

The Impact Of Brown V. Board Of Education On Education Excellence: A Closer Look At Leadership In Professional Learning Communities

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: June 19,2026 Accepted: September 22,2026	<i>This paper highlights the crucial role of a reading methods class at a mid-western university in preparing future literacy specialists for effective leadership in professional learning communities (PLCs). Furthermore, the researcher examined how research-based practices in professional learning communities can support teachers in P-12 settings by integrating multiple technologies (Hutchison & Woodward, 2018). Additionally, the study focuses on literacy specialists and their leadership roles, emphasizing the significance of the principles from Brown v. Board of Education as a foundation for educational excellence and equity (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).</i> <i>The findings suggest that by establishing explicit, equity-centered goals, PLCs can ensure that their initiatives aimed at supporting all students are not only intentional but also measurable. These well-defined objectives serve as a framework that guides the development of targeted interventions while also allowing literacy specialists to track their progress toward bridging the achievement gaps that often persist within the education system (D'Ardenne et al., 2013). This structured approach encourages accountability and fosters a deeper commitment to equity among educators, ultimately benefiting all students.</i>
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Introduction

The landmark Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education, 1954 declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional (Green, 2004). The journey to improving public schools to excellence following this decision involved several key phases and initiatives. Policies were introduced to promote equal opportunities in education, including programs aimed at increasing minority representation in schools and universities (Gutierrez, 2008). While significant strides have been made in desegregation and educational equity, efforts are ongoing to address remaining disparities and ensure that all students have access to high-quality education (Sarat, 1997). The recent reform efforts have placed enormous pressure and anxiety on teachers in order to raise and enhance the achievement levels and learning outcomes of their students. There are persistent work-related problems that teachers face, such as isolation from colleagues, unnecessary or illogical time constraints, limited knowledge bases, and scarce resources (Louis, 1992). For teachers to accomplish reform goals effectively, schools must foster conditions that encourage student achievement (Louis & Kruse, 1995). It is these conditions that define what most educators refer to as professional learning communities (PLCs). The development of professional learning communities is the organizational strategy that could make school reform more successful (Bates et al., 2016; Louis & Kruse, 1995; D'Ardenne, et al., 2013). Additionally, strong professional learning communities enhance learning outcomes for students. Professional learning communities that foster communication and collaboration around shared norms and values have shown increased student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

The limited research on professional learning communities in the context of literacy can be attributed to a combination of broad research focuses, the emerging nature of PLCs, variability in implementation, resource constraints, the complexity of literacy instruction, and limited data availability (D'Ardenne et al., 2013). Addressing these challenges will require targeted efforts to prioritize literacy-focused PLC research, standardized implementation practices, increased funding, and improved data collection methods. By overcoming these barriers, the educational research community can better understand and harness the potential of PLCs to improve literacy outcomes (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1994). To address the existing research gap concerning Professional Learning Communities, this study undertook a comprehensive examination of literacy specialists' knowledge bases and practices. The focus was primarily on their leadership roles within these professional learning communities, which serve as collaborative environments for educators. The investigation aimed to ensure that the foundational principles established by the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education are integral to the pursuit of educational excellence. By exploring the ways in which literacy specialists navigate their responsibilities and apply their expertise, this research seeks to enrich our understanding of effective

leadership practices that contribute to equitable and high-quality education for all students.

The Research

The landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a turning point in the civil rights movement and had significant repercussions for the landscape of public education in America. In its aftermath, the quest to elevate public schools to a standard of excellence unfolded through a series of critical phases and initiatives (Balkin, 2001). In the wake of the *Brown* decision, a considerable number of school districts exhibited reluctance or outright resistance in their efforts to desegregate. As documented by Scott (1996), this hesitance was driven by ingrained social attitudes and systemic barriers that prioritized the status quo. To counter this inertia, the federal government intervened, utilizing court mandates and legislative measures such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to compel compliance with desegregation mandates, as highlighted by Paterson (2001).

To promote racial integration within schools, numerous districts implemented busing programs designed to transport students beyond their immediate residential areas. These initiatives aimed to create a more equitable educational environment, but they often faced significant public backlash. Civil rights activists, alongside organizations such as the NAACP, played a pivotal role in advocating for these changes (England & Meier, 1985). They organized legal battles and public demonstrations to challenge discriminatory practices and highlight the injustices of segregated schooling, as noted by England and Meier (1985). Through relentless advocacy and community mobilization, these activists sought to ensure that the vision of integrated and equal education became a reality for all students, regardless of their race or background.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided legal and financial support to ensure compliance with desegregation efforts and improve educational opportunities for all students (England & Meier, 1985). Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided additional funding to schools with high percentages of low-income students, helping to address educational disparities (Balkin, 2001). Magnet schools, which offer specialized curricula and programs, were established to attract a diverse student body and promote voluntary desegregation. These schools often emphasized academic excellence and innovation. Courts continued to oversee and enforce desegregation plans in various districts, ensuring compliance and addressing ongoing issues of segregation and inequality. In the 1990s and 2000s, there was a push for higher standards and greater accountability in education. Policies like the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) aimed to close achievement gaps and ensure all students received a quality education. Efforts were made to identify and address achievement gaps between different racial and socioeconomic groups, with a focus on improving outcomes for all students (Klein, 2015). The expansion of school choice options, including charter schools, aimed to provide more educational opportunities and improve school performance through competition and innovation. The integration of technology in education has offered new opportunities for personalized learning and improved educational resources, helping to raise the standard of education in public schools (Fullan, 1993).

In the years following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, there was a push to equalize funding and resources across racially integrated schools. This involved efforts to improve school facilities, provide better educational materials, and hire more qualified teachers, which were previously lacking in many segregated schools for Black students. The *Brown* decision spurred various educational reforms aimed at improving the quality of education for all students. This included curriculum improvements, enhanced teacher training programs, and policies promoting diversity and inclusion within the classroom environment (Cochran-Smith, 1997).

Despite the progress made, significant challenges persist. It is imperative to sustain our efforts to tackle ongoing inequities and ensure that every student, regardless of their racial background, has access to a top-tier education. This enduring struggle underscores the necessity for constant vigilance and timely policy adjustments to combat emerging forms of segregation and inequality. The collective endeavors to improve public education have led to gradual advancements, promoting a more inclusive and equitable system. However, we must recognize that the pursuit of excellence in education is a continuous journey. It demands unwavering commitment to address and eliminate the disparities that continue to affect us today (Hudson & Holmes 1994).

Numerous studies conducted in school environments have reinforced the transformative concept of teaching organizations (Fullan, 1993; Louis, 1992). Fullan (1993) emphasizes that school leaders must cultivate learning organization environments that prioritize both teacher and student development to drive substantial change. In the context of schools, a professional learning community signifies a collaborative approach among teachers and administrative teams, leading to enhanced student outcomes (Louis et al., 1996). This collaborative effort aims to break down silos and elevate professional practices, all in the name of boosting student achievement. Yet, despite the compelling support for this approach, there remains a pressing need for further empirical research that delves into the nuances of leadership practices in education and their direct impact on both teacher and student learning. Addressing this gap could unlock even greater potential for positive change in our schools.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged as a powerful approach in educational research, designed to promote collaborative professional development among educators. However, despite their promising potential, there remains a significant gap in research specifically focused on PLCs in the context of literacy education. Most existing studies tend to address general teaching strategies and overarching educational outcomes, neglecting the specific intricacies and challenges that literacy instruction presents (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). This oversight has resulted in a lack of targeted investigations into how PLCs can directly influence literacy instruction and student outcomes. In this paper, the researcher delves into a vital exploration: how a reading methods class at a mid-western university equips future literacy specialists for leadership roles through the dynamic framework of a professional learning community. By employing research-based teaching strategies, this approach not only enhances educators' skills but also fosters a collaborative environment that is essential for addressing the unique demands of literacy education (Bates, Huber, & McClure, 2016).

Methods

The Graduate Cohort from the University was Utilized in this Study: An Online Course on Literacy Assessment Methods

The revision of the university reading methods course to incorporate the principles established by the groundbreaking *Brown v. Board of Education* decision demonstrates a profound commitment to fostering educational equity and excellence for every student (Chaw & Tang, 2018; Lim, 2020; Mansfield, 2019). As part of the graduate literacy assessment methods course offered by a Midwestern university, reading materials reflect the diversity of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives of young children, allowing literacy specialists to select curricula that promote cultural awareness and empathy among young children as well as a sense of self within it. To make learning more relevant and effective, the researcher integrates teaching methods that relate the curriculum to young children's cultural contexts and experiences.

The literacy specialists tailor teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of all students, including those with different learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds, and foster environments where literacy specialists can share best practices, challenges, and successes in promoting equity and excellence. In the methods course, the literacy specialists learn to develop and use assessments that are free of cultural bias and that accurately measure the abilities of all students, identify and address disparities in student achievement, and inform instructional practices and interventions with data (Quatroche, Bauserman, & Nellis, 2014). Moreover, the course equips literacy specialists to create and utilize assessments that are culturally responsive, accurately reflecting the abilities of all students. By identifying and addressing disparities in young students' achievement, these assessments inform instructional practices and interventions with actionable data. This proactive approach ensures that all young learners receive the quality education they deserve.

The graduate course on literacy assessment methods is crafted to empower literacy specialists with the skills necessary to effectively utilize a diverse range of technology-driven assessment tools and strategies (Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017). This course emphasizes the importance of equipping all young learners with a keen understanding of their unique strengths and areas for growth as readers, writers, listeners, and speakers. The literacy specialists explore various innovative assessment methodologies that integrate the latest technological advancements, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of literacy skills. A significant focus was on fostering collaboration among literacy specialists within the PLCs to drive meaningful educational reform and elevate the overall quality of teaching and literacy instruction.

The course curriculum offered a wealth of information on the fundamental principles of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), specifically aimed at boosting young students' performance and transforming school culture (Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017). Through compelling vignettes from public schools, the researcher illustrated how to cultivate more learning-centered PLCs that foster the professional development of literacy specialists, ultimately benefiting young student achievement (Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017). Literacy specialists were not only encouraged to share and reflect on their practices and personal experiences but were also tasked with studying and implementing research-based strategies and best practices to elevate all students' learning outcomes (Lai et al., 2014). The importance of data transparency within the PLC team was emphasized, with a strong recommendation that such data be visible and accessible within the school environment (D'Ardenne et al., 2013). Moreover, the literacy assessments—computer-adaptive tests engineered to deliver precise, reliable, and valid data—were utilized to empower educators in making informed decisions regarding instruction and intervention. The researcher showcased effective, research-backed strategies for assessing student skills and leveraging this data to identify appropriate interventions. Through collaborative review of student data, literacy specialists actively reflected on their practices and engaged in productive discussions aimed at enhancing young student achievement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

The methods course was expertly delivered, encompassing 3 credit hours of in-depth learning. Leveraging the power of the CANVAS learning system, the instructor empowered literacy specialists with an array of valuable resources. This innovative platform facilitated seamless content sharing, the assignment of literacy assessment-focused projects, timely communication of course updates, collaborative opportunities, and

thorough monitoring of participants' progress. Additionally, it fostered dynamic discussions among candidates and ensured transparent grading practices (Chaw & Tang, 2018; Lim, 2020; Mansfield, 2019). In a typical week, the literacy specialists engaged with the course materials by downloading comprehensive lecture notes, ranging from PowerPoint presentations to Google documents and Word files. They delved into textbook chapters corresponding to these notes and actively participated in engaging discussion boards. The asynchronous format of the CANVAS modules allowed candidates to access all course content at their convenience, ensuring flexibility and accommodating diverse schedules.

The Professional Learning Community and Collaboration

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are powerful collaborative networks of educators dedicated to enhancing teaching practices and boosting their students' outcomes. In the realm of literacy education, PLCs focus on sharing effective strategies, analyzing student performance data, and crafting instructional approaches tailored to support every learner, particularly those facing challenges with reading (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1994). By promoting a culture of continuous professional development, PLCs instill a sense of collective responsibility among educators for the success of every student. They play a crucial role in promoting educational equity by creating an environment where educators can exchange best practices and offer mutual support to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Furthermore, PLCs are instrumental in uplifting struggling readers, as they encourage educators to collaborate on successful strategies and interventions. Through consistent professional development and thorough data analysis, educators are equipped to better address the unique challenges faced by young learners. Regular meetings allow PLC members to share their expertise, work together, and refine their teaching skills, ultimately enhancing the academic performance of young students. The effectiveness of a PLC is grounded in its commitment to using data from assessments, alongside a critical examination of professional practices. Members, including literacy specialists, systematically track and adjust curriculum, instruction, and assessment methods to ensure they meet the ultimate goal: graduating every student, inclusive of those with diverse needs, equipped and ready for college or a career (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

In the reading methods course, literacy specialists engaged in dynamic discussions about their collaborative efforts within a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to examine classroom data and leverage it for informed instructional decisions. Utilizing the school's criteria as benchmarks for their PLC meetings, these specialists reflected on their collective experiences and insights. They also highlighted the critical literacy needs that influence student achievement. By sharing how active participation in PLCs has enriched their literacy instruction, they underscored the importance of data analysis in identifying effective, high-yield literacy strategies tailored to support struggling students (Betebenner & Van Iwaarden, 2020). This collaborative approach not only enhances teaching practices but also significantly impacts young students' success.

Collaboration among professionals and the use of multiple technologies

In a Midwestern state, the majority of schools are situated in predominantly rural areas where challenges related to economic hardship are prevalent. A substantial number of students in these communities come from neighborhoods affected by significant poverty, which impacts their educational experiences (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). These students often face a myriad of obstacles, including limited resources at home, and many lack essential access to technology that is increasingly vital for effective learning in today's educational landscape.

To address these disparities, our dedicated literacy specialists play a crucial role in ensuring that these students do not fall behind in their academic pursuits (Betebenner & Van Iwaarden, 2020). They work diligently to provide access to high-quality technological resources, which enhances the effectiveness of the students' learning experiences. The groundbreaking Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, set the precedent that all students are entitled to equal access to a quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic background (Green, 2004). In alignment with this mandate, our literacy specialists actively participate in Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. Through collaboration and shared strategies, they focus on developing robust interventions that support the progress of all students in literacy. This collective effort reflects our commitment to fostering an inclusive educational environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

The integration of technology into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) was designed with the specific goal of enhancing student performance (Matzat, 2013). The intention was to engage students in a way that makes the learning experience enjoyable and impactful through the use of relevant and meaningful technology. Literacy Specialists played a pivotal role in this process; they employed a variety of advanced technological tools and online platforms to systematically gather, organize, and analyze critical data concerning student performance and the effectiveness of teaching methods (Matzat, 2013). This data-driven approach, as noted by Bates, Huber, and McClure in their 2016 study, allowed them to develop a deeper understanding of their students' needs.

Through this comprehensive analysis, literacy specialists were able to customize their instructional strategies and select appropriate resources tailored to the diverse learning profiles within their classrooms. This commitment to equity in education echoes the principles established in the landmark case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which emphasized the importance of providing all students with equitable educational opportunities. By leveraging technology, literacy specialists were not only responding to the evolving educational landscape but were also fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment that promotes academic success for every student.

Flippity: By leveraging Flippity, an innovative online platform, the literacy specialists developed and polished creative strategies that significantly improved their young students' comprehension skills, driving remarkable success across the entire school. For instance, they organized a dynamic session in which all literacy specialists leveraged Flippity to facilitate a comprehensive discussion centered around the analysis of student performance data and the effectiveness of various teaching strategies. This interactive platform enabled literacy specialists to collaboratively evaluate data trends, share insights, and brainstorm actionable solutions, ultimately strengthening their collective impact on student learning outcomes.

FigJam: The FigJam platform served as an invaluable resource for literacy specialists, enabling them to publish their work in a collaborative environment where others can easily access, view, and adapt these resources for their own needs. This feature fostered a collective approach to learning, allowing literacy specialists to share insights and methodologies that can enhance literacy education. One of the standout functionalities of FigJam was its digital whiteboarding capability, which empowered users to work on the same project in real-time. This synchronous collaboration ensured that all team members stay informed about updates and modifications, helping to streamline the workflow and enhanced communication among participants.

Quizlet: The teams gathered evidence of student learning through various assessments and observations, which they then meticulously analyzed to identify the most effective instructional practices and strategies. This collaborative effort was not only aimed at enhancing educational outcomes but also at developing the skills and capabilities of all team members, empowering them to take on leadership roles within the group. Together, they worked diligently to set and achieve their learning goals. In a specific instance, Quizlet was utilized at the start of the class to create a dynamic and engaging environment. This innovative tool allowed the candidates to connect with colleagues in an interactive manner, setting a positive tone for the session. Through the use of flashcards and quizzes, they were able to initiate discussions on critical literacy topics, promote teamwork, and energize the learning atmosphere.

Kahoot: This multifaceted platform offered an array of features such as interactive quizzes, engaging games, and comprehensive assessments, all meticulously crafted to enhance the involvement and effectiveness of literacy specialists. Kahoot not only enabled participants to design captivating learning experiences that resonated with young, diverse learners but also allowed them to monitor student progress in real time. This timely feedback facilitated a dynamic and responsive educational atmosphere. Moreover, the platform served as a vital link for literacy specialists to connect with colleagues beyond their immediate Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). By fostering these broader networks, it encouraged collaboration, support, and the sharing of innovative teaching practices. This collaborative spirit ultimately enriched the overall educational landscape, empowering educators to enhance their teaching methodologies and improve student outcomes.

This research was carried out in a midwestern state characterized by a significant population of students hailing from low-income families, many of whom face considerable hardships in their daily lives. In this challenging environment, school serves as a vital refuge and resource, offering the only opportunity for these children to engage with books and access technology. Such resources not only enhance their learning experiences but also inject a sense of excitement and motivation into their educational journey (Sarat, 1997).

Furthermore, it is essential for schools to fully embrace and implement the mandates outlined in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case (Sarat, 1997). This landmark decision aimed to dismantle racial segregation in public schools and ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equitable access to high-quality education (Balkin, 2001). By adhering to these principles, schools are mandated to create an inclusive environment that fosters success for every student, empowering them to overcome obstacles and reach their full potential (England & Meier, 1985).

Leveraging technology in professional learning communities (PLCs) brings a multitude of compelling benefits that significantly boost collaboration, efficiency, and resource accessibility. With the power of technology, literacy specialists engage in real-time communication and teamwork, transcending geographical barriers. Tools such as video conferencing, collaborative documents, and messaging apps enabled continuous dialogue and the vibrant exchange of ideas (Bates, Huber, & McClure, 2016).

Methodologies for Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis Employed, Participants, and the Procedures Implemented:

The primary objective of this research was to ensure that our literacy specialists possess a comprehensive understanding of the landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, as well as its significant impact on desegregating the American school systems (Scott, 1996). To achieve this goal, we utilized

a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods (England & Meier, 1985). This involved gathering statistical data to analyze the broader implications of desegregation, alongside conducting discussions and reflections to capture personal experiences and insights related to the ongoing effects of this pivotal policy on literacy education. Through this thorough investigation, we aimed to equip our literacy specialists with the knowledge and context necessary to effectively address the educational disparities that arose from decades of segregation.

The primary goal of this quantitative approach was to provide clear answers regarding the frequency and magnitude of various phenomena within the literacy methods course (Creswell, 2013). Data collection took place throughout the spring academic term, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. In addition to quantitative analysis, the researcher integrated qualitative methods to explore the intricate relationships between variables in this study (Crossman, 2019). Through the use of open-ended questions and comments, the researcher delved deeper into the experiences and perspectives of participants. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher exercised great caution to minimize personal bias, ensuring that the interpretations remained objective and reflective of the data. This meticulous approach enhances the credibility and impact of the findings, paving the way for meaningful conclusions and recommendations. This study involved 13 literacy specialists who enrolled in the reading methods course in the spring semester. The candidates were between the ages of 25 and 40. Out of thirteen, ten literacy specialists had taught for less than five years, and three literacy specialists had taught for more than five years. In the schools where they work, poverty affects young students' academic performance and access to educational opportunities. As part of their support package, these schools offer free or reduced-price lunches, clothing, and other necessities to students living in poverty.

Through a detailed analysis of course evaluations, the researcher sought to determine the extent to which the course content positively influenced the effectiveness of literacy specialists. Participants were prompted to provide feedback on various aspects of the course, specifically assessing its impact on their overall achievement (Garner et al., 2013). Importantly, literacy specialists provided their evaluations anonymously, ensuring that their responses would remain confidential and not affect their grades. In addition to the evaluations, the study incorporated participants' exit reflections on their teaching and learning experiences, along with dynamic group discussions conducted on CANVAS. These reflections aimed to measure the class's impact while identifying participants' progress and ongoing needs. Furthermore, the depth of literacy specialists' academic and professional expertise was analyzed through their contributions to the discussion board, underscoring the class's comprehensive effect on their development.

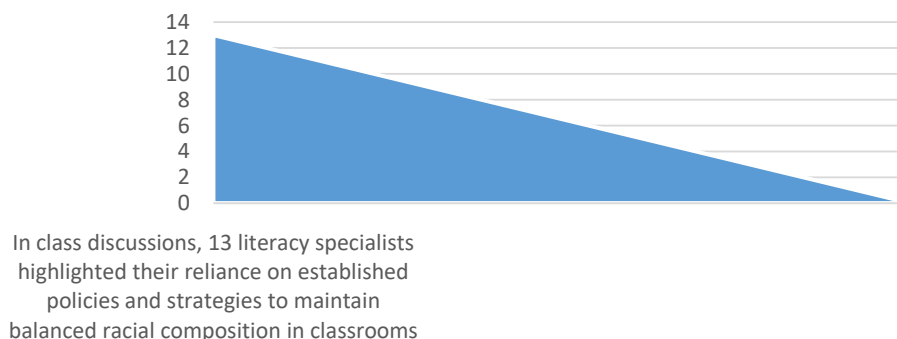
Results and Discussions

Assessment of Qualitative and Quantitative Measures

Public schools across the state actively embody the core principles established by the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which abolished state-sanctioned, race-based segregation in public schools (Paterson, 2001). To achieve this mandate, schools employ a variety of strategies that include managed student assignment systems, socioeconomic integration initiatives, and strict adherence to federal civil rights legislation (England & Meier 1985). These measures are designed to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds have an equal opportunity to receive a quality education. In class discussions, 13 literacy specialists emphasized that they heavily depend on established policies and strategic educational approaches to achieve a balanced racial composition among students in their classrooms. The specialists collectively expressed their belief that when students are supported to succeed in school, they can ultimately evolve into valuable contributors to society, enhancing both their communities and the broader world (Betebenner & Van Iwaarden, 2020).

Table 1: During class discussions, a group of 13 literacy specialists highlighted their reliance on established *Brown vs. Board of Education* policies and strategic educational frameworks to achieve a balanced racial composition among their students

In class discussions, 13 literacy specialists highlighted their reliance on established policies and strategies to maintain balanced racial composition in classrooms

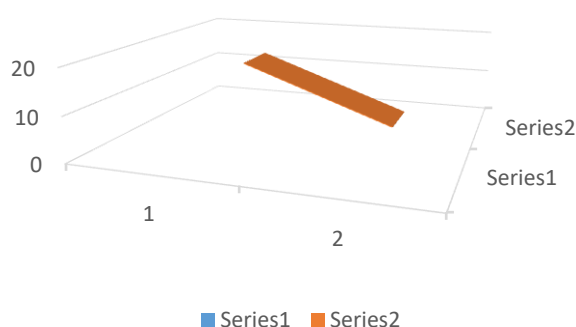


The literacy specialists' commitment to upholding the ideals of *Brown v. Board of Education* reflected a deep understanding that fostering an inclusive learning environment is essential for all students to thrive. Research has consistently highlighted the significant impact that professional learning communities (PLCs) have on promoting equity within educational settings. Through this collaborative approach, literacy specialists not only refined and enhanced their individual instructional practices but also contributed to cultivating a more equitable educational landscape (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Based on thorough course evaluations, all 13 specialists unanimously recognized that equitable education practices are essential and should include targeted support for struggling readers. This approach entails implementing differentiated instruction, ensuring access to specialized programs, and designing interventions that are specifically tailored to meet each student's unique needs. By prioritizing these strategies, literacy specialists were able to significantly improve literacy outcomes and foster a more inclusive learning environment. Through effective collaboration within the Professional Learning Community (PLC), the team of 13 literacy specialists successfully differentiated their teaching strategies. The initiative was a concerted effort designed specifically to address and close the achievement gap among students, with the overarching goal of ensuring that every learner received the tailored support necessary for academic success. To achieve this, the team of specialists undertook a thorough analysis of student performance data, which provided valuable insights into individual and collective learning needs. By engaging in regular collaborative meetings, they were able to share findings, discuss challenges, and brainstorm effective solutions. This ongoing dialogue allowed them to refine and adapt their instructional strategies meticulously, leading to the development of more effective, targeted interventions in literacy instruction (Baumann et al., 2013).

Table 2: A dedicated team of 13 literacy specialists effectively differentiated their teaching strategies through collaboration within the Professional Learning Community (PLC).

Through effective collaboration within the Professional Learning Community (PLC), a dedicated team of 13 literacy specialists adeptly differentiated their teaching strategies.



A candidate discussed how peer observations and feedback in PLCs improved their differentiation practices and enabled collaborative analysis of assessment data to identify students needing extra support or advanced challenges:

Our PLCs create a structured space for collaboratively planning lessons and sharing resources for diverse learners. We discuss ways to modify content and activities to meet our students' varied needs, saving time and offering diverse strategies for implementation.

In a similar vein, another literacy specialist articulated her application of research-based strategies designed to foster collaboration, reflective practice, and innovative experimentation.:

This class is highly effective due to its small size, with just thirteen literacy specialists and the instructor on Zoom. This allows us to collaboratively problem-solve and receive immediate feedback. We focus on research-based strategies that enhance both reading and writing skills while also considering holistic approaches for each child. Peer observations and feedback within PLCs further enhance our differentiation practices.

A literacy specialist highlighted how their PLCs have become a strong method for professional development, promoting collaboration and continuous improvement in education:

In this literacy assessment class, my teaching improves through collaboration with colleagues. We analyze assessment data to identify students who struggled with concepts and then discuss our teaching methods to create a research-based reteaching plan.

Every one of the 13 literacy specialists agreed that participating in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) significantly alleviated their sense of isolation when it came to adopting innovative strategies like differentiation. The support and acknowledgment they received within the PLC bolstered their confidence in effectively differentiating instruction. This collaborative environment fostered a powerful sense of accountability and motivation, encouraging literacy specialists to not only implement but also maintain effective differentiated teaching practices (Bates et al., 2016).

Assessment of Literacy Specialists' Performance Through Discussion Boards

Extensive research has shown that educators who create structures for communication and collaboration centered around shared norms and values significantly enhance student achievement (Watts-Taffe et al., 2011; Baumann et al., 2013). This study reveals a compelling finding: 100% of literacy specialists reported that schools could dramatically improve students' literacy learning through collective action. Notably, eight out of 13 literacy specialists emphasized the importance of shared responsibility for students' overall development, a practice that fosters exceptional literacy learning while defining effective teaching and classroom practices. Every candidate affirmed that engaging in a learning community transformed their teaching methods. Furthermore, seven out of 13 literacy specialists observed a notable increase in student literacy learning as a direct result of teachers participating in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Among the candidates, six recognized that active involvement in PLCs not only bolstered their professional knowledge but also elevated their young students' learning (Hannaford, 2010). All literacy specialists noted measurable student achievement improvements linked to PLCs, which focused on refining educators' instructional practices.

A literacy specialist monitored an at-risk student's progress, offering recognition and tailored interventions to help the student master reading skills. To ensure the student could perform at or above proficient levels on state tests, she used research-based strategies to enhance vocabulary proficiency (Watts-Taffe et al., 2011; Baumann et al., 2013):

I had a student struggling to read and understand the scientific articles I assign weekly. Unsure of how to help, I sought advice at a PLC meeting. My team suggested several strategies, including the Read Aloud Chrome extension and creating a vocabulary list. I focused on assessing the student's comprehension through vocabulary quizzes based on word families. This approach boosted their confidence in reading, and I've seen improvement in their comprehension. I'm grateful for the support from fellow educators that helps me grow.

The researcher engaged in regular Zoom meetings with literacy specialists to thoroughly examine student performance data and analyze the results. These sessions allowed the specialists to share their strategic plans for improving literacy outcomes and enabled the researcher to offer tailored support to ensure the effective application of diverse instructional strategies. Together, they discussed modifications to current teaching practices and the implementation of research-backed, differentiated instruction methods that correlate with the defined essential learning outcomes (Betebenner & Van Iwaarden, 2020).

Throughout this collaborative process, the literacy specialists were afforded numerous opportunities to provide valuable input. This included participating in the formulation of essential outcomes, establishing measurable goals, and developing both formative and summative assessments. They also collaborated on interpreting student data and worked together on creating and applying research-based differentiated instructional strategies. This comprehensive involvement fostered a sense of ownership and commitment to the enhancement of young students' literacy abilities (Matzat, 2013).

Analysis and Results of Candidates' Exit Reflections

Exit evaluations revealed a diverse range of approaches among participants regarding Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and assessment. This variation also extended to the level of engagement in instruction, practice, and assessment among different students (Hamilton et al., 2020). The methods course proved transformative for literacy specialists, transitioning them from passive online learning to active, impactful discussions centered on effective online teaching strategies. Participants were empowered to enhance student learning through collaborative examination of data reflecting their progress, co-assessing their student work, and critically evaluating its quality. This collaborative environment fostered a culture of shared learning and innovation, enabling educators to adopt new practices with continuous support from their teams.

A literacy specialist highlighted the PLC's impact on student learning and its resulting changes.:

We enhance educational experiences for economically disadvantaged children through a collaborative, data-driven, and equitable approach. Our PLC focuses on continuous professional development, targeted interventions, and equity to help all students thrive academically and personally. I believe students should only be referred after all research-based interventions are implemented. This methods class provided a platform for sharing instructional practices and fostering critical conversations, promoting a culture of continuous improvement. Teaching is a collaborative effort, and we consult research to align best practices with current standards.

The thirteen dedicated literacy specialists came together to collaboratively analyze student data, uncovering critical learning gaps and implementing targeted interventions. Their collective effort not only fostered a deeper understanding of each student's needs but also drove impactful change in student achievement. They used a data-driven approach to provide timely support to struggling students, adjusted instructional practices based on performance, and allocated resources where needed. Their efforts prioritized equity in education, aimed at closing achievement gaps by addressing biases and barriers for economically disadvantaged students, developing differentiated teaching practices, and ensuring all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Conclusions and Limitations

The findings indicated that by adhering to the foundational principles set forth in the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, literacy specialists are dedicated to achieving high standards of educational excellence (Balkin, 2001). This commitment emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all students have equitable access to learning opportunities, regardless of their background. Furthermore, the research highlights the critical function of professional learning communities in fostering this equity in education. These collaborative networks provide educators with the support, resources, and shared knowledge necessary to address the diverse needs of their students, ultimately working towards a more inclusive and effective educational system (DuFour & Mattos 2013; Anderson & Kumar 2019; D'Ardenne et al., 2013).

The findings of this study reveal a powerful commitment among the 13 literacy specialists, all of whom actively analyzed student data to uncover achievement gaps. By meticulously evaluating the performance of every student, they crafted targeted interventions designed to provide the necessary support in specific areas. Each specialist emphasized their collective effort in fostering a school culture that not only values diversity but also cultivates a safe and supportive atmosphere for all learners (Evans, 2012). A shared consensus emerged among them regarding the importance of recognizing implicit biases and developing strategies to address them. By utilizing Professional Learning Communities, they successfully created a more equitable learning environment tailored to meet the diverse needs of their students. These findings echo previous research, highlighting how PLCs can amplify students' voices and perspectives, ultimately nurturing a supportive and equitable educational ecosystem that empowers all students to thrive academically (DuFour & Mattos 2013; Anderson & Kumar 2019; D'Ardenne et al., 2013).

The limited number of participants in this study constrains the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population (Owen, 2014). To enhance the applicability of the results, future research could be conducted on a larger scale, involving a diverse array of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) from various regions across the country. This would allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the outcomes. Additionally, forthcoming studies may provide deeper insights into the various mechanisms that contribute to the capacity development of literacy specialists. These specialists play a crucial role in high-performing, collaborative PLC teams that focus on enhancing the reading and writing skills of young students. By understanding these mechanisms better, researchers can identify best practices and strategies that effectively support educators in fostering student literacy development.

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