Partnership to Support the Social and Emotional Learning of Teachers

A New Teacher Learning Community

Tanya Flushman, Megan Guise, & Sarah Hegg

Abstract

Teacher preparation programs and school districts annually invest significant personnel and money to support cohorts of preservice teachers and new first-year teachers. Despite this support, the transition from teacher preparation to the first years of teaching remains challenging. In this article, the authors discuss the impact of a New Teacher Learning Community (NTLC) on supporting the social emotional learning (SEL) of first-year teachers. The NTLC encouraged new K–12 teachers to engage in community building with peers, reflective thinking, and collaborative problem solving. Data included a satisfaction survey and semistructured interviews with participants. New K–12 teachers who participated in the NTLC (n = 21) found increased confidence around key SEL constructs, including relational skills through fostering a sense of belonging and communication abilities and decision-making through practice with problem solving. NTLC findings have implications for future collaboration between teacher preparation programs and school districts to jointly support new teachers and together mitigate challenges first-year teachers face.

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Introduction

Research into the challenges early career teachers face has documented the difficult transition from a teacher preparation program (TPP) into the first years of employed teaching (Johnson, Down, LeCornu, & Peters, 2014). Research has shown that new teachers face challenges during this transition to teaching, such as (a) insufficient knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for teaching (Barnes, 2013; Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010); (b) a mismatch between teaching philosophies and the realities of the classroom; (c) insufficient support (Castro et al., 2010); and (d) ineffective school structures and leadership (Peters & Pearce, 2011). Furthermore, research on teacher attrition has identified job dissatisfaction and burnout as reasons for teachers leaving the profession, with researchers arguing that developing teachers' and K–12 students' social and emotional competencies is important in addressing attrition (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007; Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2015; Young, Baron, & Golden, 2020). In particular, turnover for beginners is influenced by levels of preparation in their TPPs and early mentoring. Teachers without preparation before entry leave teaching at two to three times the rate of fully prepared teachers. Those without mentoring also leave at about twice the rate of teachers who receive regular mentoring, collaborative planning time, and reduced teaching loads (Darling-Hammond, Sutcher, & Carver-Thomas, 2018).

With TPPs and school districts investing time and money into preparing and onboarding new teachers, understanding how to mitigate the challenges that lead to attrition is paramount. Johnson et al.'s (2014) work on teacher resilience identifies conditions for new teacher success, advocating for "innovative partnerships and initiatives that assist smooth transitions to the workforce" (p. 537). Valuing partnerships between TPPs and school districts that hire our graduates, we wanted to stay connected to our graduates beyond the credential program. Our goal was to support new teachers to feel a sense of belonging and empowerment and to obtain the skills and dispositions needed to overcome challenges during the transition to teaching.

Described in this article is our implementation of a New Teacher Learning Community (NTLC) developed through a grant-funded partnership wherein a TPP and district provided a unique space for first-year teachers to develop social and emotional competencies. In the sections that follow, we provide a literature review on teacher learning communities, social and emotional learning, and the intersection between SEL and culturally responsive teaching, which guided our design of the NTLC. Then, we describe the mixed-methods study and data collected and analyzed to inform the NTLC throughout implementation. In the findings, we argue that supporting the SEL needs of new teachers through a NTLC can enhance current induction models and shows promise in addressing teacher attrition.

Literature Review

The following review is divided into three distinct literature bodies. First, key characteristics of successful teacher professional communities are discussed. This is followed by a review of the benefits of participating in teacher communities. Last, we discuss the integration of SEL into pre- and in-service teacher learning.

Teaching Communities as Professional Learning Communities: Key Characteristics

The problems faced by teachers today are multidimensional, and many are difficult to improve. We need to help teachers "rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways that they have never taught before" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argued that teacher learning is an essential condition for efforts to change schools. One particular approach they highlight is *knowledge of practice.* In this case, "teachers learn when they generate local knowledge of practice by working within the contexts of inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). This approach is driven by the assumption that the knowledge needed to make change is located in the daily work of teachers and can be best accessed when they are asked to critically reflect (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003).

In their comprehensive review, Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, and Kyndt (2017) examined 40 studies and found that five shared characteristics of effective teacher learning communities. First, leadership is supportive and shared (Boone, 2010; Hord, 1997) and seen as belonging to the community (Parker, Patton, & Tannehill, 2012). Second, a common vision and norms were important for carrying out the collective work of the learning community (Boone, 2010; Hord, 1997; Newmann, 1996; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hamalainen, & Poikonen, 2009). In this common vision, goals should address the needs of the teachers at the time to improve their practice (Chou, 2011; Gallagher, Griffin, Parker, Kitchen, & Figg, 2011; Keung, 2009) and may include sharing common teaching problems of practice (D'Ardenne et al., 2013; Graham, 2007), sharing effective practices (Akerson, Cullen, & Hanson, 2009; Boone, 2010; Graham, 2007; Owen, 2014; Thessin, 2010), addressing learning goals and/or areas for growth (Akerson et al., 2009; Jones, Gardner, Robertson, & Robert, 2013; Rahman, 2011), lesson planning (Aubosson, Steele, Dinham, & Brady, 2007; Boone, 2010; Graham, 2007; Hindin, Morocco, Mott, & Aguilar, 2007; Pella, 2011), and/or receiving feedback on practice (Aubosson et al., 2007; Owen, 2014; Thessin, 2010; Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Third, teachers are in learning communities to collectively learn and improve their practice, and this requires thinking about practice and individual needs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Newmann, 1996; Stoll,

Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Collaborative reflection on problems of practice allows for collective knowledge construction via question posing and ideas of others (Attard, 2007; Nissila, 2005; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2006; Zellermayer & Tabak, 2006). Fourth, the sharing of individual practice encourages group accountability so that each is responsible for the learning that takes place for all (Hord, 1997; Newmann, 1996; Webb et al., 2009). Last, nurturing physical and human conditions is essential. It is important that members feel like the physical conditions of meetings are supportive (Hord, 1997), including a dedicated time to talk (Aubosson et al., 2007) with funding and facilitation support (Boone, 2010; Chou, 2011; D'Ardenne et al., 2013; Hindin et al., 2007; Jones, Gardner, Robertson, & Robert, 2013). Participants need to trust that they can position themselves as not knowing by asking questions (Parker et al., 2012). In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer (2017) has argued that the types of questions asked are critical for allowing teachers to critically reflect. Learning communities allow teachers to answer the "who" question. Palmer advocates for us to consider "who is the self that teaches? . . . How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes?" (p. 5). This line of questioning requires trust so that learners in the community can "open-up, discuss, take on alternative viewpoints, appreciate individual differences, tolerate uncertainty, and understand that individuals are free to take different decisions" (Attard, 2007, p. 205).

Effective learning communities should be designed in ways that preserve the agency and self-efficacy of teachers (Attard, 2007; Armour & Yelling, 2007; Duncombe & Armour, 2004). The type of learning community may mitigate the kinds of opportunities available to members. Additionally, the structures of traditional schooling and teacher learning may need to be revisited to allow teachers to have control over their professional development (Attard, 2007; Armour & Yelling, 2007; Duncombe & Armour, 2004).

Teacher Communities: Benefits

Teacher communities show promise for continual learning for educators in ways that traditional professional development (often top-down and with content not decided by participants) does not. In this case, teacher communities usually allow for the participants to drive the learning (Attard, 2007; Boone, 2010; Westheimer, 2008), resulting in a more sustained and "continuous teacher learning" (Vescio et al., 2008, p. 86) whereby teachers stay engaged in the authentic problems of their work over time (Bolam et al., 2005; Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, & Towner, 2004).

Moreover, these teacher communities are in some ways a direct rebuke of singular workshops asking teachers to implement practice in isolation. Teacher participants in learning communities have opportunities to reflect on personal practice with invested and reflective others, which is of more benefit to their professional

practice than traditional professional development opportunities (Attard, 2007; Duncombe & Armour, 2004). In school-wide PLCs, this often leads to a positive change in the culture of the school (Bolam et al., 2005; Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; Vescio et al., 2008). Aubosson et al. (2007) found that there were certain levels of community reached by groups ranging from meeting to talk and pseudo-community (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001) to a true community where individuals felt safe to take risks, fail, and learn from missteps together. DuFour (2004) similarly outlined four stages of group development, including preinitiation, initiation, developing, and sustaining.

When teacher communities are run well and successfully, they have the potential to improve teacher practice and student learning (Brodie, 2014; Hord, 2004; Lomos, Hofman, & Bosker, 2011a, 2011b; Minnett, 2003; Vescio et al., 2008). Leadership is seen as belonging to the community (Parker et al., 2012), and the difficult facilitator task is to balance their need to guide learning with being inclusive of teacher voice (Brodie, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Parker et al., 2012). Brodie (2014) argued that the facilitator is "central in creating possibilities for enquiry, collectivity, safety and challenge in the community" (p. 237).

In a review of the literature, Vescio et al. (2008) found all 11 studies attested to change in teacher practice as a result of participating in a teacher learning community. However, only half attested to the ways specific practices changed. Moreover, teachers reported that they perceived their practices had changed. Some explicitly stated that changes included more student-centered approaches to teaching and learning (Dunne et al., 2000), a more strategic approach to language arts instruction (Hollins et al., 2004), more authentic pedagogy (Louis & Marks, 1998), and stronger instructional norms and collaborative practices around instruction (Strahan, 2003). Teacher communities offer opportunity for all levels of teacher learners regardless of how much/how little and how quickly/slowly they are able to change their practice (Akerson et al., 2009), including confirming and disconfirming views and thinking among community members.

The intent of improving teacher practice is ultimately to improve student learning. When teachers participate in learning communities, do their students learn more? In a review of the literature, Vescio et al. (2008) found that of the eight studies that examined the relationship between student achievement and teacher communities, all found improvements in student learning. For example, Louis and Marks (1998), comparing school achievement data among schools with PLCs, found that even when controlling for student background, students who attended schools with the strongest PLCs did better than their peers at other schools. In fact, the researchers found that the quality of the PLCs could explain 85% of the variance in student achievement data. A key to boosting learning across studies was a singular focus on student learning as a PLC (Vescio et al., 2008).

Teacher communities also have the potential to increase the satisfaction of teachers and encourage collaborative choice making (Aubosson et al., 2007; Du-

Four, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997, 2004; Hord & Summers, 2008). In their review of the literature, Vescio et al. (2008) found collaboration to promote a positive change in culture in schools with learning communities. Across studies, they found "successful collaborative efforts include strategies that 'open' practice in ways that encourage sharing, reflecting and taking the risks necessary to change" (p. 84). Additionally, in their qualitative study of Finnish and English teachers involved in PLCs, Webb et al. (2009) explained, "They [PLCs] play an important role in promoting teacher motivation and welfare believing they are instrumental in preventing teachers from leaving the profession" (p. 412). In particular, Webb et al. attested that the youngest teachers in their study particularly liked the collaborative nature of the work.

Data have shown that teachers like to engage in communities of practice through PLC-like work (Leite, 2006) and that they prefer a communal versus an isolationist approach (Snow-Gerono, 2005) to teaching. Well-run learning communities can promote teacher agency to lead initiatives that tackle authentic challenges over sustained periods of time (Bolam et al., 2005; Hollins et al., 2004; Vescio et al., 2008). Furthermore, if the teacher community is well established, the sharing between members extends far beyond the formal meetings of the teacher learning community (Dawkins & Dickerson, 2007). As evident in the review of teacher learning communities, social and emotional dimensions, such as sense of community and belonging, are critically important to the success of these efforts.

Social and Emotional Learning

SEL is the development of competencies related to the awareness and management of emotions and relationships as well as skills needed to address challenges through problem solving. More specifically, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) developed an SEL framework that encompasses five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Recently, TPPs have explored ways to embed SEL in program coursework for teachers to explicitly support the SEL of their K–12 students. Previous research of both teacher credentialing requirements and coursework has shown a limited focus on SEL and/or a narrow focus that omits the complex dimensions of SEL (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development [NCSEAD], 2019; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). TPPs working to reform coursework and fieldwork to strengthen an SEL focus seek to form rich university–district partnerships that provide opportunities to implement SEL when working with K–12 students. The university–district partnership between the Center for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child (CTRWC) (affiliated with San Jose State University) and Sunnyvale School District shows how a TPP can strategically develop coursework and clinical experiences that embed SEL throughout. Pre-service teachers develop their skills

for embedding SEL in their teaching, while in-service teachers serving as mentors also receive professional development in SEL (Markowitz, Thowdis, & Gallagher, 2018). Markowitz et al. argued for a continuum of SEL professional development, beginning in TPPs with ongoing professional development for in-service teachers, during the first and second years of an induction program. The work of Markowitz et al. shows the value in a deliberate partnership between a TPP and an induction program for achieving continuity of support provided to first- and second-year teachers. By training induction mentors in SEL, partnerships like CTRWC and Sunnyvale School District are able to pick up where the TPP left off.

Recent efforts to intentionally embed SEL in both TPPs and postpreparation professional development have been met with critiques, arguing that from a culturally responsive lens, depending on how SEL is taught, SEL could perpetuate inequities (Hoffman, 2009; Saavedra & Nolan, 2018; Schlund, Jagers, & Schlinger, 2020). Hoffman (2009) identified issues such as "implicit ideologies of selfhood and their links to cultural norms for emotional expression" (p. 537) and posited that SEL curriculum can draw on implicit cultural bias and fail to reflect cultural diversity. Furthermore, Schlund et al. (2020) stressed that SEL needs to be implemented from an "asset-based frame that affirms the strengths, values, cultures, and lived experiences of students from diverse backgrounds" (p. 6).

Both CRTWC and CASEL are aware of these concerns and continue to determine ways to integrate social, emotional, and cultural competencies into their frameworks. Teacher educators at San Jose State University, when working with CRTWC to embed SEL in teacher preparation, recognized that the CASEL heuristic on which CRTWC's work was built centered on White, middle-class values and did not take a cultural approach when working with emotions (Swanson et al., 2019). Seeking to integrate SEL and culturally responsive teaching, CRTWC (2019) developed the Social, Emotional, and Cultural (SEC) Anchor Competences Schema (2019). CASEL, in 2016, formed the Equity Working Group, a professional learning community created to support districts in exploring intersections between SEL and equity efforts.

Despite recent emphasis on the SEL of K–12 students, researchers also recognize the importance of understanding and supporting the well-being of teachers (Jennings et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Williford & Wolcott, 2015). Schonert-Reichl (2017) stated, "Thus to successfully promote SEL, it's not enough to enhance teachers' knowledge of SEL alone. Teachers' own social and emotional competence and wellbeing appear to play a crucial role" (p. 142). Research conducted by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) on teachers' SEL showed that with high SEL competencies come emotional, social, and cultural self-awareness. In addition, these teachers exhibit collaborative relationships and strong self-management (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In sum, researchers posited that the SEL of teachers is vital to reducing stress and burnout, improving job satisfaction, and enhancing teachers' ability to support the SEL of their students

(Jennings et al., 2011; NCSEAD, 2018; Palomera, Fernández-Berrocal, & Brackett, 2008; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Young et al., 2020).

Keeping in mind this call to action to support the SEL of teachers, we designed an NTLC that focused on two SEL competencies: *relationship skills* through fostering communication abilities and a sense of belonging to the group and *responsible decision-making* through practice at problem solving. Based on interviews with new teachers, induction mentors, and key district personnel prior to implementing the NTLC, we hypothesized that creating a community for new teachers focused on developing SEL competencies might mitigate transitional challenges and lead to greater job satisfaction. For the purpose of this study, our primary research question was the following: To what extent does the NTLC support new teachers to feel a sense of belonging and develop relationship skills (through enhancing communication abilities) and responsible decision-making (through practice with problem solving)?

Methodology

This study takes a mixed-methods approach to understanding how a focus on SEL competencies in a NTLC might support new teachers in their first year of teaching. The NTLC was designed to be responsive to the needs of new teachers and highlight key transitional SEL skills. Both survey data and interviews were collected and analyzed to capture the perspectives of participants at key points during and after NTLC sessions. In the following section, we detail the design of the study, data collection efforts, and methods of data analysis.

Design of the Study

Context. This study took place on the West Coast and was a collaborative effort between TPP faculty at a state university and a local public school district. The NTLC was part of a collaborative grant effort that emphasized partnership between teacher preparation and school districts. The K–12 district in which this research occurred had a district-wide attrition rate of 6.5% for the 2016–2017 school year and a 9.5% rate for 2017–2018. Forty-three new teachers were hired for the 2018–2019 school year, the year of this study.

Recruitment. The NTLC was established as a community to support first-year teachers professionally and socially. Members of the team introduced the NTLC during the district-wide new teacher orientation. Following this orientation, all new teachers within the district received an email invitation with information about the first session and were asked to complete an interest survey. Teachers were provided with the scope and sequence for the community and the participation requirements. Twenty-five out of the 43 new teachers initially expressed interest in the community. The authors secured institutional review board approval for this study and obtained

Figure 1
New Teacher Attendance for Each NTLC Session
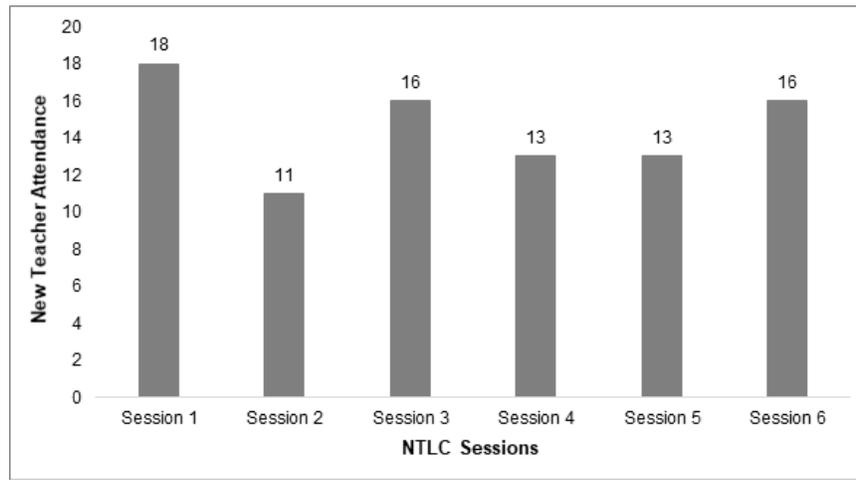
informed consent from all participants. No participants dropped out of the study; however, not all data collection surveys were completed if a participant did not attend the NTLC session when the survey was administered.

Participants. To measure new teacher attendance and participation, the team maintained a spreadsheet documenting NTLC participation. Participation was recorded for face-to-face sessions, online discussion forums, coteaching opportunities, and check-ins. Attendance at the six face-to-face sessions varied with a range of 11–18 participants per session (see Figure 1). The average attendance for the six sessions was 14. Fifteen new teachers attended four or more sessions and were eligible to receive stipends. The majority of new teacher participants attended five of the six sessions. In all, 27 distinct teachers participated, including 15 elementary, 5 secondary, and 7 special education.

NTLC design. Prior to the first meeting, the team developed a tentative scope and sequence for the full year of the NTLC. This plan was created in coordination with district induction mentors so as not to supplant the district's required program for new teachers. Participation was voluntary and incentivized by both the district and the university; new teachers could timesheet their hours or receive salary credit from the district, and the university provided a $250 stipend for attending four of the six sessions. The major components of the NTLC included the following:

● one-hour NTLC sessions every other month that included community building, teacher-driven content supported by faculty expertise, and exploration of problems of practice

- informal check-ins with new teachers in between community sessions

- an online support community in the form of a Google Site with space for sharing resources and for posting and responding to questions and a Twitter handle for sharing teaching resources

- coteaching opportunities with teacher education faculty

- social activities to build connections outside of the face-to-face sessions

All NTLC sessions were jointly planned and implemented by district and teacher preparation personnel, and data collected throughout the study informed small and iterative changes to NTLC components.

A typical NTLC session consisted of new teachers signing in and informally interacting with fellow NTLC members and facilitators. After the welcome, new teachers engaged in either a problem of practice (PoP) protocol—an inquiry-based protocol where teachers identified a problem and group members shared interpretations and solutions—or content provided by the TPP facilitators. This content was determined in advance via a survey to new teachers to see what content they wanted to explore. Some of this content was directly connected to furthering teaching practice (e.g., how to elicit and interpret student thinking in math class, how to support emergent bilinguals), while other times, this content had a SEL focus (e.g., teacher self-care). Each session concluded with a survey distribution to capture participant feedback and inform future sessions.

The literature tells us that to be effective educators, teachers need also to take care of and address their own SEL needs (Jennings et al., 2013; NCSEAD, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Therefore the majority of the content for the NTLC focused on the social and emotional well-being of participants. SEL-focused content included collectively establishing community norms, engaging in the PoP so that new teachers could identify challenges and brainstorm solutions, a self-care activity, and a journey map implemented at the conclusion of the academic year where the new teachers identified the highs and lows of the year. By overtly implementing activities to support the development of SEL competencies (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making), we hoped these new teachers would feel supported during their first year of teaching. In implementing this SEL focus, we did not explicitly connect to the new teachers' cultural assets, a limitation that we will discuss further in the implications section.

Data Collection

To better understand how the NTLC's focus affected new teacher SEL dispositions, the research team collected self-reported survey data, conducted semistructured interviews, and collected artifacts produced during NTLC sessions. These data sources will be described in further detail in the following sections.

NTLC satisfaction survey. At five of the six NTLC sessions, a satisfaction survey was administered to capture the new teachers' perspectives on session efficacy. No survey was administered at the third session, when teachers took a distinctly different survey so as to avoid survey fatigue. The satisfaction survey varied slightly each time based, in part, on content provided in each session (e.g., *As a new teacher, I felt comfortable sharing "glows and grows" at the NTLC*). Some statements remained consistent so changes could be tracked over time (e.g., *The NTLC is a supportive space for new teachers*). To protect the anonymity of participants, name and school site were optional; however, we did ask new teachers to mark what sessions they attended. This survey was used to drive the content and activity for subsequent sessions.

New teachers' feelings about the NTLC were tracked across sessions using this satisfaction survey. The survey included four statements that asked new teachers to reflect on (a) their connection to the other new teachers in attendance, (b) the sense of their ownership of the NTLC community, (c) their level of comfort participating in the NTLC session activity, and (d) whether the NTLC was a supportive space. For example, one statement related to ownership was *I feel ownership/responsibility for the content and conversations in the NTLC.* The survey given in Session 1 did not include a question asking about connection to other new teachers as this was the first time teachers had met together. New teachers reported agreement on these four statements using a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*not true at all*) to 6 (*extremely true*).

Semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews were conducted at the conclusion of the yearlong NTLC to better understand participant experience. All participants in the NTLC were given the opportunity to be interviewed and receive a small stipend for their time. In all, 13 participants were interviewed. The interview protocol was jointly created by team members. Questions addressed the efficacy of the various components of the NTLC and their thoughts on the key constructs of belonging, relationship skills through communication abilities, and decision-making through practicing problem solving. One question new teachers were asked was as follows:

Has your participation in the NTLC sessions affected your first year as a teacher? If so, in what ways?

a. In particular, how has it affected your sense of belonging?

b. In particular, how has it affected your ability to communicate with key stake-holders?

c. In particular, how has it affected your ability to problem solve as a new teacher?

While new teachers were asked about challenges associated with the first year of teaching, they were not asked to critique their district. The omission of critical feedback specific to the district was intentional, as the team lacked authority to address district staffing, schedule, or school assignments. Additionally, the team

felt that asking teachers to voice critical feedback about the district would have undermined the partnership. Interviews did invite new teachers to think critically about their TPP and to identify what portions of the NTLC experience had best supported them.

Artifacts from NTLC sessions. In four of the six NTLC sessions, various products were created through the course of activity. For example, when the community jointly created norms, they individually wrote responses on Post-it notes, and those responses were synthesized by the facilitator. In this case, Post-its were collected and images were captured of the synthesized text. In Session 2, new teachers did a free-writing activity around a PoP; free-writes were collected and photographed. Additionally, photographs of the new teachers engaged in activity were also collected. Field notes were also recorded at each NTLC session.

Data Analysis

The research team used a mixed-methods approach to data analysis. This included the use of descriptive statistical analysis for survey data, a qualitative coding process for the semistructured interview transcripts, and document analysis of session artifacts. All data were triangulated to determine major findings. These data analysis methods will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Survey data. After entering the satisfaction data into spreadsheets, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted. Four questions were common across all five surveys distributed. Responses to these four questions were averaged (to account for the variation in session attendance) and compared across the timeline of distribution with special attention paid to those averages that increased or decreased across the year. Survey questions unique to each NTLC session were also reviewed, and results were analyzed with attendance in mind.

Semistructured interviews. All interviews were transcribed and thematically coded. We conducted first cycle coding, using analytic memoing to inform our analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The themes inherent in a priori codes were also used for analysis of interview transcripts. These codes sought to capture the new teacher's experience as a participant in the NTLC and the efficacy of the community on three identified key constructs: (a) belonging, (b) relationship skills through communication abilities, and (c) decision-making through practicing problem solving. Additionally, all transcripts were coded for new teacher challenges, the new teacher's perspective on the efficacy of their TPP, and any limitations of the NTLC.

Artifacts from NTLC sessions. If available, participant-created documents were analyzed at the end of each NTLC session. Documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning to participant perspective (Bowen, 2009).

Primarily, these data were used formatively to drive the instruction and content for the sessions and not for the express purposes of answering the research question.

Findings

In this section, we present findings from two data sets: the NTLC satisfaction survey (administered at the end of each NTLC session) and semistructured interviews (conducted at the conclusion of the yearlong NTLC). We organize these findings by data set and by the three SEL constructs: belonging, relationship skills, and decision-making skills. We also present recommendations on how the NTLC could have been improved.

NTLC Satisfaction Survey

To better understand the impact of the NTLC, we asked new teachers to rate their level of agreement (on a scale of 1–6) with the related SEL competencies. Average agreement for each of the four statements was at or above 4 at each session, indicating a consistently high level of agreement. Figure 2 shows that there was some variation in this average agreement across sessions. Average new teacher agreement to the statement *As a new teacher, I felt comfortable participating in the [problem of practice/journey map] activity during today's NTLC* had an average at or above 5.75/6 that dropped during Sessions 2 (5.73/6) and 6 (5.5/6), evidence that new teachers were less comfortable participating in activities during those sessions. These dips in agreement are explained when we look at the activity to which new teachers were responding. Although several of the NTLC sessions included a

Figure 2
Average New Teacher Agreement on Satisfaction Surveys for Individual NTLC Sessions
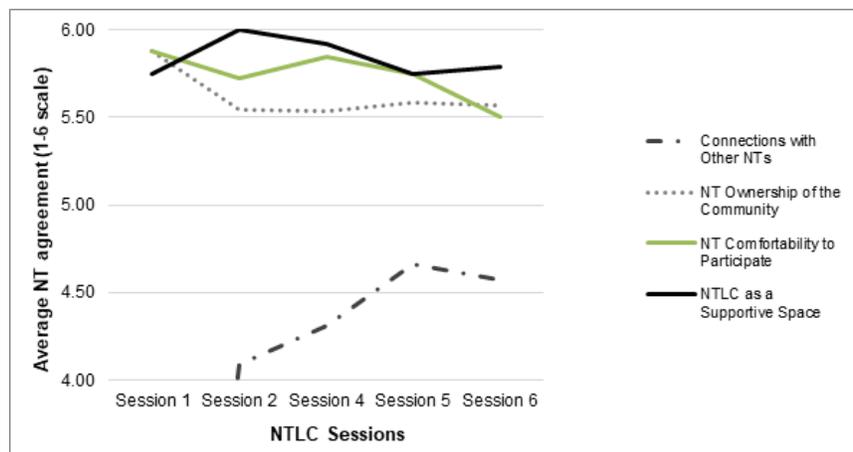
PoP inquiry activity, Session 2 was the first time new teachers participated in this PoP cycle, so comfortability would be expected to be lower. Likewise in Session 6, a new journey map activity[1] was introduced, which may have caused the decline in new teacher comfortability. While the first PoP activity in Session 2 focused around discussion of a preselected problem (parent communication challenges), during Session 4, new teachers participated in a general PoP where participants had freedom to select and discuss a challenge unique to their classroom. Average agreement increased for Session 4 from 5.73/6 to 5.85/6.

New teachers gave the highest scores of agreement to the statement *The NTLC is a supportive space for new teachers* (5.84/6). In contrast, new teachers gave the lowest scores of agreement to the statement *I know the other new teachers in the NTLC and am making connections*. New teacher agreement to this statement started out at an average of 4.09/6 but increased at each of the following sessions (4.31/6, 4.67/6, and 4.57/6). One possible reason for slightly lower scores of agreement to this statement is the fluctuation in new teacher attendance. Each NTLC session consisted of teachers who had attended the previous session(s) and others who had not, so there was an increased likelihood that some of the teachers were not familiar with each other.

Interviews

Interview data yielded consistent themes related to participation in the NTLC and the new teachers' SEL. These themes included a sense of belonging, fostering relationship skills through communication, and promoting decision-making abilities through problem solving. Additionally, themes emerged around the challenges of being a new teacher and the efficacy of TPPs and the NTLC.

NTLC and belonging. Belonging was a major theme in the interview data and the most frequently coded construct. Primarily, participants attested to feeling a sense of belonging through their participation in the NTLC. One teacher responded,

> I think it did increase my sense of belonging . . . definitely going to the sessions helped with that because I see this group of other new teachers who are all strug- gling with the same things I am or nervous about the first [Individualized Education Plan] meeting or administration observation. (Interviewee 12)

In this way, the participants were commonly identifying with the challenge of the new position. It was reassuring to know that their perceptions of the enormity of the job were not abnormal, or as Interviewee 9 stated, "It was just kind of nice knowing that I'm not the only person having these feelings that pretty much everyone in the room was feeling the same way I was. It was affirming and normalizing to know that others struggled as well."

New teachers repeatedly referred to their newfound network of other new teach-

ers across the district: "I got to meet other teachers in the district that I didn't know before and also connect with teachers that I went through my credential program" (Interviewee 1). In some cases, participants were the only new teacher at their school site and would have had no other mechanism for meeting other first-year colleagues. Additionally, for those new teachers who went to the researchers' TPP, this was a way for them to stay in touch with the cohort they had created during their year of training.

Last, participants felt cared for, and this contributed to their sense of belonging. One participant described the effects of the NTLC leaders "singling me out and saying hello . . . that was always the best" (Interviewee 7). More than one participant mentioned that having someone from the NTLC check in with them to see how they were doing was good for their mental health. For example,

> as a first-year teacher, you kind of always feel like you are learning everything for the first time, so you kind of always think that you're not doing as well, so even those little remarks of positivity from them, I think benefited my teaching and just my overall mental wellness. (Interviewee 9)

NTLC and relationship skills through communication. New teachers attested to the ways in which participating in the NTLC sessions impacted their relationship skills and particularly their ability to communicate effectively with others. Although communication was referenced less often than other constructs, it was commonly mentioned when participants discussed making connections with others in the community. Having relationships with others and, in particular, having knowledge and access to information were important. One new teacher stated,

> It was nice to also find out different resources of people that I could ask whether it was people at the district office. I mean just in different conversations things would come up like people in [human resources] that could help me with something or like "Oh you could talk to your TIP mentor about that," and just that was really helpful. (Interviewee 5)

Participants particularly reflected on their ability to "reach out to new teachers" in the NTLC (Interviewee 3). Although none of the interviewees specifically referenced a time they did reach out to another NTLC member (outside of the session), it seemed that the fact that they could if they desired was important.

The NTLC also fostered new teachers' communication skills directly. Participants referenced the communication practice they engaged in during the sessions. Largely, this practice occurred when they used meeting time to walk through actual scenarios involving complex communication skills. Multiple participants attested to how they practiced a specific conversation in the NTLC session and then later had the conversation in their school setting (e.g., with a parent or an administrator). Some transferred the collaborative communication practices from the NTLC to working with their colleagues at their school site. For example, Interviewee 6

stated, "Being able to collaborate with teachers there [at the NTLC] also lent itself to being able to collaborate more effectively with teachers on my campus." Interviews revealed that while a few NTLC members were able to transfer communication skills practiced, the NTLC sessions did not overtly support this transfer, something that could be strengthened in future NTLCs.

NTLC and decision-making through problem solving. Fostering good decision-making skills through problem solving was a primary focus of the NTLC sessions using PoP. Problem solving was the second most frequently coded construct in interview data. Three main subthemes were related to the endeavor of problem solving. First, new teachers appreciated the practical application of problem-solving behavior for constructing real strategies to address their problems. When referring to the PoP activity, one teacher said, "It was something I looked forward to every month. I really liked connecting with other teachers that were in the same boat, and it was nice to have that time to troubleshoot things and problem solve" (Interviewee 4). Part of the impact of engaging in problem solving was the construction and availability of resources that could be used to address problems in their classrooms. These resources were both actual artifacts (e.g., those posted on the Google Site) and verbal suggestions provided from expertise and experience. For example, Interviewee 2 recounted a particularly helpful problem-solving session with two other special education teachers and a fifth-grade teacher:

> We had to pick one challenging student or a challenging moment, and then share it out and then give feedback as to how you might handle that situation. I implemented it in my classroom, and it was really great. That student has really improved, and I attribute a lot of that to working with my peers and working in figuring out a solution together. I think the collaboration was extremely helpful.

This demonstrates how expertise was distributed across the community as fellow new teachers were positioned as helpful and knowledgeable problem solvers.

Second, new teachers often referred to feelings of affirmation that they felt knowing that they shared common problems with other NTLC members. One new teacher stated that it "was nice to know that I have other peers and teachers out there who are going through similar struggles that I'm going through as a new teacher" (Interviewee 2). For many NTLC participants, it was enough to know that others had similar challenges even when the problem might be one that does not get solved (e.g., working with a challenging colleague). New teachers' self-efficacy was impacted by this affirmation from peers: "To have that reality check of like OK, I'm not the only person in the world with problems. It's going to be OK" (Interviewee 4).

Last, through sharing problems and solutions, new teachers were able to witness a diversity of perspectives on a singular, common issue. Interviewee 10 stated, "Just getting a different perspective . . . sometimes it's just nice to get a fresh set of eyes that haven't had the same trainings as me and just different life experiences to help problem solve." New teachers would discuss common issues, for example, the

challenging behaviors of a student, and leave with many different ways to consider the problem and root causes and a variety of solutions. This helped new teachers avoid getting "stuck" (Interviewee 12) in their own ways and to "think outside the box" (Interviewee 13).

New teacher challenges. All interviewees attested to the unique challenges of being a new teacher. These challenges ranged from personal issues, including feeling isolated, time management, and general stress, to more professional ones, including differentiating instruction and classroom management. By far the most frequently cited challenge was the sheer overwhelming nature of being responsible for all aspects of the job for the first time. This included planning, behavior management, interacting with stakeholders, administrative and bureaucratic tasks, and so on. In response to the challenge of being a new teacher, Interviewee 8 responded,

> I think because you're juggling so many different things, like I'm trying to learn the content, I'm trying to learn how to interact in certain situations with students, I'm trying to learn how to communicate, I'm trying to stay on top of grading, I'm trying to stay on top of lesson planning. So, I think it's just you're learning so many different things at one time that it's like I just feel my head is spinning sometimes juggling all of those moving parts.

The novelty of this experience also made the work more challenging. One teacher cited how she frequently felt as if she were doing things "from scratch" (Interviewee 9). More than one made explicit or implicit reference to the thought that it would be easier for them next year.

New teacher perspective of TPP. In general, the majority of interviewees seemed positively disposed to their respective TPPs. In fact, one of the more prevalent themes for this construct was the new teacher's honest appreciation for the inherent challenge of TPPs. For example, when asked how TPPs could better prepare first-year teachers, one participant responded,

> I'm not sure because that's really hard to do. Especially since every school is different. Every school has different playground rules, every school has different types of kids and different parents and different admin, quirks and stuff. It's really hard to even get you ready for it. (Interviewee 7)

After actually engaging in the work as a teacher of record, they understood the enormity of the position and therefore developed a newfound respect for the work of teacher preparation.

Some participants did provide suggestions for ways to improve the training for prospective teachers. For example, the most prevalent request was for more training in how to handle the administrative and bureaucratic work of educators. This included managing and organizing the volume of paperwork, keeping grading records, and maintaining student files, including records and other correspondence.

The next most frequent suggestion was for TPPs to provide more diverse experiences for candidates so as to better prepare them for the wide range of potential contexts they might encounter as first-year teachers. As Interviewee 4 stated, "I guess just more experience and a variety of experiences going into classrooms, not just the classrooms you are student teaching in, but observing in other classrooms."

Challenges of the NTLC. Although new teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the NTLC experience, they identified challenges and suggestions for improvement. The most frequent recommendation was to incorporate alternative content into the NTLC sessions. A common theme here was altering session content so that ample time was provided for teachers to follow up on activity they had implemented in between sessions. For example, "I think [it] would be helpful in the sense to also then get feedback on how we implemented it, and what we could do to change that would be kind of what I would recommend" (Interviewee 2). This suggestion was also made in conjunction with the work teachers did around problem solving. More than one would have liked the opportunity to create a plan, implement the problem, and then reflect on their practice in a subsequent meeting.

The next most frequently offered suggestions included revisions to scheduling of meetings and amending the use of the Google Site experience. To the facilitators' surprise, the majority of the teachers who referenced revising scheduling and timing requested longer and/or more frequent NTLC sessions. For example, Interviewee 6 responded, "To be honest, it would be nice if there were more of them." Although most teachers who referenced the Google Site did so when saying they did not really use it much, there were teachers who made suggestions for increasing the use of the online platform. These included Interviewee 4, who offered, "I think just using it more frequently, updating it more frequently. There were some good sources on there but it doesn't update terribly consistently."

The district TIP mentors played a limited role in the NTLC experience. While they were made aware of the meeting schedule and intention behind the NTLC, they did not attend meetings, and communication between NTLC team members and TIP mentors was minimal. Lack of NTLC coordination with the district TIP mentors is a limitation of the design. The community could have been strengthened by inviting TIP mentors to cofacilitate NTLC meetings or share meeting agendas and content with mentors to encourage follow-up at future TIP mentor/mentee meetings or observations of new teachers.

Discussion

Interview and survey data reveal that participants were generally satisfied with the NTLC, describing this community as a place where they could develop positive relationships with other new teachers while focusing on problems of practice that were specific to their individual needs as new teachers. Similar to previous

research on PLCs that advocated for shared leadership and support (Boone, 2010) and goals that address the needs of teachers to improve their practice (Chou, 2011; Gallagher et al., 2011; Keung, 2009), the NTLC provided this space.

New teachers need spaces to feel like they belong, as their work is extremely challenging. The participants poignantly described the difficulties of managing multiple, often competing demands on their time, intellect, and emotions. Interestingly enough, most of them also possessed the critical reflective abilities to realize how difficult it is to prepare someone to take on the role of a new teacher. There was little, if any, blame given to TPPs for not adequately preparing them for the task. Rather, their thoughts seemed more sympathetic to the seemingly impossible task ahead of TPPs. As highlighted in the interview data, new teachers in the study remarked on the importance of developing strong SEL skills that are not of primary focus for the TPP and the district, echoing previous research that has advocated for the SEL of teachers (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

The NTLC had the unique advantage of being able to focus on SEL competencies that are difficult to address fully in the scope of teacher preparation. As neither a credential program nor an induction program, our mission was not constrained by external accrediting agencies, and this flexibility allowed us to augment and enhance the support the district was already providing to new teachers. The NTLC had the space to be user driven and to focus on those skills that have been unfortunately labeled as "soft." These data show that these skills, in fact, are the very skills that teachers attest to needing to feel successful in their first year. In the NTLC, we were able to operationalize relationship skills through a focus on communication abilities. Similarly, we hoped to develop their decision-making abilities with an emphasis on repeated practice with problem solving.

One of the highlights of the community was that it fostered feelings of affirmation and care in part through meeting others who were going through a similar experience. In addition, having someone check in on their well-being helped new teachers to feel supported and cared for both on a professional and personal level. Furthermore, new teachers engaged in developing relational skills fostered through communication and connection with colleagues. Feelings of affirmation and care align with the research on SEL that argues for the importance of focusing on and developing the SEL competencies of teachers to reduce stress and improve job satisfaction (Jennings, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

A focus on problem solving and developing decision-making skills created an authentic space for discussion of PoPs and potential transfer of learning from the community to the classroom/school site. The structure of the PoP protocol encouraged the new teachers to position themselves as not knowing (Parker et al., 2012) and to trust that through dialogue with their peers, they could arrive at collective knowledge, empowering them to make decisions (Attard, 2007; Nissila, 2005; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2006; Zellermayer & Tabak, 2006). As the process was

constructivist, the knowledge was seen as lying within the body of new teachers that was accessed when they were asked to critically reflect (Buysse et al., 2003).

Implications

Supporting the SEL needs of new teachers through an NTLC has the potential to enhance current induction models. One of the participants stated,

> I think that my teacher prep program, the credential program on top of being a part of the new teacher community was exactly what a new teacher needed. It was just somewhere you could always count on being and feeling prepared, and I was able to share in it. I think it was just really beneficial. . . . I'm really glad they did that. (Interviewee 11)

Ideally, SEL is a focus in both TPP and induction. In a model such as this, the NTLC can bridge the gaps and address some of the issues that individually TPPs and districts have not addressed.

Before further enumerating the benefits of the NTLC, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of this study. When conducting research on the NTLC and its efficacy, we encountered challenges, including finding ways to provide anonymity on surveys and interviews while simultaneously better understanding the experience and needs of each new teacher. In addition, one limitation of this research was the lack of generalizability due to the limited number of participants and the voluntary nature of participation. As new teachers were not mandated to attend, this limited the number of participants who attended individual sessions and were present for data collection. A second limitation was the lack of follow-up after new teachers engaged in the PoP to see what recommended next steps were implemented by the new teachers and the impact on addressing the identified problems. Finally, the team was unable to collect data from new teachers in the district who chose not to participate in the NTLC. Without this data set, it was impossible to determine why new teachers chose not to participate in the NTLC opportunity. Furthermore, we were unable to compare the first-year experience of participants with the broader new teacher population for the district, an analysis that could show the impact of the NTLC.

For the future direction of other TPPs and districts interested in partnering to implement a NTLC and supporting the SEL of their teachers, we would recommend the following. First and foremost, we suggest building a community that positions the new teachers as the drivers of the content and community, allowing their needs to inform the structure and content of the community. Second, asking for input on length and frequency of sessions helps to ensure responsiveness to new teachers' needs. In our study, contrary to our initial hypotheses about session length and frequency, new teachers desired longer and more frequent meetings. Furthermore, continuity across sessions is important; revisiting content from previous sessions

after new teachers have had an opportunity to implement these learnings into practice has benefit.

For the SEL focus, we would recommend being transparent with new teachers about this focus, allowing them to see not only the importance of developing these competencies but also how this community supplements current induction models. For future iterations of the NTLC, we plan on augmenting the SEL focus by exploring an SEL competency over several sessions—even designating a competency for an overarching theme for an entire academic year of NTLC sessions—and tracking the impact on teacher practice. Furthermore, much like researchers and practitioners have called for K–12 teachers to "conceptualize, implement, and assess SEL in a way that adapts to students' cultural assets" (Saavedra & Nolan, 2018, p. 3), our NTLC could have better served the needs of our new teachers if we had taken a similar approach and aligned our implementation with a transformative SEL framework. Our NTLC did not explicitly connect the new teachers' cultural assets and their SEL development, which potentially reduced the ability for the NTLC to create a community where new teachers felt respected and valued, increasing their sense of belonging in this community and at their respective school sites. Embedding the CASEL core competencies framework explicitly in NTLC sessions would allow for SEL competencies to be explored through an equity lens.

Finally, we believe that the NTLC can inform TPPs as they engage in program improvement. By interacting with graduates of the TPP, gaps in program content come to the forefront, which can inform revisions to program coursework and clinical experience. In addition, program faculty become more knowledgeable on the most pressing needs of graduates during the first year of employed teaching.

Note

[1] The journey map activity asked new teachers to identify three highs and three lows from the school year, placing these in chronological order. After providing a description and identifying a teaching-related skill, new teachers engaged in conversation with a partner, making observations about what the highs and lows revealed.

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