators, and participants of PLCs in working seamlessly toward one collaborative effort.

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Collaborative Decision-Making

By Ronald Warwick

The aim of this paper is to share a process the author has developed and implemented with many private and public organizations as well as thousands of graduate students over the past 50 years. The aim of this process is to identify values, concerns, issues, priorities, and goals, and then plan and implement improvement strategies, gather and analyze data from these improvement strategies, revise and continually improve the organization to meet and exceed its aim.

The journey through this process enables you to lead a collaborative process with any group in your organization, however small or large. This process involves two phases: Phase One is the Identification Process phase, and Phase Two is the Continuous Improvement Process phase. Phase One can be achieved usually in a one full-day meeting. However, Phase Two requires a number of small-group team meetings to address the continuous improvement process.

The first step is for you, as the leader, with your leadership team, to determine an area needing improvement. This first step starts by the leader placing a question in front of the leadership team who will be going through this process and/or assisting the organizational staff who will be going through this process. The question is on the screen starting with the stem: “What are the ...?” Some examples of areas needing to be addressed might be:

1. What are the values most important to implement in our department?
2. What are the causes of our decision-making system not being effective?
3. What are the academic competencies and behavioral skills required of our graduate nursing program?
4. What are the criteria to be considered in selecting our next church leader?
5. What are the strategies we can design in our work place to help us be more collaborative and supportive of each other?

Phase One: Collaborative Decision-Making Process

Step 1: The point is that whatever issue, priority, item, etc. . . . you wish to address, formulate it into a question. This question starts the process. NOW STOP! The

wording of this question must be discussed, clarified, and agreed upon with the leadership team before going to the next step. Once this has been achieved, move to step two.

Step 2: Groups of five to seven members are selected who represent a mixture of the organization work-force community. Each group follows a process that enables them to list items (responses to the question) with no conflict. The groups are led through this process by a leader/facilitator and all groups proceed through the “Collaborative Decision-Making Process” starting with 2.1 listed below:

2.1 Each group brainstorms responses by writing each idea on a 5x8 index card using large felt pens, one idea per card. (NO TALKING ALLOWED) The reason “NO TALKING IS ALLOWED” is that each person must be allowed to think of ideas that respond to the question without being influenced by another person’s comments during this step in the process. This step takes only five to ten minutes. After ten minutes, ask each group to close this activity down.

Step 3: After step two is completed, one member at a time, places his cards on the table/floor following the procedures listed below:

3.1 Place one card down on the table/floor. Place the next card under it if it is related to the above card.

3.2 If the idea on the next card is not related to the card previously put on the table/floor, start a new column.

3.3 Proceed under this criterion until that person places all his cards on the table/floor.

3.4 The next person in the group follows the same criteria and the activity proceeds until all group members have their cards down on the table/floor in columns.

3.5 NO TALKING ALLOWED DURING THIS ENTIRE PROCESS Again, each person must be allowed to think without being influenced by another person during this step in the process. (The leader/facilitator, must stop any discussion during this process. This is critical!)

Step 4: After everyone has placed cards on the table/floor, anyone can now move any card to any place in any column where one feels it is more related. Everyone is allowed to discuss the card moves and debate any move. This process is time consuming and should not be rushed. It is the key time for everyone to explain ideas and hear different points of view. The leader/facilitator moves the discussion along but does not cut people off or force a decision. Respect for each person’s

view is critical and **DISCUSSION IS CRITICAL!** The leader/facilitator reminds each group to remove any duplicate card and clarify any card that is not clear to the entire group. After moving and clarifying the cards, the leader reads each card to the group and if any editing is suggested, the card is changed to reflect the edit.

Step 5: After the cards in each group have been arranged to everyone's satisfaction, the next step begins. This step involves two groups integrating their columns into one set of columns. As these columns are combined, remove duplicates and edit card wording if needed. Read and agree on the final set of columns after combining is complete. Repeat Step 5 again, and again, and again until one group of columns remains on the table/floor.

Step 6: After all the column cards have been combined and clarified, and the total group is satisfied with the location of the cards, the total group creates a title card for each column. In the upper right corner of each card, mark the title column card and number code of the column cards in each column so they are identified. Title cards are 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0... Cards under Title Card 1.0 are 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3... Cards under Title Card 2.0 are marked 2.1, 2.2, 2.3... and so on.

Step 7: The next step is to determine which card items are the most critical to the entire group at this time from all the items generated. This is done through a multi-voting process. The leader/facilitator explains the criteria used for the voting process: If the item is "critical to be addressed now", vote five fingers, if it is "important to be addressed now", vote three fingers, if it is "important but not critical at this time", vote one finger. The facilitator reads each card and asks for the vote. All members of the group vote at the same time, and **no talking during the voting process**. If you are slow to vote, shut your eyes and then vote so you are not influenced by other votes. The leader will delay to count votes until all group members vote on the item. The leader/facilitator (or a group member) records the vote on each individual card in the lower right corner of each card, no vote on the title card. This process is done on each card on the table/floor. One strategy used for counting votes is to ask the entire group to sit in a circle with their backs facing the center of the circle. Also, sometimes the leader/facilitator asks the group to keep their eyes closed during the voting step to enhance no influencing from others during the vote.

Step 8: The top-voted column of cards is identified. The group might notice a natural break in the votes between the top level and the next level and select the top-level items. The top seven to ten cards based on the vote count need to be identified and selected. These items are then set in a single column in any order for the group to see, and then labeled in the upper left corner as "A, B, C, D, E, F, etc..." Then individuals in the group are asked to rank the items in order of importance to be addressed with the highest rank number given to the one "most

critical”, and the next highest rank number given to the next rank, and so on down the line. The lowest number (1) is given to the “least critical” of the items in the column. If you have eight total cards in the column, (8) would be given to the highest ranked item, (7) to the next ranked, and so on down to (1) for the lowest-ranked item.

Step 9: The leader/facilitator totals the “rank votes” from all participants and displays them on the screen for all to see. Once the rank vote totals are complete, ranking the items is next. The rank of the items is written next to the total vote column and everyone can see the rank. The highest voted item is ranked # 1; next highest vote is ranked # 2, and so on. If any items tie for a rank position, revote the item by the five-three-one vote method only to determine the rank position, and do not change its previously recorded total vote.

Step 10: After the rank is recorded, the total group determines if the group has control over the items listed and ranked. The item-control analysis is done by asking the group if it has control, (authority to make decisions to address the item) over improving this situation/item. Again, the group may be asked to sit in a circle facing to the center to allow easy vote counting. The vote is done by the “thumbs up / thumbs down” method with no talking during the voting process. If an individual feels the work-group has control over improving this item, vote “thumbs up”, if not, “thumbs down.” The facilitator records the control vote in the next column in the following manner: yes vote (35) /no vote (15) if 50 people are in the total group. After the control vote is recorded, the group may decide to discuss the control vote interpretation, and may vote again after some group clarification is understood differently based on new information.

Collaborative Decision-Making Process Rule: The rule that determines the group’s priority to be addressed is “**HIGHEST RANK AND HIGHEST CONTROL.**” The items with the highest rank and highest control are the items the group believes are the best ones to address at the present time.

Review Table 1, Chart 1, and Chart 2 below.

Collaborative Decision-Making Process Steps Review

Step 1: Formulate a question

Step 2: Individually brainstorm responses to the question on 5 X 8 cards:
(NO TALKING)

Step 3: Create card column distribution

Step 4: Move, discuss, clarify, remove, and edit cards

Step 5: Combine groups, again and again to get one total group of cards

Step 6: Code the title card and column cards

- Step 7:** Vote on each card, 5-3-1, with 5 most important, 3 very important, 1 important
- Step 8:** Select top voted cards (7-10 cards) and label them (A, B, C, D, etc...), single file line
- Step 9:** Total individual rank votes and determine Final Rank 1, 2, 3...
- Step 10:** Item Control Analysis Rule: Highest Rank and Highest Control

Table 1

TOP SELECTED ITEM	RANK SCORES				RANK TOTALS	RANK #	CONTROL #YES/#NO	TASK SELECTION PRIORITY
	1	2	3	4				
A								
B								
C etc...								

Below are two example charts of data; Chart 1 is from a high school head coach athletic staff, and Chart 2 is from a middle school teaching staff, each after a one day seminar using the above process to determine the values important to them, and what they expect from their students in their programs.

Chart 1

Head Coach Data				
	Descriptions Determined by 11 Head Coaches	Total	Rank	Control Count Y/N
C	Respect (Self, Teammates, Opponent, Fans, Officials & Facilities)	209	1	10/1
B	Take responsibility for their own actions	175	2	11/0
F	Integrity	170	3	11/0
G	Importance of being a student first then an athlete	168	4	11/0
A	Athletes should be dedicated in becoming a better player, student and overall person	162	5	11/0
I	Be a good representative of LZHS in the community	153	6	11/0
D	Handle constructive criticism	119	7	1/10
H	How to set goals and steps to reach them	115	8	11/0
E	Value all levels and all roles in the sport	114	9	10/1
N	Relationships with coaches and teammates	112	10	11/0
M	Positive reinforcement from coach and athletic department	108	11	11/0
K	Thoughtful (about actions, self, others)	100	12	11/0
O	Demonstrate how to handle criticism, setbacks	95	13	11/0
J	A support group of friends and family	70	14	6/5

Chart 2

Middle School Teacher Data					
	Descriptions Determined by 26 M.S. Teachers	Total Votes	Rank	Y/N Control	HR/HC
A	Focus on ALL students not only the extremes	167	10	26/0	
B	Students feel school is a safe and caring place	200	3	21/5	X
C	Keep high expectations and have students meet them	194	5	14/12	
D	PD that is worth staff time	188	6	*4/22	
E	Piloting before forcing implementation	168	9	*3/23	
F	Bring back the FUN!	151	13	26/0	
G	More opportunity to speak openly	195	4	12/14	
H	Acknowledge each classroom is different, but important	162	11	26/0	
I	Work together towards common goals	184	7	23/3	X
J	Follow through (admin)	181	8	*4/22	
K	Mix teams evenly	202	2	*7/19	
L	Admin. should follow handbook matrix	159	12	*6/22	
M	Bad Behavior needs to be taken care of	215	1	25/1	X

Collaborative Decision-Making Process Analysis

As participants of this collaborative decision-making process move through these steps, they come to realize that each step requires agreement of a vast majority of people in order to move to the next step. The process is built on participants discussing ideas and coming to consensus before moving forward. By the end, almost all participants are in agreement and display very little disagreement. This is the result of the designed collaboration strategies built into the steps in this process. In the end, the participants contribute all the information addressing the initial question, discuss and determine all the input in each step, do all the voting to identify priorities, do the final ranking of the most important items to be analyzed and addressed, debate and determine what they have authority to control, and not able to control, and plan solutions going forward. Through this collaborative process, leaders of the organization need to support the findings from this process, and work within the work place to improve their work environment and in turn, improve the organization as a whole.

Phase Two: Continuous Improvement Process

After the organizational work group completes the “Collaborative Decision-Making Process” to identify the “Highest Rank and Highest Control” priority items, each selected planning team addresses one priority item using the “Continuous Improvement Process” phase which consists of the following steps: Plan Improvement Strategy, Implement Improvement Strategy, Gather and

Analyze Data on Improvement Strategy, Revise and Re-Implement Continuous Improvement Strategy within the organization.

Plan Improvement Strategy

1. Who should design the improvement strategy?
2. Who should implement the improvement strategy?
3. What are the expected criteria?
4. How are the criteria assessed?
5. How are data collected?
6. How are data analyzed?
7. When, with whom, and where are data shared?

Implement Improvement Strategy

1. Research group identified
2. Instruction on improvement strategy
3. Control group identified
4. Time limits established
5. Criteria established
6. Data collection methods identified
7. Data collection times determined

Gather and Analyze Data on Improvement Strategy

1. Data gathered and analyzed
2. Findings determined
3. Conclusions stated
4. Recommendations suggested
5. Impact of recommendations is analyzed
6. Integration of recommendations considered
7. Final recommendations agreed upon

Revise and Re-Implement Continuous Improvement Strategy

1. Plan staff development on the intervention
2. Support staff with mentoring and modeling
3. Expand the intervention implementation
4. Plan assessment of the implementation
5. Assess the implementation
6. Continually assess and improve the implementation

Final Thoughts

Once the top priorities are identified and selected, planning teams are created from the staff to address as many priorities as the leader and staff can handle. Each planning team should consist of members who are most knowledgeable about the topic. Team members may be selected from any level within the organization

who can contribute knowledge and understanding to the improvement design, intervention implementation, gathering and analyzing of data, and revising of improvement strategies continually. This entire process is a long-term investment in the building of quality in any organization, and as each priority is improved, other top-ranked priorities continue to rise to be assigned a planning team. As years go by, many of the top 10 items may be addressed and improve the quality to the organization.

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Let Music Take the First Chair in Your Lutheran School

By Jeffrey E. Burkart

Editor's Note: This article is taken from in the Spring issue of Shaping the Future. It is reprinted by permission and with its original formatting. Because the original article contained several footnotes that extended the information of the article itself, LEJ has retained those footnotes as endnotes here.

Music - A Gift of God

To Martin Luther, music was a gift of God that worked hand in hand with theology. He believed in the power of music to express the gospel and encouraged the vigorous teaching of music in schools. Luther had much to say about music's importance in the life of the church, its relationship to theology, and its support. The Luther quotes that follow are a small sampling of his love for music and its value:

“Music is an outstanding gift of God and next to theology. I would not want to give up my slight knowledge of music for a great consideration. And youth should be taught this art; for it makes fine, skillful people.”

“Those with prodigious skill in music are better suited for all things.”

“Music is a very fine art. The notes can make the words come alive.... Princes and kings must support music and the other arts too; for although private people love them, they cannot support them.”

“I have no use for cranks who despise music, because it is a gift of God. Music drives away the Devil and makes people joyful; they forget thereby all wrath, unchastity, arrogance, and the like.” (Luther/Plass, 1986, p, 979-980)

Recent Research on Music Education

I'm sure that Luther would be gratified to know that research supports his beliefs regarding music as an art form and its ability to make people “fine and skillful” and “better suited for all things.” Numerous studies have shown that music education and appreciation, private music lessons (both vocal and instrumental), and participation in musical ensembles of all kinds, do the following:

- 1) Develop the areas of the brain related to language and reasoning;
- 2) Increase one's ability to memorize;
- 3) Keep students engaged in school activities throughout the day;
- 4) Shape character and develop sensitivity to other cultures;

- 5) Increase one's ability to empathize with others and develops teamwork skills;
- 6) Increase verbal and mathematical understanding (one study showed that students who had music appreciation courses scored 63 points higher on verbal and 44 points higher on math on their SAT than those who did not have music appreciation);
- 7) Increase eye-hand coordination, motor skills, and spatial intelligence that helps children perceive the world more accurately (spatial intelligence is important for learning higher mathematics as well);
- 8) Develop creative thinking, reasonable risk taking, and self-confidence;
- 9) Promote "craftsmanship" i.e., the desire to produce high quality work across the curriculum;
- 10) Enhance children's spiritual development.¹

The above summary demonstrates the importance of music education and its significant role in the social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of children. Studies also show that music has beneficial effects on the mental health of adults who suffer from illnesses related to aging. Moreover, music and music therapy have shown positive health benefits for children and adults with serious health concerns such as depression, anxiety, and pain. Is it any wonder that David (one of the earliest music therapists) was called to play the lyre for King Saul to calm him when "a harmful spirit" was upon him (1 Samuel 16:14-23)?

Music in Lutheran Schools

Because of Luther's emphasis on music as a gift of God, Lutheran congregations and schools have traditionally stressed the study of music in general, and the specific use of music to teach doctrine, the liturgy, psalms, and Bible stories through hymns and spiritual songs.² In other words, Luther championed singing of the Good News; that's why the Lutheran Church is known as the "Singing Church."

Luther wrote many liturgical hymns such as:

- *Kyrie* – "God Father in Heaven Above" - LSB 942;
- *Gloria* – "All Glory be to God on High" - LSB 947;
- *The Creed* – "We all Believe in One True God" - LSB 954;
- *Sanctus* – "Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old" - LSB 960;
- *The Lord's Prayer* – "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" - LSB 766;
- The post-communion canticle, "O Lord, We Praise Thee" - LSB 617.

These are *catechetical hymns* that serve both a spiritual and educational purpose. They teach biblical truths to both children and adults through poetry and music. This combination of music and text makes it easier to remember the

theological meaning behind the biblical texts and to tell the story of salvation in ways that people of all ages can understand.³

Other important “teaching the scripture” hymns are:

- “These are the Holy Ten Commandments” - LSB 581;
- “To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord” – the Story of Jesus’ baptism - LSB 406;
- “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” – a poetical rendering of the Christmas story as written in Luke 2:10-20 - LSB 358,
- The story of the manifestation to the shepherds from Luke 2: 10-11 - “To Shepherds as They watched by Night” – TLH 103.⁴

In addition, Luther composed metrical paraphrases of the Psalms such as:

- “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” (Ps. 46) – LSB 656 & 657;
- “From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee” (Ps. 130) – LSB 607;
- “If God Had Not Been on Our Side” (Ps. 124) – TLH 267;
- May God Bestow on Us His Grace (Ps. 67) – LSB 823 & 824;
- “O Lord, Look Down from Heaven, Behold” (Ps. 12) – TLH 260.

The above hymns are a few samples of what Luther composed to teach the Christian faith to the people of Germany in the 16th century. This Lutheran singing tradition continued through the subsequent centuries and is alive today as musicians and poets mingle melody and words to create new songs that articulate the Gospel in our age, to all ages.⁵

What Does This Mean?

“What does this mean?” should be a Lutheran teacher’s most-asked question. What, in this case, does music mean for those of us who teach in Lutheran schools? I think it means that we need to put music as a high priority in all our schools. This is not to say we should denigrate the other arts. Far from it!⁶ All the fine arts need emphasis in our schools. However, in this article I want to encourage every teacher to make intentional efforts to ensure that all students are exposed to our great Lutheran musical heritage through the singing of hymns and spiritual songs that teach the biblical truths that we hold dear. Moreover, we should make it possible for all our students to read notes, play musical instruments, sing music in parts, know and appreciate music from various cultures and eras, listen to music of the great masters, attend orchestral and choral concerts, and learn about music history and those who compose music both ancient and modern. That is a tall order!

Some Lutheran schools have the capability to do some or all of these things and more; however, many of our schools do not have the resources necessary to provide such a robust music education experience. In spite of this, there are many ways teachers, even those with limited musical expertise, can address music in their classrooms.

Every Teacher A Music Teacher in Lutheran Schools

Every time children sing a hymn, there is an opportunity to teach both music and poetry. Not only the “mechanics” of music— $3/4$ or $4/4$ time, musical notation, sharps and flats, musical scales, etc., but also the way music supports and amplifies the meaning of the words. In addition to teaching children to sing, we can teach them the stories behind the hymns, how and why they were written, and by whom. The story behind a hymn’s composition is, more often than not, as significant as the hymn itself. Here are a few examples:

Now Thank We All Our God – LSB 895

Text by Martin Rinckart (1586-1649).

English translation by Katherine Winkworth (1827-1878).⁷

Martin Rinckart was a pastor in Eilenburg, Saxony (Germany), during the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648). At that time, Christians were killing Christians in a prolonged series of conflicts throughout central Europe in which over 8 million lives were lost in battles, associated violence, and plague!

Swedish mercenaries held Rinckart’s city of Eilenburg under siege demanding a ransom payment from the city. Since it was a fortified city, people from surrounding villages sought refuge behind Eilenburg’s walls. If the siege were not enough, famine took many lives and, to make things worse, plague struck as well. Eight thousand people died from starvation and plague, including Rinckart’s wife and every pastor in the city, save Rinckart. He presided over as many as 70 funerals a day, and, when all hope seemed lost, he went to the commander of the invading army to negotiate a deal to save the city and its people. Impressed by Rinckart’s faith and courage, the commander lowered his ransom demand.

Shortly thereafter, Rinckart wrote “Now Thank We All Our God” for a worship service to celebrate the end of the Thirty Years’ War (hymnary.org). That is a story worth knowing! Understanding the historical context in which a hymn was written gives us insight into the deeper meaning behind the text, and allows us to “sing with spirit and understanding.” (1 Corinthians 14:15).⁸

This hymn is often sung at Thanksgiving services, but can be taught, and memorized, so that children can sing or pray it with zeal at any time throughout their lives. They can, like Rinckart, raise their “hearts, hands, and voices” in praise to God who has done “wondrous things” and “blest” them, even in times of trouble, because of His “countless gifts of love” given to them by His Son, Jesus.

Question: Would it make a difference to your understanding of a hymn text if you knew that...

1. “Abide with Me” was written by a pastor who knew he was close to death;

2. “Eternal Father, Strong to Save” was written by a music teacher at the request a young school boy who was terrified about to traveling across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States in 1860;
3. “When Peace, Like a River,” was written by a man who had lost his business, his fortune, and his two-year-old son in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and shortly thereafter lost his four daughters in a ship collision at sea? (hymnary.org).

Furthermore, we can help students learn about the music that accompanies the hymn texts and serves to augment the meaning of the words and leads to a confident hope in the resurrection of the dead and the eternal life that we shall inherit by grace through the Spirit’s gift of faith.

To do this, I would suggest the following strategies:

1. Adopt a “Hymn of the Month” study by all grades. Choose one hymn a month that can be sung by everyone in school. The hymn’s origin, music, poetry, and composer(s) can be studied in age appropriate ways at each grade level, The hymns can be memorized, sung at weekly chapel services, used in daily devotions, and during weekly chapel services by a children’s choir (perhaps as an offertory). The text can be orally interpreted as a poem, illustrated with artwork, dramatized, or explained in oral reports.
2. Use the vast music resources available on the internet to listen to hymns, spiritual songs, and other great Christian choral and instrumental music. For example, Google “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” You will find more information, YouTube videos, biographical information, etc. than you expect. You can do this with virtually any hymn in almost any hymnal. There are also print and online resources that you can use to find out about the stories behind a hymn’s composition.¹⁰ See the following:

Print Resources:

- Osbeck, Kenneth W. (1982) *101 Hymn Stories*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications. (Also see: Osbeck’s two other 101 More Hymn Stories books (three volumes in all in paperback covering traditional and contemporary hymns.)
- Petersen, William J. (2006) *The Complete Book of Hymns: Inspiring Stories of 600 Hymns and Praise Songs*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
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- Precht, Fred L. (1992) *Lutheran Worship Hymnal Companion*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.
- Stulken, Marilyn Kay. (1981) *Hymnal Companion to the Lutheran Book of Worship*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press..
- Westerhoff, Paul. (2010) *Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Augsburg Fortress.
- *Hymnal Supplement 98 Handbook*. (1998) LCMS Commission on Worship. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

And the recently published...

Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns - 2 Volume Set (2,624 pages).

Edited by Joseph Herl, Peter C. Reske & Jon D. Vieker. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (2019).¹¹

Online Resources:

- <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/> - A.K.A. The Cyber Hymnal. Don't know how to play the piano? No problem. This site has recordings of thousands of hymns. They are very simple recordings, but the melody and accompaniment will play at the touch of a button, and you will find resources on virtually any hymn. Lyrics for hymns in public domain can be copied into PowerPoint presentations or duplicated for vocabulary study or for the study of hymn composers.
- <https://hymnary.org/> - A comprehensive index of over 1 million hymn texts, hymn tunes, and hymnals, with information on authors and composers, lyrics and scores, etc. An excellent resource!
- <https://songsandhymns.org/> from The Center for Church Music Songs and Hymns. Easily search this database for 56 common hymns – not a large resource, but a useful one. Site has excellent MP3 arrangements of hymns sung by singers who can really sing, resources on composers and lyricists, sheet music (hymns are in the public domain), and articles on music.
- <https://www.cuchicago.edu/about-concordia/center-for-church-music/> - Concordia University Chicago's Center for Church Music (not to be confused with the web site immediately above), is an excellent resource for learning about hymnody and church music from a Lutheran perspective. One of the site's most useful classroom resources is the "Devotions on the Hymn of the Day": <https://www.cuchicago.edu/about-concordia/center-for-church-music/devotions-on-the-hymn-of-the-day/>. This robust set of devotions on some of the greatest hymns ever written is a must read for Lutheran teachers and musicians. Hymns and devotions are keyed to the church year and can be used as weekly devotions in classrooms. Highly recommended.

For singing techniques, try the following sites:

- Posture: <https://musicaroo.com/correct-singing-posture/>
- Breathing: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sing/learning/breathing.shtml>
(Exercises to help students breathe correctly. These could be done as part of a P.E. class.)

Protecting Children's Voices:

- http://www.voiceteacher.com/children_article/children.html
- Sing Better: <https://musicaroo.com/learn-how-to-sing-better/>
- <http://www.jenevorawilliams.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Inside-the-book1.pdf>
(The above contains a 214-page book about the teaching of singing.)

Moving in the Right Musical Direction

If you do not have someone in your school who shepherds your music education goals, or if you are uncomfortable leading singing in your classroom, call in a music consultant to do a workshop to help everyone make music part of the day-to-day classroom experience.¹² No judgment here – music can be intimidating to teach for any number of reasons.

Find or create a music curriculum that meets the objectives you would like to have your students achieve. Perhaps you can have someone consult with your faculty as to how to best implement music in your classroom, or ask your district education conference committee to have several music workshops available for you to attend.

I highly recommend the following LCMS blog and its description of a significant music curriculum at: <https://blogs.lcms.org/2019/nurturing-singing-and-faith-through-music-education/> and feierabendmusic.org/curriculum - Feierabend Association for Music Education (FAME). The “Nurturing Singing and Faith through Music Education” blog has an excellent article about a workshop in “Conversational Solfege™” that was developed by Dr. John Feierabend of the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford, Connecticut. It is an excellent place to start a conversation regarding how music and faith can be taught in Lutheran schools. Please take the time to explore the article and the curriculum. It may change dramatically the way you teach music.¹³

Heirs of a Rich and Spiritually Powerful Musical Tradition

Here's a final word of encouragement regarding music taking a first chair in your Lutheran school.

We are the heirs of a rich musical tradition that has had, and continues to have, significant impact on the spiritual life of the Church. We are charged with the important and joyful task of transmitting our musical heritage to future generations of children so that they will be able to appreciate and sing the

Church's songs of grace to each other and to the world. As St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians

“...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...” Ephesians 5:18-20 (ESV)

May your teaching be blessed as you help children to be “filled with the Spirit” through the gift of music in your Lutheran Schools.

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¹ Also see: *The Benefits of Music Education* - From the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), 2012: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/the-benefits-of-music-education>

How Children Benefit from Music Education in Schools – NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) Foundation – Research based summary, 2014: <https://www.nammfoundation.org/articles/2014-06-09/How-Children-Benefit-Music-Education-Schools>; Also see NAMM research categorized by age levels from toddlers through senior citizens (2019): <https://www.nammfoundation.org/what-we-do/music-research>. For further reading on the benefits of music see: The National Association for Music Education's (NAfME), *Journal of Research in Music Education*.

² See Carl Schalk's, *Singing the Church's Song: Essays and Occasional Writings on Church Music* (2015). Lutheran University Press: Minneapolis, pp: 23-24. “One of the persistent models that has shaped the relationship between music and worship presents music as a Christian teacher or pedagogue. Closely tied to this paradigm is the didactic view that turns songs into weapons of argument. Virtually from the beginning, Christians have recognized that psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs can be enlisted in the battle to refute heresies. The early Church faced a largely hostile, pagan culture that threatened it from within. Education, indoctrination, and teaching became the crucial means for carrying on the Church's mission. The song of the Church was an important tool in that task. . . . Christians readily perceived that truth more easily impresses itself upon the hearts of the faithful when it is sung. (pp: 23 & 24).” Emphasis mine. The times we live in are often hostile to the Church, are they not? There still seems to be “nothing new under the sun” Ecclesiastes 1:9.

³ It is interesting to note that the words in the hymnal are all syllabicated. This helps young readers to sound out words and to understand the text better. Consider providing a hymnal to every student in your school. It is a treasury of biblical proportions.

⁴ *The Lutheran Hymnal*, a.k.a, TLH, contains hymns that are not in later hymnals such as *Lutheran Worship* (LW) and the *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB). There are probably copies of TLH somewhere in your church or school. Copy public domain hymns such as “To Shepherds as They watched by Night” and teach them to your students. To them they will be brand new.

⁵ See: Robin Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 144. Luther, writing in the fall of 1523 to his friend, Georg Spalatin, says: “Following this example of the prophets and fathers of the church, I intend to make vernacular psalms for the people, that is, spiritual songs so that the word of God even by means of song may live among

the people.” Luther goes on to say that he is looking for poets who can write hymns (in German) that avoid the use of “new-fangled” words for congregational singing that are “simple and common enough for the people to understand yet pure and fitting.”

⁶ See my *Shaping the Future* articles: “The State of the Arts in Lutheran Schools,” - Summer 2007 Volume 4, Issue 2, pp: 6-9; “Drama: A Life Changing Experience” - Winter 2009, Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp: 21-24. “Encouraging the Fine and Performing Arts in Lutheran Schools” at: <http://stf.lea.org/winter2019/ETnet.html>.

⁷ Catherine Winkworth is one of the most prolific translators of German hymns. I counted 46 of her hymn translations in the LSB (see page 1002 in the *Index of Author, Translators, and Sources of Hymns and Songs* - LSB pp: 998-1002). Go to the following sites and learn about the extraordinary life of this significant 19th century translator, hymn writer, educator, and women’s activist: https://hymnary.org/person/Winkworth_C (This site has a comprehensive listing of Winkworth translations and hymns. It is a useful place to find out about hymns, their authors, and composers.); <https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/winkworth-catherine-1827-1878> (This is another of the many sites that give a brief biography of Winkworth. Simply type her name into your search engine and you will find all sorts of articles on the “Queen of Translators.”

⁸ The last stanza of “Now Thank We All Our God” is a doxology that was eventually said or sung as a table prayer (*Tischgebetlein*) throughout Germany. It might have been as common then as our “Come, Lord Jesus” table prayer is today.

⁹ Try Googling “Away in a Manger” and see all of the resources you get. I just did it, and the first thing that popped up was a YouTube video that had a children’s choir singing the hymn with lyrics projected. You will have to skip the ad at the start of the video, as usual, but, if you haven’t done it before, you’ll be surprised at how much information you can access online.

¹⁰ **DISCLAIMER:** What one finds on the internet is not always “scholarly” in the best sense of the word. Use good judgment when researching hymns online and get a second or third source confirmation on information that looks suspicious. The hymnal companions mentioned in the print resources section above are the best resources to do some checking. **Remember:** When on the internet you are surfing on, what is sometimes, a slippery electronic surfboard.

¹¹ *The Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns* (2 Volumes) has a hefty price tag at \$179.95, however, it is a robust resource that every church should consider purchasing as a reference book. See: <https://www.cph.org/p-33586-Lutheran-Service-Book-Companion-to-the-Hymns-2-Volume-Set.aspx> for a complete description of its contents. It would make a great gift to your pastor or church musician(s).

¹² I recently spoke with an early childhood educator who said, “I know I should be doing more with music with my kindergartners, but I’m just not comfortable with it. I don’t play the piano and I’m not happy with how I sing. Can you help me?” I said that I’d be happy to help, but it reminded me of how some, and I suspect many, teachers may be afraid of teaching music. Hence this article.

¹³ The article also contains endorsements from: Emily Wook, cantor at Redeemer Lutheran Church & School, Elmhurst, IL and FAME certified instructor; Kathy May, Director of Parish Music, Peace Lutheran Church and Academy, Sussex, WI; Miguel Ruiz, Director of Parish Music at Messiah Lutheran Church, Keller, TX; Nathan Beeth, Kantor at Grace Lutheran Church, Auburn, MI; and Andrew Himelick FAME-endorsed teacher/trainer and elementary school teacher in Carmel, IN and Assistant Director of the Indianapolis Children’s Choir.

Improving Professional Relationships and Organizational Leadership in Congregations: Starting with Pastors and Preschool Directors

By Douglas Kregel

Editor's Note: This article grows out of the PhD work in Organizational Leadership that the author completed in 2019. His interest in early childhood education has developed out of the two centers his congregation is growing in Houston, TX, where he is the pastor.

In order to be a leader in the church one needs to consider many aspects of leadership. One of those aspects is the definition of leadership itself. Is leadership an individual phenomenon? Or is leadership a phenomenon founded in human relationships? Sánchez (2010), noted a trend in how humans understand themselves:

Along with the modern, postmodern, and post-colonial turns to individual reason, perspective, and voice respectively, there has also been a move in the West towards an understanding of humans not simply as individuals who exist and function in and by themselves but more fully as “persons” who exist and live with and for another. Humans are social beings who find fulfillment in their relations, or better yet, are fully human through their relations. (p.57)

This definition of humanity affects the definition of leadership in organizations—including the church. This paper considers leadership as a function of relationships in contrast to leadership as rugged individualism. Therefore, the research here presented explores one of the largest professional pairings in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), the pastor and the preschool director (P-D dyad), as one example of leadership defined by relationship.

The idea of relationships being primarily definitive to human fulfillment and church leadership may sound familiar to Lutherans, for these elements have been and continue to be part of the liturgical leadership found in the Divine Service. In the traditional worship of the church “liturgical alternation” has and continues to be celebrated. Peter Brunner (1968) in his classic work on Lutheran worship, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, described liturgical alternation as shared by a pair of church workers, namely, the church fathers, Ambrose and Augustine:

The legend of the genesis of the Te Deum graphically illustrates the spiritual basis of this alternation. It relates that Ambrose intoned the hymn at Augustine’s baptism, and that Augustine, prompted by the Holy Spirit, immediately took up the song of praise, and that the two, stirred with a holy zeal, alternately added bit by bit and thus sang the hymn to

its end. This legend shows the real basis of the liturgical alternating song in the profession and in other laudations; one person, as it were, takes the words from the lips of another. Both are apprehended by the same Spirit, both are absorbed in the same professing and glorifying devotion. One bears up the other, one leans on the other, one recognizes his own profession and laudation in the other. The congregation's profession and glorification of God does not attain its most perfect form when the whole congregation simultaneously professes and sings the same words, but first when one section of the congregation takes up the words, alternately, from another section. In this duality of alternation the unity of profession and of laudation finds an unequalled expression. Even the seraphim call the Sanctus to each other alternately (Is.6:3). Also the apostolic congregations "addressed one another" in song in their worship services. (p. 238)

Liturgical alternation and leadership alternation in the church have similarities. Just as Ambrose and Augustine alternately sang the Te Deum, leadership dyads in the church ought to serve God in such a way that "the duality of alternation" between the two roles results in "the unity of profession and laudation."

The author's research (Krengel, 2020) explores one leadership alternation found between the pastor and the preschool director (P-D dyad). This dyad was explored in hope of discovering empirically how professional relationships in the church achieve a high quality in congregational ministries. The pastor and director dyad was chosen as a good place to start learning about organizational leadership in congregational ministry because such a dyad occurs frequently, suffers from a paucity of research, and holds promise to serve as a catalyst for the improvement of other professional relationships within the church.

Early childhood education and care is one of the most popular ways many churches, including the churches of the LCMS, interact with the communities they serve (Christian 2004, 2008, 2014; Garland, Sherr, Singletary &, Gardner, 2008; Diamond, 2001; Neugebauer, 1998). With 1,774 early childhood centers in the LCMS, foundational educational offerings are the most widespread full-time agency offered in the denomination besides the congregations themselves. Of the 1,950-total number of LCMS schools from early childhood to grade 12, 90.1% are classified as serving students in the early childhood level of education. In addition, there were 96,782 early childhood students in the 2018-2019 school year in comparison to 86,208 students in K-8, and 18,317 students in grades 9-12. Therefore, almost half of the LCMS students (48.1%) between early childhood and 12th grade are early childhood students (www.luthed.org).

The trend in the LCMS to offer foundational education came well before the more recent trend across the globe – the trend for nation-states, states, and cities to extend publicly funded early childhood education to their citizens (Bouffard,

2017; Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, & Varga, 2015; The United Nations, 1989). However, while publicly-funded initiatives supporting early childhood education and care are growing around the world, the trend within the LCMS has been one of steady decline. According to the Lutheran School Ministry (2020), for example, from the 2013-2014 school year to the 2017-2018 school year, the LCMS went from 1,285 early childhood centers to 1,127 centers. In other words, there were 158 fewer early childhood centers reported over those four school years.

As noted earlier, the combination of ministries represented by congregations which are associated with foundational educational offerings (church-preschool dyads, or C-P dyads), provides a major intersection of such organizational dyads with their communities. At the nexus where the C-P dyads meet their communities there is a powerful opportunity for sharing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. One way the decline of LCMS early childhood centers could be addressed is with a training program specifically designed to assist the pastors of the congregations and the directors of congregation-based early childhood centers so that their professional relationships would be of a high quality. Based on recent qualitative and quantitative research conducted by the author (Krengel, 2020) among LCMS congregations, there are four elements that are likely to assist the P-D dyads in forming high-quality professional relationships: affect, contribution, loyalty, and professional respect. These four dimensions of LMX (leader-member exchange) are defined by John M. Maslyn and Mary Uhl-Bien (2001) as they describe the development of LMX:

With notable exceptions, LMX theory has considered the exchange between members to be essentially work-related. That is, they consist of work-related behaviors such as effort toward the job or favorable task assignments. However, in a recent review of the LMX literature, Liden et al (1997) noted that LMX is not based solely on the job-related elements emphasized in the LMX research of Graen and his colleagues (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) but may also include socially-related “currencies.” In this vein, Dienesch and Liden (1986) and Liden and Maslyn (1998) proposed four dimensions of LMX relationships labeled *contribution* (e.g., performing work beyond what is specified in the job description), *affect* (e.g., friendship and liking), *loyalty* (e.g., loyalty and mutual obligation), and *professional respect* (e.g., respect for professional capacities). Other LMX research has produced measures of these constructs and demonstrated validity of the dimensions. (p. 699)

In order to create a chain reaction of improvements throughout the LCMS system of education and care, or educare, the quality of the professional relationships shared in the pastor-director dyads needs to be improved. In order to improve the professional quality of the pastor-director relationship,

congregational and educational leadership need to be understood as dyadic in nature, and not the work of one actor (Anand, Vidyarthi, & Park, 2016). Dyadic leadership, in turn, requires a dyadic approach to leadership training. A dyadic approach to training leadership in congregations with educare centers could include publications, workshops, conferences, and leadership initiatives that would invite both the pastor and educare director to learn together as mutual participants in a way similar to how Ambrose and Augustine collaborated in the Divine Service while singing the *Te Deum*.

Training Pastors and Early Childhood Directors in Dyadic Leadership: A Curriculum for Building High Quality Professional Relationships by Building on Relational Strengths

According to the results of the author's research (Krengel, 2020), the P-D dyad could be built upon its strongest element with the less strong elements being addressed later in the learning process. In the dissertation research, four dimensions were identified as critical to any professional relationship: affect, contribution, loyalty, and professional respect. Using the Leader-Member Exchange – 24 Survey (LMX-24) (Chaudhry, 2012, 2017), these four dimensions of professional relationships were measured. A sample size of 105 (n=105) professional church workers was received. Out of the 105 participants, 66 were educare directors or assistant directors. In addition, 39 of the 105 participants were LCMS pastors. Of the 113 educare centers in the LCMS district where the study was conducted, there were 80 dyads represented in the author's research study in some manner. From the 105 participants and the 80 dyads, 26 intact, nonrandom, mixed-gendered, vertical dyads were identified. While survey data of all the participants were analyzed, the 52 individuals who were part of the 26 P-D dyads were the focus of the exploration.

Out of the 26 complete dyads, 6 dyads composed of 6 pastors and 6 educare directors were further studied using semi-structured interviews. Each professional church worker was interviewed independently from the others in order to avoid any unintended influence. Interviews were conducted in private spaces, most often the participant's own office. Each interview was recorded as an audio-file while the interviewer simultaneously took detailed handwritten notes. Numerous different types of interview questions were asked to gain as much insight as possible. These question types included the following: opinion; feeling; knowledge; sensory; background; hypothetical; devil's advocate; ideal position, and interpretive question types (Merriam, 2009). Verbatim transcripts were provided to each interviewee in a member check process. Peer examination was also undertaken to assure this exploration was trustworthy. Dr. Donna Peavey from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary corresponded with the researcher

in addition to the researcher's dissertation committee. Emergent themes were then identified by the researcher from the transcripts using thematic analysis as he searched for units of information (UIOs), or "small pieces of meaningful information" (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.255). An iterative process was used by the researcher until stable patterns were discerned.

This mixed-method exploration of the quality of the professional relationship shared between the pastors and the educate directors resulted in the following six meta-inferences:

1. The pastors and the directors both perceived the professional relationships they shared as being of a high quality; however, the pastors perceived the relationships to be of a higher quality than did the directors.
2. The directors perceived the professional relationship they shared with the pastors to be of a lower quality in the dimension of contribution/ the work domain than did the pastors.
3. The directors and the pastors agreed that professional respect was of a high quality.
4. The directors and the pastors agreed that the dimension of affect was of a middle quality.
5. The dimension of loyalty was of an indefinite quality relative to the spectrum of scores.
6. A dimensional spectrum of professional relationships to relationship strengths was evident.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data from the author's research (Krengel, 2020), the Dimension of Professional Respect would be the first element addressed in a training process, then the Dimension of Affect, followed by the Dimension of Loyalty, and ending with the Dimension of Contribution. This order of training would move from the strongest existing characteristic of the P-D dyad to the middle quality dimensions (Affect), followed by the indefinite dimension (Loyalty), and would conclude with the dimension needing the most improvement, the Dimension of Contribution. In this manner participants would experience a sense of affirmation at the beginning of the training and move across the four LMX dimensions to the final and most challenging LMX dimension. By proceeding in such a manner, the P-D dyads could be expected to stay motivated to complete the training together while maintaining high morale for their common work.

Building High Quality Professional Relationships on a Dyadic Definition of Leadership

By starting the training with Meta-Inference 1, the educate directors and pastors would learn that both members of the P-D dyad perceive the dyad as sharing a high-quality professional relationship. An oppositional example was found in the research of Dr. Judith Christian (2004). Christian reported that a struggle exists between the educate directors and the predominantly male leadership in the LCMS. Christian said, “The majority of early childhood directors in the LCMS are women who often struggle to have their profession affirmed in a church body where the predominately male leadership frequently gives voice to a different set of priorities” (p. 9). This opinion may have been accurate in 2004, but the author’s research (Krengel, 2020) indicates that the pastors and the directors both perceived the professional relationships they shared to be of a high quality in 2019.

In the proposed training, after the current perspective of the P-D dyads is shared with the community of pastors and directors, the second portion of Meta-Inference 1 would be shared: In this study, the pastors perceive the relationships to be of a higher quality than do the directors. In contrast to Christian (2004), not only does the predominately male leadership of the LCMS perceive the P-D dyads as being of a high quality, the pastors (e.g., male leadership) perceive the relationship as being of a higher quality than their corresponding educate directors.

Since Christian’s (2004) report was used as the basis for training throughout the national synod, it is possible that reporting that educate directors “struggle to have their profession affirmed” (p. 9) could still be understood by pastors and directors in the LCMS to represent the current status of the P-D dyad. However, such an understanding would be a misunderstanding of the current state of affairs in the P-D dyads of the LCMS district that were studied.

By addressing the new status of the P-D dyads, both members of the dyads would discover that the “struggle,” while not completely gone, is different than it was in 2004. While there are no formal training courses at either of the LCMS seminaries in the United States regarding the P-D dyad, it appears that pastors’ perspectives regarding the work of educate, and the perspectives of the educate directors, has shifted away from struggle and toward acceptance. While this study found examples of dyads that express great differences, those dyads were part of a small minority of cases.

Building High Quality Professional Relationships with the LMX Theory

In addition to the community of P-D dyads learning that pastors are not so antagonistic to educate, the dyadic learning community would do well to be

oriented to relational leadership as defined by the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). Such an orientation would include the four dimensions of LMX and its two domains. With an orientation to LMX theory, the P-D dyads could take the LMX-24 Survey and then receive their results. A facilitator could then walk the dyads through the significance of said results. Since the LMX-24 Survey is made up of just 12 questions, the results of the survey would, more than likely, not be perceived by either the educate directors or the pastors as too much of a burden.

Building High Quality Professional Relationships on Professional Respect

The P-D dyads would begin interacting with their results from the LMX-24 Survey by considering the Dimension of Professional Respect. Even though this dimension is represented by the last three questions on the LMX-24 survey, it would be discussed first, since it is the dimension most likely to register a high level of agreement between the pastors and the educate directors. After the dyads receive an orientation to LMX theory, discover Meta-Inference 1, and then learn that their dyads have a high level of agreement regarding the Dimension of Professional Respect, then the other three dimensions of LMX would be introduced in the order outlined below.

Building High Quality Professional Relationships on the Dimension of Affect

The Dimension of Affect would be considered next by the P-D dyads. The results that the participants are likely to experience are results in the middle-level of the quality spectrum of the professional relationships shared by the pastors and directors. However, encouraged by the orientation to LMX, and the information from Meta-Inference 1, the dyads would be able to discuss any differences openly and honestly.

Building High Quality Professional Relationships on the Dimension of Loyalty

In the author's research (Krengel, 2020), loyalty was on average reported to be of an indefinite quality (i.e., no clear pattern was found in the responses). The Dimension of Loyalty would, therefore, be the third dimension of LMX discussed by the community of P-D dyads. As previously mentioned, the Dimension of Loyalty is an indefinite quality in part due to numerous valuations by the educate directors of a 4-ranking (i.e., undecided) on the LMX survey. With a well-led interaction, and with the encouragement from the preceding discussions, the dyads may be able to work through any indecision and gain clarity on how loyalty is represented in their dyad.

Such clarity is important, as is the case for all four of the dimensions, because "the higher the quality of the exchange, the greater will be the vertical

dyad linkage agreement” (Graen & Schiemann, 1978, p. 207). When the “linkage agreement” is of a high quality, then the partnership shared in the dyad is stronger, and positive organizational benefits are the result. Anand, Vidyarthi, and Park (2016) listed some such benefits as, “enhanced negotiation latitude, trust, respect, autonomy, challenging assignments, and satisfaction with job and manager, whereas the organization benefits through enhanced positive attitudes and behaviors such as organizational commitment, performance, and citizenship behaviors” (p. 263-264).

Building High Quality Professional Relationships on the LMX Domains

At this point in the dyadic training for pastors and educare directors, the concept of LMX domains would be presented. The first three dimensions having already been introduced to the dyads, they would be further explained as representing the Personal Domain of LMX. Next, the Dimension of Contribution, also known as the Work Domain, would be introduced. Since Meta-Inference 2 expects the directors to report the Dimension of Contribution and/or the Work Domain as of a lower quality than that of the pastors, this aspect of LMX would be presented last. The leaders of the training would plan for this dimension of LMX to require more time for dyads to process since the results would be more likely to be conflicted.

Each of the three survey questions that provide data for the Dimension of Contribution/ Work Domain would be discussed in turn. These three questions from the LMX-24 survey are as follows:

- Question 4. My pastor/director does not mind working his/her hardest to support me.
- Question 5. My pastor/director is willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to meet my work goals.
- Question 6. My pastor/director does work for me that goes beyond what is normally required.

By encouraging the P-D dyads to discuss these three questions, it would be fair to expect the professional exchange within the dyad would improve, mutual understanding between the leader and the member of the dyad would increase, and the organization could fairly expect improvements in organizational commitment, performance, and citizenship behaviors.

Building High Quality Professional Relationships Using DDA and APIM

Lastly, Dyadic Data Analysis (DDA) would be introduced to the learning community, especially the Actor—Partner Independence Model (APIM). The concepts of the intrapersonal affect and the interpersonal affect would be explained and illustrated. The relationship between the intrapersonal affect and the interpersonal affect would be emphasized. In other words, how a member of

the dyad relates to himself, or herself, affects how the member of the dyad relates to his coworker.

Within the context of a professional church workers training event in the LCMS, the intrapersonal affect would be addressed using traditional pastoral methods of caring for souls such as Bible study, Holy Communion, prayer, worship, private confession and absolution, and the mutual encouragement of Christian believers by one another. By inviting members of the dyads to improve their intrapersonal factors, one would also be affecting the probability of improving the interpersonal factors within the dyads. In other words, if the individual person is in good care, then the dyad may also be in good care.

Training P-D dyads in Dyadic Leadership: The Pilot Training

The Training Pilot: Materials and Participant Selection

The order of business noted in this article would be included in published materials that would be especially designed to accompany the dyadic training process. At the end of each chapter, worksheets and interactive exercises would be provided. A pilot version of such dyadic training would be best offered to a select group of P-D dyads representing a variety of Congregation - Educare Center dyads. For example, P-D dyads who serve in congregations that have educare as their only educational full-time agency would be one type of dyad. P-D dyads that serve in congregations that offered both educare and an elementary school would be a second type of dyad. Dyads which serve where educare, elementary school, and middle school services are provided would be a third type of dyad. Additionally, different kinds of educare would also be represented. With a variety of P-D dyads from a variety of organizational types established, dyads would also be sought out which represented the five official regions of the LCMS.

The Training Pilot: The Means of Delivering the Training

The initial pilot training would be conducted using a virtual platform. This author has taken instruction online from Concordia University Chicago and from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The synod also offers online instruction as part of its colloquy program. With the virtual platform in place, the pilot training would email each dyad a copy of the training materials. The steps of instruction outlined above would take place in five 1-hour installments.

The Training Pilot: Processing the Victim Posture and Encouraging Dyadic Efficacy.

Previous researchers have suggested that the rapid decline of congregational educare centers in the LCMS is largely caused by exogenous variables such as a lower birthrate among LCMS members, an aging population within the LCMS membership, etc. (MacPherson, 2016a). While such exogenous variables are

reported to influence the LCMS population, if the learning community is left to think that there are only exogenous variables, then the learners may possibly respond with an internal posture of victimhood. “There is no reason to persist with the educate enterprise in our congregation since our denomination as a whole is not very productive in a biological sense” is one way such a victimhood posture may be conveyed.

To address such postures of victimization, this researcher strongly encourages the pilot training to include a reading list such as MacPherson’s articles in the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* (2016a), as well as his article in *The Lutheran Witness* (2016b) which, when referring to the latter, the following would be highlighted:

The ‘standard stories’ fail to explain the pervasive patterns of decline. . . ,Some say: ‘We need more early childhood centers to attract young families.’ The fact is: The number of child baptisms per year plunged 55 percent from 1990 to 2010 – precisely the era in which early childhood centers were growing in both numbers and aggregate enrollment. (p. 6)

Such comments might possibly cause members of P-D dyads to feel as if they are simply a victim of demographic forces and therefore work in vain to offer educate.

Cook’s (2017) response in the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* to MacPherson’s (2016b) research should also be included on the reading list. In addition, Schumacher’s response in *Lutheran Mission Matters* (2017) to MacPherson’s (2016b) article also should be included on the reading list for the training. After reading all of the entries on the reading list, participants in the training should be encouraged to address the articles with their own opinions and experiences.

Throughout the discussions of these articles, the facilitator should listen to those who share stories of being a victim of circumstance but should also encourage the participants to consider adopting an intrapersonal posture that retains agency and efficacy. For example, the facilitator could point out there are two major types of data: exogenous and endogenous. The research presented in this study of the quality of the P-D dyad is of the endogenous type and will hopefully be received as a complement to the exogenous variables commented upon by Cook (2017), MacPherson (2016b), and Schumacher (2017).

With both the exogenous and endogenous data considered, the P-D dyads in the pilot training would be asked to analyze why there has been an average yearly decline in the number of LCMS educate centers. One possible explanation, in addition to demographics, is that the leaders in LCMS congregations with educate centers have not been trained to lead in a dyadic way. If the pastors and educate directors had been trained together before, or during, the period of educate expansion noted by MacPherson (2016b) the relationship to the number of child baptisms per year in the LCMS may not have “plunged” by 55%. Those

participating in the training will be invited by the facilitator to consider that instead of the decline in LCMS educate centers being solely based on exogenous factors, and therefore outside of the realm of effect by the P-D dyads, it may just as possibly have been the absence of dyadic leadership training in the synod. The lack of a dyadic definition of leadership may have led to a lack of training professional church workers dyadically.

Further Research Regarding Organizational Leadership in the LCMS

Further research on the LCMS' approach to training professional church workers in leadership is encouraged. What leadership styles have been encouraged by the LCMS? Has there been an emphasis on a single male leader being the source of the ministerial initiatives and solutions? Or has the LCMS been teaching that leadership is dyadic? Or has the concept of leadership been defined in some other manner? If there has been a preferred definition of leadership in the LCMS, what has that definition been? Or have there been several preferred definitions of leadership over the history of the LCMS? If so, why were new definitions of leadership undertaken? What was the relationship between the definition of leadership promoted by the LCMS and the actual behaviors of church leaders in P-D dyads and other professional relationships? What were the consequences of the leadership behaviors based on the preferred definition of leadership?

These questions need further research well beyond what has been provided in this brief article, or that which was offered in the research provided by the author (Krengel, 2020). Establishing dyadic training for pastors and preschool directors could be the first step in sharing something like the liturgical alternation enjoyed by Augustine and Ambrose with pastors, preschool directors, and other ministry pairings (e.g., Senior Pastor - Assistant Pastor, Senior Pastor – Director of Christian Education, Senior Pastor – Director of Music Ministry, Senior Pastor – Lutheran School Principal, etc.) that serve in congregational ministry together.

Dave Reuter discussed one such ministry pairing: the Ministers of Religion - Ordained and Ministers of Religion – Commissioned in the LCMS. In his article, after reviewing centuries of teaching and practice about the Office of the Holy Ministry and the helping offices, Reuter (2019) stated the following: “The DCE is a second-chair leader. As such we support the ministry of the pastor and others called to serve on our team. We are there to support them as they are present to support us The balance is perfect” (p.52).

This author's research (Krengel, 2020) moves him to extend Reuter's (2019) analogy. Is it not true that the second chair and the first chair are to focus on playing in harmony with each other? And are not both chairs (i.e., pastor and DCE) also to perform in concord with the rest of their instrumental section

(i.e., the local congregation)? And isn't the entire instrumental section to play in coordination with the rest of the orchestra (i.e., the broader church) as directed by the conductor (i.e., Jesus) while all the musicians (i.e., the baptized believers) interpret the written musical score (i.e., the Bible) together? As in the orchestra, so in the role relationships within the church. Whether starting with the pastor-director dyad, or the pastor-DCE dyad, all professional church workers are called to pursue high-quality professional relationships for the good of the dyad, as well as the greater good. Since the dyads are embedded in the congregation-preschool dyads, or congregation-youth ministry dyads, the quality of the professional relationships may be expected to affect the larger group (For more information on how dyads relate to larger groups see Part Four, LMX Beyond the Dyad in *The Oxford Handbook of Leader – Member Exchange*, 2016).

As noted at the beginning of this article, Sanchez (2010) reminded us that persons are more likely to find fulfillment in our various vocations if the relational aspect of the vocation is celebrated. The pastor-director dyad is a good starting point for the church at large to improve in the area of professional relationships while remembering that such relationships are embedded in congregation-preschool dyads. By learning from the sizeable and important example of the pastor-director dyad, congregations may also improve in other role relationships, and in organizational leadership, thus assisting congregations in witnessing to Christ concordantly.

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Parish: The Thought

Ministry in the classroom?
Oh, there's so much more!

Long ago, educators called to minister in Lutheran schools needed a “parish perspective” if they were to be a highly valued part of their congregation. It was good to be parish -minded—good for the congregation and good for the school. Sometimes not so good for the worker. This led to a “perish the thought” attitude among overworked and under-appreciated professionals.

“Balance” was often neglected in the vocabulary. Congregations found a cheap and easy way to do ministry. Their teaching ministers resented it. Perish the thought made a huge dent in Parish: the thought.

God knows—He really does—the effort and time needed to be one who teaches in His name. By the way, with or without theological training, when you teach in a Lutheran school you do indeed have a ministry—not just a career, or worse, a job. God calls all people to a vocation, and yours—praise God—is a ministry. It doesn't matter that you might not teach a religion course. You have the privilege and responsibility of wrapping all content in a Christian biblical worldview. If this isn't what you want to do, pardon me, you shouldn't be teaching in a Christian classroom. But please don't go away. Lutheran schools need good teachers—good teachers with an attitude—an over-and-above attitude.

But assuming that's where you're at or where you are headed for....

You might find it advantageous to offer your skills and interests before someone “asks” you to fill some role. Oh, you can serve in so many ways! If that does not work, then—yes, this is a sacrifice—praise God for an opportunity, one that you might not choose but one in which He wants to use you.

VBS always gave me the sweats, coming right after an exhausting school year. No choice. Even harder to face was public school confirmation class from 3:30–5:30 on FRIDAY afternoons. In those days, one did not have a right of refusal, with the possible exception of death. I never liked it. I always grew from it. (You know, Romans 8:28 the “All things work... passage from Paul).

Some things never change. Congregations still need ministry-minded and trained educators. Perhaps it would be better to say that children and adults in congregations still need education. Since you are trained to do that... well, you never will find a time when you don't feel needed!

Perish the thought. Parish: the thought! *LEJ*

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From Backpacks to Broadway: Children's Experiences in Musical Theatre

by *Rajan, R.S.*

2017, *Rowman & Littlefield*

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From the moment Rekha Rajan begins the book *From Backpacks to Broadway: Children's Experiences in Musical Theatre*, with the prologue to the end of the book, her enthusiasm about musical theater and how it impacts the young performer can be felt. The reader is hooked and understanding is deepened of how the musical theater experiences support the growth and learning of children who participate in them. This book is a valuable gem which provides personal reflections based on the author's own musical theater experiences, as she explores the various social, emotional, cognitive, and physical demands these experiences bring to the young thespian. Using direct quotes and paraphrased narratives, the author's goal is to give a voice to the young people who share their perspectives and how they value participating and performing in musical theater.

Currently, Rekha Rajan Ed.D. is a visiting associate professor of Research at Concordia University Chicago. Her expertise is in arts education, program evaluation, and arts assessment. The author's unique insight and perspective are further supported by her wealth of personal and professional education in musical theater. Rajan's background as a performer helps her focus on various aspects of musical theater that a novice may miss, while her knowledge of young children and education, coupled with observation and evaluation expertise, supports her articulation of musical theater as a phenomenon experienced by young children.

The book shares the author's phenomenographic research, broken down into distinctly defined parts. Following the background and definition of musical theater, the author presents a framework from which she examines the children's perception on the personal, social, and artistic learning they experienced. In the proceeding chapters these experiences are examined and reflected on within three different environments: school-based

musical theater, community musical theater, and professional musical theater. Each chapter clearly articulates the process the young performer navigates, from auditions, rehearsals, and performance, to post-show perspectives. All this is delivered within a theoretical framework and focuses on the author's observations, and the children's own words. While reading the author's observations and the voice of the young performer a deeper understanding of how each component of the process affects them. Rather than tell the reader about these experiences, Rajan furnishes examples of the conversations which allows you to hear the children's motivation in their own words. In the final chapter of the book, based on the children's perspective, Rajan discusses the commonalities and differences between the environments and how they support learning through participation.

The essential component making this a unique book on children's musical theater is its concentration of the children's perception of their experience. It makes it unequivocally understood how musical theater can inspire young artists, developing their sense of self within social, personal, and artistic domains. Through this delightful collection of varied musical-theater experiences, Rajan is able to open up the world of musical theater. Whether you are a novice or expert individual working with young children in musical theater, you cannot help but want to get 'into the act' and reap the rewards of being a part of this experience. *LEJ*

A.D.Chronicles

Fourth Dawn (2005)

Fifth Seal (2006)

Sixth Covenant (2007)

by *Bodie and Brock Thoene*

Tyndale Fiction

Part of a Twelve-Book Series on the Life and Times in Israel during the Earthly Life of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Messiah

Discover the truth through fiction? I agree! I have always been a fan of historical fiction. For decades. When I was parenting preschoolers, I discovered historical fiction set in Bible times. I was hooked!!

Sometime in this decade just past I discovered Bodie and Brock Thoene (it's Tay-nee, they are quick to tell you). Now I'm really hooked. The opening phrase of this review is, I believe, their mission statement. I have read the Galway Chronicles, the Shiloh Legacy, and 90% of the A.D. Chronicles, all by the Thoenes. My love of historical fiction has yet to be sated.

The books I am reviewing here each contain about 300 pages of story, moving between several sets of important characters, telling the story through the eyes of a variety of people. The books are liberally sprinkled with Scripture paraphrases. Each of those drops of wisdom is referenced in an endnote, taking the reader to the appropriate Bible reference. Each of the three nativity books contains about 140 such references, making it an average of one Bible paraphrase for every two to three pages of story.

Included at the back of each book is a study guide of six topics. These guides have been fashioned in such a way that they could be used by either an individual or a small group. Given the six topics, I would suggest a six-week Bible study with a small group. I have spent time with each end-guide and found these resources to be very useful as an individual meditation and reflection. I think, however, that I would like even more to enter into a discussion with others. It just feels like it would be a richer experience.

In *Fifth Seal*, the volume in which Jesus is born in a mostly-deserted lambing cave in Bethlehem, the clarity of the truth

comes shining through the pages of this almost-fiction story. It has never been more clear to me that God's principle of freedom of choice covered a lot more than just Adam's and Eve's choice of whether to eat the fruit Satan was offering them. Even Mary had a choice! Do I think God already knew what her choice would be? Yes. But do I also wonder where God would have taken that choice if she had refused? You betcha!

No, I'm not in danger of becoming an atheist, or even an agnostic with these thoughts. Instead, I think these questions actually are strengthening my faith in the *TRUTH* of God's Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God (John 1: 1-2). Going back to Genesis, God uses Moses to tell us that the *Word* spoke the world into existence. That's the same *Word* that John writes about many centuries later. Did God have a plan? You betcha!!

One of the questions about the Virgin Birth that has niggled at me for years is why in all the world Jesus would choose to come as a fetus rather than an adult. Why did he come as a zygote, not a teenager? Or a two-celled babe-in-waiting, not fully-formed rabbinical scholar? As an early childhood educator, I am in awe of the choices God made for this salvation story. God miraculously placed his Son, our Messiah, fully God and fully Man, his entire essence, into Mary's womb and stayed there for nine months before allowing himself to see the light of day! *The day he had created in the first place!!* If you knew what he knows, would you have made the same choice? More basically, would you or I have chosen to even create the world, knowing that several millennia later, you would find yourself in the womb of a virgin, escaping to Egypt for your life, being maligned by all the religious leaders of your day, and even hanging on a cross to pay for the sins of all those ungrateful people you created?

Think about the wonder that all of the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in Jesus. How exactly does that work? At the same time, how does it work for any of us? Everything we will ever be is there from the beginning. Right from the start. What a great God we have! What a great creation we are!! What a creative mastermind it is that made us and all there is!!!

This is not our usual academic fare to be found in an academic journal. But make no mistake. This topic is of far greater importance than anything we study academically. This topic has eternal ramifications. It's the stuff of which our heavenly trajectory is made. This has eternal consequences! Don't ever take your faith for granted. **LEJ**

Thinking about Learning

I began thinking about doctoral studies in the early 2000's, as I was completing my Master's degree. I put the thought aside as I accepted a call to lead a school at my home congregation. It would be too demanding as a wife, mother, and principal/teacher to add "doctoral student" to the list. I was, however, ready and able to begin years later in 2013 to consider the doctoral path. After research, prayer, and conversation with my spouse, I decided to pursue my doctoral degree at Concordia University Portland. I chose Portland because it offered a program of writing support as well as two classes in the faith along with the core content of the degree, and I could complete it all online. The courses in the faith mattered to me. Additionally, until you have had to learn to write at the doctoral level it is difficult to appreciate how important the writing support that I received was.

I jumped into the program in June 2014 and successfully defended my dissertation in May 2018. Those four years were academically the most challenging, invigorating, and engaging of any courses I had taken anywhere. CU Portland offered me the first true academically freeing experience I have ever had and I am so grateful for it. At CU Portland I was fully free to express my faith and say what I truly thought without fear of reprisal from professors. I cannot say that about other Christian and Lutheran universities that I have attended. Until my doctoral program began, I kept my mouth shut and my true thoughts and faith to myself in university classes because I was there for a degree, and I needed to pass. Not so at CU Portland. Academic freedom and all that it implies feels like a relatively rare thing these days, and I am saddened that CU Portland won't be around to offer that to future students.

You see, I got my doctorate from Concordia University Portland. Yep, CU Portland. Nowadays, folks generally just say "Oh" rather solemnly when I say that I got my degree from the most recent Concordia University that is closing. **LEJ**

Love and Learning in a Time of Coronavirus

In *The Great Divorce*, a masterful little book about sin, death, and forgiveness, C. S. Lewis paints a fascinating image of Hell. Distinctly lacking are devils, pitchforks, flames, and overt suffering. Instead, the denizens of the great abyss are living what would appear to be ordinary lives. The problem, and “problem” is a gross understatement, is that everyone is completely isolated from God, and they eternally become more isolated from one another. Eternal death, posits Lewis, is found in the complete lack of relationship.

Countless aspects of earthly life give us little tastes of Lewis’s Hell. From ordinary circumstances like linguistic divides, to maladies like physical and mental illness, to sins like anger, pride, and indifference, and ultimately to death, we are prone to separation from one another. Now, the latest cause of separation and isolation, the latest taste of Hell, is brought to us by the Coronavirus and our steps to mitigate its havoc.

This is not to minimize the good that we have, even now. We still have relationships with one another and, most importantly, with God. Those relationships are made more difficult, however, by our inability to be together physically. We cannot worship and receive Christ’s body together as the Communion of Saints. For the most part, we cannot relate face-to-face with one another.

We also, suddenly, cannot learn in the physical presence of one another.

Learning is inherently relational. We learn not only from what another says, but from who the person is and how we connect with him or her. The character, interest, temperament, accessibility, and other characteristics of both teacher and learner matter to the learning process. Moreover, to say that learning is inherently relational is to say that it is founded in holy love: love of truth, of Christ who is Truth, and of neighbor who benefits from truth. I look forward to the New Creation, where we will be able to spend time without measure in the presence of Christ and our Christian brothers and sisters, learning from and relating to one another in unity, bound together perfectly in the love of Christ. Now THAT will be some great pedagogy!

Of course, all earthly learning falls far short of this ideal.

Even the most closely-knit and longest-lived mentorship communities suffer under the effects of the fall. Thankfully, perfection is not a prerequisite to learning. More to the point, physical presence is not a prerequisite to learning or even to the relationality of learning. From my own experience I can attest that, although St. Augustine wrote his famous *Confessions* about 1,600 years ago, I learned from him and felt somehow connected to him as I read it. Similarly, some years ago I supervised Masters students exclusively through electronic means, and we established good pedagogical relationships.

Still, it seems inevitably true that those connections and relationships would have been enhanced by physical presence, and so also would the learning. The opportunity to flesh out nuance and explore paradox, to have spontaneous dialogue and read nonverbal cues, and in general to build up interpersonal relationships, would transform the learning. These things increase the depth, texture, meaning, and ultimately the love in the learning process.

Which brings us to the spring semester of 2020, a time of Coronavirus. Students and teachers are away from each other, friends are separated from friends, and the relational aspect of learning is reduced. As beneficial as e-learning has proven itself to be (and it is extremely beneficial in many ways), we must face unflinchingly the damage that forced isolation is inflicting upon the relationality of learning. We do not yet know precisely what the extent of the damage will be, and in any case it surely will vary from teacher to teacher and from student to student. Today's *Last Word* is not aimed at repairing or even fully assessing the damage. Rather, the aim is to put words to a common experience, the experience of barriers to the relationality of learning. That is to say, the experience of barriers to holy love. *LEJ*