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The implementation of literacy lab classrooms as a form of professional learning for teachers

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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LITERACY LAB CLASSROOMS AS A FORM OF

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

by

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Dedication

To my husband, William Patrick Madden, my best friend and life-long companion.

Your undying support and encouragement has guided me during this difficult journey.

Along the way, you taught me the true meaning of perseverance. I look forward to

sharing a future filled with great accomplishments and unconditional love.

To my children, Shane, Maura, and Reid, my "gems."

You embody such innocence and your smiles emulate happiness. You have a future of

endless possibilities at your fingertips. Explore, smile, love hard, care deeply, and most

importantly work hard at whatever you do. A mother's love can never be explained.

To my parents, Robert and Theresa Garrity, who led by example and taught me that hard

work and dedication can lead me to great places. Thank you for bringing me into this

world, for raising me with such high moral standards, and instilling strong values within

me. I now teach them to my own children. I love you.

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Abstract

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This action research study examined the implementation of the lab classroom

professional development concept in a K-5 school district. Teachers who engage is

professional development that is ongoing, job-embedded, and collaborative can further

their learning and strengthen their teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Fullan,

Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Reeves, 2010). Teacher practices, knowledge, reflection, and

collaboration were explored through the lab classroom implementation to see if this type

of professional development was beneficial for the teachers. The power in knowing the

organization and planning a change of this magnitude were also reported.

Additionally, the researcher looked to gain insights on leadership strategies that

one must embrace to implement change. Leadership discoveries were made and

challenges arose in which the researcher needed to reach to her guiding moral principles.

Building leadership capacity and exploring the transparency of leadership were identified

as important aspects of leading change.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Professional development is an essential learning opportunity provided by school

districts and schools to help teachers grow as professionals. The current research around

professional development practices challenges the traditional approaches that many

districts choose to use today. These include top-down teacher training and one day

workshops which lack practicality to help improve classroom practices (Osterman &

Kottkamp, 2004; Reeves, 2010). Furthermore, engaging in these types of professional

development is not enough for teachers to learn and grow as professionals (Allington &

Cunnigham, 2002; Easton, 2008; Reeves, 2010).

Osterman, Kottkamp (2004) and Sweeney (2003) argue that effective professional

development, in its truest sense, provides teachers with the opportunity to develop and

acquire new knowledge and skills while engaged in collaborative efforts to discuss and

reflect on their learning. In addition, powerful professional development influences

student performance and enables students to meet the high demands placed on them

(Darling-Hammond, 2009). It is up to districts to provide valuable professional

development experiences for teachers so that students are taught by knowledgeable and

reflective practitioners who can help students achieve high performance standards

(Darling-Hammond, 2009; Guskey, 1995; Reeves, 2010).

Adopting effective professional development, best practices in teacher learning,

may require a shift in organizational beliefs and current practices within the organization.

The organization must examine past practices and determine how to best emulate

professional development that is in sync with the needs of the organization and current

research. Organizations can combat resistance to new types of professional development by working towards the greater good, a learning community (DuFour, 2004; Sweeney, 2003). Professional development that is grounded in the theory behind professional learning communities unites key features that can lead to teacher learning and improved student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009; DuFour, 2004).

Teacher learning is ongoing and ever-changing (Barth, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006). School districts must look for professional development to further the knowledge of their teachers which will directly impact student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). Furthermore, implementing professional development that breaks down the walls of isolation will encourage a professional learning community that collaborates around instructional practices and student learning (DuFour, 2004; Guskey, 1995). Professional development is often criticized for being irrelevant and not practical. Educators must work to improve professional development and provide teachers with opportunities to increase discourse and reflection around instruction in response to these criticisms (Lieberman, 1995).

The Need for Effective Professional Development in Central

Central School District, a pseudonym, is an organization where student learning comes first. Central's superintendent reminds the staff of this when he speaks about the importance of our students at staff and district meetings. His passion toward student learning is evident when he also speaks at faculty meetings and board of education meetings. He considers the students in Central when making decisions for the organization.

Five years ago, I joined Central School District as a Reading Specialist. I currently work with students in kindergarten through grade five in the areas of reading, writing, and word study. My responsibilities do not just consist of basic skills instruction. I also assist teachers in my building and across the district in implementing the new literacy curriculum and engage in conversations regarding literacy practices. Furthermore, I provide professional development to the K-5 teachers during district in-service days and write curriculum for the district. It was during my professional development sessions and curriculum work that I recognized the need for change in Central's professional development approach.

Through committee work, the district developed a comprehensive literacy education framework that would be used to guide the district in making decisions for their future language arts program. The curriculum department formed this committee because they respect and honor the input of their teachers. This committee consisted of classroom teachers from K-5 grade levels, reading specialists, and administrators. Together the committee participated in study groups, collaborative conversations, and professional development sessions to plan and write the district's vision for its literacy curriculum. Central was able to achieve committee buy in for this change in the curriculum through the use of this collaborative committee.

Central is now in year five of a six year change in the literacy curriculum. The committee recognized this change would require a lot of time to implement and allowed for this in its plan. The district's strategic plan for the new literacy curriculum represents a shift in pedagogy for many teachers. The teachers are expected to move from a whole class model of teaching reading, writing, and word study to a differentiated way of

teaching. This way of teaching considers the needs of each individual student. It is a powerful way to teach literacy that needs to be supported by effective professional development that fosters collaboration and reflection.

For several years, the teachers in Central have been filling out evaluation forms from the one day professional development sessions that are related to the new literacy curriculum. These exit slips give the presenters and the Curriculum Department information about what the teachers still feel they need to learn. While looking back over the exit slips, it has been hard to ignore what the teachers have written. Teachers from every grade level repeatedly wrote, "I need to see this live. I need to see this in action." As a leader, I listened to this statement and immediately recognized peer observation as a need for the teachers in Central. The statements on the exit slips were so profound because the teachers wanted professional development to look different in Central. Guskey (1999; 1995) and DuFour (2004; 1998) note professional development should be a learning process and engage teachers through ongoing practice. It was important for Central to offer something more for these teachers or else their literacy initiative could fail.

Central's literacy committee engaged in conversations about the possibility of implementing lab classrooms as a form of professional development. Lab classrooms, by definition, are when host teachers teach students while being observed by peers. Time is given to the host teacher and the observers before and after the lesson to discuss and collaborate about teacher decisions and student outcomes. These pre-conference and debrief sessions are led by a trained facilitator. Furthermore, the lab classroom is an ongoing, job-embedded, collaborative professional learning community that breaks down

feelings of isolation and challenged competency that teachers sometimes feel with a curriculum change (Evans, 1996). Peer observation through this form of professional learning supports teacher reflection and collaboration around student learning through non-judgmental conversations (Sweeney, 2003).

Research Statement

There is a growing need for effective professional development to support teachers in learning new practices and knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Guskey, 1995). The purpose of this action research study is to implement literacy lab classrooms to address the need for collaboration, reflection, and pedagogical change in Central School District. A parallel purpose of this study is to revisit, refine, and reflect upon my leadership role to see if differences exist between my espoused leadership and the leadership I actually emulate. In addition, I will reflect on my leadership to better understand whether or not it encourages teachers to be reflective practitioners.

The following research questions will be explored in this study:

- Are the practices and knowledge of teachers influenced by the participation in literacy lab classrooms?

- Do reflective practice and collaboration have an impact on teacher instruction for literacy lab classroom participants?

- How did my espoused leadership theories guide me in the implementation of the literacy lab classrooms?

Scope of the Study

Over the 2009-2010 school years, I participated in the lab classroom committee with teachers, reading specialists, and administrators where I recorded notes from meetings.

These notes helped a smaller committee create a pilot study for Central in the spring of 2010. There were two pilots planned. I conducted a lab classroom pilot within my building while two other staff members ran a pilot in another school. These pilots were designed in response to the requests of teachers to see literacy instruction "live". The participants in the pilot noted how valuable the experience was for them and stated the lab classrooms provided a safe way for them to collaborate with their peers about instruction. This was much different than the district workshops they had attended in the past because there was little time to collaborate with their colleagues about instruction or view the teachers in Central implementing the new literacy curriculum.

At the end of the pilot, I helped present key findings from the evaluation forms of the pilots to the lab classroom committee where it was determined that this was something Central's teachers would like to participate in as professional development. I recognized this as my chance to impact the professional development delivery in Central for the future.

This action research study ran through a series of iterative cycles where I collected data through recording observations, interviewing teachers, establishing focus groups, and examining my own leadership journal. The participants included six teachers from across the district. They voluntarily participated to view instruction in the area of language arts literacy and developed a professional learning community around instructional decisions and student learning. Furthermore, this study provided me with the opportunity to view my leadership within the context of where I work. My leadership is a journey that requires deep reflection into how I act and react in different situations. This

project helped me define my leadership strategies in order to gain an in depth look at the leader I am. See Appendix A for a full description of my methodology.

Conclusion

Professional development should be grounded in new knowledge and remain practical in support of what is happening within schools (Corcoran, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Guskey, 1995). School districts often use professional development to support the current policies and practices they are trying to implement (Reeves, 2010). The expectations of professional development in school districts should mirror the high expectations for students. As an integral part of teacher learning, professional development should foster collaboration, new learning, exploration, and time to learn and grow in a setting that holds high expectations for its teachers.

Chapter II

Leadership Platform

Leadership is a powerful word that has many definitions. When I first began this my journey to find myself as a leader, I had a very general idea of what makes a leader great. Through my readings and experiences, I was able to develop specific definitions that define great leadership. What I discovered was that my morals played a powerful role in how I defined myself as a leader.

In this platform, I identified different leadership theories that resonated with me and my emotions. According to Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee (2002), "great leadership works through emotions." (p.3) This platform is an indication of where I saw myself as a leader when I first entered the Rowan Doctoral Program and where I still need to go to be successful. I linked my values and beliefs with narrative accounts of my teaching (Court, 1991). I also used this reflection to provide insight into defining the type of leader I have become.

Morals, Beliefs, and Values

People hold a set of beliefs and values for themselves based on previous experiences and their moral development. These essential beliefs and values are usually developed when a person is young and contributes to the way a person understands the world (Arnold, 2000). Most people stay true to their moral beliefs and values because of the personal importance people place on them (Arnold, 2000). According to Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Walker, 1982), people create meaning from the experiences and environment they are exposed to and this affects their moral development at more mature stages. This meaning is dependent upon social experiences

of people as well (Arnold, 2000). Exposure to certain experiences affects how they see the world and develop their own morals, values, and beliefs when they become an adult (Arnold, 2000).

The development of my beliefs. When I sat down to reflect on my beliefs and what influenced the formation of them, I immediately thought about my family and the twelve years of catholic education I received. Overall, my family and education taught me to believe in myself. I learned to respect others and always quest for knowledge, while remaining compassionate towards others. My family and education also instilled a very strong sense of hard work in me. I have taken these beliefs with me through the years and applied them to my teaching career.

As I reflected some more on my catholic school experience, it was not without deep reflection that I found a moment that strongly influenced my beliefs, one I will never forget. Sister Peggy was her name, a brown haired nun who wore a habit every day. She rarely dropped down to look into my eyes. This was an indication to me that she did not care to see the person that I was. Her arms were never out to welcome hugs, which was one thing I needed to make me feel at home. To this day, my image of her is so clear. My experience with her is one that helped shape the beliefs I hold today.

She was my first grade teacher at St. Luke School in Stratford, NJ. I distinctly remember my first grade classroom as not being a very welcoming place. It was not comfortable, colorful, and by no means a fun place to be. I hated going into Sister Peggy's classroom every day. She was not warm nor was she affectionate to any of the six-year old children sitting in her room.

I remember hopping on the bus in the morning and getting to my seat. As soon as I would sit down, I would start to cry and get myself so worked up that the bus driver could never pull away from my stop. The doors would swing open and she would yell out to my mom, "Here she goes again." My mother would take me off of the bus and drive me to school. I remember her discussing the situation with the principal and Sister Peggy. She could not understand why I was behaving like this and at the time, neither did I. I was doing what any six-year old would do, cry out for help.

 I never once expressed to my mom how much I disliked Sister Peggy's classroom. Sister Peggy used to call me out in the hallway and yell at me for crying on the bus. She would make me feel terrible for making my mom drive me to school. For some reason, I thought that if I cried every morning on the bus, my mom would know the truth behind all of my feelings and keep me home from first grade. Unfortunately, this was not the case. I learned that I had to find a way to preserver so that I when I became a teacher, I would never make my students feel the way Sister Peggy made me feel. I have taken ownership over these feelings and planned to use them in a positive way.

You see, Sister Peggy was not the only factor in this mix. It was also the fact that I had a hard time learning how to read. I was always in the lowest group and sent to sit with Mrs. Lunet, a teaching assistant, to practice my reading. I remember clapping out syllables until I was blue in the face and still not understanding them. I vividly recall reading the Dick and Jane books over and over. This experience was just horrific. Somehow, someway, I made it through my first grade year. The impact it left on me has and never will be forgotten. I am who I am today because of Sister Peggy. I choose to teach, to make a difference; however, big or small it may be. I revisit my experience with

her every day as I stand in front of the children and staff members that I have to work with.

Looking back on this experience, I can still wipe a tear from eye. It has left that kind of imprint on me. Although this was not a wonderful experience for me in any way, it was an important one because it contributed to the development of my beliefs. These beliefs are respect for others, a quest to learn, compassion, and loyalty. These are all beliefs that a true leader resonates with time and time again (Wharton, 2000).

People come into our lives for different reasons. I can stand firm behind why Sister Peggy came into mine. Becoming a teacher was a natural thing for me to be because of my experiences I had in my own schooling. It was the path I needed to take in life to make sure young children did not have the same experiences I had with my teacher. I became a first grade teacher because of Sister Peggy. I ultimately became a reading specialist because of Sister Peggy. As a reading specialist and former first and second grade teacher, I reflect on my experiences that I had with Sister Peggy in first grade often. It is the foundation for how I act as a professional.

I believe in honoring the beautiful faces that walk through my door every day because of Sister Peggy. The environment I establish for my students is a comfortable and risk free one. Another strong belief I hold is respecting my students and meeting them where they are in their reading and taking them to places beyond their imagination. I believe that there must be compassion in my teaching as well. As an effective teacher, I need to be compassionate about my students and the experiences they bring to the classroom.

My realization of the need to be compassionate for my students was also confirmed when I taught in Camden City, New Jersey. I received this job right out of college and was eager to teach. I wanted to make a difference and I chose to start in Camden. At first, I found there to be many struggles. There was new curriculum to learn, my first year teaching work load to contend with, and disruptive students to deal with. That's where I went wrong. My initial reaction to the challenging students I faced was to consider them disruptive, as if it was their fault. I did not take the time to think about where they came from and what they brought to my classroom that would cause them to act in certain ways. It was very easy to judge these children by what was on the outside. My principal persuaded me to look beyond their faces and into their hearts.

I remember walking into Room 206 every day wondering what I was going to encounter from my students next. When I think back to this, I remember a pivotal time for me happened one day when speaking with my principal. We were in a discussion about my class and the challenges that I faced with the students. She looked me in the eyes and stated, "You have to find an understanding of where these students come from and have compassion for them in ways you did not think you could." I remember this conversation as if it just happened the other day.

At the time, I thought back to my experiences with Sister Peggy and how she lacked compassion for me and my feelings. I had to make a decision to rise above what she had done to me. What I took away from this experience in Camden was something that I hold to be strong beliefs of mine, compassion and caring about the children I teach.

My first grade experience also lends itself to the beliefs I have about my professional growth. I believe in respecting myself as an educator and embracing the

challenges I am faced with. I strive to remain loyal to my profession and seek out as many professional development opportunities that are offered. I vow never to become stagnant in my field.

This single experience that spanned a year of my childhood taught me to believe in the children I teach. There is not a day that goes by that I do not catch myself reflecting back on Sister Peggy and the troubles I had with learning how to read. Every day that I walk through the doors of Craine Elementary School, I make a choice to make a difference in the children I teach. The powerful beliefs that I hold allow me to dream big for the students and for myself. If I had the chance to see her again, I would let her know how much my first grade experience has shaped my beliefs and grounded me as a professional.

The development of my values. The values I hold are reflective of my experiences with Sister Peggy and also my exposure to certain experiences over the course of my life. I feel strongly that my values are a reflection of my beliefs. My values are what inspire me to be who I am. They are a reflection of what I stand for as a person and what I try to impose on those close to me.

Each day I walk into my classroom and fulfill my role as reading specialist, I treat others the way I like to be treated. For example, I have embraced where Craine School is in their literacy instruction. Because the staff has not been afforded professional development opportunities in the past regarding literacy instruction, I still respect what they do with their children and how they teach literacy. Their previous principal lacked compassion for them in their growth as professionals in literacy education. Their professional growth was stilted just like my growth was in first grade. As a teacher

leader, I understand this and treat the staff the way I would like to be treated if I was in their shoes. I was there…where they are right now…I was unable to grow into the person I wanted to be in first grade. My experiences continue to ground me as I work to lead Craine School and Central School District into better practices in literacy instruction.

This weighs strongly on how I interact with others, especially in my reading specialist position. It is what I believe is morally right. I not only teach students but also work hand in hand with the staff and my principal. Kouzes and Posner (2007) explain this so clearly in their book titled, *The Leadership Challenge.* They reflect on the five practices of exemplary leadership. The first practice they note is "Modeling the Way" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This practice refers to "leaders modeling the way" and "living up to what they say" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 15).

Another value that I hold true is compassion. A compassionate person understands others on levels that some people cannot. This value started to develop when I was young, but was most definitely confirmed when I taught in Camden City, New Jersey for seven years. Year after year, I would see these beautiful faces sitting in front of me and behind their eyes unimaginable things existed. I had to bring the value of compassion with me so that I could "stay in the moment" with my students and still remember all of the unique backgrounds and experiences they brought to my classroom.

For example, I taught fourth grade my first year in Camden. Whether it was Nelson, Clarissa, Brittany, Luis, Tony, or Nicole, they had to know I cared about them like they were my own because of the way I treated them. I distinctly remember one student would hoard food whenever we had a party because at home she never had that much food to eat. She literally would wrap her arms around it, as if one of her seven

brothers or sisters were going to come by and take it. Compassion was what I needed to have when teaching in Camden. If she was having a tough day, I had to remind myself that it was probably due to factors outside of school. I had to feel for her and understand that her basic needs, like eating, needed to be addressed first before she could learn. Most often, Room 206 was a place you could feel at home. There was always food, winter coats, clothing, and many other basic necessities ready to be handed out to those children that needed it. I would never ask if they needed it because I know their answer would have been, no. My decision to just give to those in need showed my students that I cared.

Loyalty is another value I hold dear. This value is one that has developed and strengthened over my years in education. I have been around too many of my colleagues that say they care and I do not doubt that they do. They just care in a different way. My way, is by no means better, but it is based on my beliefs that I have for myself and my students. I feel an undying need to remain loyal to my students' learning and my growth as a professional. I make a promise to the students and staff with whom I work. My loyalty is evident in my persistent nature to get all of my struggling readers to read. I also have accepted some responsibility to move the staff forward in their literacy teaching. This value is consistent with my identification with moral leadership (Court, n.d.)

The beliefs and values that I have developed are part of my self-awareness. Being aware of my beliefs and values help me define where my passions lie. I am better able to explain my personal vision because my beliefs and values have been set and strengthened with experiences that have been presented to me.

My Leadership Beliefs

How do I define my leadership beliefs? Am I a leader? If so, how did I come to be a leader? Did I subconsciously choose to lead or was I inspired by a moment that caused me to lead? How do I encourage others to move toward my vision of learning? These are all questions that consumed my thoughts and required countless hours of reflection when writing this leadership platform. During my reflections, I found myself repeating over and over again, "I just do what I do." It was then that I realized in order to find a platform I had to step out of my body and look deep within my soul. According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), "leaders cannot lead through someone else's values, words, or experiences. Unless it's your style, your words, it's not you-it's an act" (p. 58). Looking deep within myself to find out how I lead others kept coming back to my foundation that is grounded in moral leadership.

This platform was life changing in a sense that I had to recognize first that I was a leader and then find confirmations for all of my beliefs and values that represented why I lead. I always seemed to come back to one question when writing this platform. Do I have the power to lead effectively? The answer I found was yes.

I looked at this platform as a long walk that required me to stop many, many times along the way to look closely at myself and what I represent. It was truly a walk, a very slow one. I never once had to jog nor did I sprint because I would have missed out on finding what I truly believe in…and that is me.

Moral Leadership

When defining effective leadership, I always reverted back to what I value and believe in the most. I found moral leadership to be the foundation of my leadership with

subsequent theories resting on this foundation. Since my experiences with Sister Peggy affected me in so many ways, my beliefs and values about my students and how I act in a leadership position have been mostly shaped by her. I observed her and her actions and promised myself I would never act in that manner (Wainryb, 2000). This observation is linked to the moral behavior I learned (Wren, 1995). I act the way I do because of my family values, beliefs and my interaction with Sister Peggy so many years ago.

I have discovered that "morals are something that are rooted in your character, your decisions and your actions, so that teaching it is a matter of demonstration, intention, and deliberate choices." (King, 2009, p. 2) Over my twelve years in education, I have found myself demonstrating moral leadership daily. A recent indication of the power behind my beliefs and values occurred with four staff members within the district I am currently teaching.

As a reading specialist, I help teachers implement the new writing workshop curriculum, which is part of a six year revamp of the district's literacy curriculum. I was invited into a first grade classroom to assist the teacher in a writing lesson. To my amazement, these first graders were handling the rigor of the new writing workshop curriculum with such great ease. I reflected back on seeing these faces in kindergarten and their struggles to learn to write. Their first exposure to writing workshop was last year in kindergarten. I was just amazed with how they handled my lesson and what they were producing in the workshop. These children had stamina to write and viewed writing as a way to express themselves and their real life stories.

Upon completion of my lesson, I shared my positive thoughts with their teacher. I left their classroom feeling charged. I quickly returned to my room and called one of the

supervisors, within the district, who was responsible for shifting the district into the writing workshop model and overseeing the curriculum writing. I discussed all of the wonderful things that I saw and how this was a tribute to the fabulous kindergarten curriculum that helped prepare the students for first grade. I then called the two staff members that were responsible for writing the kindergarten curriculum and spoke to them about what I just witnessed in first grade and thanked them for their amazing work which helped create these fabulous writers.

Lastly, I sent the kindergarten teacher an email expressing my thoughts about her delivery of the kindergarten writing curriculum on the students who are now in first grade. I stated, "You make a difference." This is a clear example of something I value most. Treating others the way I like to be treated. I received a genuine thank you from all of the staff that I reached out to and they even expressed how my thank you and acknowledgement made their day. This is being a moral leader, one who builds positive relationships and recognizes hard work (Thomas, 2009).

Based on my beliefs, they had to know what I witnessed. It had to be recognized because I value and respect the hard work that people put forth. I could not pass up this opportunity because if I were the former teacher, curriculum writers of the grade level, or supervisor, I would want to know. This is just one example of how I lead using a value I hold dear, which is treat others the way you like to be treated.

I also consider myself to be an emotional leader (Goleman et. al., 2002) which is deep seeded in my morals, beliefs, and values. I consider a leader who leads with emotions to be empowering and one who works toward the greater good for others. My emotions help guide me in the decisions I make in my current position as a reading

specialist. Being a reading specialist requires me to possess four dimensions of leadership (Wepner, et. al., 2002). Of these four dimensions morals and emotions are key components. A reading specialist that resonates with their emotions are honest with themselves about people, policies, and practices and recognize when these practices inhibit student learning or stifle teaching (Wepner, et. al., 2002). I can relate to this view because I believe that a reading specialist that has a strong moral conviction and emotional connection to their role is comfortable in expressing their thoughts about teaching that may be impacting student learning.

For instance, when I first arrived at Cranberry Pines many of the teachers viewed me only as a basic skills teacher and questioned whether my instruction would have a significant impact on their students and their teaching. They saw my role as solely serving the basic skills population and they did not want or choose to have me in their classrooms. However, I was so convinced that teachers also needed me to help improve their literacy instruction I continued to chip away at their resistance to me. I established relationships with many of the teachers who expressed interests in changing their literacy instruction to best meet the needs of their students. I focused on my morals and values and helped them perceive that change is good. I made them feel safe and capitalized on their years of oppressed professional development.

I now go into many classrooms during reading and writing instruction acting as a coach and also modeling best practices in literacy education. I tell teachers what I observe and I can tell them what they can do better to help them be more successful with their students. I believe I am leading in a way that reflects my beliefs and values. It is my emotional charge for doing what is best for students. This is my opportunity to act as a

change agent and promote teacher learning which ultimately leads to greater student success.

This example also provides evidence that I am self-aware. "Self aware leaders are attuned to their inner signals." (Goleman, et. al., 2002, p. 20) I was able to recognize where my strong emotions were coming from in regards to their instruction and was able to do something about it by supporting what I believe to be best for students. I also was able to show empathy towards how they viewed their approaches to their literacy instruction. Reflection is very powerful and is embedded in my day.

For example, prior to the new principal and I being hired, Craine School had an administrator that did not value professional development for his staff. Therefore, the staff accepted that their literacy practices were what was best for students and rarely pushed on to learn new and innovative techniques for teaching literacy. In reality, this was not what was best for the students or for them as teachers. They did this because their administrator always recognized them as being effective in their instruction and they felt that was good enough. To the staff, good evaluations meant good instruction. I felt the staff did want to branch out in their literacy practices but the precedent that he set was that they did not need to because they were getting good evaluations. He wanted everyone to stay just the way they were. His feeling has now left them behind in their literacy practices to no fault of their own.

When deciding to branch out to teachers within the building, I had to remain empathetic to their situation and understand why they did not seek to grow as professionals for many years. I was aware of the precedent that was set before I arrived and was mindful of that in my approach. My ability to tread lightly with the staff afforded

and still does afford me opportunities to work closely with them and their instruction. A self-aware leader is a person who is able to be empathetic because of his/her own awareness of feelings (Goleman, et. al., 2002). This is an example of how I used empathy to gain insight into the emotions of others (Goleman, et. al., 2002).

Visionary Leadership

Another leadership theory that I found that rested on my strong platform of morals is visionary leadership. Visionary leaders make important decisions based on what they know are best for everyone involved (Wren, 2004). A visionary leader is person that makes decisions based on their personal characteristics, behavior, and the situation (Wren, 2004). This type of leader has "a personal conviction that what they do can make a difference." (Wren, 2004, p. 405)

For example, I display my effective ability to problem solve and make important decisions that affect our district. I served on the district's Elementary Literacy Committee. Initially, this committee worked together to plan the district's vision for literacy instruction. We spent many long, painstaking hours studying at research that supported best practices in literacy instruction. This committee was responsible for planning the six-year literacy initiative for the entire school district. I was recognized as leader among the group that was comprised of staff members from each of the five schools.

Many teachers who sat on this committee had different beliefs, experiences, and knowledge about what was best when it comes to literacy instruction. It was through this committee that I effectively communicated and collaborated with a diverse group of

colleagues. I facilitated many small group interactions at the meetings because I was seen as a visionary leader.

This committee had a planned vision for the district and where it should head with its literacy instruction. At the time, we had recently begun writing curriculum that encompassed the vision the committee identified as being best for students. For the past four, I have displayed my decision-making skills in my role as district curriculum writer. In my role, I was responsible for leading a team of first grade teachers in developing the first grade writing curriculum. This was an enormous task but my team went head on into the writing of it. We developed lessons for writers' workshop that were our own ideas based on research. The lessons that the team wrote were well thought through so each met the needs of our teachers and students.

While we were spending countless hours writing, revising, and reflecting, I discovered we never lost sight of the district's vision to provide students with what was best in literacy instruction. Our collaboration was so reflective. We had four minds working together at once to make sure we stayed true to the vision. A visionary leader is one who is reflective by nature (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). During this process, my team spent a tremendous amount of time reflecting on our personal beliefs and how they aligned with the committee's vision for the district.

Visionary leaders also provide emotional empowerment to others (Wren, 1995). They use their power to influence others in a positive way. In a relatively short time that I have worked in the district, I have had a significant impact on initiating district-wide change. Because of the new writing curriculum, the district had the first grade teachers meet once a month for professional development on the teaching of writing. I played a

key role in preparing and delivering the professional development activities. I not only did this at the district level, but also at the school level. In the past I have ran a series of workshops on taking and analyzing running records. I was also responsible for starting professional book clubs among the staff. This represented a huge shift in the culture of my school because of their views about professional development and literacy instruction. Collaborating and coaching are key parts to my reading specialist position (Bean, 2006). This is a characteristic of a transformational leader that remains grounded in their morals and their actions are indicative of change and innovation (Gilley, et. al., 2008).

A visionary leader also makes intangible values tangible for a group (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Somehow, someway this type of leader needs to make the participants see the value in what they are doing and strive meet the core values of the group and leader. How does one do this? At the school level, I promoted a setting where people were free to explore, innovate, and experiment (Goleman, et. al., 2002). For instance, I verbally encourage teachers through email when I know they are exploring new practices. I frequently check in with them to see how their new approach is going and remain supportive and positive in my comments. Again, recognizing their hard work and remaining supportive of this is a key part of being a strong leader (Thomas, 2009).

For example during my first year as reading specialist, teachers in my school were hesitant to change based on the new literacy curriculum. At the time, the only portion that was being implemented was the writing curriculum. The teachers were feeling the need to spread their wings when it came to their reading instruction. The district was not requiring certain reading instruction because the committee had not

developed the reading curriculum yet. This had left all five schools doing random things regarding their reading instruction. Upon stepping aboard, I noticed this and reached out to those teachers who were willing to make a change in their teaching for the betterment of their students and themselves.

I was responsible for starting a leveled book room where teachers could find text to support their small group reading instruction. This was most certainly a culture shift in the building since most of the reading instruction was whole group and basal driven. The book room has now grown into a "hot spot" where teachers go to "play and experiment" with their reading instruction. The teachers saw the value in small group reading instruction and how it has helped make their students successful in reading. They have also expressed how much they have grown as professionals by using the book room. They feel they are now able to meet the needs of their students.

Servant Leadership

This is another theory that I think rests on my moral leadership foundation. Servant leadership theory believes that one must serve first before becoming a great leader (Wren, 1995). This theory acknowledges a servant leader as being an "extraordinary presence" in the objective at hand (Wren, 1995, p. 18). I feel I resonate with this theory in the sense that I value my experiences and the identification of my beliefs and what is best for students on a daily basis. I believe we grow more personally when we give ourselves to others (Covey, 2004). I believe my relationships have grown and deepened over the past three years of my career because of my attempt to serve my family, district, principal, staff, and students (Mayer, Bardes, & Piccolo, 2004).

A servant leader's actions reside in her morals. I can most relate to this because of my view about working to provide students with the best literacy instruction they deserve. Because I serve as a reading specialist, I am responsible for instructing a basic skills population of approximately 35 students in grades one through five. I also work in kindergarten on a weekly basis. I look to my role to serve these students with new and innovative approaches to teach them what they are not getting in the classroom. I serve at the student level and implement practices that I feel are best in the hopes that I will reach every learner. My instructional decisions are related to my values and beliefs about the students I encounter every day.

Another example where my servant leadership is evident is in my strong interpersonal skills (Gilley, Dixon, &Gilley, 2008). I have served as a teacher leader by modeling for other teachers. In my previous district and presently, I have been used to model lessons in classrooms and at the district meetings. I have also opened my classroom for my peers to observe. Upon completion of these lessons, I would be required to meet with my peers and discuss my approaches and back them up with research. This has always been a difficult part of my job because you are really putting yourself out there. This is one role of my position that I find most difficult because of the adult learners involved. Some of them do not have deep values in life-long learning and in this case it is due to their previous principal not acting as a life-long learner. Their previous principals' beliefs add more fuel to my tank when it comes to my life-long learning.

For some, this may put a strain on their relationships with staff members, but I have managed to somehow stay grounded and reflect on my abilities to reach teachers at

every level. I ultimately find satisfaction in this because I know they have left my room questioning their approaches, which only benefits the children in the long run. This is a difficult aspect of being a reading specialist; nevertheless, it is part of my role. I am responsible for collaborating with teachers and serving them in these ways (Bean, 2004).

My Aims for Education and Goals for Myself

Before writing this platform, I had always envisioned myself teaching teachers. This was before I knew the theories that encompassed leadership. Upon my realization that I was a leader, I feel my experiences that are deeply rooted in my morals, values, and beliefs and specifically tied to my emotions can help me lead successfully in any position I may take in the future. I do have a goal to lead in a supervisory or administrative role one day. Maybe I will even find myself as a professor in an education department at a college or university. The opportunities that await me are endless. I never looked at myself as maintaining the same job for more than ten years. So far, I have kept that stance and believe I will continue to choose paths that reflect what I value most and that is doing what is best for children.

In order to achieve these goals, I continue to remain loyal to my profession and the students I teach. I will stay current in my field and always challenge myself to be better at what I do. In addition, my reflective nature will not allow me any room to get "too comfortable" in the profession I hold. I will make a difference in as many students' lives that I can whether that be directly working with them or the teachers that teach them.

With these thoughts come questions that I have about myself as a leader. Will I fail as a leader if I become an administrator or supervisor? Can I lead effectively? I am

scared to take this leap for fear of failure. Although I lead right now, I think I still have a lot to learn. I take moments to step back and observe other leaders that I interact with. The only way I will gain more confidence in myself is by having more experiences. Right now, my role is huge. I have to wear a lot of different hats. At times this can be daunting, but I mostly look at it as an opportunity to learn how to successfully lead others in the direction you are headed.

On this walk that I have taken, I learned that I will continue to observe and value all of the experiences I face as a reading specialist. Out of these experiences, I will gain greater insight into what resonates with a true leader.

Conclusion

This platform has been such an amazing walk for me. It was slow because I stopped along the way to savor moments and experiences that have shaped me into a leader. I found on my walk that I resided most with moral, visionary, and servant leadership. I have developed myself based on the foundations of moral leadership. My beliefs and values that I hold today are based on my previous experiences when I was a child. I had such a strong emotional connection to these experiences and developed my philosophies from these. I then used what I learned to make lasting impressions on students and staff I have encountered over the course of my career. Leadership is an inspiring call that requires me to develop habits of the mind and practice (Thomas, 2009). My actions in my career reflect the leadership theories I resonate with and connect to on an emotional level.

Chapter III

Literature Review

School districts continue to struggle with understanding the definition of effective professional development. Borko (2001) asserts the inconsistency between professional development programs occurring in school districts and the NCLB (2001) description of what this should look like. The fact that teachers need to partake in professional development opportunities to increase their knowledge is understood, but getting districts to adopt what really works regarding professional development is hard work (Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2004). Although professional development is an important component of teacher quality, NCLB's professional development mandates have caused many districts to develop a top-down and non-collaborative manner of teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Colbert, et al., 2008; Corcoran, 1995; Kragler, Martin, & Kroeger, 2008). This professional development is easily accessible and usually does not challenge the organization to grow. Additionally, this type of professional development fails to meet the learning needs of teachers.

Research suggests teacher learning can further improve student learning (Colbert, et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2009). High quality professional development, in its truest sense, does not involve top-down approaches instituted by states and districts. Corcoran (1995) argues top-down approaches, often characterized as one day workshops, do not have a significant impact on teacher learning and change of practices. However, some districts only provide their teachers with this mandated form of professional development thus stunting their professional growth (Colbert, et al., 2008; Kragler, et al., 2008). This professional development is not practical and does not give the teachers what

they need. School leaders fail to consult teachers about choosing beneficial types of professional development that will help the teachers make changes within their classrooms (Elmore, 2007; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Little, 2007).

Guskey (1995) notes "never before in the history of education has there been a greater recognition of the importance of professional development" (p. 1). The need is great; however, the definition of high quality is unclear. Despite the mandated professional development programs implemented by school districts, the effectiveness of these programs must too be evaluated (Borko, 2004; Guskey, 1995). Local school districts should maintain efforts to link their professional development programs to the current research and rely on leaders within the organization to promote effective professional development. The application of effective professional development, under the right leadership, can increase the content knowledge and teaching practices of many teachers (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).

Professional Development Programs

School reform comes in all shapes and sizes with the knowledge and effectiveness of teachers at its core (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Professional development continues to remain a major focus in these reform efforts. The research links core elements of professional development, which include the teacher actively and collaboratively engaged in continuous learning, to improved instruction (Guskey, 2009). Furthermore, emphasis on these elements of professional development creates a focus on professional growth and a change in the organizational systems of schools and the current leadership (Fullan, 2007).

Garet et al. (2001) describe the effects of different kinds of professional development on teacher learning in their national study. Their results found that traditional professional development programs did not enhance teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Colbert, et al., 2008; Corcoran, 1995; Kragler, et al., 2008). Moreover, they noted teachers who participated in content based study groups and were collaborative and took place over an extended period of time had significant gains in teacher learning.

Similarly, Colbert et al. (2008) discuss how professional development programs impact teacher learning and student learning. The professional development in this study was teacher driven. Although the study incorporated some traditional forms of professional learning, non traditional forms such as study groups, were part of the professional development plans of teachers. When teachers are given ownership over their learning needs and use a collaborative discourse to reflect on their practices, teacher learning is enhanced (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Desimone et al. (2002) examined the impact that professional development has on classroom instruction. It was found the teachers who participated in study groups and collaboratively engaged in conversations around content showed changes in professional knowledge. One certainty is that teacher learning and reflection, under the right leadership, can support changes in instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Desimone et al., 2003; Garet et al., 2001).

The importance of planning professional development programs that incorporate many, if not all, of the effective characteristics mentioned above are critical to teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Easton, 2008). Teachers can create new knowledge

and skills to enhance their practices if given time to collaborate (Colbert, et al., 2008; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2002). The opportunity to continuously grow through collaborative conversations is an integral part of professional development.

Understanding the Organization

Transforming schools into professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004) requires a greater understanding of the term as well as the organizational system (Eaker & Keating, 2008). It is to no avail of organizational systems to impose professional learning communities on its staff members without examining its culture. Sergiovanni (1992) notes that in order to achieve a true learning community the "internal forces emerge when collegiality becomes an expression of professional virtue" and leadership will be present in many members (p. 43). Culture shifts take time and rattle many members if not approached in the right manner by the leader. Organizational systems that share common causes and visions and value strong relationships can promote teacher learning (Fullan, 2001; Wheatley & Frieze, 2007).

Teacher learning is one area of school culture that raises debate. Because teaching has been termed as an isolated profession, leaders of organizations struggle to find ways to break barriers to change (Guskey, 1995; Fullan, 2001). Eaker and Keating (2008) note that this can be done by establishing a purpose for teachers to learn and grow, ensure collaboration, and focus on results in professional learning communities. In addition, Fullan (2001) notes teachers need to see the impact of their collaboration on student learning. Instituting a change requires strong leadership grounded in understanding change and focused on knowing what the needs are of the organization (Fullan, 2001; 2002).

Furthermore, organizations that have leaders who value these characteristics can work towards establishing professional learning communities within their systems. This does not mean they will not be met with resistance. A learning community where a leader values relationships in producing desirable results will slowly bring about change (Fullan, 2001). As Leithwood and Beatty (2008) state, "leaders need to reenvision leadership itself, as learning for everyone, including themselves" (p.69). They also note that leaders who build learning communities establish organizations that support learning through genuine collaborative inquiry.

Instructional Leadership

Change, according to Fullan (2001), can be led, but will sometimes be met with resistance. Teacher resistance can lead to unresolved feelings between the teacher, leader, and change (Knight, 2009). Professional learning breeds resistance if leaders do not understand the nature of change (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001, 2007). First, leaders need to develop a relationship with teachers which will help suppress resistance. Second, leaders who use data to support proven teaching practices that have a positive impact on the learning of students and teachers can minimize resistance. Also, support given to teachers in the form of coaching and collaboration gives them a feeling of camaraderie during change attempts. This sense of camaraderie will foster trust which successfully improves relationships (Fullan, 2001, 2007).

School leaders who want to bring about successful teacher change must hold characteristics of an instructional leader (Fullan, 2002; Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). Instructional leaders understand how teachers learn new knowledge and skills. An integral component of instructional leadership is to understand how to empower teachers

to learn and grow during change initiatives (Glickman, 2002; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Giving teachers the opportunities to reflect on their practices and hold collegial discussions with their peers about instruction is just one way an instructional leader can help bring about change (Blase & Blase, 1999; Glickman, 2002).

These leaders encourage learning as an active process for teachers that develops a school learning community of authenticity (Fullan, 2001, 2002; Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). Similar to the constructivist theory (Poplin, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978), instructional leaders garner beliefs about learning that are grounded in constructing knowledge. These leaders work to gather professional knowledge from the entire organization to help inform decisions that need to be made within the organization.

Additionally, instructional leaders are also focused on the educational activities and curriculum programs of schools. This focus helps link teachers to better pedagogical practices. By fostering a school culture of learning together through valuable professional development, instructional leaders can work to establish an excellent school (Blase & Blase, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Guskey, 1995). The behaviors that instructional leaders embody can work to build a strong organizational culture around improving teacher and student learning.

Teacher Change

Teaching and change, two simplistic words that can cause an educator to shudder or smile, have been researched for years. These two words have power because of their link to professional development. Fullan (1993) notes teaching is a profession that stands firm on moral purposes of doing what is right for students. Professional development remains a key component of teacher learning and educational change (Fullan, 1993).

Linking the moral purposes of teachers and effective ways to bring about change may limit fears and change beliefs of educators.

Guskey (2002) notes that professional development does not bring about teacher change, but the attitudes and beliefs of teachers change when they are successful at the implementation of new practices. When teachers can see an improvement in student learning, they learn as well (Fullan, 2007). Teachers need professional development programs that respect the gradual change process, allow them to interact with colleagues, and provide them with ongoing feedback on student learning (Guskey, 2002). Furthermore, examining professional development opportunities for teachers is vital in order to bring about educational improvements.

The process of teacher change is difficult in the sense that it requires time and key stakeholders to understand the cyclical nature of it. It is not something that can be rushed and one must start small (Wheatley & Frieze, 2007). Guskey's (2002) model for teacher change provides an order that if followed may contribute to lasting change. As a result of this model, teacher change comes last after experimenting with what was learned through the professional development program. Teachers, just like children, need to feel success with something before they grab hold of it and make it their own.

Fullan (2007) notes that lasting change requires an understanding of the need to collaborate about what is best for students. Like Guskey (2002), Fullan explains change is a difficult process but necessary for educational reform. Teacher learning remains at the forefront of teacher change. Professional development and teacher learning needs to be continuous, supportive, gradual, collaborative, and sometimes forced in order to bring about sustained change (Guskey, 2002).

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Professional development programs that are grounded in understanding the dynamics of teacher change are the most effective (Guskey, 2002). Teacher learning is successful when teachers can personalize their learning to meet the needs of all students and when they collaborate with others to explore their own learning (Fullan, 2007). Despite many barriers to teacher change, professional development programs that contribute to ongoing learning and collaboration can set the stage for change.

Teacher Learning and Reflection

Educators should take into account the ways in which students learn. This same type of knowledge can be applied to teacher learning. The needs of teachers and their learning processes should be taken into account when designing professional development (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003). Professional development offered to teachers should focus on transforming teacher's thinking encouraging them to learn through reflection (Guskey, 1995; Mezirow, 1991; Parsons & Renyi, 1999). This transformative learning includes challenges existing assumptions and knowledge, struggles with new understandings which lead to action and new learning (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006). Moreover, teachers should be able to gather meaning from their learning experiences and apply it to their professional work. An awareness of adult learning theories and reflection is essential when planning professional development (Trotter, 2006).

Another important piece of teacher learning is reflection. Argyris and Schön's (1974) description of reflection in which double loop learning takes place results in teachers changing their practices and empowers them to take charge of their learning. Reflection provides teachers with insights into what is working in their practices

(Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Allowing teachers to determine their own forms of professional development enhances their development of being life-long learners and can help them become reflective practitioners.

Educators are learners and push themselves to develop through continual reflection and interactions with others. (Renyi, 1998; Trotter, 2006). Renyi (1998) notes that when teachers take charge of their learning, good things can happen. The National Foundation for Improvement in Education's (NFIE) two year study recommended that teachers take charge of their learning in order to bring about change. It was noted that teachers learned collectively when they assumed responsibility for their own professional development by being able to learn within the classroom.

Teaching is not only related to cognition, but emotions and motivation are areas that can affect teaching and learning as well (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). These researchers note that teachers who experience more positive emotions are able to incorporate ideas and strategies within their classrooms. Professional learning, when viewed with positive emotions, can spur teachers to develop and refine their practices (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Another area that can affect the pedagogy of teachers is motivation. Teachers who are motivated to learn new things can transfer those feelings over to their students (Roth, Assor, Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). It is imperative to examine the needs of teachers and find support for them during their professional learning experiences in order to foster their motivation, positive emotions, and growth so that they can enhance their knowledge and skills (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Sweeney, 2003).

Schools that foster adult learning, who truly embrace model II behaviors (Argryis and Schön, 1974) by transforming the way adults learn, do see effects on student learning (Sweeney, 2003). Sweeney's (2003) book, titled *Learning Along the Way*, argues schools that have a collaborative culture for both teachers and students and embrace the learning of teachers as a gradual process have significant impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002). For instance, she describes the case of Harrington Elementary, a low-income school that transformed from haphazard instruction and lack of collaboration to a learning community that supported collaboration and encouraged teachers to continue to improve their practices. Sweeney states, "teachers were expected to be learners and to work collaboratively, a responsibility that affected all members of the school community, most importantly the students" (p. 10).

Peer Observation, Collaboration, and Professional Development

The teaching profession is all too often characterized as an isolated profession, but when teachers feel comfortable enough to open their doors amazing learning can take place. The development of learning communities that include peer observation can promote reflection and self-assessment for teachers (Sweeney, 2003). Sweeney notes that learning is affected by the quality of support and time for collaboration given to teachers in their professional learning endeavours.

Sweeney's (2003) description of lab classrooms for professional learning helps build learning communities. She notes that teacher learning and student learning are similar. Just as teachers release responsibility to students in their learning, adults need that as well. Furthermore, Sweeney discusses that when teachers have independence in their learning supported by peer observation and discussion, there yields an increase in

teacher learning. A voluntary, collaborative, job-embedded, and sustained form of professional learning helps provide teachers with ownership over their learning (Guskey, 1995; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Sweeney, 2003).

A lab classroom, by definition, is when a host teacher instructs students with a group of peers watching. Time is given to the group to preconference, observe, and debrief about their visit. A facilitator or coach is present to guide pre-conference and post-conference discussions focusing on what was viewed by the group. Peer observation, through this form of professional learning, supports teacher collaboration and reflection around teaching practices and/or student learning (Sweeney, 2003; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).
This hands-on professional learning incorporates many of the effective components mentioned in this review.

Fernandez, Cannon, and Chokshi's (2003) study discusses the implementation of the US-Japan lesson study with collaboration, observation, and reflection at the heart of the design. Lab classrooms take on a similar approach to the lesson study design. Two similarities are continual reflection and maintaining a focus during the visit. Another piece that cannot be discounted is the collaboration with peers and critical reflection needed to institute teachers' learning and change in practice (Fernandez, et al., 2003; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Sweeney, 2003). Learning communities that support the learning of teachers through peer observation value the impact it can have on student learning.

On the contrary, Hindin, Morocco, Mott, & Aguilar (2007) describe an action research study of urban middle school teachers participating in a research group based on

literacy instruction. Classroom literacy practices, collaboration around teaching and student learning, and common practices were examined. Through their teacher meetings and classroom observations, interviews, and case studies they discuss that the actively engaged teachers did learn new knowledge and changed their practices based on what they learned. However, teachers assumed roles in their peer observation discussion group which could have affected the dialogue. The teachers who had a significant amount of knowledge about literacy instruction did not share their knowledge often and the teacher who felt the need to learn looked to the experienced teachers for new knowledge. It is apparent that further research is needed involving the formation of peer groups and the roles in which teachers assume in these groups.

Despite the findings of Hindin et al. (2007), peer observation has a valuable role in professional learning. It is a practical way for teachers to learn in the context in which they teach. At no time should this type of peer observation become evaluative or enforced. Richards and Lockhart (1992) note the peer observation approach should not be viewed as another initiative or it could meet resistance. Also, teachers need to see themselves as researchers, collaborating with peers to extend their thinking and learning.

Developing Professional Learning Communities

Creating professional learning opportunities can help raise teaching quality and improve student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Wei et al. (2009) state:

> Professional learning can have a powerful effect on teacher skills and knowledge and on student learning if it is sustained over time, focused on important content, and embedded in the work of professional learning communities that support ongoing improvements in teachers' practice. (p. 7)

A professional learning community (PLC) is comprised of individuals who collectively want to work together to improve student learning (DuFour, 2006). In this community, individuals work collaboratively to achieve teacher and student learning goals. With a clear focus, teachers depend on each other to help impact their classroom practices so that the school and students improve.

This professional learning community model does not merely reflect teaching students, but work is done to increase student learning (DuFour, 2004). The essence of professional learning communities is that teachers commit to their organization through collaborative efforts in order to bring about positive change (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002).

In addition, the power behind professional learning communities is its collaboration piece. Professional development programs that are effective emphasize collaboration and reflection (DuFour 2004; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Through peer observations, like the lab classrooms, collaboration and reflection have a significant role in teacher and student learning. Furthermore, peer observations through lab classrooms, when linked to collaboration and reflection, can provide teachers with sustained learning.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

Supportive organizations that foster professional learning communities provide powerful ways for teachers to learn. There is not a single recipe that can bring about system-wide change for professional development. However, the research supports several key ingredients that promote effective professional development opportunities. Professional learning that establishes trust, sets common goals, and ensures time for learning through collaboration and reflection under an instructional leader can help shift

school culture (Eaker & Keating, 2009). In addition, embedding teacher learning into their everyday lives provides an avenue of collaboration as well as practicality, which counteracts the isolation that frequently hovers over organizational systems. Effective professional learning embraces teachers and strengthens and clarifies the rigorous work they put forth daily. If teachers are empowered and respected to look within, they will find true learning.

Chapter IV

Context Chapter

Managing and leading schools is a difficult task that requires a deep comprehension of the current operating systems and the roles within it. Organizations are often hard to understand. The complexity that exists within organizations breeds challenges for many school leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Senge, 2000). By understanding the ideas and assumptions that drive organizations a leader can make better decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Senge, 2000). School leaders must learn to negotiate these territories and find avenues to pursue change. I chose to examine Central so that I could gain a better understanding of how the organization functioned. The knowledge that I gained from my observations of Central helped me eventually lead this action research project. Furthermore, it is important to understand the events that have led up to the planning and implementation of this study.

Therefore, this chapter provides a description of the roles and responsibilities of the current members of Central School District and lists the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization in relation to change. It also explains the political side of Central. Lastly, this chapter outlines the current role I hold within the organization and describes the beginning phases of the lab classroom initiative work that laid the foundation for this research study.

Overview of Central School District

Central School District is comprised of five elementary schools, one sixth grade school, and one seventh-eighth grade school. There are approximately 3,060 students and 250 teachers. While conducting an environmental scan of Central, I discovered that this

district is organized and committed to its core belief: doing what is right for the students. Time and again this is stated and reaffirmed in many aspects relating to district programs and undertakings. It is the back bone of the organization and is a common thread that weaves through the top administration, building level administration, teachers, and the community.

Central has clearly defined roles among the top administrators that trickle down to the building level administrators. Each of the building administrators are free to run their buildings and make decisions that best meets the needs of their staff. Although the principals have the freedom to run their buildings, the district does stand behind making decisions for the good of the students in Central. At times, principals make decisions in their buildings that do not directly align with district initiatives thus developing loose links between buildings and the district's philosophy. These loose links create gaps in communication between top administrators, principals, and teachers. Overall, there is room for the organization to grow and creativity and input is valued.

Additionally, Central has recently struggled with passing the school budget. Central's budget has been significantly impacted which has placed a strain on the organization. In the past two years, Central has lost staff members and programs because of the budget not passing. Although this has placed Central's administrators in difficult positions, they still stay committed to student learning as much as they can. The dynamic nature of his leadership caused Central's superintendent to dig into the political side of the organization more to help pass the school budgets. At past board meetings and town hall meetings, the superintendent told the public that he does not want to see anymore cuts to programming and staff. The budget cuts impacted the students in Central most and

he wanted to stay committed to the district's belief in providing the students with the best education. I observed the superintendent speaking at several board of education meetings and his sincerity and compassion for the students of Central was clear. At the time, he felt he had no other choice but to cut staff members which in turn affected teachers and students. He also needed to cut back on the Curriculum Department's budget which directly impacted professional development.

Central's commitment to high academic standards and the achievement and well-being of all their students embodies the organization. This is evident in the well maintained school buildings, number of staff members in each building, and the commitment to curriculum initiatives, like the literacy curriculum, to maintain high academic success and teaching that is grounded in research and connected to state standards.

Furthermore, the teachers of Central stay devoted and care deeply about their students. This is apparent in the observations of the positive relationships with the families and community, the number of community volunteers at the schools, the positive relationships with students, and the care with which each teacher talks with students.

Strength of the Organization

The top administrators of Central operate vertically and laterally among the staff to link group efforts to the common goal and commitment of the district. This is part of what makes Central successful in many areas, especially student achievement. Central focuses on its goals which are closely aligned to its mission and makes decisions for the organization from the desired goals. Their goals are derived from plans that include

internal and external stakeholders in decision making for the organization (See Appendix B).

For example over the past five years, Central has made a significant effort to reform its literacy curriculum. Top administrators looked mostly within its own curriculum department to work to achieve this change. Central pledged to invest in its own people in order to bring about this systemic change. These administrators sought to rely on supervisors, reading specialists, and their very own teachers to plan a comprehensive literacy framework for Central through the use of the Literacy Curriculum Committee. This Committee met on a monthly basis for two years to help plan this curriculum change. It consisted of regular and special education teachers from each building at various grade levels, five reading specialists, one media specialist, two supervisors, and principals. Central values and empowers their staff by providing them with opportunities to learn together. By maintaining a clear focus based on the organizational goals, Central was able to successfully develop a strategic plan for the new literacy curriculum that is continuing to bring about change in Central to this day.

Additionally, Central began working to keep the parents informed of this curriculum change. Although Central was reaching out to the parents by presenting at Board of Education and Home and School Association meetings, some parents were still unsure of the expectations within the classroom regarding the implementation of this new curriculum. I also believe that this left some of the resistors, the teachers, with a clear path to forgo teaching the new curriculum because the parents were not knowledgeable about the change. The organization still has parent support in this endeavor. This clearly

is an example of how supportive this part of the external environment is when it comes to doing what is best for students.

Weakness of the Organization

I would be remiss to not mention Central's district operating structures versus building level operating structures regarding this framework. Building level administrators have espoused theories about the comprehensive literacy framework, but then have specific theories in use that do not always agree with Central's plan. Breakdowns in Central occur here. It is evident that there exists a knowing and doing gap. A disconnect between the espoused goals and the current operational definition exists. This remains a challenge for the implementation of change, specifically in implementing Writing Workshop, Reading Workshop, Guided Reading, and Word Study. The principals need to learn how this new curriculum should look within the classroom in order to hold the teachers accountable. It is also up to the building principals to encourage and expect that teachers change their literacy practices to meet the district expectations.

This remains a weakness of the organization because the principals are given the freedom to run their buildings how they would like. The implementation if this new curriculum really depends on the way in which the principals establish how they are going to bring about this change in their buildings. Some principals have chosen to support their staff through book clubs and professional learning communities. Some have even joined the book clubs to gain a better understanding of the new curriculum. Other principals have taken a "hands off" approach and allowed teachers to try things on their own and experiment with the implementation. This has backfired, specifically in my building, because the teachers are not accountable for doing the new curriculum. They

feel they have more freedom than they should in choosing to implement it and some refuse to change.

Internal Politics: A Force

Central does have a political side as well, which acts as a weakness for the organization at times. The top administrators work with board members to achieve the highest standards for the students. Central's relationship with board members and union leaders is strong and valued. They each come with their own agendas and manage to coexist under the guidance of Central's top administrators. Building relationships around a shared vision is welcomed and respected by all members of Central.

The union is a key stakeholder in any initiative undertaken by the organization. They remain committed to the students as well as the rights of the teachers. At times, this weighs heavy on decisions made at the district and building levels. There is strong union presence in many of the schools and this affects the culture of each of those buildings. The union holds a position of authority and it is present in almost all of the decisions made in Central.

Central is an organization whose actions define its vision and values. Actions speak louder than words in Central in most of the buildings. The top administrators leave many things in the hands of the building level administrators. Some may define this type of leadership as hands-off, but Central's top administrators revel at the success of each building. Each building in Central has a specific culture that is deep rooted in the values and beliefs of Central with a strong union presence. However, there is a lack of knowledge among the staff members of each of the buildings as to how to stay committed

to student learning. This can be attributed to the building level administration and their own leadership styles as well as political forces present in each of the buildings.

Literacy Committee: Revisiting Their Work

Despite the aforementioned organizational descriptions, before 2007 each building and grade level in the five elementary schools were working with independent theoretical frameworks causing a wide range of teaching curricular resources, practices, and beliefs in literacy instruction. Perhaps the reason for this was because of the way previous curriculum and curriculum reviewing had been framed in the district. Curriculum review occurs in a cyclical process with elapsed time between cycles (literacy last started in 1999 and the series adoption was completed in 2002).

Therefore in 2007, the teachers were finding the literacy curriculum materials purchased by the district and some of the practices espoused by the series not meeting the needs of their students. In addition, school principals were given freedom at the building level to support their teachers in adjusting their practices, leading to differences in literacy instruction to occur at the building level and across the district. The inconsistencies in resources, practices, and beliefs were a major shortcoming in Central and were recognized by the top administrators as areas that needed to be reviewed.

Initially, Central's top administrators were fearful to pursue change in literacy instruction because of the differences that were occurring from building to building and classroom to classroom. This was recognized as an enormous task and the district was well aware of the challenges it would face. In September of 2007, Central notified its teachers through faculty meetings that the district was looking to establish a committee to work on changing the current literacy curriculum.

This committee formation was the key to unlocking the mental models (Senge et al., 2000) within Central regarding the current literacy practices. Central chose to bring together many teachers with varying beliefs, visions, and practices to develop one shared vision for the organization. This type of planning was what first introduced me to the work of Senge et al. (2000). In fact, *Schools that Learn* was referenced by the top administrators when they talked about developing a Comprehensive Literacy Framework with the literacy committee. It was clearly evident that the leaders in Central were using all of the five disciplines of Senge's work to plan this enormous literacy change (Senge, 1990).

By working together, the Literacy Curriculum Committee, which consisted of reading specialists, teachers from each grade level across all five schools, supervisors, and administrators developed a comprehensive literacy framework for Central based on a shared vision. This Comprehensive Literacy Framework was developed by the committee through collaborative efforts. The tireless effort of the committee members included monthly meetings, additional reading around best practices in literacy, and time to discuss where the district should go with their new curriculum. This new literacy curriculum would lay the foundation for a serious change in pedagogical practices in all of the schools

Understanding this Literacy Curriculum Change

Even with a focus on collaboration and understanding of the current operating systems, Central knew this change would be met with resistance. Due to the nature of this second order change, the change in the literacy curriculum required a change in curricular resources, practice, and beliefs. The initial implementation of the new literacy curriculum

changed instructional practices, by causing teachers to adjust their current practices but left many underlying beliefs unchallenged.

It was not until the teachers had a full year to get to know the curriculum and see it work with students that they then started to change their beliefs. This supports Guskey's (1985) research in changing teachers' beliefs. Teachers will resist until they change their practices, see change in student learning, and from these changes, new beliefs will emerge. It is very common to experience resistance regarding instructional beliefs because it challenges the competency of teachers and requires teachers to engage in reflective practice (Evans, 1996; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1994).

Although the leaders had an understanding of the organizational culture of each of the schools, breakdowns in communication occurred during the initial change process thus causing resistance. At times, the K-5 teachers felt that the leaders and the committee members were not communicating their message regularly. In order to combat this resistance, the leaders listened and developed the Literacy Communicator, which was sent via email to all K-5 staff members explaining what was discussed at committee meetings. Teachers felt informed because of the communication that was established, however, some still remained resistant to the work of the committee.

Surprisingly, Central was combating resistance from its very own principals as well. Each of the five buildings has very distinct cultures and each principal is required to deal with its own members in relation to the implementation of the new writing and reading curriculums. Several principals struggle with serious resistance from select staff members that still are not implementing the new curriculum. Central's leaders have left the principals with this challenge. In order to break this resistance to change, the

principals need to work in supporting teachers in the form of coaching and collaboration, which gives them feelings of camaraderie while changing. This sense of camaraderie fosters trust which successfully improves relationships (Fullan, 2001).

Who are the Reading Specialists in Central?

Further clarification of my role as a reading specialist is important in understanding the organization and the events leading up to the implementation of this research project. Reading specialists are key players within the organization under the current literacy curriculum change. It is evident that the reading specialists wear many hats within the organization. We are not only responsible for servicing students, but we also provide professional development for the teachers, assist teachers with their instruction through coaching models, and help write curriculum. Central fails to clearly define the roles of the reading specialists because of the strong union presence. The reading specialists are considered a "classroom teacher" even though our job encompasses much more. Our roles and responsibilities often go undefined and are taken for granted by many. Certain administrative things are expected of us; however, we must remember that the teachers are our peers. I sometimes feel like a tight rope walker who is constantly balancing each of my roles so that I do not appear like an administrator to my peers. I am acutely aware of the union presence and their understanding of what I should and should not be doing as part of my job description.

Currently, the reading specialists are responsible for servicing a basic skills population, providing professional development to teachers in relation to the new curriculum, coaching and assisting teachers who ask for help, and continue to remain a dominant figure on the curriculum writing teams. These roles clearly link to the position

of the International Reading Association (IRA) in defining the role of the reading specialist. The IRA (1998) notes that the reading specialist role consists of three major areas which include instruction, assessment, and leadership. I can relate to these three areas very well since they define the reading specialist that I have become in Central.

Instruction and Assessment

Currently, there are five reading specialists in Central that work in each of the K-5 buildings. The instructional piece of our role remains the most important because we each carry a significant number of students that require individual or small group instruction in order to become better readers and writers. As a reading specialist, I service a basic skills population ranging from 25-40 students each year in language arts literacy and co-teach in kindergarten. I also assess students who teachers are concerned about and use that data to make program recommendations. It is my duty to stay current in my field. I examine best practices in reading, writing, and word work and do my best to implement the most innovative teaching practices to best meet the needs of my struggling readers and writers. Additionally, knowledge and use of solid assessment procedures provides an intergral piece in diagnosing reading problems.

Professional Development Provider

Over the past three years as reading specialist, I have been called on by the supervisors and my principal to provide professional development around literacy instruction and the new language arts literacy curriculum to the teachers of Central. As a professional development provider, I have planned full and half day workshops for the teachers by trying to model the most effective forms of professional development. For example in November of 2011, I taught a model interactive writing lesson using second

grade students for Central's K-2 teachers. I have a passion for valuable professional

development and use what I am learning through this research project to help me plan for

workshops that I am asked to provide.

Central's administration assumes we will fulfill this role every time there is a

district in-service day. For example, district supervisors consistently turn to the reading

specialists at the last minute to help plan in-service days for its teachers. They look to our

knowledge base and skills to help plan meaningful professional development for the

teaching staff. This is a good thing because we all share similar philosophies and believe

in Writing Workshop, Reading Workshop, Guided Reading, and Word Study. I believe

this sometimes puts me a difficult position with my colleagues because at times I can be

viewed as an "expert" in my field. This has been stated to me just recently in conducting

the lab classrooms. A participant referenced me as an "expert" in guided reading. I

continue to remain aware of the way I am perceived and realize the importance of

navigating the relationships I have formed in order to lead the way I believe a reading

specialist should.

Curriculum Writer

Since the new comprehensive literacy framework was laid out by the committee,

Central's administration and literacy committee was clear that the teachers of Central

would be developing and writing the district's literacy curriculum. Relying on its own

staff members to help bring about this change was believed to be imperative in order to

move the teachers to change their classroom practices.

I have been a member of the curriculum writing teams for writing workshop,

guided reading, and reading workshop. I helped lead teachers to develop units of study

from "scratch." This work is a crucial part of helping the district move towards a systemic change in the literacy curriculum. While writing K-2 curriculum, I find myself leading among the teachers, sharing my knowledge and learning new things while working alongside my colleagues. This invaluable experience is something I savor and look forward to every summer. I have been part of the curriculum writing teams since 2008.

Literacy Coach: Can I Say That?

According to Bean (2004) reading specialists must be prepared for many roles within the organization. It is a position that is multifaceted requiring specific knowledge in the area of literacy coaching (Bean, 2004). Central does not recognize the reading specialists as coaches but it is apparent in our daily actions at the building level. I am frequently asked to help teachers in implementing new literacy teaching techniques and to coexist in the classroom with the regular education or special education teacher while co-teaching a lesson or performing a model lesson. I love this part of my job and find it most challenging because it puts me in a unique position with my peers. Just like being the professional development provider, literacy coaching also can lead my colleagues to believe that I am the "expert." I never realized that I am viewed this way until I noticed some of colleagues hesitating to share their literacy practices when I am present.

Literacy coaching provides me with the opportunity to lead among my peers and from behind my peers. I can sit alongside teachers and share my knowledge of literacy and coach them to make better decisions in regards to their own literacy practices. Additionally, this unique opportunity also allows me to lead from behind. This means that I can work closely with teachers and provide them with all of necessary materials

and knowledge and then step back and let them try it on their own. I can support and encourage them when it's needed and let them know I am always there to help. When working closely with teachers, I can coach them to be better literacy teachers and then let them try it out on their own. I can then revisit with them and through reflection help them grow from their decisions and actions. Politically, I never refer to myself as a literacy coach because of the implications it can have on me with some of my peers. There are some members in Central that do not feel we should be asked to act as a coach. These are usually the strongest union members. Treading lightly is a must so that I can maintain balanced relationships with my colleagues and still lead in an effective manner.

New Curriculum = More Professional Development

After the efforts of Literacy Curriculum started to bring forth change in Central, the topic of professional development to support this initiative became part of the plan as well. Part of the implementation process of the new literacy curriculum was half day professional development workshops presented by members of the curriculum writing teams. I had the opportunity to work with the first grade teachers from across the district in teaching them about the new curriculum that was written and supporting them in their implementation efforts. While listening to them as well committee members, it was evident that these teachers wanted more practical professional development. I heard them say things like "I would really like to see this live." "I want to see this in action." "This would be easier if we could just see it." These responses led to what we called the of the Lab Classroom Committee.

Growing the Lab Classroom Committee

Central's top administrators believe in effective professional development. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction is knowledgeable about professional development practices that will benefit Central. These strong beliefs coupled with requests from teachers resulted in the formation of the Lab Classroom Committee in Summer of 2009. I volunteered to be a member of this committee along with other teachers, reading specialists, and administrators. There were a total of fifteen members representing the each of the five schools.

Together this committee worked to plan for future professional development in Central that included the lab classrooms. We developed a district vision for this professional development and set a goal to develop two pilots for the upcoming school year. The committee decided to start small because this form of professional development was new to the teachers and something that had never occurred in Central.

Lab classroom pilots. In the spring of 2010, I facilitated one of the two lab classroom pilots for Central. This was an amazing experience to be part of such powerful professional development for the teachers of Central. It was an awesome way to let them know that the district had listened to their previous professional development evaluations and offered them what they wanted to support their implementation of the new literacy curriculum.

These pilots set the stage for the work done in this study. As a group we took the informal data and observations we gathered from the pilots to help plan for the future. This was a way to not only support the implementation of new curriculum but to introduce a new type of professional development within the district.

Having the will means finding the way. After the lab classroom pilots were finished, there was no doubt in my mind that this was something that needed to continue in Central even if we only had a few teachers interested at first. The teachers of the pilots all filled out evaluation forms about their experiences and after reading these my "will" to move this forward overpowered me. The teachers answered questions about their overall feelings about participating in this type of professional development. Most of the pilot participants felt that this experience was beneficial and worthwhile. One member stated, "This was the best professional development I have had in Central. It was a real experience you could learn and grow from" (Pilot participant evaluation form, Spring 2010).

When asked about how this helped them as teachers most of them noted how they learned so many new techniques and strategies to teach new lessons in their classrooms. One teacher wrote, "I built my confidence in teacher writing workshop" (Pilot participant evaluation form, Spring 2010). Another teacher stated, "It was a thought provoking experience in that it made me analyze my own teaching skills and enhance what I was already doing, taking it to the next level" (Pilot participant evaluation form, Spring, 2010). It was clearly evident that the teachers who participated in the pilots valued their experience and felt this type of professional development needed to be continued as well.

I had the will to pursue this change based on the work of the pilots and worked to move this professional development forward through this study. There was something about the responses of the pilot participants that I could not let settle. I felt compelled to build on this, to create something far better than a couple of pilots, a real change in professional development.

Conclusion

It is clear that Central's top administrators seek to rely on supervisors, reading specialists, and their very own teachers to help bring about change within the district. The leaders value and empower their staff by providing them with opportunities to learn. The top down and bottom up approach to managing the organization has truly benefited the organization

There is not just one recipe that can bring about system wide change. However, the research supports several key ingredients that promote effective change in organizations. Professional learning that establishes trust, sets common goals, ensures time for learning through collaboration and reflection while developing instructional leadership can help shift school culture (Eaker & Keating, 2009). Central has tackled this huge task and plans to continue to embark on the journey of continuous change while implementing the new literacy curriculum and supporting the implementation through professional development opportunities like the lab classrooms.

Chapter V

Cycle I

Leaders of change must stay on course by adapting their leadership and developing other leaders to help bring forth change. Fullan (2007) notes "leverage leadership" is when leaders develop other leaders through the change process. This type of leadership promotes sustainability (Fullan, Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Sustainability was something that Central wanted to come out of changing the literacy curriculum and implementing new professional development like the lab classrooms. This is hard to do unless the change process is built from the ground up and members of an organization change their beliefs. Very early on, the leaders in Central noted that the district was going to rely on its own educators to develop and write the literacy curriculum as well as lead professional development opportunities for the teachers in support of the change. Their transfer of leadership was witnessed through this process and is still prominent in my work to implement the lab classrooms district wide.

Overall, the literacy curriculum and the entire literacy change initiative have been sustained because of the leaders' commitment to student learning and the long hours they have spent with the Literacy Committee. The changes that this Committee planned for Central have been carefully thought through and supported from the top administrators down to the building principals. In addition, the Reading Specialists, like me, have been called on to provide building based leadership and district wide leadership to help with this change. Central is slowly building its internal leaders by looking to the knowledge of its very own staff in order to get buy in for this change. This is a way Central tried to

maintain this change. Sustainable change helps build the capacity to grow leaders in an organization (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Central has done just that with the literacy committee, lab classroom committee, and district curriculum writing teams. Its belief and trust in its very own members has been the heart of the major change in Central and the spring board for this research project. The leaders, one being myself, have become stakeholders grounded in new beliefs and knowledge of best practices. The work of the committees and curriculum teams has spiraled through the district and transformation in teaching has occurred slowly. If the leaders stay committed to inspiring their followers and building leaders within the organization, change will continue to happen in Central. As mentioned in the Context Chapter, top administrators work to fulfill the needs of the students first and by empowering its own staff to bring about a change will only make the organization stronger.

This Cycle was planned to build off of the previous work of the lab classroom pilots as well as plan for the future implementation of the literacy lab classrooms. It details my leadership skills while working closely with top administrators in Central. Furthermore, it describes the challenges I faced in leading this professional development change in the early planning stages.

On Course for a District Change

The work of the lab classroom pilots in the spring of 2010 was integral to help sustain change thus far in Central, regarding professional development and teaching practices to support the literacy curriculum. The work of the lab classroom pilots spearheaded more work to be done in the area of professional development. In the fall of

2010, I met with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and reviewed the lab classroom pilot evaluation forms.

Each of the teachers who participated offered feedback about their experiences in the pilots. Their evaluations yielded positive feedback and recommended that the district continue to offer this form of professional development for teachers. There statements on their evaluation forms were so detailed and informative. They took their time in filling out there forms and wrote an exorbitant amount of details about their experiences. They described their pilot experience as being beneficial and referenced the professional development as some of the best that they have ever received in Central. Words like, "learning opportunity," "the best experience ever," and "very valuable" appeared on their forms. During my meeting with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, I showed him their evaluation forms and requested permission to run another lab classroom in the winter of 2011.

While working closely with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and district supervisors to plan the lab classroom rollout, I was granted permission to pursue my dissertation research of the lab classrooms to see if it would benefit the teaching practices of the teachers in Central. In addition, I also submitted my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to Rowan University and received permission to conduct my research study. I decided to study three areas of the lab classrooms in the hopes to help Central find another form of professional development that they could offer the teachers. My research questions included (a) Are the practices and knowledge of teachers influenced by the participation in the literacy lab classrooms? (b) Do reflective practice and collaboration have an impact on teaching practices for literacy lab classroom

participants? (c) How did my espoused leadership strategies guide me in the implementation of the literacy lab classrooms? I believed in the work that we did for the lab classroom pilots and remained passionate about instituting professional development, like the lab classrooms, to assist the teachers in Central during the implementation of a new literacy curriculum.

My meeting with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction was a collaborative effort to plan the lab classrooms during a highly political time in Central. Bolman and Deal (2008) note all organizations have people that exist within them that have their own existing agendas. The process in Central to rollout an initiative must include the union. This notification typically happens before anything is rolled out to the teachers, but sometimes it coincides with the planning process. This represents the political power the union holds in Central. In the case of the lab classroom pilots, the union was notified while the planning occurred and reported no problems with the pilots. Since then, I planned with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to implement the lab classrooms again and the union was notified after the planning process because it was assumed they supported the initiative based on the previous work. This is when the political sabotage begun.

With a Curriculum budget severely cut and negotiation year around the corner, we tried to plan a unique way to roll out the lab classrooms to the teachers to try and generate interest from all grade levels. Initially, Central's top administrators did not want to spend any money on the substitute teachers needed for the lab classroom participants so we planned to use in house substitute coverage. Supervisors and administrators were going to join together and support this form of professional development by covering the

classrooms of the teachers who volunteered so the teachers could participate. Although this was not what happened during the pilots, the Curriculum office and I had worked to pursue this change and planned to do whatever we could to get this initiative off the ground. This was my servant leader taking over the process.

Political Sabotage

After my meeting, I was directed to put together all of the protocols that would be used and an email that would be sent out to the teachers in Central to recruit members for the lab classrooms in December. I submitted my work to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction early for review and was given permission to send out the email to the staff. Concurrently, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction met with the union president. The outcome of the meeting was that the union leaders did not want the teachers to volunteer any of their time outside the school day. This is an example of the union coming with their internal needs as an organization existing in Central. As soon as my email was sent a follow-up email from the union president was sent to all staff members recommending that they not participate in the lab classrooms because they would be volunteering an hour of their time after school.

I quickly communicated the union's resistance to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction in order to get advice and guidance on what to do. My entire dissertation research was shot down in one email and the lab classroom experience was squashed for the small coalition of teachers that I was going to work with to help establish change in professional development. The organization depends on union "buy in" to establish successful initiatives within the district (Bolman & Deal, 2009). He told me to sit back and that he would reach out to me when things were settled with the union. The union's

reaction came to a surprise to me since the Director of Curriculum and Instruction told me he spoke to the union leader prior to planning the rollout. He was told they had some concerns about the hour of time teachers would have to volunteer but did not expect a reaction of this magnitude. I had to step out of this problem because of the fact that I was a union member and I was forced to rely on his relationship with the union leaders to restore this initiative.

Even though I chose to back out of this disagreement, I did take it upon myself to have a conversation with our union leader about how I disagreed with their stance on volunteering time. In a democratic way, I noted how the teachers should be free to choose whether or not the lab classroom was something they wanted to participate in for their learning. I expressed appreciation for the union's work at our negotiation table, but also spoke about how threatening teachers through an email to not participate in professional development only promotes the status quo. The email was honestly a way to inflict fear in the teachers and that is no way to run a union. During the conversation, I posed a question with which our union leader had trouble answering. It was, "How about the teachers that want to learn and grow in their profession?" The response I received was in reference to the fact that we had to honor past practice in the district and teachers typically never volunteer their time outside of the school day without getting paid in Central. This was difficult for me to swallow because I usually have no problem volunteering my time to learn and grow outside of the school day. This was an example of how an internal force within an organization can squash change if their rights are not represented. I made it a point to let our union leader know that this initiative was

something that I was not going to give up on and that the union and the district would have to find a way to work something out.

A few days later, I received word that I could resend an email and that the district would be paying for substitutes for any of the teachers that participated. There would be no volunteer time associated with the lab classrooms. The union leader was directed to send an email retracting what was said prior about not joining and to show support for this initiative. In a matter of a couple of clicks, the lab classroom initiative was underway again. This was an example of how the union leaders and top administrators worked together to figure out a way to support this initiative. It is clear that the strength of the teacher's union plays a major role in rolling out anything new in the district.

So if this was something the teachers requested, why was it hard to get people to volunteer to participate? Change in any form is difficult, especially in a highly political organization like Central. Although the teachers were requesting professional development that supported the new literacy curriculum, they shied away from signing up for the lab classrooms for many reasons. After receiving the initial email from the union leaders, many teachers felt afraid to join the lab classrooms for fear of what others may think of them. Despite the email that was sent that retracted the recommendation from the union not to participate, the teachers were still hesitant to sign up. This is a another example of the political force the union is in Central. Some other reasons included lack of the knowledge about what to expect and the inability to take risks and try something new.

A Leadership Sign

Since joining the Rowan University Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, I indentified myself as a leader who is grounded in my morals, values, and beliefs.

Pursuing a leadership project like this was purposeful for me so that I could find myself, my every being, as a leader. Since I began teaching in the inner city in 2000, I realized I was different than many of my other colleagues but I could never really indentify why I felt this way. As my leadership journey continues to unfold, I receive signs from others and myself that I am a leader.

After my recruitment email was reviewed by the Director of Curriculum and Instruction in December, I received it back with a title added to my name which was "Lab Classroom Coordinator." It was interesting to me because I did not feel much like a coordinator, just someone who believed in the power of professional development since she began teaching twelve years ago. I took this label that was given to me as a leadership sign. This title meant that it was my responsibility to implement the lab classrooms in Central effectively and successfully. The title was a sign of trust. The top administrators trusted me and the job I would do with this teacher driven form of professional development. Again, this was a way for them to develop a leader by stepping back and supporting this initiative from the back seat.

It was scary to receive a title like this because I have always thought that I could not be a leader, that I did not have what it took. In my college years, I shied away from trying to step up whether it was on the athletic fields or in the classroom. It was not until I became what I love, a teacher, that I discovered that I was different. I had a purpose. Jennings and Stahl-Wert (2004) write about servant leaders and how they resonate with a powerful purpose that comes from within. This was me.

The title alone did not lead me to this discovery. It has been years of searching and believing in my purpose to do what is right for the students I interact with and now it

has shifted to the teachers that I interact with too. It has been the discovery that my love of learning and growing as a professional has the opportunity to impact an entire district of teachers.

I knew the title of Lab Classroom Coordinator was just the beginning for me and my leadership discoveries while implementing this study. I began to wonder who or if any teachers would sign up for the lab classroom. I started to prepare my next steps in implementing this action research project.

The Power of Preparation

I sent out my recruitment email in mid December of 2010 to the entire teaching staff in Central (See Appendix C). Initially, I was hopeful that I would receive at least ten interested teachers. Given the time of year and the political controversy from the union, I received seven interested participants that signed up to attend my informational meeting in the beginning of January. I had to stop and remind myself that in order to have systems thinking and true change in an organization I had to build from something small and work towards something much bigger (Fullan 2007, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Reeves, 2009).

Preparing for the informational meeting was crucial because I was opening up the lab classrooms based on the work of committee and the pilots that ran in the spring of 2010. It was important that I drew from those experiences and included the previous work to build an even better experience for the teachers. I noted in my leadership journal that I was "bouncing back and forth between the challenges of leading this implementation and still presenting myself as one of the teachers" (Madden, 2010, p. 12). It was critical to establish a team atmosphere at this informational meeting as well as give

the teachers ownership over this professional development. With the title of coordinator, I had to be aware of how I would be viewed by the participants.

Along with preparing for the informational meeting, I also worked diligently on preparing the lab classroom preconference and debrief protocols as well as the lab classroom visitation form that teachers would fill out during their visits (See Appendices D, E, and F). I developed these forms based on the forms we used for the pilots. I noted what worked well with the previous forms and what needed to be changed to develop the present day forms for the lab classrooms. These forms were available for the teachers at the informational meeting. It was important for them to see the "big picture" so that they would buy in and sign up. Although the forms were finished, they were not finalized until I sought input from the seven teachers at the meeting. Since it was their professional development, I wanted to make sure they shared their opinions about the forms that I developed.

Cycle I Leadership and Reflection

Blanchard (2007), Greenleaf (2002) and Jennings & Stahl-Wert (2004) note that a servant leader is one who believes in serving first and then moves into discovering herself as a leader. During Cycle I, it was important for me to balance my communication as well as my presentation skills. It was during this Cycle that I discovered a servant leader piece that I never knew existed within my leadership skills. I noted in my leadership journal, "I represent the voice of the teachers while finding mine as a leader. I have a purpose to serve the administrators, teachers, and students of Central" (Madden, 2010, p. 15).

I discovered that communication is critical when leading. I had several meetings with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Supervisors as well as communicated

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via email with them throughout the Cycle. By doing this, I was able to establish an even stronger relationship with them so that they felt comfortable enough to entrust me with running the lab classrooms for the district. The evidence of their trust came when they provided me with the title "Lab Classroom Coordinator." I reflected on the crucial skill of communication in my leadership journal noting that my moral duty is to do what is best and to do it well (BM, leadership journal, 2010). My relationships with these individuals will help me make a difference in Central. I will take what I learned about building these relationships and apply it to building relationships with the participants that signed up for the lab classrooms (BM, leadership journal, 2010).

The success of Cycle I was due to my self-reflection while involved in my meetings with top administrators, planning, and my informational meeting with the participants. While meeting with the top administrators to help get the lab classrooms up and running, I remained cognizant of their leadership styles while trying to develop a shared leadership approach to this project. I wanted to remain in a position that I could be the voice of the teachers who want this type of professional development.

Chapter VI

Cycle II

Implementing the Literacy Lab Classroom

This chapter will uncover the leadership strategies that I incorporated to help implement the literacy lab classroom as well define this professional development experience to guide the future of the lab classrooms in Central. Additionally as the facilitator of the lab classroom, I hoped to gain a better understanding of this experience for the teachers in Central. Furthermore, I was able to build off of my reflections from Cycle I so that I could continue to move further with my research. These reflections guided my leadership decisions and actions.

Blanchard (2007) notes leaders have to put themselves out there for something that they believe to be beneficial for the organization. I promised myself that I would not let feelings of fear get in my way of trying to implement professional development that I am passionate about. As a leader, words like fear and apprehension often run through my mind. My self-talk usually brings me back to the conscious level but it takes energy for me to suppress these feelings when leading. They surface again and again.

Before the Informational Meeting that I scheduled, a series of emotions and feelings of uncertainty about whether others would join me in this quest for change entered my mind. Although I sent a sign up form out with the Informational Meeting Flyer to every elementary teacher, I only received responses from seven people who planned to come. Even though the union gave their blessing of this, as mentioned in Cycle I, I was still fearful that those seven teachers who expressed interest would not show up. I noted in my leadership journal:

Leadership can happen at every level but it comes with having guts. I continue to say I am just a teacher but I have to recognize that I am more than a teacher. This is one time that I am scared to lead. This is stepping out there and hoping that others join (BM, leadership journal, June 10, 2010).

I think my feelings of fear have developed from the high expectations I hold for myself. I never want to fail; therefore, I tried hard to manage my fears about leading this initiative. I was forced to step outside of my comfort zone as a leader. This was a way for me to learn.

Revisiting and Learning from Cycle I

Although Cycle I was built around planning for the lab classrooms to officially run in Central, I was able to look at what happened in that Cycle and develop my plans for Cycle II. I overcame adversities in Cycle I when almost losing this entire research project because of union opposition. I was able to examine my behavior and reflect on my leadership when I experienced union issues in Cycle I. I used my reflection to help me learn to lead better. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) discuss one aspect of reflective practice is looking at particular problems and examining our behaviors and reactions to these problems. Leaders learn from experiences just like children do. I noted in my leadership journal, "I take one experience with the next while reflecting on it and learning. It makes me a better person, a better leader" (BM, leadership journal, October, 14, 2010).

Initially, my reaction to the union opposition was emotional. I struggled with my reaction because I had a strong personal attachment to this research project. I not only believed in what I was doing but I also felt committed to what I had started. It was

important that I continued to serve the district under the title they gave me, Lab Classroom Coordinator. It was a matter of finding out how to pursue this in the face of adversity.

Most of my reflections have come from this one experience and my reaction to what happened. I look back and wonder if I should have been less emotional. Perhaps, being more proactive about what to expect from the union would have better prepared me. Although, I performed an organizational scan prior to beginning my research, I could not help but feel I underestimated the political nature of Central. I did identify the political side of my organization and the power of our union was clear. However, I was blindsided by their initial opposition. I should have expected their reaction given their strong stance in other areas within the district but I did not. As mentioned in Cycle I, I thought that the union supported this initiative because of the pilots we ran in the spring of 2010.

Looking in the Mirror

As a leader, I failed to look at the external factors that were contributing to our union's stance. With a negotiation year around the corner and a school budget that was being cut, the union was feeling threatened by the town and local and state government officials. In a conversation with the superintendent after this happened, he told me the reaction of the union did not surprise him and he assured me that he would support the continuation of this initiative and my research. I noted in my leadership journal that his support was invaluable but I also would need support from the teachers. This professional development was theirs and they had to own it. As superintendent he gets to experience the union first hand in many decisions that need to be made for the district. The fact that I

do not hold a position as a top administrator does not give me the chance to interact with the union regarding district decisions, so I constantly feel torn between trying to do what is right for the teachers and still act as a union member.

It was important for me to look back on my Cycle I leadership strategies and recognize what new strategies I needed to incorporate into my leadership in Cycle II. In addition, I needed to take what I learned from Cycle I about the organization and use that to my benefit in the future. I recognized two areas that I could potentially grow in my leadership. These included figuring out how to communicate about the initiative with members of the organization to generate more interest in the future and forming relationships with the participants of the literacy lab classroom that I was about to facilitate.

From Coordinator to Coach and Facilitator

As a facilitator, I was able to explore a teacher leader role since I hold the position of Reading Specialist and the labs were geared towards exploring literacy instruction. As Bean (2004) notes the reading specialist role is multi-faceted. Acting as a facilitator for the lab classroom allowed me to step into an instructional leadership role. Bean (2004) explains the instructional leadership role of a reading specialist encompasses supporting and working with teachers. This helped me gain insights into what was working and what was not working with the lab classrooms because I was right there experiencing it with the teachers who volunteered to participate in the lab classroom.

Additionally, the host teacher asked me to come into her classroom and "coach" her while teaching a guided reading lesson. She wanted to feel completely comfortable with her instruction before opening up her classroom to the participants. I set up two

observation times to go into her classroom. While observing her, I could not help but feel honored to be in a coaching role. This was not a role that the reading specialists in Central were formally assigned. I sat beside her as she instructed her small group of readers and interjected into her lesson to show her how to prompt efficiently during guided reading. We also spent time after the lesson discussing the positive points of her instruction and recommendations that I had for her to boost her instruction. This was an opportunity for me to step up as a teacher leader and help another colleague improve her guided reading practices through coaching.

Concurrently, I opened my classroom door to the host teacher so that she could come and observe me teaching in my classroom. This type of peer observation and coaching provides teachers with a chance to collaborate and reflect on their instructional practices while learning in school. (Bean, 2004; Easton, 2008; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lieberman, 1995). It also helps them grow as educators. She visited me twice prior to the lab classroom starting. As the facilitator of the lab, I wanted to make sure she was comfortable with her instructional practices. Also, one of my responsibilities was to make sure that I helped the host teacher with whatever was needed. This makes the lab classroom experience run smoothly. This was crucial because the lab classroom concept was still in the infancy stage within the district. We had only run two pilots and were still trying to implement this as a new form of professional development within the district.

This professional development experience requires teachers to put themselves out there. Sarah and the others that signed up did just that. Teachers feel isolated from their peers and need reassurance and support when they venture into something new (Sweeney, 2003). Sarah was a teacher with whom I had written curriculum with before

and when often conversed about classroom instruction. As a leader, this was a critical time to build even stronger relationships. I noted in my leadership journal:

> Sarah and I had a great relationship prior to starting the lab. She always appeared confident in her instructional practices but after she volunteered to be a host teacher I saw her confidence diminish a bit. My relationship was built on trust and Sarah. I believed my knowledge and guidance was needed to help her prepare for the lab. She trusted me and found my feedback reassuring and valuable. We are two colleagues that can observe each other on any given day and offer constructive criticism grounded in respect and honor (BM, leadership journal, January 12, 2011).

Building relationships is one of the key components of successful leadership (Evans 1996; Fullan 2001, 2007; Senge et. al., 2000). My relationship with Sarah was guided by strong moral underpinnings like care and respect. We genuinely care for each other and want to push each other to reflect and grow in our instruction. This relationship strengthened as each lab visit took place and our collaboration deepened throughout the lab classroom experience.

Organizer

Another role that comes with being the lab classroom facilitator is one of an organizer. This was another opportunity to build relationships with teachers I was not familiar with who volunteered to participate in the lab classroom. It was my responsibility to reach out to the lab classroom participants and schedule the six visits. There were a lot of logistical items to stay on top of while in this role. I found myself reflecting in my leadership journal about the role of organizer:

It is difficult trying to make sure that the schedule is correct and that I send out reminder emails to the participants before each visit. I feel organized and wonder what this would look like if I was not on top of things. It is hard to juggle my responsibilities as reading specialist in my building and the lab classroom coordinator. At times, I feel overwhelmed and pulled in many different directions, but I realize the importance of this work and how valuable this is to those who volunteered to participate. They are counting on my organizational and leadership skills to carry out this experience for them because I established a relationship early on with each of them that was built on trust. (BM, leadership journal, January 26, 2011).

As a leader, it is hard to get followers to trust you and your decisions. Leaders who lead genuinely with compassion and care build strong relationships because the followers trust that they understand (Blanchard, 2007; Evans, 1996). I found myself in this position with the lab classroom participants. Prior to the lab starting and after the informational meeting, I reached out to each member via phone and email asking them if they had any questions or concerns about participating. I also explained the experience again to them hoping their comfort level would rise. I could hear apprehension in some of their voices. It was my job to understand their feelings, acknowledge their concerns, and accept them for who they were. I recognized my relationship with each of them as an open door to help foster new learning.

Lab Visits

I continued to build my relationships with each of the participants as the lab classroom got underway. I reached out to the participants via email several times before

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the lab visits started to answer any questions or concerns. I made myself available to them in person as well. I wanted them to know I was there to support them in this experience because they were experimenting with something they had never tried before. As a leader, I pushing them out of their comfort zone, challenging them through this professional development. It is the responsibility of a leader to ignite others to participate in new experiences and provide support and encouragement for them along the way (Schlechty, 2002).

The lab classroom experience consisted of six lab visits where the host teacher taught and the teachers viewed live instruction. Each of the components of the lab classroom followed a specific protocol that was designed to keep the group on task and learning. I shared the protocols with the participants before the lab classroom started so that they were comfortable with what to expect. This was an example of how I tried to establish a sense of trust with the participants and this professional development adventure they were entering into.

Prior to each lesson, I facilitated pre-conference discussions where the host teacher shared the goals of the lesson and the participants asked questions while identifying the focus of study for the visits. After the preconference sessions, I led the group into the classroom and monitored the participants and participated myself in filling out the lab classroom response sheet while viewing the lessons. This was a way for me to show the group that I was there to learn as well. Although my role was to be the facilitator, I still chose to fill out a response sheet to learn along with my peers. Finally, the group met for debrief sessions to discuss what was viewed and to collaborate about

instructional practices and student learning. For the purposes of this action research

project, these sessions were referred to as focus groups.

Listening and Learning

Listening is an important aspect of being a good leader (Goleman et. al., 2002;

Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). The first lab visit came with many different emotions for

me. I noted in my leadership journal again about my fears of this not going as planned. I

questioned my ability to keep my colleagues focused and comfortable with the

experience. This lab classroom concept was new. It was fresh. These participants were

joining me in a change effort. I felt successful just to have volunteers and was excited to

see change happening, even if it was small (Fullan, 2001; Senge et. al., 2000). I needed to

understand if this type of professional development was valuable and I did this by

listening closely to what they were saying. While listening to the participants, I noticed

that this experience was coupled with a huge emotional component that I feel I only

scratched the surface of through my focus group discussions.

Focus Groups

These focus groups helped me collect a significant amount of data in a short

period of time about the lab classroom (Morgan, 1988). They also allowed participants,

who may have otherwise felt intimidated, to open up among peers (Creswell, 2007). I had

hoped that the preconference and debrief sessions would offer the participants the

opportunity to communicate with their peers comfortably. During the focus groups, I

hoped to gain valuable insight into this professional development for the teachers in

Central so that I could use the data to springboard future lab classrooms.

The data was collected over the course of six focus group discussions. The pre-conferences lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes each and the debrief sessions lasted each for one hour. After analyzing the data from the focus groups and observations, I was able to develop interpretations for the themes that arose. The code map represents the data analysis steps I took to establish my overarching themes and interpretations for this Cycle (See Appendix). There were several interpretations I made from analyzing the focus group discussions that led to four overarching statements.

Emotions

There were many emotions that surfaced during the focus group discussions and some even came on the first lab classroom visit. During our preconference, many of the teachers expressed concerns about not knowing what the experience was going to be like. They admitted being scared of trying this type of professional development for the first time. Sarah, the host teacher, was worried what her colleagues would think of her. I remember giving her a "pep" talk before everyone arrived and reassured her that everything would be fine. I read her feelings as a sign to make sure I made everyone feel at ease, comfortable with the process. The fear of the unknown, even though we may know more than we think, is like entering into unchartered waters. I listened to the participants and learned that everyone comes to an experience with different emotions and the job of a leader is to get in touch with these feelings and empathize with the followers (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee 2002; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008).

At the end of the first lab visit, I had each participant answer a question about what they expected to get out of this professional development. Additionally, I asked them about their expectations. It was interesting to me that none of the participants

indicated feelings of apprehension about the experience in their comments. Instead, their comments were full of energy and hope to learn and grow professionally. Although Sarah expressed fear before the first visit, she still had a similar goal as other participants. She noted:

> I expect to learn from my colleagues about student learning and my own teaching. I expect to reflect on my own teaching and learn from the people sharing ideas. I also expect to push my own teaching to the next level (Sarah, personal communication, February, 16, 2011).

Another participant stated, "I hope to gain knowledge from other professionals" (Rob, personal communication, February 16, 2011). Their feelings were mainly positive with everyone indicating that they wanted to learn from their peers. I took these positive statements away and hoped that the participants would begin to feel more comfortable with each other to open up about their learning and the challenges they faced in their classrooms.

Vulnerabilities Surface

The emotional component of the lab classrooms was clearly evident in the words and demeanor of the participants. Early on, my observations revealed that the participants who felt most vulnerable did not open up as easily as others. They remained cautious during our conversations and did not share much. However, as each lab visit occurred, they did open up enough to share their struggles and feelings with the group. This was a huge step for the group. The isolation of the teaching profession creates a persona that teachers are supposed to know everything which happens to not be the case. It is important for teachers to recognize where they need to grow and admit when they do not

know something or when something is hard (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). The host teacher spoke about her feelings to the group when teaching during reading workshop. She stated, "I have to remember to teach the reader and not the book. This is hard for me" (Sarah, focus group, February 24, 2011). Sarah was admitting a weakness of hers and showed the group that she too struggled with teaching decisions.

Admitting that something is hard for you in front of other colleagues helps others open up too. This is collaboration at its best. Another participant noted how he needed to learn more regarding guided reading instruction before he set it up in his classroom. He stated, "I wouldn't want to do it any other way. I need to understand the fundamentals first before I take it up to the next level" (Rob, focus group, March 22, 2011). The participant understood and recognized the fact that he needed to learn more before he could effectively implement something in his classroom. I noticed the participants speaking freely about how they felt some teaching practices were hard. One example was when Cara reflected on using strategy groups in her classroom after seeing Sarah conduct one during a lab visit. She said:

> I always thought it was more planning and harder. It was nice to see that
> sometimes it is off the cuff. Like one day you may not be very prepared but it is
> still doable. You could say to yourself I can do that (Cara, focus group, March 18,
> 2011).

Not only did this reassure Cara that she could do this in her own classroom, but it also took the vulnerability she felt towards trying it out and turned it into a positive. She left the lab visit feeling like she could do it. She no longer felt defeated. I checked back with

Cara after the visit and found she did try a strategy group in her classroom. She was still unsure of how she would continue with this but trying was the first step.

Fear

Branching out and trying something new comes with feelings of fear and apprehension. The emotions of the participants were two-fold. There was initial fear to just participate and then when some of them got into the lab visits fears surfaced about their own teaching abilities. Right before the first lab visit, I spoke with Lynn, a first grade teacher. She felt unsure of what the experience was going to be like. She told me she did not feel like a good teacher compared to the other teachers who were participating (Lynn, personal communication, February, 2011). I took this as an opportunity to reassure her and tell her to give this type of professional development a chance.

After working alongside Lynn for the past five years, I knew she would find this experience of value. She just needed to believe that. I told her that I was there to listen to her and answer any questions or concerns she had. Identifying with Lynn's emotions was crucial because as a leader you do not want to fail at this. I noted in my leadership journal:

> Lynn is so worried. She is always self reflective and I believe this professional development is a perfect fit for her. How will I get her to believe this? I must understand her fears, examine them, and still push her to become a better teacher. I must be careful with the words I choose (BM, leadership journal, February 2, 2011).

Lynn did find this professional development to be valuable and her fears did subside. During one lab visit she stated in a de-brief session:

> It was incredible. I was focusing on or supposed to be focusing on conferences. Of course, there is so much going on and I have to look everywhere. I am definitely going to use post it notes. I like how you use them in guided reading and the workshop. It keeps them organized. I am definitely going to try it (Lynn, focus group, February 24, 2011).

Her fears turned into learning and wanting to explore new instructional practices. She found herself wrapped up in the experience from the very beginning. Communicating with colleagues vertically and horizontally across the district about teaching decisions and student learning grounded Lynn and set her at ease with herself.

While listening to participants in the focus groups, I was able to hear words of appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this form of professional development. A teacher who expressed apprehension prior to starting the experience noted "I am so happy to part of this. I have learned so much in this little bit of time" (Lynn, focus group, February 16, 2011). Other participants shared how valuable and thankful they were to be offered an opportunity like this. One stated, "This has been just awesome. I hope I am given this opportunity in the future. I have valued my time so far in the lab classroom" (Mary, personal communication, February 2011).

Empowerment

Listening to these teachers feel empowered by this experience was reassuring. By facilitating this experience, I was helping them learn and grow through a new type of professional development that our district was supporting. I reflected on this reassurance:

As a leader it is nice to hear feedback about something you are working on with others. I feel valuable. I am helping these teachers and that makes me feel good inside. I want them to feel empowered. They should. This feeling will only encourage them to grow leaps and bounds (BM, leadership journal, February 25, 2011).

Additionally, their empowerment came from the ownership they felt while participating in this type of professional development (Fullan, 2007; Guskey 1995). I was able to observe the participants getting excited before each lab visit to pick their foci for the morning. As a facilitator, I tried to narrow their foci and keep the experience free for them to choose what they wanted to study during each visit. I would state during each preconference to try and narrow their foci down to what they thought they needed to learn more about. This type of reassurance was what the group needed to own their own professional development. They almost did not know how to react. They spent years participating in professional development that had already been chosen for them. They had never been given power over their learning. Too often, professional development is forced on teachers, preplanned, and does not offer freedom to explore individual needs (Elmore, 2007; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Little, 2011). The lab classrooms recognize this and allow the teachers flexibility to explore instructional decisions and student learning (Sweeney, 2003).

Collaboration

Collaboration about teaching practices and student learning helps teachers learn and grow (DuFour, 2006; Guskey, 1995, 2002; Sweeney, 2003). Teachers learn just like students learn. An important aspect of professional development is that it meets the needs

of the teachers and actively engages them in learning with their peers (Reeves, 2010). Although research supports this concept, professional development for most teachers comes in a formal fashion without much time for teachers to collaborate about classroom practices or student learning (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Reeves, 2010). As a professional development presenter for Central, I am acutely aware of the research that supports actively involving teachers in professional development. I noted in my leadership journal while planning for the lab classroom, "I realize the importance of this type of professional development. Since I began teaching, I always learned best by seeing things in action. I feel this has strengthened my own teaching practices" (BM, leadership journal, December 10, 2010). The lab classroom concept supported this and provided the teachers with the opportunity to be actively involved in their own learning through observation and collaboration (Lieberman, 1995; Sweeney, 2003).

The collaboration piece to the lab classroom was something that all of the participants were looking forward to since this was something that they felt was lacking from their teaching. It has been through my observation in teaching over the years that teachers collaborate with their colleagues to a certain extent. I call it "surface level" collaboration. This is when teachers share daily items like worksheets, parent letters, and incidents about their students. Although these conversations stimulate some discussion about teaching, they never really go beyond the surface. There is rarely discourse around teaching decisions or student learning therefore it does not push one to grow or learn. The lab classroom was shaped to foster deep discussions about teaching decisions and student learning by using the specific protocols during the preconference and debrief sessions.

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During these sessions, I discovered that it was hard to break teachers of the "surface level" collaboration. It was always present and I took full responsibility to work to move this collaboration to a much deeper place. I reflected on this in my leadership journal:

> I have to push these teachers in a firm but gentle way to talk about teaching decisions. Most of the time, they want to 'dance around the topic' and speak about tangible items like reading journals and forms developed by the teacher. I guess this is ok. I am certain this is helping. It just needs to move beyond this (BM, leadership journal, March 1, 2011).

I wrestled with this throughout my facilitation of the lab classroom. Collaboration was present in two prominent areas which did foster growth among the participants (See Appendix G). The participants recognized the importance of questioning their colleagues about their teaching practices as well as sharing instructional practices that existed in each of their classrooms.

Questioning

The participants followed the protocols for the lab visits which did prompt them to ask questions of the host teacher and other participants to a degree. At first, these questions were centered around Sarah's classroom management and materials. I would observe participants perusing through items in her classroom while they were viewing her lesson or writing out charts that she had hanging on her wall to ask her about them in the debrief sessions. These were all observations of good things but I recognized the group needed to move beyond the "surface level" items and find deeper meaning in the experience.

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As the visits progressed, I noted that the participants started to really question Sarah about her teaching decisions. I observed several participants asking Sarah many "why" questions during our preconference and debrief sessions. I believe these type of questions forced Sarah to think about her own teaching practices and reflect on the decisions she made before, during, and after her lessons. After being questioned about conferencing with a student during a reading workshop lesson, Sarah reflected on her own practice, "I think of my reading conferences the same way I think of my writing conferences. I think research first and then go in to my teaching points" (Sarah, focus group, March 10, 2011).

Sharing of Instructional Practices

There was not one lab visit that instructional practices were not shared among the group. Some of these practices were simply new anchor charts to support a mini lesson that was taught or new reading stems that students could use in their notebooks to support their thinking while reading. These are just a couple of examples of what was developed by the participants based on what they viewed in Sarah's classroom. Additionally, the experience of seeing "live" lessons prompted the participants to write Sarah's language she was using to teach particular concepts down verbatim. I examined the lab classroom participant response sheets and noted that the participants drew out anchor charts that she had developed and quoted her teacher language and transition phrases. Lynn, Rob, and Mary all admitted to taking Sarah's language back to their classrooms and gave it a try. They even joked about how they felt like they were turning into Sarah. This was an indication of how teachers learned new instructional practices and immediately took them back to their classroom to try.

On many occasions, the participants tried something out in their own classrooms that they learned and came back to the next lab visit and discussed it with the group. For example, Mary took Sarah's lesson on character traits and reworked the lesson to meet the needs of her second grade students. She brought the new reading stem she developed as well as the some examples of what her students produced from the lesson she taught back to a lab visit to share with the group.

As the facilitator, I reflected on their sharing of instructional practices and realized I wanted to continue this collaboration even when the group was not together for a lab visit. I decided to set up an email chain so that the participants could share practices via email between lab visits. Some participants took advantage of this by sending teacher created forms and anchor chart examples that were originally developed from viewing Sarah and then adapted to meet the needs of their own classrooms. This was an example of how the lab classroom turned into a horizontal articulation opportunity for teachers in Central. One participant noted that she did not get to see what was happening in other schools and other classrooms across the district until she participated in the lab (Lynn, personal communication, March 2011). It was evident that she valued this collaboration and soaked up whatever she could. She was quoted in a lab visit, "I want it all. Share everything. I want to see it all" (Lynn, focus group, February 16, 2011).

Teacher Reflection

Another theme that arose from the data analysis in Cycle II was teacher reflection. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) note, "To engage in reflective practice, people need a sense of security" (p. 70.). I hoped that my strong commitment to this type professional development and my belief in it would move the group to an area where they could feel

comfortable in examining their own practice in front of other colleagues. The lab classroom offered a unique form of reflection for teachers. They had the chance to reflect on their own practice while they viewed another colleague and discussed what they saw. Proper facilitation for the teachers was critical because it is through facilitation that the teachers were guided to reflect and open up.

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) note that a leader who works to establish reflective practice for teachers not only should believe in the process but model it as well. I do have a strong belief in learning from others. In fact, I find it very difficult to plan for professional development sessions inside or outside of the district that I provide without collaborating with my colleagues. I find I learn best when I collaborate. Engaging in collegial discourse about my struggling students occurs on a weekly basis. I am in touch with the other reading specialists across the district so I can get their suggestions and feedback about my struggling readers. Communicating with other professionals about my practices is what helps me reflect back on what I am doing and how I can adapt or change it so I can see better results. This type of communication and reflection helps reassure my teaching decisions. As a reflective practitioner, I am most comfortable sharing with colleagues that I trust. This is why it was important for me to establish a relationship with the participants and help them feel comfortable when participating in the lab visits.

The reflective process during the lab visits was slow. Initially, the group needed to get to know each other and feel a sense of security in order to open up. Although, I worked to provide this type of environment, it took some participants a long time to open up. I could tell from their body language that this process was hard. Some of them just sat

and listened and added a word here or there. Each of the participants knew when the lab started that they had a responsibility to participate in the discussions.

Even though collaboration was what most of them wanted to get out of this experience, some of the participants soaked up information that was shared but had a hard time opening up to the group. One participant struggled to find a way to open up during our preconference and debrief sessions. She noted in a conversation with me how she did not feel like she had anything to offer. She felt not as good as the host teacher (Cara, personal communication, March 2011). Cara's insecurities were made clear to me during our conversation. I felt challenged to try and figure out how to build her confidence in what she was doing.

It was through reflection that Cara recognized areas in which she could grow. This was uncomfortable for her but I presented it as a challenge. At the end of each lab visit when I asked the participants about what they were going to take back and try, I listened to what Cara said. I attached a comment to the end like, "I could really see this taking place in your classroom" or "I know you can do it." I was hoping my encouragement would get her past years and years of feeling alone and unsure of her teaching decisions. By the last lab visit, Cara was opening up more and indicating to the group that she was trying out things in her classroom. This was the first step in helping her become better at self-reflection.

Teacher Learning

The lab classroom placed the teachers in a position to reflect on their practices. Although the reflection process was initially slow, the participants did come away from the experience with more knowledge. Teachers learn and grow through reflection and

from taking part in their own learning (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Guskey 1995, 2002). This sense of ownership provides teachers with feelings of power and direction over their own learning. One participant stated, "I know exactly what I came into the lab for. I wanted to learn about Reading Workshop and I wanted to see it. I am focused and ready to learn" (Mary, personal communication, February, 2011). These feelings Mary felt did not necessarily exist during preplanned, one day workshop professional development sessions that she attended in the past.

During my facilitation of the lab classroom, I reflected on Mary's statement that I often replay in my mind:

> Listening to those words makes me feel honored to work with teachers in this capacity. The unique opportunity of the lab classroom provides teachers with such strong control over their learning. This experience empowers them to go back and change their practice because they believe in what they see in each visit (BM, leadership journal, March 18, 2011).

Ownership over learning did surface in the data analysis of Cycle II (See Appendix G). The participants were eager to admit they learned something from Sarah and wanted to try it out right away in their own classrooms. I categorized this as short-term application of new learning. After they tried it out, the group discussed how it went which encouraged and supported the teachers.

One participant took all of Sarah's language back into her classroom and posted it on her smart board so she could use it to guide her while she was teaching her focus lessons in reading workshop. She explained this in the last debrief session as something that was so valuable and it had lifted her teaching to the next level (Mary, personal

communication, March 10, 2011). While viewing Sarah in one of the earlier lab visits, Mary stated:

> I love the fact that you give each individual child attention. It is like each child in your room has an individualized plan. I am excited to go back. My wheels are turning. I want to do something like this. I am going to start today (Focus group, February, 24, 2011).

By the end of the lab visits, the participants were sharing a variety of instructional practices that they learned from participating.

An interesting piece to the lab classroom was that teachers were able to immediately try out what they learned from viewing Sarah. It was hard to tell if the teachers added it to their daily practice or just experimented. Teacher change is difficult. Acccording to Guskey (1995, 2002), teachers must change their practice and see success with their students before they become believers. My hope was that in seeing that what they learned worked in their own classrooms their beliefs about implementing it on a daily basis would change. I had the opportunity to check back in with some of the participants to see how things were going in their classrooms. Lynn explained how she learned so much from seeing it in action. She expressed how she uses some of what she learned in the labs but has adjusted it to meet her needs (Lynn, personal communication, September, 2011). I thought about how incredible this experience was for the teachers and for me.

Reflection on Cycle II

This Cycle was a clear representation of a small number of teachers making big changes in themselves and each other. I felt these participants added valuable insights

into the lab classroom. However, I only scratched the surface while interpreting the themes which emerged from the data. As the lab classroom coordinator, I needed to dig deeper into the experiences of the participants to help continue and grow this change in professional development. I viewed this Cycle as a single seed that has now branched out and established its roots. As Fullan (2001; 2007) and Wheatley and Freize (2007) note, change starts small and is encouraged to grow when there is a group of people that share the same common beliefs about the change. These participants grew to love their lab classroom experience and recognized they were better teachers because of it. As a leader, I recognized the need to take their positive feelings about this professional development and transition it to more teachers in Central. It was figuring out how that would be the challenge.

Chapter VII

Cycle III

Creating a learning community requires commitment to collaboration and a shared vision (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Reeves, 2010; Senge, 2000). The lab classroom concept was something that Central believed in and was part of their professional development plans for the future. These six teachers who joined me in this experience shared a similar vision about this professional development and their literacy teaching. During Cycle II, I worked to build trusting relationships with the participants. I felt I grew to understand them better during our pre-conferences, classroom visits, and debriefs. While building these relationships with them, I realized, in essence, I was creating a learning community that was built around commitment and a shared vision (Fullan, 2007; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Senge, 2000). The group was working towards a transformational change within the district. Each participant, including myself, viewed the lab classroom as a way for teachers to learn new things, clarify what they were already doing, and change existing practices through the use of dialogue and reflection.

Kegan and Lahey (2001) note leaders need to build upon the importance of language and how to deconstruct it to create new learning. I felt committed to helping these participants get in touch with their own goals through self reflection and discussion. Additionally, I wanted to discover their underlying beliefs about this form of professional development in order to help the organization grow in the way they present professional development to its staff. Although the lab visits allowed for discussion, I wanted to dig deeper into how the participants viewed their lab classroom experience in a one on one

setting. I hoped to glean an understanding from these participants that I was not able to from our group discussions.

This Cycle was designed to develop rigor in my data collection about the beliefs and assumptions of the participants. I thought by sitting with each of them that I would be able to listen to them as they described their experiences in the lab classroom. Furthermore, I hoped to uncover more leadership strategies as I continued to move this professional development initiative forward in Central.

Nourishing the Roots

Traditionally, professional development in Central School District consisted of one day workshops where teachers gather in large groups or grade level groups. Some of the teachers do engage in book clubs with their peers and grade level professional learning community (PLC) meetings within their respective buildings. However, the lab classroom professional development initiative was new and innovative, a true risk for many teachers given the political nature of Central and the organizational culture regarding professional development. The teachers had never been offered to experience professional development like the lab classrooms prior to this initiative.

Engaging in work like this is like nourishing a seedling. I felt the lab classroom committee planted this seed in the spring of 2010 and it was waiting for someone to grab hold of it to help it grow. I believe in Cycle II we did just that. This professional development was unique because it required growth from the ground up, just like a seedling. It was a teacher driven form of professional development that only needed support and funding from Central's top administrators. Otherwise, it was up to us to strengthen and nourish it so it continued to grow. Cycle II provided me with the chance to

build on the previous work that had been done as well establish a learning community vertically and horizontally across the district with the participants.

In order to continue to strengthen the roots of this professional development, I engaged in six semi-structured interviews, thirty to forty-five minutes in length, as a follow-up to the focus groups. Seidman (2006) notes that interviews provide a researcher with an opportunity to hear the stories of participants in a one on one setting. I wanted the participants to open up and discuss how they felt about experiencing this form of professional development. This was an opportunity for me to dig deep and gather data rich in content (Creswell, 2007). I planned to use this data to continue to spearhead this professional development change for Central.

Emerging Themes

The interview questions were prepared based on my work from Cycle II (See Appendix). The participants were given the interview questions prior to meeting so that they could better prepare themselves to respond. Several themes arose from my data in Cycle II. These included emotions, collaboration, teacher reflection, and teacher learning. I used these themes to guide my interview discussions with each participant. I was able to corroborate the themes that arose from my interview data with the themes from Cycle II. This not only provided triangulation of my data but also strengthened my understanding of the participants so that I could compare my data with Cycle II. Corbin and Strauss (2008) note these comparisons are so that a researcher can identify similarities and differences with the data so that interpretations can be made. Furthermore, the one on one setting provided me with the opportunity to listen to the participants and collapse their responses into three main themes: emotion, collaboration, and organizational culture.

Emotions That Can't Be Denied

This theme of emotion is something that has reoccurred in my data analysis and among each of my participants during my interviews. Emotion presented itself in four different ways in my data analysis. These included: passion, empowerment, fear, and feelings of isolation. These emerging categories were compared to the emotional theme uncovered in Cycle II and correlations and new interpretations were made. One particular category that did not arise from my Cycle II data but came out of my discussions with each participant was their passion to teach. I elaborated on this category because I had a strong personal connection to it.

While listening to these teachers speak about their experiences within the lab classroom, it was apparent that teachers are emotionally tied to their work in the classroom. My discovery of this brought me back to my emotional investment in teaching that began twelve years ago. I entered the teaching profession because I wanted to make a difference, to serve children and make their experiences in school positive despite the challenges they faced. To this day, I have not lost sight of why I do what I do because of my own personal experiences in school. As noted in my Leadership Platform, my personal values and beliefs have been shaped from my family as well as my first grade experience (See Appendix). I am without a doubt emotionally invested in my role as teacher leader. My ultimate goal is to directly impact students through my teaching or indirectly impact students through my interactions with other teachers. The students are at the heart of what I do.

Passion

Prior to starting Cycle III, I had no doubt that the teachers involved in the lab classroom cohort did not have an undying passion to serve their students. Despite the pressures that they feel with district demands and less and less time to do everything that is asked of them, they truly sat back and found joy in participating in the lab classroom cohort. There was evidence of this during our visits in Cycle II when I observed their collegiality grow among each other and their positive attitudes during each lab visit. It was really refreshing to attend our six visits and their positive attitudes carried over to my interviews in Cycle III.

I noted in my leadership journal how comfortable everyone seemed when I sat down and interviewed them. "Each interview came with the participants smiling and excited to talk with me about their experiences. They seemed refreshed and encouraged by their experiences. In a sense, I feel I have started to build new teacher leaders that are just as passionate about their teaching and this professional development as I am" (Leadership Journal, June 15, 2011). The passion that I felt about this professional development was felt by all of the participants after it was over. They found tremendous value in the overall experience that only strengthened their passion for teaching.

On a beautiful spring morning as I interviewed Mary, a teacher of seventeen years, I could not help but gaze around her classroom only to notice items and new teacher language hanging from her active board. These were all representations of things that she had learned from Sarah, the host teacher, during our lab visits. She referred to them prior to our interview and was so proud to show me that she was using what she learned. I remember looking at Mary describe the items with such enthusiasm. I reflected

on this in my journal. "Mary is an amazing teacher. She loves what she does. I could tell in the way she spoke about her classroom practices and her love of learning. Passion describes Mary" (Leadership Journal, May 20, 2011).

As our interview progressed, Mary began to well up with tears while she described her lab classroom experience. She stated, "This was so beneficial to me as a teacher and a learner. Watching highly skilled educators just excites me and motivates me even more to improve and build upon my existing practices" (Mary, Interview, May 20, 2011). Mary's passion was a vivid memory that I have taken and placed in my heart. I replay her words and moments from our interview when I feel I have nothing left to give as a teacher and leader.

Debbie, a reading specialist in Central, was also a participant whose passion for teaching and leading spoke through her strong yet gentle personality. Working closely with Debbie as reading specialists, I know that she is emotionally tied to the work that she does with her students and the teachers in Central. She has participated in writing curriculum during the summer months and she helps present at district in-services.

Debbie chose to participate in the lab classroom cohort to learn and grow as a reading specialist and also train as future facilitator for the lab classrooms. She took her lab classroom experience and used it to turn key new information about Reading Workshop to the teachers in her building. She noted, "The whole thing with how one of the other lab cohort members did this weekly reading response. I shared this with a fourth grade teacher who is really trying to get that independent reading piece…independent" (Debbie, Interview, May 26, 2011). Debbie's passion for collaborating and helping others learn and grow was clearly evident in her actions to share information from the labs.

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Trust Builds a Sense of Power

Passion was not the only form of emotion that arose from the data in Cycle III. Empowerment was also discovered. Their empowerment came through the trust they felt among their colleagues during the discussions. Viewing live instruction and being able to speak about it with other colleagues was a form of professional development that the participants valued and found empowering. Rob spoke about how he used one of the lab visits as a springboard for one of his observations for his principal. He noted that he would not have been comfortable teaching reading workshop for the principal without his experience in the lab classrooms. He explained that the lab classroom helped change his perspective on teaching. I believed this to be evidence of the impact that lab classrooms can have on practice. Rob stated, "I was nervous to teach reading workshop for an observation. It was a different kind of nervous. I wanted the lesson to go well and I did not feel pressure to prove anything to my boss. For once, I was comfortable with my teaching" (Rob, Interview, May 9, 2011).

Sarah, a teacher of nine years, was the lab classroom host teacher. She taught the six lessons while the cohort viewed her instruction. During her interview, she spoke about how the lab classrooms made her more of a reflective practitioner. Sarah stated:

> I think this type of professional development is the only professional development where you get immediate feedback and you have immediate modifications that you can make to your teaching. Never have I ever walked out of a workshop or professional development where I felt so empowered because of the dialogue that you have with people from the same district or the same grade level. (Interview, May 25, 2011).

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Sarah's reflection was evident when we would speak prior to each lab visit. The lab visits encouraged Sarah, as the host teacher, to build on what she was teaching. The visits and the discussions allowed her to question her teaching decisions, reflect on her decisions, and to use them to guide her teaching. As she did this, she felt like a stronger teacher.

Another teacher who felt strengthened by the experience was Cara. She has taught for seventeen years and chose to participate in the lab classroom because she wanted to learn more about Reading Workshop and she felt that it could help her teaching practices. Initially, during the lab visits Cara had a difficult time opening up during our discussions. Eventually, she did begin to trust the members of the group enough to open up and share her thoughts and feelings about teaching. After the lab visits, I looked forward to interviewing her because I wanted to see if she would open up even more. My interview with Cara lasted for an hour and I learned so much about her and her teaching.

Cara referred to the lab classroom as a way to "build her toolkit" (Interview, June 8, 2011). She reflected on how the lab classroom helped her grow as a teacher and encouraged her to add new knowledge and skills to her teaching. She noted, "As teachers, we have so much to learn from each other. We can grow together through a lab classroom. I went to college so long ago and I learned to do things differently. This was just so engaging" (Interview, June 8, 2011). She spoke of how much she valued her experience and how it encouraged her to reflect on what was and was not working in her classroom.

Being Afraid

Some of the teachers involved took a huge leap in participating in an innovative form of professional development like the lab classroom while others wrestled with fears

of inadequacies in their teaching practices. These feelings of fear were closely aligned with the fear discovered in my Cycle II analysis. I was able to dig deeper in my interviews to help understand this feeling of fear.

Sarah, the host teacher for the lab, admitted that "…being a host teacher is scary but you have to walk in knowing that this experience is comfortable and it's going to be great" (Interview, May 25, 2011). The fear of the unknown and trying something new is a challenge for teachers. Sarah described this as "breaking down the walls so that teachers can talk about their practices" (Interview, May 25, 2011). I thought about the power in what she stated during her interview with me. Although districts like Central pride themselves in time for collaboration and articulation among grade levels, it never really addresses instructional needs or student learning. These are contrived forms of collegial discourse that are planned for the teachers to force collaboration (Dr. Gini Doolittle, personal communication, November, 2011). This contributes to the fear that teachers feel about their teaching practices because they are rarely given the power to plan discussions based on their needs.

Rob noted fear in the area of continuing this form of professional development during his interview. He noted how important it was for Central to not force this form of professional development on its members because it is so different for many of the teachers. He referred to the teachers in Central as "fearful" because this form of professional development allows them to step outside their comfort zone. When talking about the role of the host teacher, he stated:

It's important that the host teacher is willing to have a conversation and not feel like he or she is having fingers pointed at them. I think this whole form of

professional development is a 'pro' because it is teacher driven but I think it can

also be a 'con' because teachers don't know how to talk with each other (Rob,

Interview, May 5, 2011).

His fear was relevant to how teachers feel about their practice and it speaks to the

insecurities that fester within teachers because they are not given responsibility for their

learning. Teachers in Central have never been given a choice for their professional

development until the lab classrooms started. Nieto (2009) notes "Mandated professional

development activities-in which administrators select the topics and teachers are a captive

audience for a half or whole day-are notoriously unproductive" (p. 10). She goes on

further to explain the value of a learning organization that creates an environment that is

suitable and safe for learning. This is crucial to student learning.

After listening to Rob, I reflected on our organization and the disconnect between

its espoused beliefs in professional development and its theories in use regarding

professional development. Central has empowered its own teachers to step up and present

at in-service days in the past but in order to shift the professional development culture of

the district it was going to take time, baby steps. The teachers were not used to this type

of professional development. I reflected in my leadership journal,

> This project is so powerful. I had no idea when I entered into this how much I was
>
> trying to change the culture of Central. No wonder the teachers are fearful of
>
> participating and trying new things in their classrooms from what they learned in
>
> the labs. Although I believe this to be a natural thing to do with teachers, they
>
> don't. Will I make a shift? (Leadership Journal, May, 10, 2011).

Loneliness

The emotions that teachers feel impact their teaching (Nieto, 2009). Nieto suggests that teachers need to re-examine themselves as learners in order for them to grow. The lab classrooms have given the teachers this chance. They are able to volunteer for the experience and then pick what they would like to focus on during their classroom visits within the labs. The teachers were given this power and some of the participants spoke about how lonely they feel on a daily basis. This professional development helped the teachers not to feel alone.

I thought about my interviews with my participants and how the category of isolation came up over and over again as it did in Cycle II. Two teachers spoke about their feelings of loneliness and how they felt like these feelings have hindered them from learning. Cara and Sarah both noted that they needed to learn among their peers because that is how they become better teachers. They know themselves as learners and were finally given the opportunity to pursue their learning firsthand through the lab. Cara noted:

> Sometimes teaching is a lonely profession. I don't think we get to go into each others' classrooms and get to see each other teach. We have so much to learn from each other and really there is not enough time in our day to collaborate with the people that are in your building (Interview, June 8, 2011).

Cara noted later in the interview that the protocols the group followed to guide their preconference and debrief discussions helped stimulate discussions centered around the lab visit and what the group learned. She stated:

I thought the protocols were helpful. That is what we were there to do. It is very easy to get side tracked when you are in conversations with your colleagues especially since it's a lonely profession and we don't get to talk. I think people are afraid to go into each others' classrooms. I certainly would be much more hesitant about wanting someone to come into my classroom and watch me, but it was just so valuable (Interview, June 8, 2011).

Although Cara saw the value in the lab classroom format, she still noted how isolated her and her colleagues feel in their building. After her interview, I reflected on her feelings of loneliness in my leadership journal. I wrote:

I often wonder why teachers, like Cara, feel so alone. Are outside pressures like state mandates and politics contributing to teachers wanting to shut their doors and continue to teach by themselves? Perhaps, it could be internal factors that contribute to these feelings. The organization may foster an environment that does not provide teachers with the time and ability to collaborate with their peers about instruction and student learning, which in turn makes them feel alone (Leadership Journal, June 11, 2011).

Cara's feelings not only speak to the culture of the organization, but the culture of the teaching profession as well. Teachers need to be given the time and encouragement to participate in learning experiences that are valuable for them. They need choice and the power to make decisions about their learning. This could help build strong learning environments where feelings of isolation are diminished.

Sarah was another participant that spoke about the isolation that teachers feel when entering the teaching profession. She explained:

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I think there are walls up and that is just the way the teaching profession has always been, so isolated. This has become a habit and since day one of my teaching career, I've had someone else in my room the entire time. I've never taught by myself. I'm used to working with others and having others watching me. I think the typical teacher from the day she starts her career is isolated, so having other people watch you teach or watching other teachers can feel uncomfortable. This puts up the walls because you feel like you can't do it the same way or measure up. I think it is a common feeling. Also, we don't have a chance to talk about our instruction. This also makes others uncomfortable and teachers feel threatened when they talk about their instruction. They may hear what other teachers are doing and not do it the same way. The reality is we are all doing the same thing (Interview, May 25, 2011).

The initial feeling of isolation that Sarah discussed in her interview led me to believe that this must be engrained in the organization. When I thought about the power in teaching children, especially reading, I started to feel for teachers like Cara and Sarah. I began to uncover that the culture of Central has been to espouse to do one thing but really do another when providing teachers a chance to learn. Finally, there was a chance to change the culture through the implementation of the lab classrooms. They were a step towards a transformational change in the culture of the organization.

Breaking Through the Brick Walls

The lab classrooms were built to foster collaboration (Sweeney, 2003). The type of professional development was something that the teachers in Central were not exposed to in the past. During Cycle II, I felt the teachers involved were beginning to "break

through the brick walls" and share instructional practices and student learning with their peers. Although some teachers shared "surface level" information, the participants walked away from the experience thankful to have been given the time to engage in discussions with their colleagues. Some of the participants spoke about how valuable they felt the pre-conferences and debriefs were during their interviews.

When asked about the collaboration piece of the lab classroom, Debbie, a reading specialist in Central, stated "You can't put a price tag on it. It was a priceless part of the experience" (Debbie, Interview, May, 26, 2011). She explained how much she treasured the chance to speak with her colleagues about literacy instruction with her colleagues. She found the collaboration aspect very powerful.

Sarah expressed how much she learned from collaborating with her peers. She pulled out one specific instance and spoke about it. After hearing Debbie speak in one of the debrief sessions, Sarah explained:

> Debbie questioned my format for my one on one conferences and my guided reading groups and she brought a form that she had made. After looking at mine, I went back and I added prompts to my own because I wanted to make sure I was hitting certain things and I liked her format better. I changed my practice right away (Interview, May 25, 2011).

Her statement was evidence of how the lab classroom provided her with an opportunity to learn something new while engaging with her peers that she could apply directly to her practice. When I spoke to Sarah later in the year, I asked her how her new format was going. She spoke about how she was still using what she learned from Debbie and found that it was working much better than the previous format.

Lynn spoke about how she viewed collaboration during her lab classroom experience. She noted:

It was excellent to get to collaborate with each other. Everybody was willing to share things. We would talk as a group and everyone was just so open and willing. Sarah shared how she was using her reading response journals with her first graders and I came back and started reading response journals too. She helped set me up. She showed me how they could work in my room (Interview, May 25, 2011).

This was another example of how a lab classroom participant viewed something in a lab visit and directly applied it to her practice. Lynn feels more effective with her reading response journals since she had the chance to collaborate about them.

The teachers in the lab classroom were able to see literacy instruction "in action" and then discuss what they saw with their peers. The teachers found the collaboration within the lab classroom very beneficial. They were able to grow in their knowledge and teaching practices because they were given the time to share with their peers. Professional development that allows for this helps establish a learning community where teachers are personally engaged in their own learning which positively impacts student learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Fullan, 2007).

Organizational Culture

The theme of organizational culture arose from data unexpectedly. I realize that the culture of the organization plays an important part in bringing about change and creating an environment that stimulates learning for not only students but teachers as well (Eaker & Keating, 2008; Fullan, 2007). During my doctoral program, I performed several

organizational scans of Central which were combined and presented in the Context

Chapter of this dissertation. During Cycle III, I discovered for years that Central has

promoted professional development that provides teachers with time to collaborate. In

fact, it was written in our district professional development plan. However, the time given

to teachers since then has been scarce and forced. The reality is that teachers are not

given choice in their professional development or power over their own learning. It was

not until reading the professional development evaluation forms from previous

workshops, that the district realized this disconnect. Teachers requested to see literacy

instruction "live" so that they could implement the new curriculum effectively.

The lab classrooms have opened the door for change, slow change. This change is

important for the organization because it will be an example of how its theory of use will

link to what the organization values and believes. When the participants were asked to

speak to me about this professional development, they opened up to share how the

organization needs to change.

There were four powerful statements made during my interviews that helped me

discover that the organizational culture of Central definitely needed to shift. These

individuals were cautious about sharing but wanted to make sure their voices were heard.

They believed that the culture must change in order for other teachers to experience what

they did. Cara noted, "I think this professional development is so much more than one

day workshops, not that we haven't had valuable professional development, but this was

ongoing and so much more engaging then watching a video. It wasn't staged. We need

this." (Interview, June 8, 2011). Lynn described it as, "I like the hands on so to speak,

you got in, you got involved. You were able to take notes instead of having somebody just present and speak. This was more interactive" (Interview, June 6, 2011). Mary noted:

> I think this was excellent compared to other workshops we have had. It was real and watching Sarah was like stepping into the best reading workshop book I have ever read. Usually, our professional development sessions are watching videos or having discussions, but actually watching was just so real (Interview, May 20, 2011).

Sarah explained:

> This professional development is differentiated and our district doesn't do that. No matter what level you are on you can walk away reflecting on your practice and then change. When you leave professional development that is not differentiated, it's hard to walk away with as much (Interview, May 25, 2011).

These four statements helped me to discover that I did not dig deep enough into the culture of the organization when performing my scan. These interviews helped me understand how these teachers were feeling about the professional development that has been offered to them over the years I have been a reading specialist. I was able to listen and learn that these teachers requested professional development that was tailored to their individual needs and that the organization needed to move in that direction with its professional development. If not, the new literacy curriculum would never be implemented as it was intended to be.

Union Power

As mentioned in Cycle I, the teachers' union tried to politically sabotage my entire research project because the teachers were asked to volunteer after the school day.

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The Director of Curriculum and Instruction was able to get the union leaders to agree to support the lab classroom initiative by paying for substitutes for the participants. Although, their support was there, I still sensed that teachers were fearful of participating in this type of professional development. It was new, innovative, and different from past practice for professional development, which consisted of one day workshops ran in house or by presenters outside the district. My fears were confirmed during discussions after two of my interviews. Lynn noted that even though the union showed support for this, she felt that they really did not want the teachers to engage in this type of professional development (Lynn, personal communication, June 6, 2011). The union looks to past practice before engaging in anything new and professional development has looked the same in Central for many years. The lab classrooms were different, challenging past practice.

Debbie was another participant that spoke about the union after her interview. She noted she had no idea why teachers would not want to participate in this but realized that some of them are scared of the union and this fear guides their decisions (Debbie, personal communication, May 26, 2011). After I listened to these two statements I reflected in my leadership journal:

> How is one to lead in an organization that has strong union presence and supports the status quo? This is not fair for teachers who want to grow, learn, and change. I am going to need to strengthen my relationship with our union leader in order to move this initiative along. In order to make a change, we have to shift the union leaders into understanding the value in this professional development. This will

take power in numbers for them to see it, but these teachers are still scared (Leadership Journal, June 20, 2011).

The political climate in Central has not been good since all of the budget cuts and teacher layoffs. Teachers are being asked to do more with less and our union is using its power to fight back. This has put me in an uncomfortable position because I am a union member. I planned to begin to reach out to our union leader to work together on pursuing this valuable initiative.

Leadership Check

Building relationships with my colleagues has been a major concentration of my leadership during this project. Relationship building for leaders is so important because it helps a understand the followers and relate to their feelings (Blanchard, 2007; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee 2002; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Although I recognized the importance of relationships earlier in this project, I underestimated the power behind them. Due to the strong, trusting relationships that I fostered with the participants, I gathered more specific data in this Cycle that has informed my next actions. I realized through this Cycle that a leader has to step outside her comfort zone and pursue relationships with naysayers in order meet success and help implement change. The union leaders are those that cause me to step outside my comfort zone because, although a member, I do not share the same values and beliefs as they do. Even though we lead differently, it is important for me to establish a relationship with them because it will help me to push this project during a politically negative time. Leaders must do this in order to bring others along. Recognizing the internal forces within an organization is crucial when trying to bring about change (Fullan, 2007).

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Through my reflections, I have realized that leadership continues to be an iterative process. I reflected on this in my journal:

I constantly revisit what I am true to, my espoused leadership strategies, and act according to their guidance. Although I feel I am up against the odds with this initiative given the current political climate and recent budget cuts, I have listened and empathized with my participants about their needs. I have heard their voices and discovered their passion for this professional development (Leadership Journal, June 25, 2011).

I have a purpose to serve the teachers in Central with professional development that is tailored to their needs and to "break down the brick walls" so they can talk about what is their reality.

Reflection on Cycle III

This Cycle was originally designed to gather more data from the lab classroom participants about their experience through interviews. I established the roots in Cycle II and have now nourished them to continue to grow through this Cycle. I uncovered similar themes as in Cycle II which helped triangulate my data and better understand my participants. While interviewing and analyzing the data, a new them emerged that linked to the emotions of the teachers. This theme was the organizational culture of Central and how it promotes itself in offering teachers time to collaborate but does not act on it.

After speaking with the six teachers, I realized there was a disconnect between what the organization believes professional development should look like and what they actually do when providing professional development for their teachers. The teachers opened my eyes to this and shared their feelings about the lack of time given to them to

collaborate about instruction. Additionally, they elaborated on their feelings of loneliness.

This information would help guide my actions as a leader in my next and final chapter.

The value that the participants found in this professional development was something I

needed to use to continue to press on with this initiative. I planned to do just that.

Chapter VIII

Reflect, Renew, Revisit

It was not long ago that I listened to doctoral students speak about the Educational

Leadership Program at Rowan University. It was here that I first heard the leadership

program referred to as an "intellectual spa." At the time I heard this, I had just gained

acceptance into the program and I was about to enter into my coursework. When I think

of spa experiences, one thing comes to mind: reflect, renew, and revisit. Spa experiences

provide people with the opportunity to take a step back from life, think, recharge, change,

and forge on. An intellectual spa…so eloquently put…so true. This program has

challenged me in so many aspects and has stretched my thinking about educational

leadership to places I have never dreamed. It exercises every muscle in my reflective

brain and massages my spirit. It has truly lived up to its name. It has been my intellectual

spa.

As a leader, reflective practice is a notable characteristic that helps bring about

change (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). While examining my own thinking about the

cornerstone pieces that made this program unique, I deeply reflected on the person that I

am in all aspects of my life. Over the course of these past three years, I had many

opportunities to grow in my knowledge of leadership and organizational change. In

addition, I was able to link this knowledge to my experiences while leading this research

project. I discovered that my self-reflection fueled my leadership growth.

This chapter provides insight into the path that I have taken to lead. It provides the

findings of my data and links them to the research questions that were studied.

Limitations and future research are also presented to help guide the future of this

professional development in Central as well as other school districts. Furthermore, I close

this chapter with a discussion on sustainability of change and the importance of being a

self reflective practitioner.

Back to the Research Questions

The purpose of this action research study was to implement literacy lab

classrooms in Central to help support teachers in their literacy instruction and build a

learning community that recognized the importance of collaboration and self reflection.

Additionally, I planned to discover my leadership. I reflected on my leadership to better

understand myself and the impact I have on helping teachers. The following research

questions were explored:

- Are the practices and knowledge of teachers influenced by the participation in
  literacy lab classrooms?

- Do reflective practice and collaboration have an impact on teacher instruction for
  literacy lab classroom participants?

- How did my espoused leadership theories guide me in the implementation of the
  literacy lab classrooms?

The Practices and Knowledge of the Participants

The lab classrooms were set up so teachers could explore their instructional

practices in a new way. The peer observation format was one that Central had not tried

before and it challenged their espoused theories of professional development. They

believed in professional development indicative of what the lab classrooms provided but

had never given professional development like this a chance until the spring of 2010. The

participants in these pilots raved about their experience and reported learning new

instructional practices. I was intrigued in their evaluations of the pilots and wanted to see if more teachers could learn from participating in the lab classrooms. I was hoping to gain a better understanding of where this type of professional development could take our teachers. Therefore, I developed the research question: *Are the practices and knowledge of teachers influenced by the participation in literacy lab classrooms?*

The data collected from Cycles II and III showed evidence that the participants of the lab classroom did learn new literacy practices and knowledge from taking part in this professional development. My follow-up interviews from Cycle III supported the data collected from the focus groups and the lab classroom response sheets from Cycle II. The teachers used the "live" classroom visits and the discussions during these visits to extend their knowledge and implement new things within their classrooms.

Even though the participants did extend their knowledge of their reading workshop and guided reading practices, there was more evidence of "short term application" rather than long term changes in their practices. Perhaps, this was due to the highly supportive nature of this professional development. Given the fact that the group met six times over the course of two months, the participants felt supported by one another to try out new practices within their classrooms and report back to the group. Some of the participants immediately tried out new practices after viewing it in the lab and came back to the group ready to share while others chose to reflect on what they learned and implement new practices more slowly. Although it was hard to note long term changes in the beliefs of the teachers, the group of teachers did learn new literacy practices and felt the support from the cohort to go back and try to change their practices.

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Guskey's change model (2002) suggests that teachers when teachers learn something new they have to see it work before changing their classroom practices. This is what the lab classroom encouraged. According to Guskey's research, if teachers see changes in their students' learning then their beliefs will change. I believe the lab classroom supports Guskey's model of teacher change because it provides teachers with a chance to view instruction and then try out something they learned so that they can see its effects on student learning.

Despite some initial fear to participate in this unique professional development, overall the participants valued their experience and found the benefits of it to be profound. Shifting the beliefs of teachers is very difficult so engaging in professional development, like the lab classroom, can help teachers see new approaches in literacy instruction working firsthand (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). All of the participants noted how they were able to take something back into their classroom and try during my interviews with them. One example of how the participants believed this experience helped them learn and grow came from an interview I did with Mary. Mary referred to how powerful it was to watch Sarah teach. She stated, "After watching Sarah, I can press forward with even more of a reading workshop model. Watching her teach has made my teaching so much stronger" (Interview, May, 29, 2011).

This type of exposure for teachers is critical because it provides them with highly supported professional development to help implement change that links peer observation and collaboration. Routman (1996) notes the importance of having sustained professional development when new curriculum is implemented. Too often, teachers are not provided

with opportunities to observe their peers and engage in discussions about instruction that promote self reflection (Routman, 1996).

Reflection and Collaboration

Professional development that provides teachers with the opportunity to reflect and collaborate supports teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). After having read the research about the types of professional development that teachers benefit most from, I wanted to explore this concept of self reflection and collaboration within the lab classrooms. I looked to see if these impacted teachers and the decisions they made in their own classrooms after visiting the lab classroom. Therefore, I linked both reflection and collaboration in the research question: *Do reflective practice and collaboration have an impact on teacher instruction for literacy lab classroom participants?*

Evidence that this research question was answered came through observations, focus group discussions, lab classroom response sheet analyses, and my interviews. This data was collected in Cycles II and III. The participants found the lab classroom as a way to reflect on their practices. I could see the reflection taking place among the group through my observations during our preconference and debrief sessions. Additionally, the participants detailed how the lab helped them reflect during my interviews with them. One participant noted, "The lab classroom helped her reflect on everything. I had my wheels turning and thinking about how I was going to make things work in my classroom" (Lynn, Interview, June 6, 2011).

All of the teachers saw value in the pre-conferences, lab visits, and debriefs. However, they found the visit to be most beneficial in helping them think about their

instruction through watching another teacher teach. Viewing instruction "live" showed these teachers that peer observation and discussions about lessons can promote self reflection that encourages one to grow and change. The lab classroom helped them use a reflective lens to first look out and then back at themselves. Early on, I tried to explain that the type of self reflection during the lab classroom was going to be different than any reflection they had ever done before. This was hard to explain to the teachers but just brilliant to watch. During the preconference and debrief sessions, I could see the teachers intently thinking. They were actually thinking about themselves and how what they learned would fit into their classrooms. I observed people looking up as if they had this picture above their heads of what it would look like in their classroom. The discussion around what they saw only helped them envision it more. The lab classroom offered a unique form of collaboration as well.

The participants noted that they appreciated the opportunity to speak with their colleagues about instruction. Cara, in particular, noted how she "yearned to collaborate with her colleagues about instruction" (Personal communication, June 8, 2011). The participants reported how Central had never provided them with this opportunity; therefore, they have felt sheltered and alone. The lab classroom was a way to build a learning community among a small group of teachers to promote a culture that supports ongoing collegial collaboration. There was evidence that the collaboration piece of the lab classroom strongly supported the teachers to learn new practices, clarify what they were already doing, and change their existing practices. During Cycle II, the teachers often spoke about how much they were learning from Sarah. I observed a sense of relief among the group as well after each visit. During the debrief session I asked the group

about why they seemed relieved after visiting Sarah's room, they shared how this experience made everything so real to them. They explained how what they saw was reality and it is ok that things are not always perfect. I found this sense relief reassured the teachers that what they were doing in their classrooms was good.

Professional development that is natural in the sense, that it gives teachers the choice in their learning is powerful (Guskey, 1995; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Sweeney, 2003). Before engaging in this research project, I found Central believed in this type of professional development but was not taking the necessary measures to implement it for its teachers. The implementation and continuation of the lab classrooms were a second order change for the organization. They seemed to shy away from this because they did not know how to bring about this change.

Through my interviews, I listened to the teachers and discovered more than ever that the lab classroom concept was something that could truly transform the teaching in Central if it was continued. I was no longer the only one who believed this professional development could be part of Central's future. The data revealed that the continuation of this type of professional development was needed to provide teachers with the ongoing support in their literacy practices.

The Intricacies of Leading

I often watch my three children play with clay. They start with the goal of creating an object. Then, they start to mold the clay in a free manner stopping to shout out "Look Mommy! It looks like…" Then, they go back to the drawing board and remold the clay to create something else only to shout out, "Look Mommy! Now I have made a…" I watch their intent faces as they try to use their imagination to create different

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objects. They are direct in their intentions yet so creative. They massage the clay and guide it into the position they want it go, all the while, creating fascinating objects. They could sit for hours and hours molding their clay.

It is easy to think about this clay as a representation of my leadership and the ability I have to shape my leadership into ways it will positively impact students and teachers. It will continue to be remolded and massaged in order to successfully meet the challenges that I am faced with as leader. My leadership clay has already been molded with my heart at the center. When it is time to massage again and again, my heart will still remain at the center. I will stay true to what I believe in but adapt and adjust as situations are presented. Like my children molded their clay, I too will mold my leadership in unique ways.

I developed the following research question to help me reflect on my leadership while implementing this action research study: *How did my espoused leadership strategies guide me in the implementation of the literacy lab classrooms?*

As Fullan (2001) states, "Moral purpose sets the context; it calls for people to aspire to greater accomplishments" (p. 117). Although I needed to adapt and adjust my style while leading this change, I stayed true to my moral commitment (Fullan, 2001). During my leadership journey, I was able to note that my leadership was molded differently depending on situations I found myself in. The way in which I acted depended on the situation, but remained strongly centered in my moral foundation and serving nature.

I found that my leadership question was answered through my actions during the project and the reflections I made in my journal. Leadership is a term that is used to

describe great people, people who have impacted their followers on an emotional level and have successfully challenged them to become better individuals. The foundation of my leadership rests on the knowledge that I have of myself due to the deep reflection on the experiences I have had over the years. As I noted in my Leadership Platform, I was able to establish moral leadership as my foundation with my visions and ability to serve others resting on the foundation. This foundation guided me during the implementation of this project.

Moral Leadership

A leader ignites others by approaching situations with an emotional understanding. This type of self and social awareness is part of being a competent leader (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). It was through deep reflection that I discovered that my emotions drive my actions and they are present in my interactions with others. I discovered I am a leader with a strong moral foundation and am aware of my own emotions, as well as others. I noted in my leadership journal, "I constantly revisit what I am true to, my espoused leadership strategies, and act according to their guidance" (Leadership Journal, June 26, 2011).

I found my moral leadership foundation strengthened while implementing this project. I know now more than ever that a leader who leads with a moral purpose is one of great character and someone who truly cares. I once was questioned about my belief in moral leadership during one of my courses in my doctoral work. I referred to it as feeling a sense of worth, passion for something that you believe in. It can best be summed up using Mahatma Gandhi's words, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

Serving and Building Other Teacher Leaders

Servant leadership was another espoused leadership strategy that I identified with early on in my doctoral work. Evidence of my servant leader nature came often during this project implementation. I often found myself telling the participants I was here to serve them a facilitator and help them grow as professionals. Another example of how my servant leadership strategies surfaced was at a district in-service day in November 2011.

I decided to approach a participant in my study about presenting to the teachers of Central about the lab classroom. He accepted and was happy to work with me on the presentation to recruit new members for the lab classroom. His willingness to present with me speaks to the relationship I formed with him during the lab classroom last spring. We were given word that we should expect about 28 teachers total from the five schools for our presentation. I leaned on Rob to do most of the speaking since hearing his voice was important. It was a way for me to have Rob step up as a teacher leader to promote this form of professional development and have the teachers hear from someone who experienced it.

Rob and I presented the teachers in the room with some data that I collected from my Cycles II and III. We presented direct quotes and statements from the participants in a running video so that the teachers in the room were able to read what their colleagues said about the experience. This was a way for us to show how other teachers how their peers viewed this experience in the hopes of showing the teachers it was a safe way for them to learn.

The presentation was successful and many teachers seemed interested in volunteering. In fact, we received volunteer slips from sixteen teachers to participate in the upcoming labs. We were able to establish three cohorts out of our presentation. Two cohorts were formed to study reading workshop and one cohort was formed among the music teachers. This was evidence of how this professional development has moved into the related arts areas and has branched out to other subject areas. The teachers are working together on bringing about this change in the professional development opportunities one small step at a time.

Developing a Democratic Way

Democratic leadership was not a leadership strategy that I identified with when developing my Leadership Platform in the beginning of my doctoral coursework. As my project progressed, I realized the importance of the relationships that I was building and how democratic I had to be while implementing the lab classroom. Communication through collaborative means is something that a democratic leader must work to create in an organization (Woods, 2005).

During the lab classroom pilots in the spring of 2010, I recognized the voices of the teachers in wanting to see instruction "live" and continued to make this a reality in the winter of 2011. Hearing all voices as a leader and using a moral principle to guide decision making is the act of embracing democratic principles that embody a learning organization (Dewey, 1916; Woods, 2005). I showed evidence of this when I facilitated each of the lab classroom visits. I encouraged the teachers to share practices as well as implement changes in their classroom instruction. This better served the students of Central.

I also noted during my research the importance of relationship building. The lab classroom cohort was a way to bring open communication to a group of teachers that otherwise felt alone. I noted in my leadership journal about the importance of building relationships:

> I want their voices to be heard but want the group to stay true to what we believe in. They have a role in developing this professional development in Central and making it stronger, better. I noticed how the teachers were all open to providing me with suggestions on what the strengths of the lab classroom were and how we can make it better. They wouldn't have opened up to me like this if it wasn't for the open communication I let evolve among the group. I received some great ideas about how to recruit new members and strengthen this experience (Leadership Journal, June 29, 2011).

Other Notable Leadership Signs

The implementation of this research project was not the only place that signs of my leadership surfaced. Leadership is not without its challenges. What remains important is how a leader resonates with what she believes in and acts accordingly (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). As I continued this research project, I remained focused on what I believed to be valuable for the teachers in Central and I persevered in the face of adversity. The political force of the union played a major role early in my study. It caused me to second guess what I was doing and what was right for the teachers and students. I almost backed down and gave up because I thought that no teachers would support this professional development. My inner voice brought me back and reminded me of the

purpose I have as a reading specialist, why I do what I do. I believe in doing what is right for the teachers and students of Central. That is why I chose to persevere.

Grant Writing

During the implementation of this research project, I began to uncover my leadership layer by layer. Early on, I understood the driving moral and emotional connection I have to my work and my leadership skills, but began to gain confidence to present myself in a leadership light. In my journal I noted this new found confidence that I had:

Wow! I feel like a leader. I am stretching out and trying things I have never tried before because I believe in myself and what I stand for. It feels good knowing that I act according to what I believe in and put my heart and soul into it. I am ok with using my knowledge now. It is so hard for me to acknowledge that I do something well (Leadership Journal, June 22, 2011). It was almost like I felt this transformation take over my body. While leading this project, I felt so good about myself and the work I was doing, that I began finding other ways I could connect my purpose in education to my leadership.

As Cycle II and III were being implemented, I began to understand the importance of sustaining this professional development so that other teachers could have the opportunity to experience it. Due to the political forces and the current budget situation, I was not sure that the Director of Curriculum and Instruction would be able to financially support this professional development in the future. This is when I decided to dive into grant writing. I took this leadership role because I saw the value in the lab classrooms and did not want to see this initiative become part of the culture within the

organization. I realized this was a huge feat but new this professional development could be sustained if given the funding.

I received permission from the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to apply for the Learning Forward Professional Development Team Grant offered through *Learning Forward,* a national professional development council. Prior to this, I had never written a grant before and had no idea the undertakings involved. I kept sight of the fact that my will to write this grant would support Central in the long run. I spent two months engaging in this grant writing only to find out that we were not awarded the grant. It was recommended that Central continue to pursue this valuable form of professional development and our work was recognized because of its commitment to teacher learning. My email from one of the grant evaluators stated, "Your proposal reflected your commitment to quality professional learning and an understanding of adult learning and student learning. I know your project is right on target" (VD, personal communication, May 11, 2011).

I used this as a learning experience and did not get discouraged. This was an example of the persistence I learned as a leader. The recognition of the work that I was helping pursue in Central was evidence of my leadership capabilities. Leaders who are passionate about pursuing change use their successes and failures to guide future decisions. I noted in my leadership journal:

I felt saddened when I did not receive the grant. I still understand the importance of this transformational change and the need to continue to pursue it in Central. If I can get more teachers to see the value in this, then this change initiative could

grow into something so much bigger. I have to remember there will be plenty of

bumps in the road along the way (Leadership Journal, May 12, 2011).

After listening to the participants in the focus groups, I knew they felt the lab classrooms

needed to continue to move forward in Central. Using my commitment and moral beliefs

to making sure that student learning was met in the way in which I believed, I stayed

committed to this professional development initiative. Currently, there are three lab

classrooms up and running in Central so this type of professional development has moved

from an infancy stage to becoming part of the culture. Most recently, I was given word

from the Director of Curriculum and Instruction that he budgeted for four lab classrooms

for next school year. This was evidence that I helped move an organization to act

according to their espoused theories of what professional development should look like in

their district.

Side-tracked by a Principal Interview

While my research project was unfolding, news came of a principal opening in

Central for one of the K-5 buildings. Although I was focused on completing my project

and graduating with my degree, I could not help but be attracted to interviewing for this

position. I did not have the necessary certifications at the time of the interview but was

given the opportunity to interview with the Superintendent and the Director of

Curriculum and Instruction for this position. I looked at this as an opportunity to learn

and grow from the interview. I also used it as a way to reflect on my leadership abilities.

Going into the interview, I felt qualified to handle the position of principal based on my

background as a reading specialist and my most recent leading of this district wide

change.

During the interview, I spoke about the leadership position I have held in my building as reading specialist and the ongoing research project I was implementing for the district. I noted my leadership as being dynamic, stating I could lead from the front, among, and from behind. This was clear evidence of how much I had grown in my understanding of my leadership.

Additionally, this was another example of how I viewed myself as a leader and my capabilities of handling a position like principal. I did receive word that I was not chosen to move onto the second round of interviewing but did not let this discourage me from the work I was committed to within Central. I was thankful for the one on one time I had with these two top administrators and was able to personally thank them for supporting me in my leadership discoveries. I realize I have a purpose. I planned to continue to lead with my purpose.

It was not long after that in which I had a chance to meet with Dr. Bob Campbell, a professor at Rowan University. During our conversation, I gained even more of an understanding of leading. He stated, "Bree, you never make the right decision. You just work to make the decision right for you" (Bob Campbell, personal communication, September, 2011). This speaks to how adaptable one must remain in order to be a successful leader. It really comes to down to the will and intentions of the leader and the purpose that you have when you lead.

Inch by Inch: Sustaining this Professional Development Change

Fullan (2001) notes leaders must have moral purpose and an understanding of change. Although my conceptual framework for change was developed using the work of Fullan, I felt encouraged to think about how to weave change models together so as to not

think of change as a "one size fits all" process, very similar to my leadership. A change agent understands the process of change and the complexities that exist with it and adapts to the complexities by staying in touch with what grounds her (Fullan, 2001).

This research had such a profound impact on the participants that I was given the opportunity to present at a district in-service day to try and recruit new participants in the fall of 2011. The opportunity to present was evidence that Central believed in continuing this professional development for its teachers. Central's espoused theories about professional development being collaborative, reflective, and job-embedded were now starting to become reality.

Limitations and Future Research

It is hard to implement something new in an organization without bringing up the challenges of the word: change. A limitation of this study that is necessary to acknowledge is the time that will be needed to move members in Central to believe that this form of professional development is valuable and important. This type of change is not something that can be achieved quickly (Fullan, 2007). Moving an organization from first order to second order change is much deeper and requires commitment and perseverance for something greater (Argryis, 1990). Learning and adaptations within organizations develop through interactions and an increased understanding between the individuals, which then brings about change in behavior (Argryis, 1990; Senge, 1990). This type of second order change is what schools need to embrace in order to be successful learning communities.

Central was stuck in first order change because of the power that the union holds within the organization. I believe that top administration was fearful of the union's power

and was not sure how teachers would receive this professional development. Model I behaviors support the status quo and the organization members can never truly learn until there is a shift to a community of learning.

The short amount of time in which the implementation of the literacy lab classroom was studied was a limitation. Supporting teachers to change their literacy practices requires professional development that allows teachers to learn through peer observation and collegial discourse. The degree of change that Central is requiring of its teachers must be highly supported through meaningful professional development that is sustained over a longer period of time than just several months.

Another limitation is the small number of teachers that participated in the study. The results of a qualitative study are not meant to be generalized outside of the population under study. However, understanding this form of professional development in assisting teachers in the change process can make an immense contribution to the field. Therefore, future research may use this professional development model to explore and understand the change processes of teachers and use this model within the larger teacher population.

Future research may look to discover the degree of support that teachers require when changing their literacy practices through the use of lab classrooms. This model of professional development may be used over an extended period of time with one cohort of teachers to foster a learning community that supports teacher change. Further research may be done using this form of professional development as a mentor model to support new teachers within the classroom. It can be applied to other subject areas other than literacy to help teachers become more effective in their work with students.

The Revolving Door: Self-Reflection

My leadership is something that I will continue to reflect on and learn from. By reflecting, renewing, and revisiting what my purpose is as a practitioner, I will be able to mold my leadership and grasp hold of my actions in a stronger way. My understandings of my leadership have continued to stay true to what I resonate most with, which is moral leadership. Although my espoused leadership strategies were confirmed, I did discover that leadership was a reflective journey, a true commitment to introspection where new discoveries were made. I do believe Central can be better, I can be better, the teachers and students can be better. The challenges of leading will present themselves as learning opportunities as I continue to reflect, renew, and revisit my leadership. It will always come back to my self-reflection and how I use that to mold my leadership so I get the most out of the teachers and students I work with daily.

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Appendix A

Methodology

Improving literacy teaching practices in Central School District requires a shift in the delivery of professional development across the district. The teachers in Central have adopted a new language arts literacy curriculum with very little professional development to support the transition of their pedagogical practices. This action research study is designed to empower teachers to look within themselves and choose their own professional development. Through the development of the literacy lab classrooms, teachers learn through a peer observation format where a group of teachers enter a classroom and observe a host teacher's instructional decisions and student learning (Sweeney, 2003). After viewing instruction, the group engages in collegial discourse through the establishment of a professional learning community.

During the past two years, teachers across the district have wanted more out of their professional development by requesting to learn among their colleagues while seeing the new curriculum in action. This action research study began by recognizing the needs of the teachers and planning to support them in their professional learning.

Reflections on My Paradigm

My researcher paradigm is very similar to my teaching paradigm. As a researcher a paradigm can be referred to as a framework that organizes the methods and ideas of researchers (Heron & Reason, 1997). Paradigms help to clarify what we as researchers believe about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is learned so that we can increase our ability to reflect on our own research practice (Creswell, 2007).

One theoretical underpinning of my beliefs as a researcher is social constructivism. This is where an individual constructs learning by interacting with the world around them. Poplin (1988) indicates constructivist theory is when new meaning is created from learning. Creswell (2007) notes the importance of this type of research is to skillfully examine what is emerging from the participants and to try and understand the different views and meaning that is constructed.

This theory is associated and linked to the work of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky's perspectives take into account the resources people bring to situations and highlight the social nature of learning knowledge and how it is co-constructed by interactions with others. As a researcher, it is important that I search for how my participants create meaning from their experiences.

My researcher paradigm very closely links to the decisions I make in my organization. All of my interactions and acquisition of new knowledge is further enhanced when I interact with others. This interaction is the cornerstone of my beliefs as a researcher thus linking my paradigmatic beliefs and the principles of action research together.

Rationale for Using an Action Research Design

Action research is used to bring about a change in an organization (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; McTaggart, 1997). Due to the verbal and written requests from the teachers in Central, it is necessary to support these teachers through a hands-on approach to professional learning. By using the Lab Classroom Committee as a springboard, members of Central were able to plan for the implementation of the literacy lab classrooms together. Herr and Anderson (2005) note that action research is planned

according to the current needs of the organization. The dynamic nature of it allows for the insiders to work in conjunction with each other to plan, act, observe, and reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2005; McTaggart, 1997). The recurring process can foster collaborative efforts, new learning, and "homegrown" teacher driven learning. Action research design is best known to encourage educators to study practices within the context of where they work (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, this design uses cycles to help the teachers of Central gradually move to owning their professional development.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this action research study is to describe the processes that teachers undergo when participating in the literacy lab classrooms. Furthermore, I will use this approach to better understand the experiences of teachers who participate in the literacy lab classrooms and then use what I learned to "move beyond description to develop a theory" about professional development practices and teacher change in Central (Cresswell, 2007, p.62). The implementation of the literacy lab classrooms will allow me to alter the current professional development practices within Central and use my data to help make recommendations about continuing this form of professional development. I will use the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to analyze my data.

The following research questions will be explored in this study:

- Are the practices and knowledge of teachers influenced by the participation in literacy lab classrooms?

- Do reflective practice and collaboration have an impact on teacher instruction for literacy lab classroom participants?

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- How did my espoused leadership theories guide me in the implementation of the literacy lab classrooms?

Creswell (2007) asserts that grounded theory inquiry or constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) is when theories emerge from data that a researcher collects. As a researcher, I will enter my study hoping to see themes surface about the knowledge, practices, and beliefs of teachers while participating in the literacy lab classrooms. In addition, I will examine whether collaborative discourse and self reflection play a role in the literacy lab classrooms.

Corbin and Strauss (1990) note "The procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study. A grounded theory should explain as well as describe" (p. 5). This action research study will be a continuous process where I can gather data, plan, act, observe, and reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2005) to further generate a theory about professional development within Central.

Sampling Procedures

During my Dissertation I coursework at Rowan University, I realized that my research study needed to get started sooner than later due to the political forces rising within Central. At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the union will be heading into negotiations for our new contract. I realized I needed to push my research study up if I had any chances of getting teachers to volunteer their time. I submitted my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application in January of 2011 and received permission to begin my research. After receiving IRB approval, I invited teachers to participate in my research study through the use of a flyer (Appendix C).

Participants

Before developing my flyer, I met with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to review my flyer. Since I helped pilot the lab classrooms in the spring of 2010, I knew it was important to make this completely voluntary for teachers.

My initial goal was to get ten participants. However, I received only six interested teachers and developed my lab classroom cohort with those teachers. There were five women and one male who volunteered from schools across the district. The participants all signed an informed consent form (See Appendix H). There was representation from each of the five elementary schools in Central. Each participant had been teaching for over ten years. The participants included two teachers who teach second grade, two first grade teachers, one third grade teacher, and a Reading Specialist who teaches K-5 students.

Maintaining a small sample size allowed me to gain an in depth understanding of the experiences of the teachers and will help me examine my leadership role within Central more closely. Furthermore, I will take on the role of facilitator during the focus groups and be a participant observer. Due to the design of my study, I will be participating in my research to further analyze my leadership role and to help bring about a change in Central.

Leadership

This action research study is designed to help bring about a change in Central's professional development and to examine my leadership skills. While conducting the study, I will use a personal journal and written memos to help me discover whether there is a difference in my espoused leadership and the leadership I actually employ. I will be

looking to see if I challenge teachers to grow professionally through reflection and collegial conversations.

The purpose of Cycle I was to plan the revitalization of the lab classrooms, which were to be called literacy lab classrooms. In the fall of 2010, I met with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and two district supervisors to plan the implementation of the literacy lab classrooms for the spring of 2011. I examined professional development evaluation documents from the spring 2010 pilots and my notes to determine how to approach this revitalization. With Central's help, I developed a flyer to gather participants for the spring 2011 lab.

The purpose of Cycle II is to implement a literacy lab classroom to further increase Central's professional development around its new literacy curriculum. During Cycle II, the participants will complete focus sheets for their visits and conversations around their lab visits will be recorded. In addition, my role as facilitator will be examined through the use of my leadership journal.

During Cycle III, I will conduct interviews with each participant to gain better perspective on how they viewed the lab classroom experience. I will also use this Cycle to compile information and report back the Director of Curriculum and Instruction about where Central should go next with this form of professional development.

Conceptual Framework for Change

In education, planning for change is a frequent process that leaves many educators feeling like they cannot keep up. It is important to understand that organizational learning can occur without change (Fullan, 2007). However, leaders of organizational learning can use the new learning to help work to bring about change. Furthermore, change in schools

is almost always focused on first order change processes (Argyris, 1990). This type of change is top down and does not allow input from members of the organization.

When planning, it is important to note that learning and adaptations within organizations develop through interactions and an increased understanding between the individuals, which then brings about change in behavior (Argyris, 1990; Senge, 1990). This type of second order change is what schools need to embrace in order to be successful learning communities. Second order change is possible if a developmental planning model is used to achieve the change (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, Kleiner, 2000).

True change agents can effectively shift the learning paradigm within organizations to one that promotes change in the cognitive structures of its members (Fullan, 2007; Senge, 1990, 2000). This is a challenge that requires a deep comprehension of the current operating system. In order to successfully foster change, school leaders must learn to negotiate territories within the operating systems and find avenues to bring about successful change.

The delivery of professional development in Central needs to change because the needs of the teachers are not being addressed but first the organization has to learn what effective professional development encompasses. Working to shift from one day workshops to a more job-embedded type of professional learning in Central will take time and an understanding of what the teachers believe to best for the organization. It is important to always look at what is best for the organization and work from there to build a stronger basis for change.

Data Collection and Analysis

Patton (2002) notes several ways to collect qualitative data are through focus groups, interviewing, observing, and document analysis. I chose a combination of all four of the aforementioned items to collect data. Furthermore, I was able to gather detailed data that was rich in content and well-organized by working with four forms of data collection and analysis. In addition, my leadership journal provided me with greater insights into what I espoused to be as a leader and what type of leader I actually am.

Focus groups. While facilitating five focus groups, I followed a preconference protocol and debrief protocol to provide structure to the conversation while hearing the participants engage in professional discourse about the lessons viewed. I tape recorded and transcribed each focus group discussion to better explain and analyze the participants' views during the discussion as well as collected their response sheets to analyze for emerging themes. I employed member checking to establish credibility of my data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Interviewing. In addition to focus groups, I used six semi-structured interviews that lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes each (See Appendix I for interview questions). Each of the interviews took place within the context of where the participants work. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that interviewing in the context of where one works allows for rich data. Through my semi-structured protocol, I was able to answer my research questions in greater detail. Additionally, I used member checking to ensure the credibility of my data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Seidman (2006) describes the importance of listening to the participants and understanding their stories through interviewing. In order to listen to their stories and

appropriately analyze what my participants stated, I tape recorded and then transcribed the interviews. After transcribing the interviews, I came "with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 2006, p.117). I used the transcriptions to analyze for recurring themes.

Observations. According to Grady (1998) observation is a tremendous tool that can help a researcher look at participants with a keen eye and in a purposeful manner. I went into the field to observe the participants during the literacy lab classroom visits. I viewed the participants and tried to discover patterns and gain greater insights. Rossman and Rallis (2003) note the importance of observations in the field by describing them as a way identify the "big picture" and gain meaning from the participants' actions (p. 195). I used my observation notes and analyzed and coded for themes.

Document analysis. Analyzing documents produced in the focus groups allowed me to cross check the transcriptions to help answer the research questions of the study. Hodder (1994) notes that researchers work to compare material culture and gather meaning from what it represents. I used the documents produced during the literacy lab classrooms to note any recurring themes about teacher learning or pedagogical change.

Addressing Trustworthiness

Toma (2006) states "Applied qualitative research is effective only, at a minimum, if the researcher understands rigor, if the work is anchored in trustworthiness, and if the researcher integrates mechanisms to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are incorporated" (p.418). To ensure the rigor that Toma notes, I employed several strategies in my data analysis to increase the trustworthiness of my data. Triangulation of my data came through member checking after each focus group about

my observations and interpretations of each lab classroom focus group discussion. I employed member checking after my interviews to further ensure the credibility of my data.

Multiple forms of data collection strategies like focus groups, interviews, document analysis, observation, and journaling also ensured triangulation of my data. This enhanced the dependability of my data across sources (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). My journal also confirmed my role as the researcher and examined my leadership throughout my study. I used written recordings to establish confirmability (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Appendix B

Organizational Scan of Central School District
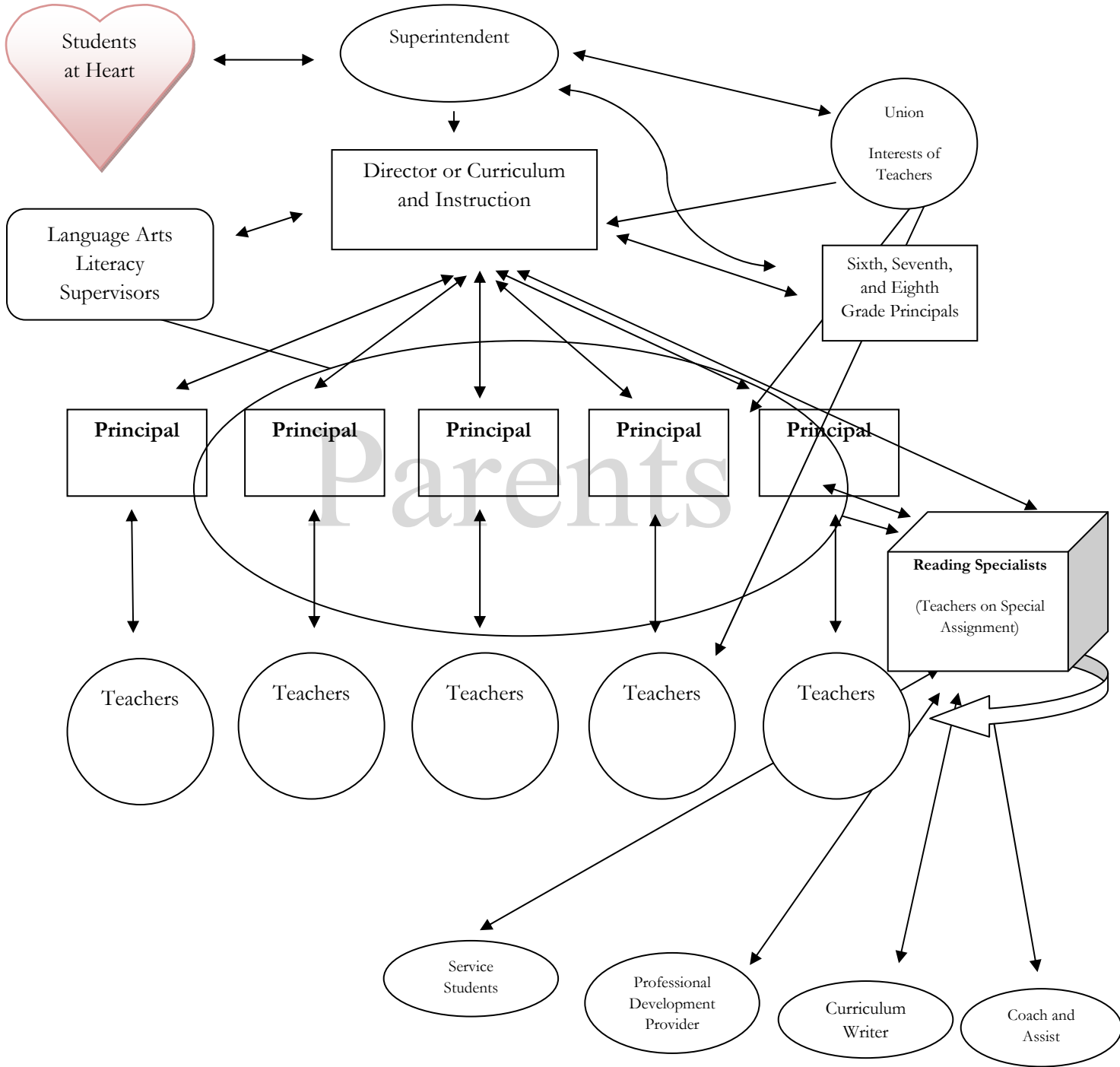
Lab Classrooms are Back!

A lab classroom is a job-embedded form of professional development where teachers view instruction by a host teacher and then collaborate with their colleagues about what was viewed. It is a dynamic way to communicate with your colleagues and view instruction "live." This is a true learning experience that allows for reflection and growth. It is time to get the lab classrooms up and running for the spring.

Please know that participation in the lab classrooms is completely voluntary and will require:

- Attendance at *five* 1 hour and 30 minute lab classroom visits. This will include travel time, pre-conference, and classroom visits.
- Attendance at *five* 1 hour debriefing sessions on the day of the lab visit.
- Attendance at the information meeting listed below so we can better plan the lab experience.

Professional development hours will be given to those who participate.

All interested teachers, please join us for a meeting on January 4, 2010 from 3:45-4:45 at Central.

Possible lab classroom topics for the spring include writing workshop, reading workshop, and guided reading for K-2. Additional items like volunteers for host teachers will be discussed as well.

If interested, please return bottom portion of this form to **Bree Madden @ Cranberry Pines** by December 22nd

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Name_____ School_____

Grade_____   Topic Interested in _____

I am interested in being a: _____host teacher   _____lab classroom participant

Appendix D

Lab Classroom Response Sheet (Adapted from Sweeney, 2003)

Name_____ Grade _____ Date_____

What is the focus of your visit?

_____

What did you notice?

_____

What question(s) do you have?

_____

What would you like more information about?

_____

I would like to try….

_____

Appendix E

Pre-Conference Protocol

30 minutes

- Welcome and thank the host teacher (2 minutes)

- Introduce teachers to guidelines for the lab classroom (5 minutes)

- Host teacher shares goal of the lesson (10 minutes)

- Develop and share individual focuses (10 minutes)

- Review visitation guidelines (3 minutes)

Appendix F

De-Brief Protocol (adapted from Sweeney, 2003)

55 Minutes- 10:05-11:00

☺Thank the Host Teacher for the Lesson☺	**10:05-10:15 (10 mins)**
Introduce and explain the debriefing prompts	

Ask the host teacher questions regarding the decisions she made during the lesson.
10:15-10:25 (10 mins)

What stood out for you today regarding the lab classroom experience?
10:25-10:30 (5 mins)

What will you bring back to your classroom and try?
10:30-10:40 (10 mins)

Remind the cohort of the next date.
Thank the teachers.
This is a time for us to grow professionally through collaborative means and apply something new to our practice.
10:40-11:00 (20 mins)

Appendix G

Code Map of Cycle II Analysis (to be read from the bottom up)
(Adapted from Anfara, Brown, and Mangione, 2002)

Third Iteration: Interpretation

1. There is an emotional component for the teachers who participate in the lab classrooms
2. Teachers yearn for the opportunity to collaborate with their peers about instructional practices.
3. Teachers who participate in the lab classrooms are able to use a reflective lens to look at instructional practices.

Second Iteration: Patterns/Themes

1. Teachers wrestle with different feelings while participating in lab classrooms. Teachers are afraid to branch out and try something new-they are afraid to fail.
2. Collaborating with peers is important and helpful
3. Reflection=Better teacher
4. Short-term application vs. long-term application-Teacher learning

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First Iteration: Initial Codes on the Surface Level

1. Speaking about vulnerability
1. Reluctant to try
1. Indicated not knowing
1. Fear to try
1. Fear to participate
1. Appreciative of the experience/feeling empowered

3. Looking back at one's self
3. Recognizing the importance of reflection
3. Pushing another colleague to reflect
3. Talking about trying something learned

2. Recognizing importance of sharing
2. Sharing of instructional practices
2. Questioning to generate collegial Discourse

4. Trying out something learned in lab
4. Admitting one learned something
4. Experimenting with new instructional practices
4. Scripting what was said so it can be tried
4. Questioning to learn

Appendix H

Letter of Informed Consent

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled: The Implementation of Literacy Lab Classrooms as a Form of Professional Learning for Teachers. The action research study will examine teacher learning through peer observation and collaboration.

Researcher: Briean Madden

Purpose: The purpose of this action research study is to implement literacy lab classrooms to address the need for effective professional learning to support teacher reflection and pedagogical change. A parallel purpose of this study is to revisit, refine, and reflect upon my leadership to see if differences exist between my espoused leadership and the leadership I actually emulate. In addition, I will reflect on my leadership to better understand whether it encourages teachers to be reflective practitioners.

Procedures: During this study, Briean Madden will be collecting data through observations, the collection of material culture, interviews, and focus group discussions. The interviews and focus groups will be audio taped and then transcribed. After transcribing, Briean Madden will provide a copy to all participants to review.

Risks: All data will be kept secure and confidential. You can withdraw from this study at any point. There will be no identifiable information when describing the results.

Benefits: The information you provide will give practitioners greater insights into lab classrooms as a form of professional development for teachers. This study could contribute to the research around professional development and professional learning communities.

Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality: All of your responses and material items will be kept confidential. The research data will also be used to develop my dissertation for an Educational Leadership, Ed.D.

Freedom to Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time.

Your signature below gives me permission to use the data that is collected from interviews and focus groups during my project. You will be provided with a copy of this form for your records. Any other questions you may have about this study can be answered by Briean Madden at bmadden@medford.k12.nj.us or (856) 983-2861 ext. 4104 or Dr. Gini Doolittle at doolittle@rowan.edu or (856) 256-4000 ext. 3637.

Participant Name _____
Date_____
Researcher Name _____

Appendix I

Interview Protocol

Project Title: The Implementation of Literacy Lab Classrooms as a Form of Professional Learning for Teachers.

Thank you for taking the time to sit down and speak with me today about your classroom practices and participation in the lab classroom experience. Please know that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time. Is it ok that I tape record the interview so that I can refer to it when I am typing up my notes?

1. Tell me a little about yourself. How long have you been teaching? What subject areas?
2. What were your overall feelings about participating in this type of professional development? Did you find it beneficial? How so? If not, why not?
3. Were you able to learn anything new about your literacy practices, clarify previous knowledge, and/or change any of your existing literacy practices by participating in the lab classroom? Please explain.
4. In what way(s) were you able to reflect on your practices by participating in the lab classroom pilot? If you did, when did you find yourself reflecting on your practices the most? If not, why?
5. How did you view the collaboration piece in the lab classroom?
6. Can you provide me with an example of when you collaborated within the lab classroom? Explain if it was valuable or not.
7. Which part of the lab classroom did you find most helpful? The preconference? The visit? The de-brief?
8. How did you feel about this professional development experience compared to professional development experiences you have had before?
9. If you could change anything about the lab classroom experience, what would it be?
10. Would you recommend the lab classroom experience to other colleagues? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and to discuss the lab classroom experience you had. I will provide you with a copy of the transcribed interview so you can review it and add any further thoughts. Please contact me if you have any further questions at bmadden@medford.k12.nj.us or ext 4104.