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# Utilizing teacher's perceptions of professional development to inform district level programming

Gina Friedman

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**UTILIZING TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT TO INFORM DISTRICT  
LEVEL PROGRAMMING**

by

Gina F. Friedman

A Dissertation

Submitted to the

Department of Educational Leadership

College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Doctor of Education

at

Rowan University

April, 2011

Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum III, Ph.D.



## **Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to all of the stakeholders who strive to preserve the high standard of public education in the state of New Jersey.

To the teachers who continue to stay focused on the “ideal of education” and what is in the best interests of our children despite the current adversity that threatens to destabilize the high quality programs in our state.

To the principals and superintendents who demonstrate the courage and integrity to “walk the walk” through the maintenance of high quality programs and staff morale in a time of drastic budget cuts in high needs districts.

To the parents and community members who, through their involvement in our schools and support of our budgets, are willing to make an investment in future generations of children for the overall betterment of society.

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their understanding and support through this three year endeavor. I would not have been able to complete this research project at all without your compassion. I promise to keep my phone turned on now.

The teacher volunteers who participated in the various phases of this dissertation project over the last two years were an integral part of my success; it is for the benefit of your continued hard work and expertise that I chose this particular topic. Your encouragement and enthusiasm motivated me to keep going.

Thank you to my chairperson, Dr. James Coaxum, for always remaining patient with me despite my incessant emails at all hours, and regardless of how busy you were. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Joanne Connor and Dr. Patrick Westcott for your professionalism and willingness to participate.

## **Abstract**

Gina F. Friedman  
UTILIZING TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT TO INFORM DISTRICT  
LEVEL PROGRAMMING  
2010/11  
James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.  
Doctorate in Educational Leadership

Teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward professional development initiatives have a powerful impact on the effectiveness of those programs after implementation. Specifically, teachers in first order change schools perceive inhibiting factors (i.e. lack of faculty buy-in, scheduling conflicts, limited time for trainings within the calendar, lack of leadership support, etc.) as a hindrance to the success of program implementation. Concurrently, Cedar Creek teacher's perceptions identify many of the same inhibiting factors to effective professional development that are found on a national level. These perceptions suggest a first order mental model perspective.

This mixed methods action research study identified a second order feedback loop process that facilitated sustainable professional development programs through an initial cycle of surveys, followed by the development of a collaboratively designed series of professional development trainings in Cycles II and III. Trainings were assessed for effectiveness both by the training participants and the committee who designed them. This dissertation cleared the way for a mental model perception shift by the staff, which became an integral component of the feedback loop process, and has fostered sustainable input from teachers to identify and eliminate the underlying factors inhibiting successful programmatic implementation at the elementary level.

Baseline data were collected from K-5 staff through qualitative surveys with a purposeful sampling of 20 teachers, and a quantitative survey of 35 teachers. Survey data were collected from workshop participants after Cycle III, to determine if workshops were effective. After two months of implementation, Cycle IV observational data were collected by Committee members to determine how the workshop content had impacted instruction. Teachers' perceptions were further assessed through surveys and interviews with committee members to ensure the sustainability and accountability of the initiative. Data revealed that participants had a positive experience, and workshop content was successfully implemented into classroom practice at multiple grade levels. Cycle IV interviews and surveys revealed that my leadership style throughout this dissertation was situational: at times "collegial" and "facilitative" and at other times "directive." While participants are optimistic about the future of this program, most realize this is only a first step toward overall systemic change.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Problem Statement**

Teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward professional development initiatives have a powerful impact on the effectiveness of those programs after implementation (Baker, Gersten, Dimino, & Griffiths, 2004; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009; Stevenson, 2007). Specifically, teachers in first order change environments, or schools in which an emphasis is placed on maintaining the status quo, often perceive a school's inhibiting factors (i.e. union contractual issues, lack of faculty buy-in, scheduling conflicts, limited time for trainings within the school calendar, and differing organizational subcultures) as hindrances to the success of a professional development program's implementation (Baker et al., 2004; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Ransford et al., 2009; Stevenson, 2007). These factors differ from district to district, and even from school to school, and are largely site based in origin (Garet et. al., 2001)

Joellen Killion (2003) writes about the importance of site based management, and using models of school improvement and professional learning that are appropriate for the unique situation of the school or district that is being studied. Understanding that top down mandates have less of an impact on teacher learning than bottom up solutions is the first step in designing professional development that can change classroom practice or systemic, second order change. Killion (2002) states, that "Effective learning designs in

professional development programming will depend less on external experts as the sole source of knowledge, and will facilitate teacher to teacher learning, a broader sharing of individual expertise, and a collaborative construction of knowledge” (p. 226). This idea illustrates that the most successful interventions are systemic in nature, and are devised in a way that allows those systems to become self-sustaining (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Garet et al., 2001; Lohman, 2000; Penuel, Fishman, Tamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Stevenson, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). In this dissertation study, I have designed and implemented a systemic intervention to address this need in the Cedar Creek School district at the local level.

The leadership team and staff of the Cedar Creek School District, an urban, Pre-Kindergarten through 12 grade district with less than 1600 students, has been focused on improving professional development through the use of a Strategic Plan, implemented two years ago. This dissertation study focuses on the three small, Kindergarten through fifth grade schools which feed into the junior and senior high schools.

According to the United States Department of Education (USDOE), a primary focus on moving our school systems forward in a global economy must start with making educators more effective in the classroom. Among the specific school improvement strategies recommended by the USDOE, and included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, are: a) redesigning teacher professional development and school schedules to ensure that teacher learning opportunities are sustained; and, b) redesigning teacher professional development opportunities so that they become job embedded, collaborative, data-driven, and focused on student instructional needs (USDOE website, 2010). Identifying and establishing a second order feedback loop process in order to

facilitate a sustainable, accountable professional development program that will ultimately result in an improved, data-driven and sustainable system is not only an area of improvement that Cedar Creek needs to focus in on, but something that other school districts around the country could benefit from as well. This dissertation project will be a significant benefit from a research perspective, both locally and nationally, as the focus on professional development implementation is both timely and relevant (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Garet et al., 2001; Killion, 2002; Lohman, 2000; Orrill, 2006; Penuel et al., 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). This will allow me to contribute effectively to the pool of research that continues to grow regarding professional development program implementation.

Research studies regarding teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards professional development, which I collected through my literature review, have given me some clear insight into the many problems that can arise when a district strives to improve programs, or make instructional changes (Baker et al., 2004; Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, & Yoon, 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Killion, 2004; Reeves, 2009; Stevenson, 2007). My reasons for addressing this topic as the focus of my dissertation stems from my own personal experience providing professional development for staff members within Cedar Creek over the past several years. There are many different factors and elements (both cultural and structural), that must be taken into consideration if second order change is to come about within Cedar Creek. The beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of teachers towards their professional development experiences are formed and influenced by a variety of variables, and have a

tremendous impact on the effectiveness of those programs during implementation (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Ransford et al., 2009).

Among the most frequently cited influences on implementation success (as stated in the research) are a lack of substantive, meaningful input into instructional decisions, leadership styles and management models employed by district leaders, prior experiences with inadequate training models, conflicting school cultures and organizational norms, contractual situations, and lastly, time constraints within the school calendar (Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000; Stevenson, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

There is also a substantial body of research citing the heavy influence of “site-based” issues. The term “site-based” issue is frequently used to describe local environmental and structural inhibitors that prevent professional development implementation from being successful (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2002; Lachance, Benton, & Klein, 2007; Penuel et al., 2007; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). This research tells us that many inhibitors of instructional change can be as unique and varying as the individual school itself, and that understanding the uniqueness of these issues at the local level is vital to correcting flaws in future implementation efforts (Baker, et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Lohman, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Stevenson, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

This “site-based” factor is one important reason research studies that aim to determine a “magic bullet” for success when it comes to solving the professional development implementation dilemma usually focus in narrowly on one particular school (Penuel et al., 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008), or even one particular

instructional training program within a school (Garet et al., 2001; Klingner, Ahwee, van Garderen, & Hernandez, 2004; Orrill, 2006). The difference between a successful training program and an unsuccessful one consists of so many possible variables of influence that it is nearly impossible to generalize results and apply them holistically to a larger venue or district (Baker et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Killion, 2002; Little & Houston, 2003; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Quick, Holtzman, & Cheney, 2009). The acknowledgement of the complexity of this situation shows researchers recognize that the key to successfully implementing and sustaining professional development, which ultimately results in instructional improvement, must become systemic and sustainable in context if it is to bring a school from a first order climate to second order change, which Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005) have defined as “a change that addresses the existing framework of perceptions and beliefs, or the old paradigm as part of the change process”(Collinson & Cook, 2001; Garet et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

This research has led me to the conclusion that my district is a perfect microcosm, ideally representative of the problems schools are facing on a national level. We face all the same problems and issues (achievement gap disparities, low SES population, and low levels of state funding) that are mentioned in the research in regard to schools that are plagued by low student achievement and adversity (Anyon, 1981; Baker et al., 2004; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Negroni, 2003). The uniqueness of our district’s situation will allow me to take a common, pervasive problem that is of national educational import and address it, through an action research study, on a very small scale.

## **Impetus of the Study**

Currently in Cedar Creek, our problems with professional development programming parallel the many districts that have been studied within the research base. Teachers' perceptions identify lack of application of teacher input, lack of follow-up on training, and lack of common planning time as inhibiting factors to effective professional development initiatives, and also suggest a first order mental model perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990).

In addition to the similarities with the many districts that have already been studied, Cedar Creek benefits from being relatively small. Our district has a student population of just over 700 at the elementary level. This makes a district wide research project very manageable in terms of the research control and design variables, which would be significantly more complex if such an endeavor were to take place in a large or regional district.

The reasons behind the need for this change are many, but ultimately the goal was to improve instruction and student learning. Until the teachers in Cedar Creek are provided with professional development that is more targeted towards classroom learning goals that are, in turn, more successfully implemented upon completion of a given training (and provided with the necessary follow-up), we will never begin to see the desired results of those trainings in the form of student test scores. A teacher is the best judge of what is and is not working when it comes to student learning in the classroom (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et

al., 2001; Killion, 2002). For this reason, teachers' beliefs and perceptions toward their professional development experience have formed the basis for this dissertation study.

Currently, Cedar Creek does not have a sustainable, effective vehicle to take valuable teacher survey data that are routinely collected after workshops and apply them in a way that will result in targeted student improvement based on what is and is not working in our classrooms. Over the past several years, workshop survey data have been collected in a compulsory fashion, and were not actually used to determine the future course of professional development programming. The reality of our current situation in Cedar Creek is that despite the sheer quantity of professional development trainings and options that are provided, teacher perceptions (in the form of survey input) on the implementation of these trainings have not been taken seriously in the past. It is for this reason that I chose to develop an action research dissertation project that used these teacher perceptions as the foundation for our program development. The initial data collected in Cycle I suggested many decisions regarding professional development programming have not been targeted toward addressing instructional needs, but instead most decisions have been made for reasons of expediency, short term "band-aid" fixes, district politics (also referred to by staff as community perception), or even state mandates.

As identified in the survey data later collected in Cycle I of this research study, this belief on the part of many Cedar Creek teachers that they have a lack of legitimate input regarding the types of training they receive created an extra layer of distrust between teachers and administration over the years. Several teachers also cited in their Cycle I survey responses that this perception has been reinforced over the years through a

cyclical process of discontinued trainings, lack of leadership support, and a lack of follow through when it comes to providing things like time and resources.

Many of the problems that were identified in the Cycle I survey data regarding professional development such as a lack of funding, communication breakdowns, lack of time/scheduling issues, struggles with consistency between schools, contractual complications, and low volunteerism, are the same problems that national researchers identified through their studies, and correspond to the themes that emerged from my literature review (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Lohman, 2000; Quick et al., 2009; Ransford, et al., 2009).

In achieving my research goals of developing a self sustaining feedback loop to inform professional development programming that ultimately improved student achievement, the very process of action research itself, and the very nature of the vehicles which were used to gather, apply, and implement our staff's input were instrumental both in my success as a researcher, and as an agent of change within my school district (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Garet et al., 2001, Helsing, 2007).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of my dissertation study was to improve the outcomes and success rates of professional development programs within Cedar Creek for the ultimate goal of raising student achievement. Staff perceptions and beliefs regarding their professional development needs were put to constructive use to develop a site-based, bottom up sustainable feedback loop process that could bring about second order change within our elementary schools (Senge, 1991). Developing an open, transparent process that utilizes teacher feedback to inform responsive, targeted training to the greatest areas of deficit

helped to ensure instructional improvement and student learning outcomes. During the initial phase of this dissertation, I studied the problems and roadblocks affecting successful implementation of staff training and professional development initiatives within Cedar Creek, beginning with the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of the teachers. I began by identifying these roadblocks to implementation (from their perspective) so that I may fulfill my research purpose of identifying a second order feedback loop process that will facilitate a sustainable, accountable professional development program. This first step was achieved through my initial cycle of research surveys. This data collection phase established a “baseline” of teacher opinions within the elementary level staff. This in turn cleared the way for a mental model perception shift by the teaching staff, which is an integral component of the feedback loop process (Senge, 1990). According to Senge (1990), these hidden mental models influence our attitudes toward organizational learning, and must be brought to the surface and acknowledged before a cultural change can come about. Senge (1990) defines mental models as “deeply ingrained assumptions or generalizations that influence how we understand the world and how we take action”.

As an intervention to redirect our teachers’ assumptions about their professional development, a collaboratively designed process was developed by the Cedar Creek Professional Development Committee and the elementary level staff, leading to a subsequent data-driven, needs based professional development workshop which will foster sustainable, accountable input from the staff. This input will serve to identify and eliminate the underlying factors inhibiting successful programmatic implementation at the elementary level.

There were many reasons why this research project was the best option to address this problem within Cedar Creek. The first relates to the importance of site-based factors as a determinant to the success of professional development implementation (Anyon, 1981; Fullan, 2001; Helsing, 2007; Hinchey, 2008; Lachance et al., 2007). As mentioned briefly in the introductory section of this chapter, much of the research on the topic of professional development shows us that implementation strategy, workshop design, and attentiveness to the local, site-based considerations have a tremendous impact on the instructional setting. Teachers must confront all of these issues when applying what they have learned in the classroom play a major role in any given workshops success (Collinson & Cook, 2002; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Stevenson, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

The second reason was that it related directly to a need as it currently existed within the district. The value in this project is that it aimed to improve and reform a current system, not only by improving a process, but by improving relationships between colleagues. This will strengthen and improve our previous process so that the change can take place on a systemic level, and achieve the optimum impact of second order change (Burns, 2003; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Senge, 1990; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

This research project also served to address a long-standing problem within our district. Over the past decade that I have worked in Cedar Creek, we had a considerable amount of professional development workshops and training programs come through our district. Many of them were excellent in terms of their substance and their quality. The results of these valuable trainings we have provided are not, and have not, been reflected in student learning or achievement within our standardized test scores, as evidenced by a

decline in the content areas of Literacy and Math. From an observational standpoint, there appears to be a disconnect between the professional development we are providing to teachers and the desired results we seek. The “disconnect” I have found within my district is also evident within the research on professional development implementation (Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000; Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007).

In order to establish the kind of climate within a school or district that can allow for systemic change to take place, teachers’ perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs must be taken into consideration when selecting, designing, and implementing professional development programs if that program is to become sustainable, have an impact on instruction, and ultimately upon student learning (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Klingner, 2004; Santangelo, 2009; Schein, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Wayne et al., 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). The action research intervention I developed had an impact on teacher’s beliefs and perceptions about their professional development by involving them directly in the needs identification, data analysis, design, and implementation of the culminating intervention process. This ensured an action research intervention system, which was not only collaborative and transparent in nature, but increased teacher buy in through the development of a responsive, sustainable feedback loop which will create small, deliberate changes that grow over time (Creswell, 2009; Hinchey, 2008; Killion, 2002; Senge, 1990; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

More specifically, involving Cedar Creek’s professional teaching staff in the data analysis process through this action research project served a two-fold purpose: 1) to model the process of how to effectively analyze data (an area of need identified by teachers in the 2008-2009 LPDC district opinion survey) so that data can be used to

improve instruction now and in future district endeavors and, 2) to model an open, transparent process that shows teachers first-hand how their input is being used to formulate needs-based professional development experiences for them in the future. Both purposes listed above served to demystify the process of how to use data, and also showed teachers what happened to their feedback after they provided it to us. Openness and transparency within the process and change cycles was a necessary step toward changing teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward their professional development programming (Baker et al., 2004; Creswell, 2009; Hinchey, 2008; Killion, 2002; Ransford et al., 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were designed within the scope of the Pragmatist Framework, in which the researcher focuses on what works to solve the problem at hand. Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy, and frequently applies to mixed methods research studies (Creswell, 2009). This study was also designed with the philosophical influences of Phenomenology and Social Constructivism (Creswell, 2007). My research and survey questions are written from a phenomenological standpoint, in which participants are encouraged to relay their personal experiences (Creswell, 2007). In the social constructivist approach, the researcher realizes that meanings are constructed by people as they interpret them through their own perceptions and biases, and these interpretations and meanings become the data that lead to the solution of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative research, open-ended questions are often used so that participants can share their views (Glesne, 2006). This type of data formed the basis for the surveys and follow up interviews within this research study, which were targeted

towards finding out what did and did not work in professional development from the perspectives of the elementary teachers in the Cedar Creek School District. This information was gathered through the following research questions:

1. What types of Professional Development initiatives (or programming) at Cedar Creek had the most success in the classroom?
2. What impact did the mode (turnkey, site-based, staff generated, top down, service provider, etc.) of professional development implementation have on the success of teachers' practice in the Cedar Creek School District?
3. According to the perceptions of the elementary level staff of Cedar Creek, which components of the Strategic Plan were the most successful when implemented in the classroom?
4. How did our Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee (NA&EC) replicate the successful aspects of those components of the Strategic Plan to inform our future professional development programming in Cedar Creek at the elementary level?
5. How did the NA&EC establish a self-sustaining feedback loop that led to second order change within the Cedar Creek School District?
6. What was the role of teacher involvement in the success of professional development implementation?
7. How did my leadership impact this research project?

## Significance of Study

This research study was significant not only in terms of meeting Cedar Creek's needs, but its relevance was reflected in many current research articles and recent books on the topic of school leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 2003; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Fullan, 2001; Little & Houston, 2003; Santangelo, 2009). Professional development plays a key role in bringing about change within schools, assuming that the professional development was implemented successfully and was viewed as valuable by those receiving the training. In order to have a genuine impact on instruction, teachers and administrators must work together to break down the roadblocks to progress. In the book *Trust Matters* (2004), Megan Tschannen-Moran points out that school leadership which fosters trust between teachers and administration through an authentic demonstration of listening to, and learning from their staff, had a greater chance at successfully implementing school based programs. Listening, caring, and being receptive as a leader, however important, were not enough. There must also be will and follow through. The seeds of trust can be planted when evidence of follow through and competence on the part of the leader is seen by school staff (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Using district numerical data to improve test scores was something that was taken quite seriously within Cedar Creek, but when it comes to utilizing staff input to create systemic change of systems that are broken, we have always suffered from a lack of follow through. There are several reasons for this. Systemic problems were seen as insurmountable in comparison to number crunching. Anything that was not a success within two years after implementation was given up on. Also, the process of how to genuinely analyze this type of data is foreign to both staff and leadership within the

district. The use of teacher data for purposes of analyzing and changing a system during my dissertation was the first time this type of information had been used for this purpose in my district. As leaders, we had to show our staff that we had the collective will to change the system and move the roadblocks that prevented second order, systemic change from happening within Cedar Creek (Fullan, 2001).

The only way to successfully bring about second order change in professional development programming is to make an honest effort, as a leader, to make the building of relationships a priority in schools (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Fullan, 2000; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Klingner et al., 2004). Developing trust between teachers and administration was a cyclical process that could only be developed over time. Through the cycles of my dissertation research, I took the first small step toward second order change in a much larger effort to show teachers that their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs really do factor into the trainings they receive from the district professional development committee. Until we can develop a transparent process showing teachers within the Cedar Creek School District how their feedback is being used to make programming decisions, the cycle of distrust and misunderstanding will continue.

As a doctoral student whose research focus has been fairly narrow over the past year, I have seen just how intently researchers are focused on figuring out the key to making professional development work in schools (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Ransford et al., 2009; Stevenson, 2007). There is a general overarching consensus among researchers that simply providing a good workshop, in terms of content, take away materials, and delivery

of information, does not guarantee that the same information will have an impact on classroom instruction (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Ransford et al., 2009; Stevenson, 2007). This research project was significant on a wide scale, first and foremost because of its focus area: implementation. What made this research study different was that we let staff identified needs and perceptions guide our programming choices, so that the professional development content delivered in the workshops was already embedded within the culture of the district. We took previously existing programs and sought ways to make them systemically viable on a long-term basis.

On a local level, the significance of the study was just as pertinent, and even represents a solution to many of the problems identified within the literature review that describe site-based solutions as the best vehicle for reform in this area (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Olmstead, 2007; Orrill, 2006; Santangelo, 2009). The need for individual school districts to create more effective feedback loops and to provide teachers with research-based trainings, which were built upon a foundation of continuous and cyclical improvement, was frequently cited as a step in the right direction if we were to improve our success rate with professional development implementation (Fullan, 2001, 2007; Killion, 2002; Reeves, 2009).

In terms of my own personal experience as an educator, this study was also very significant, and I am in an excellent position to be the one leading the initiative. As a district level employee, a professional development provider for my district for the last four years, and a new member of the Cedar Creek Professional Development Committee,

I have seen firsthand just how many things can go astray when trying to make professional development work. I was not surprised to see many of my own personal observations supported by research studies that had been done in other districts (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Ransford et al., 2009; Runyon, 2009; Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007). The convergence of variables and factors that must come together to make the process result in the ultimate goal of higher student achievement is a feat accomplished by many players, often with many different agendas, who must possess a solid vision for school improvement regardless of their other disagreements and the ability, funding, and will to carry it out.

### **Conclusion**

As stated previously, many current research studies on the topic of leadership emphasize the importance of meeting teachers where they are, and moving forward together in order to achieve systemic organizational change (Little & Houston, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Due to the highly collaborative, participatory nature of this research project, I had to draw upon the knowledge, skills, and wisdom gained through my prior leadership experiences. It was also necessary for me to utilize many different leadership theories so that I succeed as a leader by establishing second order change within a first order environment. Situational Leadership has been the category that I feel defines me most accurately, as I often have to fluctuate between facilitative leadership and directive leadership, depending on the needs of the moment and the readiness level of my colleagues (Hershey & Blanchard, 1985).

The survey data I gained through that research gave me a clearer picture of how my colleagues feel about and perceive certain professional development initiatives. It also helped me focus in on the issues that are impacting Cedar Creek's elementary staff the most, so that I am able to direct my future research in the most constructive way possible. The site-based, problem-based, systemic nature of the change initiative I proposed was the main reason the study will be of such great significance to Cedar Creek. In the remaining chapters of this paper, I will describe in depth how this topic ties into my leadership philosophy and past leadership experiences. Next, my literature review will provide an in-depth overview of the research that has been done on this topic, and describe how my own action research study ties into, and has evolved from, the major findings in professional development research. Following my literature review, I will describe in detail the methodology for my research cycles.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

The topic of professional development has been studied by researchers from a wide variety of perspectives, and within a wide range of contexts. Over the years, many researchers have asked questions relating to the effectiveness of traditional professional development programs versus the newer PDS or site-based models. Others have addressed the common problem of implementation: Why is a program or initiative successful in one school or district, but not in another? What are the reasons behind the success or failure of these programs, and can the successes be replicated in a consistent way in other settings? How much of an impact does leadership have on the success of these programs? Districts often spend a significant amount of money and human resources on a given professional development initiative, only to discontinue the program a few years down the road, citing programmatic failure (Baker et al., 2004; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Goldberg, 2004; Klingner et al., 2004; Negroni, 2003).

This “failure” that plagues so many school districts is a conglomeration of many things. On the local level, there are union contractual issues, scheduling conflicts, and limited professional development days available within the typical school calendar, subcultures within certain schools, differing teacher attitudes toward staff training, and a host of other problems. At the state and federal level, teachers’ and administrators’ instructional success in the classroom is largely, though more distantly, determined by the priorities and policies set at a level far above their control. Much of the research on the

topic ties the need for quality staff development to the concept of organizational change. As anyone who works in the field of public education is well aware, we are inundated with calls to reform coming from many different directions: changes in funding formulas and criteria at many levels of government, curriculum revisions that call for higher degrees of rigor, better (and more frequent) assessments to gauge our district's (and then our nation's) progress, and greater accountability of schools through standardized testing (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Euben, 2005; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000; Stevenson, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

Much of the literature I have read has convinced me this problem is by no means unique to my district. Many districts around the country are not able to make professional development initiatives take hold no matter how much money they spend (Euben, 2005; Hoff, 2001; Lohman, 2000; Olmstead, 2007). This literature review investigates the findings of these professional development studies with an eye to school change and reform through identifying common roadblocks and difficulties encountered with implementing these initiatives successfully (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2000; McCarthy, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Olmstead, 2007; Quick et al., 2009; Penuel et al., 2007; Santangelo, 2009). The literature also explores the predictors of successful professional development, and begins to identify some common components of programs that have been successfully implemented (Negroni, 2003; Olmstead, 2007; Ransford et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2008).

While reading through the literature, I began to notice several common themes emerging from the research, all of which shed light on why educators and researchers alike have such difficulty finding a common consensus about what does or does not work

in professional development, and the reasons behind it. These strands can be broken down into the following sections and subsections- professional development and its relationship to instructional improvement, the psychological dimensions of change in professional development, the impact of teachers attitudes toward professional development and its relationship to systemic change, the effect of consistency in professional development initiatives, and the impact of school leadership on the success of professional development initiatives. I will discuss each of these strands in relation to the research questions and findings in the following sections.

### **Professional Development and Instructional Improvement**

The first strand of research that stood out consisted of studies that, at their core, focus on the direct correlation between a given professional development initiative and its direct impact on instructional improvement (Baker et al., 2004; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet, et al., 2001; Klingner et al., 2004; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Stevenson, 2007; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). Within this strand are several research articles that focus intensively on one type, model, or style of professional development initiative in relation to a specific outcome (Baker et al., 2004; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Lachance et al., 2007; McCarthy, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007). Other researchers within this strand ask questions relating to transfer of knowledge (both from provider to teacher and from teacher to student), whether there is a positive correlation between the structural design of the professional development initiative and instructional improvement within the school, and the extent to which these program effects can be replicated successfully in other environments (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Mushayikwa &

Lubben, 2008; Orrill, 2006; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

Due to the widely perceived success of school-based initiatives, many of the professional development studies focus on locally driven activities. Locally based initiatives require school districts to supply fewer faculties and make less of a financial investment than the traditional PDS model (Hoff, 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Negroni, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007; Santangelo, 2009). In addition, they are significantly more likely to have a direct impact on teacher performance and promote a staff initiated research and inquiry model. There is also a consensus on what factors and types of activities will help promote effective professional development in these types of settings. Research has shown effective programs help enable teachers to make instructional improvements through team teaching, peer observations, collaborative planning time, and by incorporating an inquiry process into the classroom setting, allowing teachers to see the modeled lesson and to gain opportunities for active participation (Garet et al., 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Penuel et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Runyon, 2009; Santangelo, 2009).

It is also important to have significant follow up sessions after trainings. Professional development initiatives that are one time sessions do not become effectively embedded in the school culture, and in turn do not have a positive impact on instructional practice, no matter how good the information or content of what was presented. The training teachers have received in follow up sessions has had a significant impact on not only teacher knowledge, but instructional change. One last common finding of effective instructional professional development initiatives is a strong focus on taking actual

classroom practice and aligning it with state and national standards to create a more cohesive sense of relevance for educators (Baker et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Runyon, 2009).

The previous paragraph describes the positive findings of what can work in site-based professional development when care is taken with proper planning and implementation. There are, however, problems that can arise within the site-based model, particularly because of its small scale and localized specificity. Problems also arise when staff who are heavily invested in the training programs either retire or leave, and it becomes difficult to maintain the effectiveness of the program. One key to preventing this issue is making sure that enough people are involved so the system will not breakdown if one or two people leave (Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; McCarthy, 2000; Negroni, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007; Runyon, 2009).

An effective way around this problem has been the development of a construct of “collective participation” (Garet et al., 2001). This refers to professional development in which teachers participate alongside colleagues from their school and district, which has been supported by a large body of theory and research focused on the importance of teachers’ professional communities (Garet et al., 2001; Hoff, 2001; McCarthy, 2000; Runyon, 2009). Evidence from studies of school reform suggests that those districts that make extensive use of teacher collaboration are particularly successful in promoting implementation of their professional development initiatives. This is largely because a reform has more authority when it is fully embraced by a group of peers (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Lachance et al., 2007).

Within this particular theme of professional development initiatives and their direct relationship to instructional improvement, several studies investigate the transfer of knowledge from provider to teacher and from teacher to student. Transfer of knowledge is more likely to occur and become part of a teacher's instructional repertoire (which directly effects their classroom practice) if that professional development is part of an ongoing program in which teachers meet consistently over a course of time (Garet et al., 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Penuel et al., 2007). These long term initiatives have a greater impact than a traditional professional development experience. Duration measures (referring to both time span and contact hours involved) show a substantial influence on the core features (staff buy-in, impact on classroom practice, direct correlation to test score improvement) believed to determine the outcome of professional development experiences. The longer the duration and commitment to the professional development initiative, the more successful the implementation (Baker et al., 2004; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Quick, et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2008).

Furthermore, several specific elements have a direct correlation with instructional improvement, and each of these elements was incorporated into professional development initiatives that made use of follow up sessions. According to Garet et al. (2001) and Penuel et al. (2007), coherence of the program (as is it directly related to practice and the instructional needs of the staff), knowledge of pedagogy, and collective, staff-wide teacher participation in the professional development experience are significant predictors of instructional improvement.

Another significant component that directly impacts the instructional outcome of professional development is the structural design of the initiative (Garet et al., 2001; Little & Houston, 2003; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Lachance et al., 2007; Penuel et al., 2007; Wayne et al., 2008). These studies focus on the form of the activity (whether it is a reform or traditional); the duration of the activity (including total number of contact hours that participants spend in the activity, as well as the span of time over which the activity takes place); and the degree to which the activity emphasizes the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same schools, departments, or grade levels. A well designed program takes into consideration the multitude of logistical factors that are required for a program to be implemented successfully. Most professional development initiatives have traditionally been low intensity because of logistical constraints. Compared with the complexity and ambiguity of the most ambitious reform initiatives, professional development is often too substantially weak and marginal in content to have a substantial impact. The dominant structural model for teachers' professional development, which is based on primarily expanding the individuals' repertoire of skills and classroom practices, is not adequate for the ambitious visions of teaching and schooling embedded in present reform initiatives (Garet et al., 2001; Little & Houston, 2003; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Lachance et al., 2007; Penuel et al., 2007; Wayne et al., 2008).

Another major challenge in professional development is whether or not programs can be effective when delivered by those not involved in the development of the program (Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). Can these programs be effectively replicated in other environs, and by a different group of people? Issues of

local context and remaining true to the intent of the learning experience regardless of the circumstances are highly important. Many researchers have shown this feeds into the problem of determining whether there is consistency in both delivery and implementation of the professional development program and whether or not consistency is desirable considering the positive effect of many site-based programs (Baker et al., 2004; Lachance et al., 2007; Orrill, 2006; Penuel et al., 2007; Santangelo, 2009).

### **The Psychological Dimensions of Change in Professional Development**

There is a significant psychological dimension to instructional change and teacher professional development. Recent studies have shown that teachers learn a great deal through informal learning in the workplace (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Ransford et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). Informal learning refers to activities initiated by people in work settings, which result in the development of their professional knowledge and skills. Informal learning can also refer to peer to peer mentoring which occurs in a non-evaluative capacity (Killion, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Unlike formally structured professional development programs, informal learning can be planned or unplanned, structured or unstructured. Examples such as talking and sharing materials with other teachers, or experimenting with new instructional strategies fall into this category (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). The academic coaching model, which has become prevalent in schools over the last ten years, stemmed from these research findings (Klingner et al., 2004; Ransford et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2008).

This type of experimental learning promotes a tolerance for and management of uncertainties and ambiguities, which are an important factor in developing critical thinking skills, as well as being a key ingredient in the success of school reform (Helsing, 2007). Developing a tolerance for a greater level of uncertainty allows both teachers and students to use their higher order thinking skills, which is an instructional advantage since teachers can no longer simply rely on telling students what they should know (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000). However, even if teachers have a tolerance for uncertainty, bureaucratic rules and regulations are specifically designed to prevent uncertainties from occurring (Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Helsing, 2007).

### **The Impact of Teachers' Attitudes on Professional Development and Systemic Change**

The next dominant theme emerging from the data consists of teachers' views, attitudes, and beliefs regarding professional development initiatives, and their impact on teacher practice. Much of the literature within this theme links these issues either directly or indirectly to change initiatives or school-wide reform efforts (Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Klingner et al., 2004; Little & Houston, 2003; Ransford et al., 2009; Stevenson, 2007). The research questions and findings in this theme relate to teachers' commitments and assumptions about their teaching (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008), the environmental factors and personal stressors they believe impact their instruction (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000), the individual psychological differences between different personality types and the implications for professional development (Helsing, 2007), and lastly, teachers' general views on the effectiveness of their professional development experiences (Baker

et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Klingner et al., 2004; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). Within my dissertation study in the Cedar Creek School District, it was important for me to identify the depth and relevance of these factors in order to develop an open-ended feedback loop that could result in systemic, second order change (Senge, 1990).

Another common complication with staff led professional development initiatives is the quasi-supervisory stigma that such positions often have. Teachers are often uncomfortable functioning in what they perceive as a supervisory capacity. They are uncomfortable criticizing the work of their peers, and instead see themselves as teacher supporters and advocates. Many educators also do not feel equipped, trained, or qualified to evaluate other staff members (Garet et al., 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Wayne et al., 2008).

There is a considerable amount of literature demonstrating the successful implementation of professional development initiatives, which are connected with wider school reform efforts (Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007). Professional development that is embedded within larger reform efforts is frequently cited as achieving second order change more often than the traditional professional development workshop model. Reform efforts have a longer duration period and therefore give teachers more opportunity to learn and become invested in new programs and instructional techniques. This also allows time for team building and group inquiry processes to develop between colleagues (Helsing, 2007; Klingner, 2004; Orrill, 2006;

Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007). An embedded approach to professional development improvement was necessary in Cedar Creek, and allowed our Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee to achieve stakeholder buy-in to move us towards systemic change (Senge, 1990).

In many areas around the United States, educators are responding to calls for raising standards within their classrooms – standards not only for student achievement, but within their everyday practice. New skills and competencies must be mastered by educators for these higher levels of achievement to be reached. In order to do this, teachers need to deepen their content knowledge and learn new methods of instruction. Through qualitative studies conducted both here and abroad, teachers have identified the demands that multiple reform initiatives present them with, and these findings echo many of the other points that have been made thus far (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2000; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001, Helsing, 2007; Stevenson, 2007).

One demand teachers' face with gaining substantive professional development is that local patterns of resource allocation favor the training model over alternative models. However, the most effective professional development stems from these types of alternative models, and consists of elements like a focus on deeper level content knowledge, greater use of cross curricular units, learning new teaching methodologies through modeling and practice (as opposed to just gaining individual skills), a reworking of teachers' structural time so that they can spend more hours working directly with colleagues to critically examine new standards and revise their curriculums. Their work must not be viewed as static, but in flux, and in need of constant self-reflection and

inquiry in order to improve practice. In spite of national and state reform efforts calling for deeper levels of instruction and alternative teaching methodologies, most districts are receiving little guidance (and little funding) to manage, change, or improve their respective professional development programs. Most are still operating the way they always have done simply out of financial or logistical necessity (Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Stevenson, 2007).

Resistance to change is born from more than just top down managerial issues, however. One unavoidable reality that also plays into a district's success in implementing effective teacher improvement initiatives is the role of teachers' unions and negotiations in the reform of the public school system (Little & Houston, 2003; Stevenson, 2007). While trying to maximize efficient use of resources and allow teachers to focus on instruction, the sweeping school reform movement in Great Britain has led to a philosophical divide in the teaching profession, and divisiveness within the union itself. This structural change in the British school system has led to a new division of labor between those who evaluate, those who plan, and those who implement (Stevenson, 2007). All managerial and decision making tasks have been taken away from teachers so that they may focus more intensively on instruction. In the United States, reform movements thus far have not been nearly this drastic, but teachers' unions have worked to identify a common interest agenda with government to pursue mutual bargaining that works for the mutual advantage of educators, students, government, and the business community (Little & Houston, 2003; Stevenson, 2007, Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

Success in the area of teacher negotiation will also require that teachers develop different perceptions and attitudes as to what their role should be within the school system. Self-directed professional development born of inquiry and reflection will require that teachers, as well as administrators, move away from a top-down leadership model when it comes to making instructional decisions (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Stevenson, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). Competing value systems between teachers, their respective school districts, and professional development providers has led to common misconceptions about what teachers find valuable in relation to what they are actually given in the way of training (Lohman, 2000; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). Many teachers have expressed the lack of decision making power (as it relates to instructional choice) as one of the main inhibitors that has prevented teachers from engaging in self-initiated professional development experiences (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Klingner, 2004; Lohman, 2000, Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008).

Other frequently cited factors regarding lack of staff involvement in the professional development process are the characteristics of teachers' immediate task environment, the tensions of maintaining one's already heavy load of job responsibilities while taking on additional training, the lack of monetary reward for taking on extra assignments, the lack of time in general for participation in off hours, and a need to maintain one's personal life outside of work (Collinson & Cook, 2000; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000; Wayne et al., 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). There is also research showing that teacher trust, openness to change, and a low tolerance level for ambiguity

are all factors that have a direct impact on an individuals' willingness to become invested in district reform efforts (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008).

### **Consistency in Professional Development: Barrier or Advantage?**

One last strand that appears as a connecting element throughout each of these research articles is the high degree of complexity (and lack of consistency) involved when it comes to implementing professional development initiatives effectively (Baker et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Lachance, et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Ransford et al., 2009). Barriers to effective implementation are frequent due to the fact that the best professional development is widely viewed as being locally driven, site-specific, and designed "in context," which ensures that the professional development experience is well equipped to serve the unique needs of a particular staff or school (Baker et al., 2004; Ransford et al., 2009; Santangelo, 2009; Wayne et al., 2008). Such locally situated professional development achieves the greatest degree of second order change in an instructional setting, because it addresses the district and staff needs in their true context. Frequently, professional development mandates do not come from a local level, severely limiting a district's ability to take their local needs into consideration (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2003; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Killion, 2002; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Quick et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002).

The design of a given program, its content, the local standards requirements of a given area, the extent to which specialized teaching strategies or materials are needed for enactment of the model are just a few of the factors that must be considered when implementing any professional development experience. Many of the well known roadblocks to implementation such as contractual issues, lack of faculty buy-in, scheduling conflicts, time constrictions, and differing organizational subcultures are much more easily controlled for on a small localized scale (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). Districts must also have adequate localized control, which would enable them to take into consideration the specific needs of their staff, and the inevitable limitations of their unique funding situation. This idea is counter to most national and state requirements and initiatives that are taking place in the current reform movements, which focus on standardization across contexts, rather than local control (Collinson & Cook, 2000; Garet et al., 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al, 2007; Quick, et al, 2009; Stevenson, 2007; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002).

### **The Impact of Leadership on Professional Development Initiatives**

The next recurring theme in this literature review deals specifically with the impact and effect of educational leadership at both building and district levels (Goldberg, 2004; Hoff, 2001; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002). The ways in which administrators are meeting demands and overcoming the limitations they are confronted with when working with teachers, as well as the nature and type of leadership modeled by district leaders, has been an important focus of study thus far.

There are also studies that link principal leadership to instructional capacity building within the school (Desimone et al., 2002; Goldberg, 2004; Lohman, 2000; Snell, 2003; Youngs & King, 2002).

One prominent way in which principals and superintendents can shape school conditions and teaching practices is through their beliefs and actions regarding teaching and professional development (Goldberg, 2004; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). School leaders can connect their schools to sources of professional development that focus on instruction and student outcomes, that provide opportunities for feedback and assistance in teacher's classrooms, and that are sustained and continuous. Instructional quality can also be strengthened when principals create internal structures and conditions that promote teacher learning. Such actions have a direct impact on the improvement of professional development, and school organizational conditions that influence instructional quality (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Klingner et al., 2004; Little & Houston, 2003; Lohman, 2000; Ransford et al., 2009; Santangelo, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002).

The positive effects of school leadership on teacher professional development and performance-based outcomes can be felt within three different variables: governance, school climate, and instructional organization (Little & Houston, 2003; Helsing, 2007; Stevenson, 2007). All three of these are shown to correlate with higher or lower school academic performance (Anyon, 1981; Little & Houston, 2003). In their respective qualitative studies, McCarthy (2000) and Desimone et al. (2002) both found commonalities in certain principal leadership traits that relate to school success. Once

environmental factors are controlled for, principals of high performing elementary and high schools share certain common philosophies and leadership practices. They also set certain goals and priorities for their staff in relation to professional development type, focus, or implementation methods. Principals who are successful with implementing professional development programs sustain this high level of capacity by establishing trust between themselves and their staff, creating organizational and scheduling structures that promote teacher learning and effectiveness, and by either connecting their faculties to external expertise, or by helping teachers generate reforms internally (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Olmstead, 2007; Killion, 2002; Little & Houston, 2003; McCarthy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Youngs & King, 2002).

Successful instructional leaders take staff expertise very seriously and create professional development opportunities based on teacher knowledge and expertise, even allowing the teachers themselves to function as facilitators (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Negroni, 2003). Although this is shown to be an effective model for professional development, there are still contentions that teacher directed initiatives create incoherent academic programs (Youngs & King, 2002). In addition to common planning time, team building activities and collaborative, problem-based, identification of instructional needs, staff led initiatives foster shared commitments to the respective program as it is being implemented. Successful leaders also place high value on communication at all levels – between themselves and staff, among and between parents, and between themselves and their supervisors (Baker et al., 2003; Desimone et al., 2002; McCarthy, 2000; Negroni, 2003; Quick et al., 2009; Runyon, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002).

Principals and district leaders who demonstrate to teachers that they genuinely value teacher input (by giving them real decision making power in school management) are shown to have a strong impact on the success rate of implementation for professional development programs (Collinson & Cook, 2000; Quick, et al., 2009; Runyon, 2009). Teachers whose instructional needs were taken seriously by administration (as determined through administrative and staff surveys) report a greater investment of both time and effort into making sure that their training takes on relevance in both practice and curriculum. Research has also shown that principals who have substantial instructional knowledge and are able to give constructive feedback regarding what is being taught in the classroom are leading higher achieving schools than those that do not have the same level of knowledge (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Lohman, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Ransford et al, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002). Studies have also found that principals in high achieving schools are excellent communicators (Desimone et al, 2002; Santangelo, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002).

While this review of the research literature shows that strong school leadership can have a positive effect on teacher professional growth and, in turn, student achievement, it has also been noted by several researchers that the relationship between leadership and school achievement is highly complex. There is also a noticeable agreement among researchers that, even though the research on this topic is convincing, the amount of empirical evidence is relatively small in quantity. Many researchers have had difficulty defining the concept of instructional leadership in concrete terms, which has led to the inherent difficulty in trying to establish exactly what principals and superintendent's appropriate role in professional development should be (Euben, 2005;

Fullan, 2001, 2007; Lohman, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Youngs & King, 2002). In Cedar Creek, we received the support and cooperation to implement this research initiative, but the freedom to allow the staff data to drive the process.

### **Conclusion**

The research in this literature review can be sorted into several major themes. The first theme shows the direct relationship between a given professional development initiative and its ultimate impact on instructional improvement. This includes studies of site-based programs and specific models of professional development. This vein of the research also shows the impact of follow up sessions and the relevance of its structural design.

Another common theme within this body of research literature is the focus on the views, attitudes, and beliefs of teachers, their perspectives on professional development, and the impact on practice. The psychological issues are explored, as well as the underlying assumptions that color teachers' expectations. Environmental factors, life stressors, time constraints, and increasing demands on teachers' personal time and energy in an era of accountability are all major areas of focus in this research.

An equally important theme of this literature addresses leadership studies in relation to professional development success. Leadership has a much more complicated impact on schools' instructional training needs than originally thought, and can have a direct or indirect influence on the ultimate success of a professional development initiative (Baker et al., 2004; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Ransford et al., 2009; Runyon, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002).

The topic of professional development has been studied by researchers from a wide variety of perspectives, and within a wide range of contexts (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Hoff, 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Lohman, 2000; McCarthy, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Negroni, 2003; Olmstead, 2007; Orrill, 2006; Penuel et al., 2007; Quick et al., 2009; Ransford et al., 2009; Runyon, 2009; Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). Over the years, many researchers have asked questions relating to the effectiveness of traditional professional development programs versus the newer PDS or site-based models (Garet et al., 2001; Klingner et al., 2004; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007; Runyon, 2008; Wayne et al., 2008). Others have addressed the common problem of implementation: why is a program or initiative successful in one school or district, but not in another (Baker et al., 2004; Helsing, 2007; McCarthy, 2000; Ransford et al., 2009; Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007)? What are the reasons behind the success or failure of these programs, and can that success be replicated in other settings and with other people?

Most of the research shows that successfully implemented professional development initiatives are predicated upon certain factors (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Lachance et al., 2007; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Quick et al., 2009; Ransford, 2009; Runyon, 2008; Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). Most successful implementation takes place within the scope of a large

scale reform initiative, and over the span of several years. Successful programs also have a large degree of teacher buy-in, as well as teacher input into program content. Content area specific professional development makes the greatest direct improvement in classroom instruction, and administration must demonstrate flexibility, as well as outside-the-box thinking in order to make great changes in the delivery of professional development within our school systems.

Several of the themes identified in this literature review relate to the intervention I designed for my dissertation. First and foremost, the views, attitudes, and beliefs of teachers as regards their professional development will guide my research questions (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Euben, 2005; Garet et. al; 2001; Goldberg, 2001; Helsing, 2007; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Olmstead, 2007; Runyon, 2009). My change initiative will directly impact the way district leadership responds to and handles the needs and opinions of teachers within our district, via the District Professional Development Committee. This in turn will impact our programming, making it more responsively designed.

With some tweaking in the procedures and programming of the Cedar Creek Professional Development Committee, I believe that we could, as a district, achieve a high degree of success with professional development implementation. We already have several of the elements in place that research shows is necessary for second order change to happen. We have a well organized, well structured, long-term large scale initiative taking place within our district strategic plan. We have placed a high priority on targeted, content area specific training for teachers. What is missing is a well thought out, research-based, genuinely collaborative method for accurately and honestly assessing

teachers' input, attitudes, and beliefs about the professional development they are receiving, and whether or not it is meeting their needs in the classroom setting. Cedar Creek is also missing this component of professional development for any staff member who does not work in the traditional K-5 capacity, such as Art, Music, and Physical Education teachers, but these teachers' responsibilities lie outside the scope of this dissertation study. The intervention, which I will describe in Chapter IV will address this particular weakness in our overall change initiative at the elementary level.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction and Research Questions**

The ultimate purpose of my dissertation was to improve the outcomes and success rates of professional development programs within Cedar Creek for the ultimate goal of raising student achievement. Through this action research study, I have chosen to investigate the specific problems and roadblocks affecting the successful implementation of professional development programming at the elementary level in the Cedar Creek School District, and how teachers' perceptions can be utilized to improve the quality of professional development that is delivered to our elementary staff (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Hinchey, 2008; Killion, 2003). Our programming over the last five years has been determined by the areas of focus that are identified within our district's strategic plan: Differentiated Instruction, Literacy, MAP testing, Curriculum Mapping, and Responsive Classroom. Developing an open, transparent process that uses teacher feedback to inform responsive, targeted training to the greatest areas of deficit will help to ensure instructional improvement and student learning outcomes (Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000).

I decided to focus my research on the area of elementary level professional development, where I do exercise some level of control and influence. As a member of the District Professional Development Committee, I have frequent and routine responsibilities that involve surveying my fellow teachers in regards to their instructional needs, and I work to gain their trust so that they will honestly tell me what is and is not working in the classroom. In the initial survey phase of my dissertation, which I will

describe in-depth in Cycle I, I was able to determine several things that correlate with much of the current research on the topic of professional development. First of all, teachers' perceptions of professional development in our district varied widely depending on the specific initiative they were asked about, how that initiative had been implemented, and how those perceptions tied into their past experiences with professional development in the district. Teachers who had a longer tenure of service within the district had substantially more insight into what professional development training would work (and what would not work) in the classroom than did teachers with less experience, based on past practice. Also, many teachers were keenly aware of the correlation between how a program is implemented, and the success level of that program after implementation in the classroom.

As a researcher, I needed to gain an overall consensus of teachers' perceptions and attitudes that would allow me to form a baseline of the general ideas that makeup our district staffs' attitude toward professional development, so that I could ultimately guide our professional development programming towards second order change through my action research project (Creswell, 2009; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Hinchey, 2007). The research questions for my dissertation project are as follows:

1. What types of Professional Development initiatives (or programming) at Cedar Creek had the most success in the classroom?
2. What impact did the mode (turnkey, site-based, staff generated, top down, service provider, etc.) of professional development implementation have on the success of teachers' practice in the Cedar Creek School District?

3. According to the perceptions of the elementary level staff of Cedar Creek, which components of the Strategic Plan were the most successful when implemented in the classroom?
4. How did our Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee (NA&EC) replicate the successful aspects of those components of the Strategic Plan to inform our future professional development programming in Cedar Creek at the elementary level?
5. How did the NA&EC establish a self-sustaining feedback loop that led to second order change within the Cedar Creek School District?
6. What was the role of teacher involvement in the success of professional development implementation?
7. How did my leadership impact this research project?

These research questions were addressed through the initial mixed methodology surveys and through the five cycles of my action research project as described in the Description of the Action Research Study Section, near the end of this chapter (Hinchey, 2008).

### **Research Design**

This study used an action research design, which came out of both the qualitative and quantitative data collection framework. In action research, there is more insight to be gained from the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches together than either one independently (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Hinchey, 2008). Their combined use provided an expanded understanding of the research problems (Creswell, 2009). Action research is ideal for researchers who want to study problems in context, in the real

world of school systems, where a one-size fits all prescriptive research model are ill-equipped to take in the many complexities and variation that exist within our unique classroom environments (Hinchey, 2007). In the Cedar Creek School District, we are comprised of three unique schools, all with different leadership and staff. Including stakeholders from each building in the design of our professional development program ensured that all of these variables were accounted for, and the particular needs were addressed (Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1995). Systematic inquiry that involves information gathering, analysis, and reflection leading to a cyclical action plan was the ideal research design for developing an open, responsive feedback loop to move the Cedar Creek School District towards second order change (Fullan, 2001).

Quantitative methodologies, or survey research in particular, provide a numeric description of the trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative bases of this study lay in post-positivist knowledge claims, and according to Creswell (2009), are demonstrated when research participants are given pre- and post- test measures to determine their attitudes and assumptions before and after an action research event or experimental treatment. These pre- and post- data are then compared to see if the research endeavor resulted in the desired change.

Qualitative research seeks to answer research questions by looking for the relationship among variables in the population where data are being collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldana, 2009). The qualitative theoretical underpinning of the research project I am conducting is the phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach is one that attempts to understand patterns of relationships and experiences of

individuals in order to explain a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007, 2009). Within the phenomenological approach, there are two subcategories: hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). I will be utilizing both hermeneutical and transcendental phenomenological approaches in the design of my research. Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on the data collection of several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, while at the same time the researcher attempts to bracket off the researcher's own experiences so as to promote qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Transcendental, on the other hand, relies more on researcher interpretation of these phenomenological events. Teachers' perceptions are at the heart of professional development success, and their perceptions are based on the lived experiences of the collective group. It is these collective experiences that contribute to the functioning of the group, and ultimately determine the level of success they perceive with their professional development trainings.

When using both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the same research phenomena, a significant amount of interpretation must take place in order to identify the major concepts and themes in the data (Creswell, 2009; Hinchey, 2007). This can be a difficult task for the researcher to undertake, and in the context of this study was difficult since I, as the researcher, am a participant observer in the process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006). One way my role in the research process can be addressed is through the description of researcher bias during the analysis phase of the research project (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation built within the design of the survey, and within the research cycles, was one important way I controlled for researcher bias. The quantitative component of this study helped to control the potential for bias. It was also

the ideal instrument to collect information on teacher's attitudes and perceptions (Creswell, 2009).

### **Data Collection Strategies**

To accomplish my purpose, I utilized an action research approach, which allowed me to achieve a desired change in practice within an established system of professional development programming (Creswell, 2009; Hinchey, 2008). The cyclical pattern of top down, first order professional development programming, which was disconnected from instructional need, was replaced by teacher generated, responsive programming, and was then assessed for its successes and weaknesses by all stakeholders involved in the research cycles. The data collected in Cycle I consisted of both qualitative and quantitative survey data. I implemented two types of data collection tools: open-ended surveys with purposeful sampling of 20 teachers (to illicit depth in teachers' opinions and insights), and a quantitative survey given to achieve breadth. This "breadth" was vital to collect data regarding the wide range of professional development initiatives that teachers across the district were involved in from grades Kindergarten through 5. In addition to allowing for higher levels of triangulation than other types of studies, a mixed-method study in this case was ideal for an action research project that involved multiple stakeholders, and a research project that intended to promote an outcome of change (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Hinchey, 2008).

The quantitative survey (see Appendix A) was comprised of four main categories. The first was general information (years experience teaching, general opinions of professional development overall) about participants, which provided the research committee with a richer layer of coding (Creswell, 2007, 2009). The next section elicited

participant's opinions about specific professional development experiences, such as differentiated instruction training, responsive classroom, and data driven instruction workshops. The third section in the quantitative survey was resources and management. This component of the survey assessed teacher's perceptions about the factors that influenced or inhibited their success with implementing professional development in the classroom setting. Factors that have been found in research to be predominant inhibitors (class coverage, funding, scheduling and time conflicts, administrative support, lack of general exposure to needed training) were used for the purpose of comparing Cedar Creek teacher's perceptions to those on a nationwide basis (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Lohman, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Stevenson, 2007; Wayne et al., 2008; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). The last component of the quantitative survey was an assessment of the quality of teachers' experiences. This section sought to determine the effectiveness of in-house professional development providers versus outside contractors.

The qualitative component of my data collection strategies consisted of open-ended narrative questions, which were answered in handwritten paragraph form by the research participants. Using an open ended format for some of my broader questions allowed the research participant to direct the focus of the research topic towards the issues they perceived as fundamental to their professional development concerns (Creswell, 2007). This open-ended questionnaire contained three questions that were directly tied to the research questions. They focused on the general, overall perceptions of professional development opportunities within Cedar Creek at the elementary level, and

can be found in Appendix B. These questions elicited perceptions about professional development from a personal, longitudinal, and needs based perspective. They sought to delve into the deeper issues as they exist from the perspective of the classroom teacher, and provided the research committee with emergent themes to blend with the quantitative surveys when coding in Cycle I (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glesne, 2006; Saldana, 2009). Mixed methods research was the ideal approach for an action research study of this nature, and an approach to inquiry, which used both types of analysis in tandem so that the overall strength of the study was greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell, 2009).

In Cycle II, data were collected in several different forms, which provided for an appropriate analysis of the meetings of the Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee. As the researcher, I utilized anecdotal and reflective field notes that were collected during my observations of the meetings in order to describe both the process and outcomes of these collaborative meetings. The occurrences and decisions that came about as a result of these meetings formed the basis for the Cycle III workshop series.

In Cycle III, data were collected in the form of field notes, observations, and reflective journaling. Participant surveys were also used to determine the efficacy of the five workshops teachers participated in over the course of the November, 2010 in-service week. Writers' Workshops, using MAP test data to align instruction, Responsive Classroom Training, Differentiated Instruction, and a workshop piloting the use of Curriculum Maps as plans were the five workshops that were scheduled on a rotating basis. The outcomes and successes of these in-service options were assessed using the survey found in Appendix C. The information gleaned from this survey was used to

determine whether or not teacher participants believed the needs identified in the original Cycle I data had been met.

The last round of data collection took place upon the completion of Cycle IV. These data were collected in the form of teacher observations (see Appendix D), surveys, and interviews. As the researcher, I secured permission for our committee to observe a cross section of teachers at each grade level, and we looked for evidence that the professional development experiences in Cycle III had translated into effective instruction. These observations were non-evaluative peer observations, and were only conducted by the members of our committee that work in a non-supervisory capacity. Finally, members of the Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee were surveyed and interviewed to determine whether or not they felt this leadership initiative was successful, and to find what sort of improvements would be needed when we implement our professional development initiative next year.

### **Description of Research Site**

This research study took place within the three elementary schools of the small, K-12 Cedar Creek Public School District. Cedar Creek is a highly diverse district ethnically, and the socioeconomic status of this county seat ranges from High SES to low SES. The population of the public school system, however, is predominantly low SES, with a 67% free/reduced lunch rate. At the elementary level, where this study was conducted, there is a population of approximately 726 students, and 40 professional staff members teaching Kindergarten through fifth grade. The size of each school determined the respective representation on the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee (see Appendix E). The smallest school, Cherry Grove Elementary, has one staff

representative, and the two larger elementary schools, Maple Avenue and Oak Lane, have two representatives each. Cherry Grove has a student population of 89, with only one class per grade level and seven full-time professional staff members. The two larger schools have just fewer than 300 students each. Maple Avenue has 15 full-time professional staff, and Oak Lane has 17 full-time professional staff. There are three full-time staff members who are shared between all three buildings. In addition to these staff representatives, the three elementary level members of the district professional development committee (including the researcher) and the Elementary Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction are also members.

We have a higher than average rate of teacher turnover, which has been one factor in the unsuccessful implementation of professional development programs. In order to understand the relevance of the study, it is important to understand the history, background, and unique problems relating to professional development our district has faced over the past decade. In any change initiative, it is necessary to understand the past organizational context so that we may successfully move forward to second order change (Fullan, 2001, 2007).

Currently, our district is entering its fourth year of a new administrative structure. The current administrative structure is highly top down and centralized. Previously, we were working under a site-based management model. This transitional period within the district has provided me with several excellent opportunities as a researcher, observer, and a participant to see the impact of first order change in Cedar Creek.

The leadership frameworks that are employed within my district are playing a substantial role in the design and outcome of my action research project (Bolman & Deal,

2003). The dominant structural framework of the new administration has actually made a cross district action research project such as this easier, because consistent programs, teaching methodologies, and curriculums are in place at all three elementary schools (Schein, 2004). Our current district focus is on providing consistency at all levels: program choice and implementation, leadership initiatives, policies and procedures, and professional development. District wide programs such as Differentiated Instruction, Responsive Classroom, and Professional Learning Communities are being consistently implemented from building to building, and as a result there have been some shifts in the school cultures within the three respective elementary schools (Bolman & Deal, 2003). These shifts have resulted in less cross conflict between schools, and a far less competitive and more collaborative atmosphere. This was be important within the larger scope of my change initiative as I work through my cycles, develop my Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee, and ask my colleagues to come together at the design and implementation phases of this project (Fullan, 2001, 2007; Kotter, 1995).

As I have mentioned previously, teachers' perceptions are very important in the success of anything we are trying to implement as leaders; getting this small, core group of research participants to "buy-in" to this study was critical in regards to the ultimate outcome of second order change in professional development programming. They helped to set the tone for other teachers who will become involved in the future. The committee members undoubtedly discussed the topic with teachers in the other buildings during monthly grade level meetings and common planning times. The attitudes and views of these teacher leaders naturally colored the perceptions of the rest of the staff before they even got involved with the study. I wanted to make sure that any information passed on

from this pilot group was positive in nature, and therefore considered it my responsibility to demonstrate to them that their views were actually factored into the decision-making process. Being attentive to how information is disseminated and acted upon by our professional development committee will create a more positive feedback loop (Senge, 1990) and help to redirect staff perceptions. My role as a staff member who is “on the balcony” of my organization will help me to manage organizational perceptions of the staff, and monitor the changes over time (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Schein, 2004). This position on the balcony, from the district level as a teacher working in four Cedar Creek schools, gives me a certain degree of objectivity when it comes to looking at building level leadership and management issues.

### **Research Sample and Population**

The research participants in this study varied with the phases of my research cycles. For my dissertation, I chose to take on a much larger research sample, which allowed for a greater level of involvement on the part of the teachers, as well as a sample that allowed for a greater level of generalization during my first level of analysis. At the beginning of Cycle I, 40 teachers were invited to participate in the quantitative survey, and 85% responded. From this pool of 40, a purposeful sample of 20 teachers across the three elementary schools was selected to complete the qualitative survey, and 75% responded. At the beginning of Cycle II, an eight member team from this larger group of 34 respondents met to form the Staff Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee. This is a committee that requires a significant time commitment on the part of those who volunteered, and includes teacher leaders who are motivated and dedicated to creating second order change. The staff representation within this committee was based on the

relative percentage of staff within the respective schools, in order to maintain a representative population sample. Two representatives from the smallest elementary school and three from each of the larger schools were selected on a volunteer basis. In Cycle III, all 40 district elementary staff members participated in the collaboratively designed in-service programs, and participated in the completion of the Cycle III surveys. Ten teachers (two per grade level from first grade through fifth) were included in the Cycle IV observations.

### **Change Framework**

When framing the concept of change that underlies my dissertation, connections to several theorists were made. For instance, in the book *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Michael Fullan (2001) tells us that establishing change requires one to do more than simply change the outward mechanics of a process. Without considering the people involved in the system, lasting change will be impossible. To truly understand the change process, one must take into account the system itself, and all of the stakeholders within it. The idea undergirding the process of my dissertation had this systemic bottom up ideology at its heart. Utilizing teachers' perceptions to fuel professional development choices, followed by the creation of an open, transparent process in which they were involved in not only the compilation and analysis of the data, but also in the determination of how those data were applied when it comes to making programming choices, is an example of how to take Fullan's theory and apply it to professional development programming. Fullan (2001, 2007) understands that genuine change must be systemic and long term, and not end with the tenure of one administrator, or the retirement of one charismatic teacher leader.

While my dissertation topic was conceptually grounded in Fullan's (2001) framework for change, my research cycles themselves mirrored Kotter's Eight Steps very closely, and the greatest correlation in regard to my own personal framework can be found here. In the 1995 book *Leading Change*, John Kotter takes us through his eight step model for organizational change. This process aligned closely with what was needed to form the basis of any sound action research process (Action Research Foundation, 2010).

### **Description of Action Research Study**

For my action research study, I used survey data from teachers regarding their beliefs and perceptions about professional development programming in the Cedar Creek school district. These data were subsequently used by a committee of teacher leaders and administrators to inform future professional development programming choices in order to determine what professional development options needed to be arranged for the coming school year. In order to assess whether or not this process led to the ultimate goal of improved academic achievement, classroom observations and teacher feedback were collected to inform programming for the following year. This process is set to continue on an annual basis so that our district can use staff input to inform the direction of professional development for years to come. This system became self-sustaining as a result of the regular, ongoing cycle of data collection and analysis that was triggered by this dissertation study.

The first step was to identify the current belief structure and perceptions of the elementary level staff regarding professional development programming and implementation within the district. More in-depth, honest insights from staff who

participate in these professional development experiences were needed to form a baseline of the prevailing belief structure before any further actions could be taken. This self-sustaining feedback loop resulted in targeted professional development programming for the improvement of instruction in Cedar Creek at the elementary level.

The next step of the proposed action involved taking the previously described data and creating a collaboratively designed professional development workshop based on the findings from the research. This goal was achieved through the development of the Staff Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee. The design of this committee can be found in Appendix E. Involving representative stakeholders from within the teaching staff during the data analysis and workshop design phase was an important factor in creating a self-sustaining feedback loop, as it modeled the collaborative process for staff members who would be involved in future initiatives. In addition to modeling the collaborative process, it brought teachers to an understanding of how to collect, process, and analyze data through techniques that had previously been unfamiliar to them. The purpose of this team was to analyze the data that had been collected, then design and implement a selection of professional development options that reflected the needs identified during the analysis.

I established this collaborative committee by seeking volunteers during the first phase of research, and through each phase of research continued to achieve the goal of developing a transparent, collaboratively formulated professional development programming model. Teachers' perceived this as valid and useful to their teaching due to substantially increased stakeholder buy-in. This mutually determined series of

professional development workshops were implemented in the third cycle and were developed as a result of the data collected and analyzed in Cycles I and II.

Finally, I achieved my last goal, program evaluation, in Cycle IV. These evaluations were conducted through the use of classroom observations and surveys. Follow up surveys were disseminated to participants who were involved in the earlier phases of research to determine the level of success experienced during the collaborative process. Surveys were also completed by the workshop participants to determine the impact of the professional development experience upon their needs as teachers. Both of these surveys can be found in Appendixes C and D.

## **Research Cycles**

### **Connections to Kotter**

I deliberately chose this type of action research project because I believed it to be “doable” for someone in my position and situation. When designing a research project, it is important to determine first if one can have a significant impact within one’s own sphere of influence. In John Kotter’s 1995 book *Leading Change*, an eight step model for organizational change aligns very closely with the steps of a well designed action research project. I considered all of the steps when determining the scope of this research dissertation. While I did not approach the steps sequentially, all eight were addressed in the success of this action research project. When viewing this particular research problem as an open system that is responsive to both internal and external change, these eight steps could actually be viewed as interacting components of change that overlap and reoccur in a nonlinear fashion, with certain steps happening simultaneously, and others independently (Kotter, 1995; Senge, 1990).

One important step Kotter (1995) describes when planning for change is to remove as many obstacles as possible. The collaborative planning committee itself was designed to limit the obstacles to success that would have otherwise arisen if I had tried to accomplish this project independently. My position within the Cedar Creek district also ensured that there would not be too many obstacles in my path. I am not an administrator, but I am a new member of the District Professional Development Committee, and one of my primary responsibilities in this capacity is analyzing the needs of the district staff. If I were not serving in this capacity, it would have been very difficult for me to accomplish this type of research project. The fact that this action research initiative was designed by the same people who participated in the system ensured that it would be implemented in a pragmatic, effective way (Killion, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

The scope of this research project took place over the span of a year. The short term targets Kotter (1995) writes about are more applicable to a leadership initiative that has a clear end goal. However, the idea behind creating short term wins is to maintain stakeholder buy-in and increase participant motivation for success. I think that in the case of my action research project, providing full disclosure or transparency of the process by keeping people “in the loop” had the same effect. Participants could see the logic behind the full cycle and how one element of the project related to the next, I do not believe that they became discouraged or lost motivation. People become skeptical of a process when they are not given an opportunity to see the logic behind it. In the scope of my action research dissertation, I believe the staff responses in the Cycle III surveys and the Cycle IV interviews show evidence of the short term wins for our change initiative. With each

small step, our teachers saw the change that was happening in Cedar Creek, and in turn became more supportive and optimistic.

### **Cycle I**

In order to gain the necessary support for this dissertation, I had to create a vision for change within Cedar Creek, and effectively communicate that vision to the participants (Kotter, 1995). Within the framework of the research cycles, the vision creation was actually done early on in the process. At the last faculty meeting in February 2010, the principal of the largest elementary school asked me to speak about my research project to his staff. I used it as an opportunity to remind the teachers about the end of the year survey the former professional development committee had sent out. Their responses had been overwhelming similar in voice. More direct teacher input in professional development options is needed if the workshops are ever going to be “useful.” Reminding the staff of their own self-stated desires, and tying it into the direction and scope of this research project, was an effective way to establish a vision for this project, and to convince staff why they should become involved. Following this faculty meeting, I attended the faculty meetings at the other two schools to communicate the same message, and establish district-wide support. I also recruited building representatives (teacher leaders) to disseminate my surveys to the staff members in their respective schools. These were teachers I approached to serve as committee members after the data were collected and aggregated later in the spring of 2010. Having respected teachers in each building who were supportive of the research and were able to sell the ideas to their colleagues helped to create the degree of stakeholder buy-in that was necessary to maintain the vision of this project, even if I was not in the building at the time.

In order to gain more in-depth, honest insights from staff who participate in these professional development experiences, a baseline of the prevailing belief structure was needed before any further actions could be taken. For this reason, I used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies for my research survey approach during Cycle I. The surveys I have used can be found in appendixes A and B. Both the quantitative and qualitative surveys asked participants to identify strengths and weaknesses of past and current professional development programming. The qualitative survey asked teachers to describe, in narrative form, their personal opinions about how their instructional practice has been impacted by professional development, and to describe what changes were positive or negative. This type of survey gave participants an opportunity to express their opinions in their own words, instead of being filtered by the researcher's choice of questions and answers. Having this rich, in-depth data gave meaning to the numbers that were collected through the quantitative component of the survey, which asked participants about specific professional development experiences: Differentiated Instruction, Writers' Workshop, Curriculum Mapping, MAP Testing, and Responsive Classroom. There were also sections that assessed participants' opinions regarding the roadblocks and inhibitors they face when trying to implement new learning in the classroom.

The surveys were administered to 40 teachers via district mail to maintain participant confidentiality. Surveys were coded for building and grade level so that the data could later be looked at broken down by school or grade level. This entire data collection and coding phase lasted approximately six weeks. Participants were given a two-week time frame to return and complete the surveys. At that point, 85% of the

quantitative surveys and 75% of the qualitative surveys were returned. Over the course of the next four weeks, quantitative data were coded using the SPSS system, while the qualitative data were hand coded into thematic strands that correspond to the sections of the quantitative survey. Analysis of the data followed using concurrent triangulation strategy. This method was modeled for the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee at the beginning of Cycle II.

During this initial survey phase, I also took field notes regarding implementation issues, complications, and observations that helped me adjust and redirect any unforeseen problems for the next three cycles. In addition to establishing a baseline of opinions and beliefs of elementary staff within our district for this dissertation study, this phase of research also filled a district need to collect and analyze staff data for purposes of instructional improvement within the schools. The skills and knowledge base for this type of data analysis is something that had been lacking among both staff and administration, and as a result has been avoided in previous years.

From a leadership standpoint, Cycle I helped to bring focus to the sense of urgency Kotter (1995) describes as a necessary precursor to any change initiative. Creating a sense of urgency within my dissertation topic was made easier by the fact that there was already a sense of urgency, in the form of severe discontent, with the way things were being done presently regarding our professional development programming. We had at least eight major long-term professional development programs going concurrently throughout the elementary level. Many of these programs were either partially implemented without follow through, were not directly helping teachers improve classroom instruction, or were state mandated and were perceived as serving a

managerial purpose rather than an instructional one. There are limited professional development days built into the calendar as it is, which caused teachers to become genuinely frustrated when they do not perceive those days as being “used wisely.” We were being provided with a record number of professional development experiences, but very few of them were helping us raise test scores. “Why are we doing this?” was the refrain heard over and over again in each of the three elementary schools. My Cycle I surveys identified the specifics of teachers’ perceptions of all of these major initiatives, and our Cycle II research team took into consideration these views when developing more targeted programs in the future.

## **Cycle II**

After the initial survey data were collected, I selected staff on a volunteer basis to form the Staff Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee. The nine-member committee structure and breakdown of staff representation from the three district elementary schools can be found in Appendix E. The staff representation within this committee was based on the relative percentage of staff within the school.

The purpose of this committee was to ensure collaborative involvement, stakeholder buy-in, and transparency of process as early on as possible in the research project. The committee members were chosen on a first response basis. Among this committee’s responsibility during Cycle II was the collaborative analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from elementary staff surveys. In order to aide in this process, I introduced committee members to the student version of the SPSS system during our meetings to show them effective ways to analyze the quantitative survey data. I also familiarized them with the qualitative coding process I used to identify the thematic

strands within our survey data. In order to ensure the positive feedback reinforcement that can be derived from the feedback loop system, it is necessary to model desired behaviors to encourage the desired outcome (Senge, 1990). If committee members see this mode of processing the data as accessible and useful, they will be more likely to incorporate these techniques during future data collection phases.

After learning the basics of data coding, committee members then interpreted the results of the staff surveys as they relate to the success of our current professional development programming. This served several purposes: to familiarize staff members with data analysis techniques that they can apply to their own learning and use in future initiatives, to demystify the research process for teachers who are previously unfamiliar with it, to inform the programming of our future professional development programming as a district, and lastly, to ensure transparency and a vested interest in the professional development process. This cycle in the research process is what Kotter (1995) would have referred to as “Forming a Powerful Coalition.” As a member of the district level professional development committee and the only teacher who represents all three elementary schools, I was in a unique position not only to oversee this research project, but to encourage stakeholder buy in regarding the relevance of the process. After collecting and aggregating the data in a format that could be shared with my colleagues, the next cycle of my research process was to establish the Staff Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee. It is with the help of this committee that I will analyze, synthesize, and draw conclusions about how we should take this data and apply it to the creation of a professional development training that will provide teachers with what they believe they need based on their perceptions of what works in the classroom. This teacher

coalition, along with the partnership of the district professional development committee, will continue to build the sense of urgency and maintain the momentum that is needed for change to take place. This collaborative process was documented through researcher notes and reflective journaling.

### **Cycle III**

The committee became directly involved in the design and implementation of a professional development experience for elementary level staff based on the findings from the research in the previous cycles. This professional development experience was decided on by the committee, but organized and scheduled with the assistance and oversight of the elementary level curriculum supervisor, who enthusiastically gave her approval for the process. Trainings were arranged so that teachers could cycle through six different workshops over the course of a three-day span. One workshop addressed the concerns expressed in the surveys about Curriculum Mapping. The need to make such a time consuming initiative relevant to instruction was obvious to all on the committee. Our curriculum supervisor ran a workshop that showed teachers how to use curriculum maps in place of lesson plans. This met the next level requirements of our Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) mapping requirement, and enabled us to do away with the bureaucratic redundancies that teacher's perceived as "getting in the way of instruction." The Writers' Workshop program that was given high marks by teachers the previous year was expanded across the district to encompass all teachers who are responsible for teaching Literacy and Language Arts. In the previous year's program design, only 35% of the teachers were allowed to participate in this training. Follow up trainings in Responsive Classroom and Differentiated Instruction, which were each in

their second year of implementation, were included as well. We also brought in a representative to show teachers how to effectively align MAP test data results to specific skill sets that need to be taught in the classroom. The theme of each workshop within the rotation met a need that was identified by the committee while analyzing and interpreting the survey data during the Cycle II meetings.

Using this team approach, and allowing ourselves to be guided by the survey data when designing the in-service days ensured that the process remained transparent and collaborative, and that staff members were given input at every phase of the research project. In each phase, the collaborative process was documented through researcher field notes taken during meetings. Reflective journaling was also done afterwards. Workshop participants were surveyed after each in-service experience so that the cycle of data collection and analysis continued to guide the direction of programming decisions throughout the course of the dissertation project.

#### **Cycle IV**

The fourth cycle of my research was program evaluation. The evaluations were conducted through the use of classroom observations by committee members in order to assess implementation of workshop content; and two follow-up surveys: one each for committee members and workshop participants. A sampling of 12 workshop participants and four committee members were also selected for follow up interviews at the end of Cycle IV. The first survey was for workshop participants to determine whether or not the experience during the in-service days was beneficial and met the needs identified by participants in the initial opinion survey. This survey assessed participants' attitudes and knowledge gained, and the classroom observations verified that the workshop content

was implemented, ensuring the ultimate outcome of student learning (see Appendix D). The other survey was specifically for committee members (see Appendix F). The purpose of the interviews was to both triangulate the data and to gain more insight on the successes of our workshops, and my impact as a leader (see Appendix G and H). Cycle III workshop participants were interviewed to find out more about what impact teacher's perceived our committee as having on professional development. The committee again analyzed the data collected from the Professional Development Workshop Evaluation, which identified how the newly gained knowledge could be applied in the classroom setting. The second survey (Appendix F) assessed the experience of the collaborative committee and how this impacted their views on leadership. Data from both surveys were coded by hand, and interviews were conducted with an audio recording device and transcribed by hand.

Launching any new program or initiative in a school is a great idea in the beginning. If that idea does not become systemic, it will only ever be a great idea. This action research project was designed to be self-sustaining. Each year, data will be "reevaluated." In future years, committee members will again take stock of what did and did not work when implemented in the classroom. Each time, changes will be made; imperfections tweaked, and new needs addressed. Building on the change represents the long-term commitment that leads to second order change. Open feedback loops naturally lend themselves to change building, and are continually advancing in what Senge (1990) refers to as a "virtuous cycle." Change building happens internally as players in the system begin to see the larger picture, how the system operates, and their role within it. The benefits of systemic change as it is derived from a feedback loop is that the process

itself is visible and transparent, allowing the dysfunctional elements to be identified and removed, which in turn continues to accelerate the pace of the change (Senge, 1990).

All of this information on the successes and failures of this new professional development programming model was applied to next year's programming choices. In order to develop a feedback loop that is self-sustaining rather than self-limiting, this cyclical process must remain an open system, one that takes in new information and incorporates it into the next cycle so that it may grow in response to the needs of the organization (Senge, 1990). By using staff perceptions and beliefs about professional development as the impetus for systemic change, we are impacting the culture of our professional development programming from within, thereby anchoring the changes within the culture of our district (Kotter, 1995). Within his explanation of step eight, Kotter addresses the hard reality that many things that are important in a district tend to go by the wayside due to expediency. All corporate structures are change resistant, and school systems are no exception. Even though I successfully established stakeholder buy-in, an effective system of data analysis, and a responsive professional development training model, I still must make sure that I am not inhibited by structural or cultural elements that are outside of my control. This is where my position on the committee will truly become beneficial. As we establish a mode of practice and a protocol for this process, the responsibility for maintaining the research cycles and cross-collaboration that had been established during the initial phases can remain with the professional development committee. The best way to safe guard the process against structural influences is to incorporate the process into the responsibilities of a preexisting, widely accepted structure. Finally, I also analyzed these data independently for the purposes of

learning about my own leadership by reflecting upon the course of this action research dissertation.

### **Description of Leadership Study**

The ultimate goal of this action research study was to improve academic achievement within the classroom setting at the elementary level through the design and implementation of a self-sustaining feedback loop that informed the Cedar Creek School District's professional development programming. In systems thinking, a feedback loop is a much broader concept than just gathering of opinions. It refers to a reciprocal flow of influence, or a cause-effect relationship (Senge, 1990). Feedback loops help us to "face dynamically complex issues and strategic choices, especially when individuals, teams and organizations need to see beyond events and into the forces that shape change" (Senge, 1991, p. 74).

Targeted, responsive professional development that is strategically designed, properly implemented, and assessed for effectiveness using data collected from participants through a reciprocal, transparent process has a substantially greater chance of changing classroom practice than the traditional top down programming model (Collinson & Cook, 2000; Quick et al., 2009; Runyon, 2009). As leaders, the best way to shape school conditions and teaching practices is through our actions regarding teaching and professional development (Goldberg, 2004; Hattingh & deKock, 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). School leaders who find ways to connect their schools to sources of professional development that focus on instruction and student outcomes that encourage the open giving and receiving of feedback that is sustained and continuous are more successful at creating the necessary conditions that promote teacher learning quality

(Baker et al., 2004; Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Garet et al., 2001; Klingner et al., 2004; Little & Houston, 2003; Ransford et al., 2009; Santangelo, 2009).

Due to the nature of this four cycle action research study, my own self reflective analysis of my leadership was cyclical as well. An important component of this leadership analysis was a continuation of the journaling that I have been doing since the inception of this research proposal. Journaling helped me to reflect back on issues and factors that impact not only my own leadership, but the factors that impacted the outcome of this action research project. At various points throughout the action research cycles, participants in the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee, as well as workshop participants, were surveyed and interviewed to determine the success of the change initiative (see Appendix F, G, and H). Data were collected in Cycles I, III, and at the end of Cycle IV, each time for the purpose of assessing the success of the action research project. The very last phase of assessment came through Cycle IV classroom observations (Appendices D, I, and J), surveys, and interviews to determine the degree to which the intervention program was being applied within the classroom setting, and to assess my effectiveness as a leader. Through all of these various forms of assessment I was able to collect valuable information with which to study my leadership.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Triangulation of the data came through the combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. This occurred during Cycles I, II, IV, individually as the researcher during Cycle I and collectively as a committee during Cycles II and IV. In order to interpret the coded data, a specific strategy known as concurrent triangulation

strategy was used. This is an approach specific to mixed-methodology studies in which the researcher uses the qualitative and quantitative data collected simultaneously, and then compares the two pools of data for convergences, differences, or some combination of the two (Creswell, 2009).

For instance, my quantitative data helped me to gain a broad consensus of teachers' overall opinions regarding specific professional development experiences using hard numbers: how many participants were involved throughout the district, the individual and collective opinions of each professional development program they have participated (or not participated) in over the last three years based on a rating scale, what their level of experience is within the district, and a rating scale assessment of the main inhibitors they experience when it comes to successfully implementing their training experiences. This quantitative approach allowed me to see who has not been included in the district's professional development trainings, as well as provide my study with a substantial level of breadth throughout all three elementary schools. My qualitative data, on the other hand, provided me with a richer, deeper level of insight into specific problems with certain trainings or providers, informing me as to how professional development experiences have improved, or gotten worse over the years, and allowed me to more effectively "read between the lines" or interpret the numbers that I saw within the accompanying qualitative data. As I coded my Cycle I data into themes in Chapter V of this dissertation, these themes became contextualized in relation to each other, providing me with a more complete picture of the elementary staff's perceptions toward professional development within Cedar Creek.

My reason for using concurrent triangulation strategy was to glean the strengths of each individual strategy while offsetting their weaknesses at the same time (Creswell, 2007, 2009). During Cycle II, the committee's analysis of the very same data served the function of member checking, creating an even greater degree of validity, as five of the nine committee members were Cycle I survey respondents (Hinchey, 2008). Glesne (2006) describes member checking as "the sharing of transcripts, analytical thoughts or drafts with research participants to ensure that you are representing them accurately." The next round of data to be analyzed came about at the end of Cycle III, after teachers had been surveyed about their professional development experiences during the November in-service week.

In Cycle II of this dissertation, I used a different process altogether. My role in Cycle II was observational rather than participatory. I relied primarily on anecdotal note taking to form my assessments of the results of Cycle II. This involved not only the recording of exactly what transpired between committee members, but also what my reactions or thoughts were in relation to the events I was witnessing. My goal in Cycle II was to allow the committee members' opinions, beliefs, and assessments about the Cycle I data to dominate the process. These teachers were all at a high readiness level for decision making, and a collaborative, transparent process where my views and opinions were kept out of the discussion was the best way to ensure staff leadership of the committee (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985).

### **Conclusion**

As a researcher, concurrent triangulation strategy allowed me to gain an overall understanding of teachers' beliefs and perceptions towards their professional

development experiences, which allowed me to develop an intervention based on actual classroom instructional experiences and the wide ranging needs of the teaching staff (Creswell, 2009; Hinchey, 2008). The combined use of both the qualitative and quantitative frameworks enabled me to glean the strengths of both types of data in a way that would not have been possible using one or the other independently (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative basis of this study lay in post-positivist knowledge claims, and is demonstrated through pre and post test measures to determine attitudes and assumptions before and after an action research project, as I have done in cycles I and IV (Creswell, 2009). The use of qualitative data allowed me to look at the relationship among the variables in the teachers' responses, as well as helping me to make connections between changes in their perceptions and beliefs from one cycle of research to the next. As a participant observer in the process, I had to control for researcher bias through triangulation as it was built into the design of the research project. Using several different forms of data collection, such as surveys, field notes, reflective journaling, interviews and committee leadership at various stages in the research were the methods with which I controlled for researcher bias (Glesne, 2006).

Through this four cycle action research study, I have addressed the need that exists within the highly diverse Cedar Creek Public School District for a responsively designed system of professional development programming which has improved classroom instruction for the ultimate goal of raising student achievement at the elementary level (Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000). The development and sustained use of an open, transparent feedback-loop process brought about through

this action research dissertation will help to ensure that instructional improvement is driven by what is successful in the classroom (Senge, 1990).

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

#### **Cycle I**

##### **Cycle I Overview**

The ultimate purpose of my dissertation was to improve the outcomes and success rates of professional development programs within Cedar Creek for the ultimate goal of raising student achievement. Developing an open, transparent process that used teacher feedback to inform responsive, targeted training to the greatest areas of deficit helped to ensure instructional improvement and student learning outcomes (Garet et al., 2001; Helsing, 2007; Lohman, 2000). The most effective way to achieve this outcome was through the use of action research (Creswell, 2009; Hinchey, 2007).

Action research is defined as a form of research conducted by those inside a community (teachers, administrators, community members) rather than by outside experts (Hinchey, 2007). This type of research includes a process of systematic inquiry consisting of information gathering, analysis, and reflection. The initial phases of this type of inquiry must include a gathering, or assessment of the data that will affect the outcome, or choice of action research intervention to be implemented (Creswell, 2009). In this case, the outcome resulted in impacting a change upon teacher's perceptions of their professional development experiences by creating a more responsive, open system feedback loop with which we informed our elementary level programming. In systems thinking, no one person is responsible for the outcome of a situation. Since decision making is shared, so are the results of the feedback process, thereby allowing the

participants to shape not only the direction of the process, but the reality of the organizational culture (Senge, 1990).

Successful action research, as well as an effectively implemented, responsive feedback loop, both result in a paradigm shift - a change in belief so profound as to completely alter the way individuals within a given organization perceive it (Hinchey, 2008; Senge, 1990). Although systemic, second order change can take between five and seven years to achieve (Fullan, 2001), this year-long action research endeavor marked the beginning stage of what was a long-term strategy for professional development programming within the Cedar Creek School District. The participant data collected in Cycle IV show that our committee's change initiative thus far has made an impact on teachers' views and perceptions of their professional development experiences.

### **Cultural and Structural Influences**

For a genuine paradigm shift to take place in Cedar Creek's staffs' perceptions of professional development it was necessary to take into consideration the factors that impact the organization's culture and beliefs when analyzing these Cycle I data. The artifacts, the espoused beliefs and values of the Cedar Creek Staff, as well as the underlying assumptions about teachers' collective and individual experiences formed the basis of the perceptions which were changed through this action research intervention (Schein, 2004). Survey respondents in Cycle I share the collective espoused belief that their professional development has become disconnected from instruction. Their shared value was to have a return to the more site-based, personalized trainings that correlated more directly with classroom instruction. Some inhibitors to progress faced by our committee were cultural, while others were structural in nature (Bolman & Deal, 2003;

Schein, 2004). The cultural norm previously established within Cedar Creek's professional development practices was a mood of malcontent disengagement. Teachers felt strongly that professional development programming had gotten worse, but had resigned themselves to the reality of the changes. Changing the school culture regarding professional development practice was a desired effect of the second order change that resulted from this dissertation study (Fullan, 2001).

In regard to the structural inhibitors our committee had to contend with, an ineffective, poorly managed transition from a site-based, human resource leadership model five years ago to a top down, structural management frame created a lot of changes in teachers' attitudes towards their professional development training. The distinct separation of three different elementary schools run by three different administrators created further complications from a management perspective. A baseline of these perceptions and beliefs was established through the use of quantitative and qualitative survey data in order to identify a workable path to change. The "Resources & Management" and "Quality of Experiences" sections of the survey were beneficial for gathering information about teachers' opinions regarding the structural and managerial influences that informed their professional development choices. The narrative survey data, as well as the quantitative survey sections "General Opinions" and "Opinions of Specific Professional Development Trainings" allowed me to assess the impact of our teachers' common experiences. When we apply the concept of cultural norms development to a group that has a shared history, it is this collective experience that forms the basis for the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of the teachers in Cedar Creek (Schein, 2004).

## **Quantitative Survey**

In February of 2010, 44 quantitative surveys and 20 qualitative surveys were sent through district mail to Kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school teachers in Cedar Creek (see Appendix A). Thirty-four out of 44 staff members responded to the quantitative survey, which was divided into four main sections: General information, opinions of specific trainings, resources and management, and quality of experiences. The survey contained a total of 18 questions.

The first section asks participants for general information: how many years of teaching experience do they have, and the general perceptions they currently hold about their professional development experiences. The second section zeroed in on five specific initiatives that had been the focus of kindergarten through fifth grade professional development programming over the last three years. The participants' responses regarding these initiatives are illustrated in Table 1. The majority of our district's resources (time and funding) have been targeted at these six distinct programs: Differentiated Instruction, Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop, Map Testing (Data Driven Instruction), Professional Learning Community (PLC) Meetings, Curriculum Mapping, and PD 360©. An effective baseline analysis of our professional development programming at Cedar Creek must take into account the success level of any training within these eight areas. Through this survey, both the level of effectiveness and overall participation rates among staff were determined.

The third component of the quantitative survey, Resources and Management, assessed teachers' beliefs about factors influencing professional development implementation. In other words, to what extent did staff believe things like funding,

administrative support, class coverage, and scheduling conflicts impact their success when it comes to implementing newly acquired skills? This section had more to do with the structural inhibitors that impacted an educator's day to day success in the classroom than it did with the actual quality of the workshop, and was included to supply the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee with relevant logistical data when planning for the Cycle III workshops. Nonetheless, the previous review of the literature had shown it to be equally as important in determining outcomes of success (Baker et al., 2004; Helsing, 2007; McCarthy, 2000; Santangelo, 2009; Stevenson, 2007).

The last section of this survey aimed to determine whether Cedar Creek staff believed that there was any sort of correlation between who provided the professional development and whether or not the training was worthwhile. I sought to find out if out-of-district, contracted service providers have a greater, less than, or equal to success rate when compared to site-based, in-house workshops. Research cites the influence of these factors as having an impact on professional development outcomes (Baker et al., 2004; McCarthy, 2000). As a professional development committee, this information helped us determine if our funds for training were well spent by bringing in outside experts, or if they were better spent in-house through a turnkey approach.

When coding the data in Cycle I, the quantitative data were examined for frequency of occurrence regarding teachers' perceptions of professional development they had participated in throughout their years in the Cedar Creek School District. In the quantitative component of the surveys, the use of SPSS allowed me to determine how many participants fell into a particular rating category within a given topic, which professional development experiences had the greatest level of participation, and the

number of teachers who had positive or negative experiences within a given category. I also coded for new teachers and veteran teachers to determine if level of teaching experience had any bearing on perception, and whether or not a substantial difference in training needs would have to be accounted for in order to develop a responsive professional development experience for the staff.

When analyzing these survey data, I was able to gain an overall general sense of the breakdown of the qualitative and the quantitative data, and then compare those two pools in relation to each other through the use of concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2009). When using concurrent triangulation, both forms of data are analyzed simultaneously (Creswell, 2009).

### **Qualitative Survey**

The qualitative data responses stemmed from three survey questions that were given to study participants.

- 1) What are your perceptions of professional development initiatives within our district? How have those perceptions changed over the course of the past few years? In your opinion, has recent professional development been more effective or less effective? Please explain in detail.
- 2) What specific initiatives most effectively meet your needs in the classroom? Please explain in detail. Are there any initiatives that have not been useful at all? If so, why?
- 3) From your perspective, what are the main obstacles you encounter when trying to implement professional development training content successfully

within the classroom setting? Please consider all angles of your needs when thinking about these obstacles.

Fourteen out of 20 qualitative surveys were returned. The qualitative data were disaggregated into general themes (Appendix B). The survey respondents' comments were then linked with corresponding themes in the quantitative survey responses. The specific comments from the qualitative data could then be linked to the themes identified within the quantitative data in order to provide more detail and a greater level of understanding to the reasons behind the survey numbers. This type of parallel analysis known as concurrent triangulation strategy in which the qualitative and quantitative data are evaluated side by side helped me and the committee to discover the underlying perceptions and beliefs behind the Cedar Creek staff's dissatisfaction with the professional development programming they were provided (Creswell, 2009). The following sections show the data that was gathered from each of the surveys, and how the quantitative and qualitative were combined for the purpose of analysis. Each theme that revealed itself through the data was addressed in a different section, as well as major topics that were found to impact staff opinions, such as teacher experience and non-participation. The factors identified through this Cycle I analysis were brought to the attention of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee as a starting point for their work in Cycle II.

### **Themes**

The narrative survey responses from the three qualitative questions were initially coded into themes based on the topic of the response. Themes were generated for each individual question, and then combined where areas of redundancy were discovered. This

was necessary due to the fact that the participants' comments, while different for each question, sometimes overlapped when writing about an issue or concern they believed was particularly important. The themes in questions one and three particularly revealed similarities due to the fact that they asked respondents to identify views and opinions of professional development in general, and encouraged participants to write about the degree of effectiveness. The most dominant theme repeated in the responses to questions one and three was the disconnect between professional development programming and instructional need. Factors such as time usage and organizational efficiency revealed itself to be the second most common theme. These themes were grouped together as they both related to administrative decision making and coordination. Minor themes that appeared in the qualitative responses of questions one and three were effective versus ineffective professional development, and poor communication of visions/expectations.

Question two was of a different nature, and asked participants to describe their experiences with, and the relevance of the training initiatives Cedar Creek had been focused on over the last several years. Five initiatives received all of the comments from this survey question: Differentiated Instruction, Curriculum Mapping, Responsive Classroom, grade level planning meetings, and Lucy Calkin's Writers' Workshop. The participant comments from these qualitative surveys and the general themes were merged together during Cycle I to gain a clearer picture of Cedar Creek staff views and opinions of professional development. These opinions are described in the following sections.

## Baseline Data

**Impact of experience.** The baseline data gleaned from this survey identified that 21 out of 34, or 62% of survey respondents had been teaching for more than 10 years. Sixteen out of 34, or 47% of survey respondents stated that their general perceptions of professional development experiences were less than adequate. Only four out of 34 stated that their experiences had been generally very positive. According to the statistical cross-tabulation chart, which compared teachers' level of experience with their satisfaction level, 70% of the teacher respondents with more than 10 years of experience were dissatisfied with their professional development experiences (see Table 1). None of the teachers with less than five years of experience described their professional development as less than adequate.

Table 1

*Experience Teaching/ General Perceptions Cross-Tabulation*

	Less than Adequate	Adequate	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive
Less than 5 years	0	2	3	0
5 to 10 years	1	2	3	2
More than 10 years	14	2	3	1
Total	15	6	9	3

One novice teacher expressed her attitude towards professional development in this way:

Just starting out as a teacher with a very traditional approach, I have been able to find beneficial nuggets of knowledge in most of the trainings we

have gone to. Whatever I can add to my repertoire to improve my teaching is a good thing.

Veteran teachers, unlike novice teachers, have a greater degree of experience, and also a higher readiness level for staff training (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). This increased level of experience leads to an increased level of pragmatism, and a keener sense of what will work in the classroom setting. Veteran teachers also have a larger repertoire of knowledge, and are more likely to view workshop content as redundant (Killion, 2003). In the specific case of Cedar Creek, our teachers are also comparing current professional development to the past practice of site-based management, in which they had more control over decision-making.

Years ago, we used Mr. Levine's idea of grand rounds to discuss student needs and strategies for dealing with a student. This was time well spent, brainstorming and reaching some workable ideas for the individual child. This was one initiative that worked across grade levels to help with issues that needed to be addressed and solved now, not after years of implementation. We have lost our ability to address problems hands on.

In addition to what is perceived as loss of control, several other reasons behind this dissatisfaction among veteran teachers can be determined from the narrative comments. One participant stated that "in the past, we were given time for follow up sessions. Now, a new topic is introduced and never seen again." Another participant expressed a very similar comment in the following manner:

I have done many different trainings in my two years: DI [differentiated instruction], RC [responsive classroom], curriculum mapping, PD360©, Writers' Workshop, NJAGC [New Jersey Achievement Gap Consortium]. After my initial involvement, we moved on to other things.

Due to the amount of time they have spent within the education system, these respondents were able to hone in on the research-backed idea that second order change is achieved through long-term, focused investments, which are reinforced through the use

of quality programs and sustaining them over time (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Fullan, 2001). The development of a self-sustaining feedback loop that promotes systemic change in professional development programming is the key to changing the outcomes, and therefore the perceptions of these teachers (Senge, 1990).

**Disconnect from instruction.** As mentioned previously, disconnection from instruction was identified as a problem with a greater degree of frequency than any other. In the quantitative survey responses, this idea manifests as a general malcontent within the section titled, “Opinions of Specific PD Trainings,” in which the majority of participants checked that they did not feel a particular training was at all useful. This was particularly noticeable in the area of Curriculum Mapping, in which 62% of the participants cited the program as having no use. When looking at the data, these sections can be distinguished from those which received low scores due to lack of participation. The qualitative comments from the narrative surveys shed light on the tremendous level of dissatisfaction with the program. One participant cited that “mandated curricular experiences like this [curriculum mapping] are seldom, if ever, connected to instruction in a meaningful way.” In an attempt to describe the superficiality they perceive in Cedar Creek’s professional development, one participant wrote that over the years,

PD [professional development] has become an inch deep and a mile wide. It used to be more focused and effective, there was less of this trying to do 20 things at once and not doing any of it right.

The data collected from the resources and management section of the quantitative survey revealed that 62% of the respondents believe that lack of training on topical areas that are relevant to their job performance have the most significant impact on their success as a teacher. An additional 26% believe it had some impact, but not enough to

ultimately undermine their success. The belief that top down, external mandates are not the best solution for the implementation of systemic, second order change is evident in the growing body of research citing the success of site-based initiatives and professional learning communities (Killion, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Youngs & King, 2002). Based on the quotes above, it is fairly evident that many Cedar Creek teachers still held that perception at the time of the Cycle I survey. This is not to say, however, that large scale change initiatives (like a strategic plan) cannot be successful in achieving reform within school districts. Whole scale reform efforts can be successful as long as these reforms focus on the capacity building of staff in the form of skills development, instructional pedagogy, and program coherence (Ransford et al., 2009; Wayne et al, 2009). It is evident from the survey data that teachers did not believe Cedar Creek professional development was focused on these three elements at the time the Cycle I survey was distributed, but that it merely “correlates on the surface, and has largely been dictated to us by state requirements and external initiatives.”

It is clear that teachers who have been in the district for more than 10 years have witnessed the change from a site-based programming model to a top down model. Top down programming models are less likely to result in effective professional development (Desimone et al, 2002; Goldberg, 2004; Olmstead, 2007; Quick et al, 2009).

**Impact of time and organizational efficiency.** The second most important factor identified by survey respondents was time. According to research, school leaders who are successful with implementing professional development programs sustain a high level of capacity in part by establishing organizational and scheduling structures that promote teacher learning and effectiveness (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Olmstead, 2007).

Clearly, Cedar Creek survey respondents see the connection between poor planning, poor organization, and inefficient, ineffective leadership:

Sometimes they [administration] schedule trainings in allotted areas where we are already finished and our grade level teams sit around the whole day and don't know what to do.

I haven't been invited to attend a lot of PD workshops. If we are spending so much money on teacher training, how come I haven't gotten any?

Under the larger umbrella of time, participants identified basic lack of professional development days available for scheduling trainings, as well as the amount of time allotted for initiatives already begun. There was also attention to how time was used. One participant stated that,

Delivery of the Curriculum Mapper© training is so segmented and disjointed, with no discussion or connection to what has been learned previous sessions, before or after each training, that from one month to the next, I can't retain any of it.

Lack of time not only impacts how many programs can be offered overall, but the level of effectiveness of the ones we are already implementing. The concept of time within a school, or any organization, is complex and dynamic. It is one of the greatest constraints to any change process (Collinson & Cook, 2000). Many participants connected this use of time to organizational planning and administrative coordination. Another participant marveled at the delivery of a professional development initiative that was offered at the beginning of the school year:

This is too little, too late! Why do they [administration] introduce topics two days before they want them implemented in the classroom? Where was this information in June when we held grade level planning meetings for next year's strategy?

The above quote certainly illustrates the correlation between use of time and administrative organization. Much of the data in this theme ties into some participants' conceptions of time at Cedar Creek and how we could best make use of it. The idea that as an organization we use our time inefficiently and ineffectively was brought up by teachers, because segmented delivery of content with no time for discussion or independent time to plan for classroom implementation of new strategies has been a pervasive problem for the past few years. Several teachers articulated the problem of having more and more requirements to meet within the schedule, but the same amount of hours to do everything. "Responsibilities are continually increased, but nothing is ever taken away" was the quote from one teacher respondent.

The last theme identified in the question three data describes teachers concerns regarding "instructionally relevant professional development." These concerns were often couched within the same comments in which respondents' addressed concerns about highly prescriptive, state mandates taking over our professional development programming:

Often, the key to effective professional development is the small group coaching that happens after the in-service session- we rarely get this! We need to stop using Professional development as something to fill a time slot or meet a state mandate.

It has been suggested by several researchers that nurturing and developing site based initiatives is likely to result in greater impact on instructional practice than external initiatives will (Klingner et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001). During Cycle II and III it was necessary as a committee to find ways to accomplish meeting the needs of both kinds of mandates, external and in-house.

**Opinions of specific professional development trainings.** In the second section of the quantitative survey regarding teachers' opinions of specific professional development trainings, it was evident that our leadership team had not been successful in delivering professional development experiences that teachers had deemed useful. Very few of the trainings were seen as being highly effective by survey respondents, although further analysis of the data showed that the reasons behind the dissatisfaction varied from program to program. The components that create sound professional development programs are as unique and individual as the districts and schools that are implementing them, and each must be examined within its own context (Klingner et al., 2004). One initiative, Curriculum Mapping, received the worst response from teachers. Of the 34 respondents, 79% said Curriculum Mapping was not at all useful for teaching or that the training was inadequate and they needed to know more about the system. This initiative had taken 70% of our professional development hours the previous year. One teacher commented that, "hours and hours had been spent mapping out a curriculum that had no impact on what was going on in the classroom."

While very few trainings were cited as being highly effective, with the exception of curriculum mapping, the majority of respondents in the case of each initiative stated that trainings were either somewhat effective, or that more knowledge was required in order to make these experiences more effective (see Table 2). From a leadership perspective, I viewed this as a positive aspect: If we needed to provide more training to make our professional development effective, then it was a problem that had a workable solution. In Cycle II, our committee members were able to use the corresponding qualitative data to determine what, specifically, would make each professional

development experience more valuable, and ultimately have a positive impact on classroom instruction.

Table 2

*Opinions of Specific Initiatives*

34 respondents total	Highly effective trainings	Somewhat effective trainings	Inadequate; more knowledge required	Not useful for my teaching at all
Differentiated Instruction	3	15	7	6
Writers' Workshop/ Lucy Calkins	4	4	3	1
Map Testing	5	9	5	6
Curriculum Mapping	0	4	6	21
Responsive Classroom	6	11	0	1

**The impact of non-participation.** After initially coding both the quantitative and qualitative data separately, a hand written matrix was developed to compare both types of data for convergences and differences. This is the phase at which the analysis took place. In concurrent triangulation strategy, analysis and interpretation combine the two forms of data to seek convergences or similarities among the results. In this type of mixed-methods study, analysis of the quantitative and qualitative pools of data happens simultaneously (Creswell, 2009). Each form of data is used to back up the other, and provide both specifics (qualitative) and generalizations (quantitative) in order to get a more complete picture of the data.

Upon initially comparing the two pools of data, the most glaringly obvious issue was the significant disconnect between staff participation rates in the trainings that were deemed “highly effective” by the small percentage of teachers who were fortunate enough to experience them. Out of the four professional development programs that received high approval rates from teachers, only a small percentage out of 34 respondents actually participated (see Table 3). One program, the Lucy Calkin’s Writers Workshop, received the highest praise from those who attended, but was only attended by 35% of survey respondents. Several survey respondents commented that the inconvenience of the trainings was a major inhibitor to their ability to participate in the trainings, which were held over the summer. “Family obligations” and “second jobs” prevented many people from traveling the distance required for this particular training. Responsive classroom also received high marks from the small amount of teachers who were able to participate. It was intended to be a school-wide training initiative, but only classroom teachers in two grade levels out of five had been trained at that point. Cedar Creek could not afford to send the entire staff to the training at the same time, as it is very expensive and is not a turnkey program. Research has identified partial implementation of change initiatives to be a major cause of programmatic failure within school reform models (Desimone et al., 2002; Ransford et al., 2009). Forty percent of the total survey respondents were invited to this Responsive Classroom training, and 55% of the staff did not participate. An additional 32% of survey respondents stated that training had not been very effective for classroom instruction. When reviewing the qualitative comments regarding Responsive Classroom, it became clear that many teachers believed this was due to partial implementation. All 18 teachers who participated in Responsive Classroom training rated

the program either highly effective or somewhat effective. One participant, who checked that she had not participated in the training because she had not been invited, said:

This system [Responsive Classroom] can only work if it is being practiced by every teacher in the building and every paraprofessional who works with our students. To only do this half way is to undermine the effectiveness of the program altogether.

Another participant cited that it was confusing to the students who were in one class where they were using the Responsive Classroom model, and the “system was not implemented elsewhere in the school.” The actual rate of participation was significantly lower than this study alludes to, because only K-5 classroom teachers were surveyed. Not included were support staff, guidance, instructional assistants, or Art, Music, and Physical Education teachers, who all should be included if a program is to truly be implemented school wide. Professional development in these specialized areas is still, at this point, largely self-directed by individual teachers at Cedar Creek, and remains outside the scope of strategic plan initiatives. Responsive Classroom training was also very expensive, as there is a cost to train each teacher individually as opposed to a turnkey program.

Several survey respondents elaborated about why they believed they did not get to participate in workshops they felt would have been more useful to their teaching. Some common responses were “the district is over focused on external mandates,” or “it’s easier for administration to just have us all do the same thing.” Another common complaint was “the strategic plan is for show instead of instructional improvement.” The strategic plan is a community designed smorgasbord of initiatives the district is involved in, and is currently the source of the majority of professional development options provided to teachers. Few, if any of the items on the list were derived from a standpoint

of instructional need that had been identified by the teaching staff. In order to help teachers to see the relevance of the strategic plan initiatives and how they can improve their success in the classroom, we must take the perceptions and beliefs expressed by teachers and connect them to the larger needs of the district by using collaborative leadership to redirect our programming in Cycle II.

Table 3

*Impact of Non-participation*

	Non-Participation Among survey respondents (N=34)	Percentage of Total Respondents who did not participate
Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop	22	65%
MAP Testing	17	50%
Responsive Classroom	16	47%

**Effective versus ineffective professional development.** Embedded within the largely negative survey responses were a few selected insights describing what Cedar Creek teacher's perceive as effective, useful, and relevant in a professional development experience. The thematic strand "effective verses ineffective professional development" was interspersed fairly evenly throughout the various survey responses. In the "Quality of Experiences" section of the quantitative survey, it was revealed that 65% of respondents believed both in-house and contracted service provider trainings to be of equal quality and relevance. The key factor identified in the quantitative data regarding effective professional development was common planning time, in which 82% of the participants

stated that collaborative time to plan out training already received would make a significant difference on their success in the classroom. Many participants were able to identify where they would like to see future professional development experiences go, and in their qualitative survey responses, even made some suggestions as to how it could be accomplished. One participant described how, “Full day grade level meetings to review assessment data are more on target with meeting specific needs from the bottom up.” Another respondent expressed their need for collaboration in the following way:

Follow-up sessions after workshops that allow us to share implementation ideas with colleagues would be beneficial so that we aren’t reinventing the wheel every time a new program comes along.

Incorporating more time for staff to share ideas in a collegial atmosphere has been shown to improve teacher learning, and ultimately, student learning outcomes (Garet et al., 2001). Priority was also given to workshops or programs that provided resources to augment the trainings. Trainings which take into consideration the full scope of programmatic implementation are more likely to be viewed as beneficial (Beninghof, 2006; Killion, 2002).

When instructors (whether in house or not) provide resources and collaboration has occurred in workshops, I have benefited the most. I am able to take the information and immediately translate the content into classroom use. Without resources, sometimes the information goes on the back burner and I never get back to it.

Responses within this theme reflected what teachers, in their own words, believed to be the most effective and least effective professional development experiences.

Teachers responding to this survey had received training in twelve major initiatives over the past four years. Only four programs were mentioned by some research participants as being effective: 1) Differentiated Instruction, 2) Responsive Classroom, 3) Grade Level

Planning Meetings, and 4) Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop. These trainings, although viewed in a positive light, had not been offered consistently, or to all of the teachers.

Differentiated Instruction training, which had been a district turnkey program, was perceived favorably as it is "vital for everyday use in the classroom." Another comment that showed up several times regarding differentiated instruction related to its role in helping teachers reach a wide variety of students through the use of previously unknown instructional strategies. Cedar Creek has been working hard to close the achievement gap within our diverse student population, and creating differentiated classrooms is one way we have been exposing children to a higher level of rigor in our elementary schools (Anyon, 1981; Beninghof, 2006). Over the last year, Cedar Creek has begun to mainstream more and more of our self-contained students. A teacher who did not have a special education background commented that this type of training "gives me a greater sense of confidence when working with a student population whose needs are greater or different than what I am used to."

Responsive Classroom was also perceived positively by teachers for some of the same reasons. Comments such as, "Good for everyday use" and "vital to instruction" were the deciding factors for teachers in determining the relevance of this program. One respondent even wrote that the training had, "enjoyed administrative support and follow up" as a primary reason why they felt the training was effective. This comment reinforces the pragmatic nature of Cedar Creek teachers' concerns, and reinforces why administrative support is so often cited as a determining factor in the success of professional development implementation (Penuel et al., 2007; Youngs & King, 2002).

Grade level professional development (also referred to as planning meetings by some respondents) was viewed favorably as well. This is not a specific initiative run by the district, and was not one of the categories listed in the quantitative survey. The fact that it was listed repeatedly when teachers were given an opportunity to write down what they perceived as important shows the weight this type of opportunity is given by our staff. Teachers get their best ideas when they are working collaboratively, not in isolation (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008). The sharing of talents and tips, as well as the opportunity to gain insights into classroom needs and learn from other teachers' experiences can be invaluable when it comes to spreading best practices throughout a school or district (Lohman, 2000).

Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop received praise from respondents also. This program was thought to be well presented and organized by the staff members who had participated in it. Many teachers found this to be a "new instructional approach" and "a way of teaching writing that was completely unconventional." Another participant remarked that the program has "helped kids become better writers." One telling factor in the success of this program can be found in this respondent's comment:

This program is great because our Literacy Coach is trained in how to use this also. When we have grade level meetings, we can bring up whatever literacy unit we happen to be on and we can all sit there and brainstorm writing workshops that go along with the literacy topics.

In a study that determined the impact of professional development on literacy instruction in the San Diego Public School System, Quick et al. (2009) found that professional development which utilized the coaching model to implement curricular content correlated to a higher frequency of effective literacy instruction. At Cedar Creek,

our Literacy and Math coaches were involved in the planning and trainings that occurred in Cycles II and III.

When asked what particular initiatives or trainings had not been useful at all, only two programs were mentioned by survey respondents: Curriculum Mapping, and Responsive Classroom. Responsive classroom was only mentioned by one participant, who had very limited knowledge of the program, but the dissatisfaction with Curriculum Mapping was pervasive throughout the survey responses. Twenty-one out of 34 respondents believed that Curriculum Mapping was not at all useful for instruction. Curriculum Mapping was the initiative that Cedar Creek had devoted close to 70% of the district's overall professional development hours to over the last two years. The reasons cited for Curriculum Mapping's lack of effectiveness were numerous. Many participants were concerned about the exorbitant cost of using such a system, especially considering most perceived it as serving no purpose when it comes to teaching:

The system [Curriculum Mapper©] is expensive and useless. Not only is it irrelevant to instruction, but special education teachers within the district can't even use it. We deliver a different curriculum to each one of our students depending on their IEP.

The idea that Curriculum Mapper© “allows for limited teacher input” and “doesn't connect to classroom instruction” were other concerns voiced by teachers over and over again in the qualitative survey. This program was perceived by teachers as a one size fits all curriculum prescription to fill a state mandate.

**Communication of vision.** The last minor theme that was addressed in the survey responses drew attention to the lack of communication with administrators, and their perceived ineffectiveness when it comes to articulating a leadership vision for instructional change. Several participants echoed the concern of this teacher:

There is no communication with administration on who is supposed to be doing what, and why we are doing it. People don't see a connection between their professional development experiences and what they need to do in the classroom. This lack of communication makes my job very difficult.

In his 1995 book *Leading Change*, John Kotter describes the importance of clearly articulating ones' vision for any leadership initiative. This is also an instrumental step in achieving stakeholder buy-in within an organization. In Cedar Creek, lack of communication on the part of administration is considered to be a major obstacle to progress:

The greatest obstacle I've encountered is administrative support. Messages or visions are not well communicated across the district and makes my job very difficult. Another obstacle is continuity. Many times I feel decisions regarding PD [professional development] are either a knee jerk reaction to fill gaps, used to check off items listed on the strategic plan, or not seen through.

In the Resources and Management section of the quantitative survey, 94% of the respondents stated that administrative support had an impact on their success with professional development. Of these respondents, 55% said the impact was significant enough to undermine their success altogether. It is telling to read the comment above within the context of what this teacher defines as administrative support. Something as simple as lack of communication, even though it is not an overt form of resistance, can be interpreted as a denial of support when it comes to district program implementation. Professional growth for teachers is a process that involves multiple dimensions, and because of this teachers perceive administrative support in many different ways (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006). For the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee, this illustrated the importance of communicating our vision to the committee in Cycle II, when this issue needed to be addressed through the effective redirection of professional

development programming towards a self sustaining feedback loop which will result in systemic, second order change (Fullan, 2003; Senge, 1990).

### **Interpretation and Analysis**

A major factor that revealed itself through comparing these two pools of data was that, from a leadership standpoint, there was a tendency for us to over generalize our programming options for staff, and only provide training for limited numbers of people. This is a common problem experienced by district leadership teams when implementing programs in highly centralized school districts (Orrill, 2006; Penuel et al., 2007). This occurred for a myriad of reasons, including time constraints, lack of funding, and poor articulation of our leadership vision. Quantitative data showed that we suffered from low participation rates, and the qualitative data demonstrated that some of the training provided was not instructionally relevant. As a K-12 district with limited resources, but a wide variety of staff needs, there is a perception that we have often purchased well packaged, prefabricated, expensive programs that had generalized content due to the fact that they were easily stretched to appear relevant to a diverse teacher population, and require little planning or forethought on the part of administration. These ideas are reflected in much of the qualitative survey data described in this cycle, and the high percentages of teachers who, in the quantitative findings, voiced discontent with our programs demonstrate that these were not isolated opinions.

We have “streamlined” our professional development options, as evidenced by the high percentage of staff that are not involved in many of these trainings due to the nature of their job descriptions, but are still responsible for raising student achievement. These types of easily generalized programs, because of their more sophisticated

marketing and accessible descriptions, also sell well to school boards (Reeves, 2009).

Much of the survey data collected in Cycle I show that over the last five years, our focus on professional development choices became more politically motivated, and less about instruction. Many teachers believed a rigid adherence to the Strategic Plan, combined with conflicting state mandates, was behind this.

These combined factors manifest as a disconnect from actual instruction: we have pulled away from site-based, staff generated programming over the past several years and moved to a more prescribed, top-down model. This idea was backed up again and again in teacher comments, and also underlies the lack of satisfaction with the trainings teachers have experienced more recently. It is particularly evident in the data collected from veteran teachers who have been in the district for over 10 years, during a time when Cedar Creek was run under a site based management model.

This group of veteran teachers represents 21 out of 34 members of our staff population at the Kindergarten through fifth grade level. Because they represent such a large cross section of our staff population, working to impact their perceptions and beliefs was vital to the success of our professional development initiative, and in turn, to achieving second order change within the Cedar Creek School District (Fullan, 2001).

### **Cycle One Summary**

Many reasons underlie the lack of satisfaction with professional development programming at Cedar Creek. According to the survey responses collected in Cycle I, the main theme identified as the source of this dissatisfaction was the disconnection between professional development experiences and teachers' actual instructional practice (Desimone et al., 2002; Goldberg, 2004; Lachance et al., 2007). Teachers simply did not

feel that their trainings had been relevant since our district restructuring five years ago when we went from a site-based model to a top down, structurally dominant leadership frame (Schein, 2004). The theme with the second greatest rate of reoccurrence in the data was the impact of time usage and administrative organization (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Garet et al., 2001; Negroni, 2003). Days which were allotted for professional development were scarce to begin with, and what was perceived by teachers as an ineffective, poorly managed use of the precious time they do have exacerbated the problem. The third theme identified shed light on the contrast that exists between effective and ineffective professional development. Many staff members clearly articulated the importance of follow through and collaborative planning as necessary precursors to success. The final theme identified in the data was the lack of communication regarding both the vision and expectation for professional development programming. Many respondents cited that the lack of insight created by the opacity of our programming practice was a source of confusion for them.

There were many weaknesses as well as many strengths identified by Cedar Creek staff regarding specific trainings. Initiatives such as Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop, Differentiated Instruction, and Responsive Classroom were viewed as beneficial, but were not implemented in a way that allowed the programs to have a school-wide impact on instruction. Curriculum Mapping and MAP Testing were seen as being disconnected from instruction, and therefore perceived as less beneficial by teachers.

There were a couple of previously unrealized issues that were brought to light through the analysis of these data. Veteran teachers (defined on the quantitative survey as those who had been teaching for more than 10 years) were noticeably less satisfied with

the quality and direction of professional development programming in Cedar Creek than those who had been teaching less than five years. Through a comparison with the qualitative responses, it was determined that a loss of control over decision-making was the main underlying factor. Another issue that revealed itself through the data was the high percentage of teachers who did not participate in these trainings at all. There were several reasons for this: some teachers had not been invited, others could not participate because the trainings were offered at inconvenient times, and other programs were deemed too expensive to train more than a handful of participants.

In order to bring both relevance and a sense of connection and continuity to our professional development, we needed to insure that our programmatic choices were guided by what served to improve classroom instruction, and that we were genuine in our attempts to both collect, analyze, evaluate, and implement the findings of the resulting data in a transparent, cyclical fashion that would result in systemic change over time. The goal of my action research project was to identify this second order feedback loop process that would facilitate a sustainable, accountable professional development program beginning with my initial cycle of surveys. Taking these data and using them to inform our choices cleared the way for a mental model perception shift by the teaching staff, which was an integral component of the feedback loop process (Senge, 1990).

The collaboratively designed process in the following cycle was developed by the Cedar Creek Professional Development Committee and the elementary staff, leading to a subsequent data-driven, needs based professional development workshop series. This fostered accountable, sustainable input from the staff to identify and eliminate the underlying factors inhibiting successful programmatic implementation in Cedar Creek

at the elementary level. Without a sustainable, responsive system of improvement, second order change could not be achieved within Cedar Creek's professional development model.

## **Cycle II**

### **Overview of Cycle II**

The first meeting of the Staff Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee on September 9, 2010 marked the beginning of Cycle II. There was a threefold purpose to the second cycle of this action research dissertation. The first was to address the professional development needs of our staff in a way that involved teachers directly, allowing them to guide the choices and decisions directly from the data that had been collected during Cycle I. In the development of an open, systemic feedback loop, transparency of process is important to the successful outcome of the initiative (Senge, 1990). In order to establish teacher buy-in for the initiative, committee members had to become vested in the process as well as the outcome (Kotter, 1996). The second purpose was to help develop the leadership readiness of teacher leaders who volunteered for the committee (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). In order to create teacher generated programming which is developed from the ground up and can lead to systemic second order change, it was important that our Needs Assessment & Evaluation Committee members had opportunities to develop their own leadership skills and expertise (Killion, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The third purpose was to control the potential for researcher bias within the dissertation study. As a researcher and participant in the process, as well as a teacher within the Cedar Creek School District for ten years, my own personal views and history within the organization could have clouded my own

perceptions about how this action research intervention should unfold (Creswell, 2009). Allowing the committee to analyze the data independently of my own interpretations prevented this researcher bias.

This cycle was a highly collaborative process, which consisted of a series of three two and a half hour meetings in September and October. Five teacher leaders, two members of the LPDC, the curriculum supervisor, and I met to analyze and interpret the Cycle I survey data that had been collected from elementary staff members regarding their professional development experiences. Member checking of the Cycle I survey data occurred at the initial committee meeting of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee on September 2, 2010. This meeting marked the start of Cycle II of this dissertation project. The data were presented to the committee by the researcher in a coded form through the SPSS system and the hand coding format that had been utilized in Cycle I. Both the committee members and the researcher identified and analyzed the corresponding themes within the two pools of data to ensure that a parallel analysis was taking place. Our academic coaches also sat in on the committee meetings to provide feedback and help us brainstorm ideas for implementation when we began to plan for Cycle III.

The most obvious of this committee's responsibilities during Cycle II was to be involved in the collaborative analysis of the Cycle I surveys. Cycle II also served the purpose, from a leadership standpoint, of ensuring stakeholder buy-in, modeling participatory and collaborative leadership, and maintaining a transparency of process that was vital to ensuring the integrity of this action research dissertation (Killion, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

These teachers volunteered for this responsibility due to their belief that top down professional development programming in our district was not successful in bringing about instructional improvement in the classroom. A common desire to see our professional development programming become more relevant, instruction focused, and feedback driven was enticement enough for the teachers to take on this project, which involved several evening meetings on their own time, without financial compensation. The desires expressed above were articulated in depth by the committee members, who were not surprised to see those same desires echoed a common refrain among the staff as a whole, when our committee looked at the survey data. In this chapter I describe the process, concerns, issues, and the results of the analysis that arose from this collaborative endeavor.

### **Participatory Leadership: Making Lemonade**

As the researcher, I had already spent several months looking at the data by myself in isolation, so I deliberately took a backseat during the first meeting in Cycle II. After showing the committee how I developed the thematic strands from my qualitative data, and how I used the SPSS system on my laptop to code the quantitative data, I decided I would only interject myself in a leadership capacity if I felt I needed to redirect the group towards the focus of the meeting. After all, the value in allowing the committee to interpret and analyze the data at this point was to help control researcher bias, use member checking to ensure accurate representation of survey respondents ideas, establish a common vision and purpose, and of course, to gain new perspectives on the data that I had not previously noticed (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Kotter, 1995). I wanted the committee members to demonstrate their own leadership capacities, and share

the ideas and opinions they had about the data, instead of merely reinforcing my own perceptions of what I had read into the participant responses. The teachers on this committee were all operating at very high readiness levels for leadership, and each brought various areas of expertise to the group (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985).

Instead of expressing my views and opinions about the data, I used this opportunity to listen and write: I took analytic field notes on everything that was said regarding what committee members saw in the data, what they personally believed the reasons behind teachers' survey responses were, and how we could address them by making significant changes in how we use our professional development time. According to Glesne (2006), analytic field notes are beneficial to the researcher as a tool to document ideas and thoughts both during and after participant observations. I began this process during the committee meetings in Cycle II, and continued them as I observed the Cycle III workshops in November. These notes have not only helped to guide me through the research cycles of my dissertation, but will inform the reflective component of this dissertation.

I also documented complaints and opinions expressed about any issue that had relevance to our cause: managerial roadblocks, problems at the state level, and more local issues like achieving parental support when trying to maintain a sound learning environment in the classroom. As established in the literature review section of this dissertation, it is often the site-specific issues and concerns which are frequently overlooked in planning and implementation that can make or break the success of professional development initiatives (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2000; McCarthy, 2000; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Olmstead, 2007; Penuel et al., 2007;

Quick et al., 2009; Santangelo, 2009). This was not so much an analytical task, but a practical one to ensure smooth implementation as the research cycles continue. Most of the concerns expressed here by committee members were similar to what I had found in the research literature, and in my survey data.

During our first meeting, I listened to the curriculum supervisor, who is beginning her first year in this position, describe openly how she feels constrained and limited by both time, cost, and contractual obligations with the teacher's union, as well as state mandates and limited funding she feels are designed to undermine schools, not help them. In addition to personal opinions, there were some real, tangible truths behind the concerns expressed by both teachers and administration: There are a finite number of days during our school year that can be used for staff development, and certain programs that we participate in are either state mandated or controlled by forces outside our committee's sphere of influence. Some of our professional development funds at the elementary level had been redirected towards the middle school, which was undergoing CAPA review as a result of not making AYP for several consecutive years. All of these realities do create serious limitations that had to factor into our decision-making, and had a real impact on how we implemented trainings within our district. We had to be very creative and think outside the box as leaders (Robinson, 2001).

Could there be a common ground, a way of making sure that both the teachers' need to experience the impact of instructional improvement in their classrooms, and administration's obligation to meet QSAC and CAPA requirements were being met? This was an unavoidable factor to contend with in the outcome of our professional development programming. I paid close attention to the dynamic between administration

and staff during this first meeting. The rapport was open and sincere at this point. In order to move away from model one programming, this action research project had to receive genuine support and cooperation from administration and teachers alike if we were going to achieve second order change in our professional development model, and succeed in creating a self sustaining feedback loop (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990).

Like any team endeavor, our meetings held the potential for conflict: of priorities, for control, about how to interpret the data, and of course, the simple human conflict that could have arisen from personality differences. An important element of managing conflict lies in how we, as leaders, react to and interpret complaints. We must find the grain of truth within the heart of the criticism. In Kegan and Lahey's book *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (2001), the language of complaint is viewed as "untapped potential for change." Many of the committee members took this first meeting as an opportunity to complain about something they knew was not working or not being implemented properly. The fact that they were, as teacher leaders, taking time out of their own schedules in the evening during a time of financial crisis and a significant staffing shortage within our district, demonstrates that they were more than ready to move "from complaint to commitment" (Kegan & Lahey, 2001) as leaders. The initial process of airing concerns, fears, and possible limitations was, in a way, necessary to move on to a productive session. When reading through the survey responses, one of the committee members commented to me, "the staff sure is giving us a lot of lemons to work with!" With this realization, our committee was willing to come together and improve professional development programming within our district. I believe my role as a leader during this phase of the research was to work with the committee and try to make

lemonade from what we were given, and to contend with the factors that needed to be dealt with to make this change initiative successful.

### **From Analysis to Action**

**Curriculum Mapping.** One of the major concerns to everyone at the table, both teachers and administrators alike, was the data regarding curriculum mapping. Many at the table knew there was a general malcontent with the program, but it was both the consistency of the complaint and the amount of professional development hours devoted to the program that struck a chord with our newly appointed curriculum supervisor when our committee actually sat down and looked at the results of the Cycle I survey. Only four out of 34 of the elementary level staff throughout the district responded that curriculum mapping was somewhat beneficial for classroom instruction. “Disconnected from instruction” and “irrelevant to classroom practice” were consistent comments from one participant response to another. Curriculum mapping is mandated by QSAC; how could we take this mandated requirement and make it work for our staff? The fact that 70% of our professional development hours the previous year had been devoted to a program most saw as useless and irrelevant accounts for the high degree of dissatisfaction within the district towards professional development that is reflected in the survey responses. One of our academic coaches pointed out that just because it is not liked by the staff does not mean it is not needed. This led to an insightful group discussion regarding the survey comments in the Cycle I qualitative data, which touched upon the theme of a poorly articulated leadership vision. Several staff members had written down comments to this effect. It was verbalized by a teacher on the committee that, had she known we had received a low score on the curriculum and instruction section of our state

monitoring process (QSAC) because we did not previously have curriculum maps, she would have been more tolerant of the process. This illustrates just how important it is to establish and communicate a common vision early on in a leadership or change initiative (Kotter, 1995).

At our second committee meeting, our curriculum supervisor brought out a model piloted in her former district that allowed teachers to use curriculum maps as lesson plans through the use of a template. This model allowed the maps to be available for everyday use, and therefore relevant to instruction. Concerns were initially raised by one of the teachers on the committee that staff would have to do two different versions of lesson plans to submit to administration. It was decided that if the pilot went well, teachers would switch lesson plan formats altogether and use only the online mapping template. This would serve a two-fold purpose: to meet the state monitoring requirements for curriculum mapping, and to make maps relevant to instruction. With this decision, as a committee, we decided on our first in-service training for the month of November. The curriculum supervisor, with her first hand experience in this area, would take on the responsibility of providing the training for the turnkey workshop.

**Responsive Classroom and Differentiated Instruction.** Two programs that received mixed reviews from survey respondents, Responsive Classroom and Differentiated Instruction, received a lot of attention from the committee during our Cycle II analysis phase. Participant opinions on these two programs were either very good or very negative; so we set out to investigate the reasons behind this by aligning the quantitative and qualitative data from the Cycle I survey responses. This technique is a standard component of concurrent triangulation strategy, and served the purpose of

fleshing out the gaps in the quantitative data (Creswell, 2009). Both sets of surveys had initially been coded in the upper right hand by participant number and school, which made this process fairly easy. It was determined that the people who had negative opinions about Responsive Classroom and Differentiated Instruction often had not participated in enough of the training sessions to implement it properly within their classrooms. In these cases, incomplete information and inadequate training follow through had led to negative overall opinions of the programs in general. Three participants who rated Responsive Classroom very poorly had not participated in it at all; their low ratings came under the thematic strand of “poorly implemented/ inadequate training.” These teachers felt they were held responsible by district administration for knowing the information, but because of their grade level or content area assignment, were not given an opportunity to learn it. Based on the data, it was determined that we should compensate for the implementation flaws of the previous year, and provide phase one training for the Kindergarten through second grade teachers who were left out of the Responsive Classroom training the first time it was offered. The teachers who had been trained previously (grades three, four, and five) would move on to phase two training, which is significantly more in depth. Coincidentally, the fourth and fifth grade teachers, who had received a full year of phase-one training, were also the respondents who had provided more positive feedback about the program.

The data regarding Differentiated Instruction, which like Responsive Classroom, appeared to be conflicting on the surface, also required closer scrutiny by the committee. This program was also given low marks for partial implementation. There were other factors that fed into these responses, however. Unlike Responsive Classroom, which is

run by an outside service provider, Differentiated Instruction is a turnkey program within the district. There appeared to be a difference in satisfaction with the trainings depending on which staff member was running them. Participant approval of the program also corresponded to the respondent's level of teaching experience. Teachers with five years or less experience in the field rated the Differentiated Instruction training significantly higher than did the teachers with more than 10 years experience. The committee speculated that veteran teachers, being more experienced in working with different types of learners (and having less of a need for this type of training than newer teachers) had prior knowledge of this content, and could be approached to run grade level workshops. One veteran teacher respondent remarked that, "the DI [differentiated instruction] workshops had good content, but most of the stuff has been in my 'bag of tricks' for years." Previously, the role of staff trainer had been filled by our academic coaches. Allowing grade level team leaders to receive professional development hours for this turnkey role (as opposed to having them be workshop participants) would allow experienced teachers to gain professional development hours for sharing what they already know, help to make the workshop content more grade level specific, and therefore less generalized. It would also allow veteran, experienced teachers to make use of their skills instead of sitting through a workshop full of information that is already familiar to them. Many of these teachers have the added benefit of being respected by their grade level peers, therefore increasing their credibility. Two of our committee members volunteered to plan and run the two-day workshop in exchange for planning time and a compensation of 25 professional development hours.

**Lucy Calkin's Writers Workshop.** This program garnered one of the most positive response rates of any of the professional development items on the survey, but also suffered the lowest participation rates. Twenty-two out of 34 survey respondents did not participate in this training during the year it was introduced in our district. This low level of participation was largely due to the high cost of sending people to New York City for the training. Trainings were held over the summer as five-day long intensive sessions, and many teachers were either unable or unwilling to get involved in a professional development experience of this nature. Most literature regarding school reform identifies time and conflicting responsibilities as one of the greatest constraints to any change process, whether at the individual, classroom, or school level (Negroni, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007; Quick et al., 2009). Family commitments, responsibilities of childrearing, and summer employment were also major factors listed by Cedar Creek teachers as reasons for non-participation in this program. This training was also presented to teachers as a one-time workshop. Staff participation in follow up sessions would have necessitated teachers returning to New York a couple of times in the fall, which was deemed to be logistically impossible by district administration. Professional development initiatives that are one time sessions do not become effectively embedded in the school culture, and in turn do not have a positive impact on instructional practice, no matter how good the information or content of what was presented (Desimone et al., 2002). According to research, the training teachers have received in follow up sessions has had a significant impact on not only teacher knowledge, but instructional change (Baker et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Lachance et al., 2007; Little & Houston, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007; Runyon, 2009).

As mentioned previously, only a select few were able to participate in this professional development experience last year when Writers' Workshop was initially offered. Only 12 of the total survey respondents participated in this particular training. Of this small participant group, eight responded that the training was either effective or highly effective for classroom instruction. The remaining four teachers who participated in the Lucy Calkins training replied that more knowledge on the topic would be required before they could adequately apply the learned content successfully in their classrooms. In order to facilitate the success of a program which, despite the inherent difficulties with providing follow-up trainings received an overall positive response, our committee decided to set up turnkey workshops by grade level so that the application of these learned skills could be aligned directly with the curricular content and lessons of the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers. This way, Writers' Workshop follow up sessions could be set up monthly as group discussions with grade level teams. One major point of contention for teachers in the survey data was the importance of follow up (and follow through) with new material that is introduced to them. Setting up the turnkey workshops in this format would assure not only that a popular program was given a chance to take root within our elementary schools, but that we were following through on our intended research purpose of allowing our data to guide our professional development programming. Our committee decided over the course of the meetings that these workshops would be arranged by our district literacy coach, who not only attended the four-day training in New York, but facilitates monthly meetings with grade level teams.

**MAP Testing.** Overall, MAP Testing was perceived as being "somewhat effective" by our elementary staff at Cedar Creek. MAP Testing also boasted the second

highest participation rate, with 73% of staff having been involved in the training. This was second only to Curriculum Mapping, which had a 91% participation rate, and was mandatory. The high level of participation with MAP is directly related to our districts constant push to raise standardized test scores. The only significant complaints our committee received about this program is that, while these tests allow us to predict with some degree of accuracy how a child will perform on the NJASK tests in grades 3, 4, and 5, teachers were not fluent enough in the use of the data system to do anything more with the scores. Continuing staff training in this area was not a hard sell to administration or staff: both sides see the importance of this type of tool. Any dissatisfaction with it has stemmed from a lack of fluency with how to effectively use the information that is currently being derived from the test scores.

For these tests to have genuine instructional value and help raise test scores, it was determined by the committee that teachers would need a high enough level of training in the program to be able to identify specific skill sets as they correlated with the test questions in the scoring rubric. Being able to disaggregate the data in this way would allow teachers to know not merely how their students would perform on the tests, but to intervene by reinforcing specific areas of weakness so that they can improve test scores in the future. This is where the true value of a diagnostic tool such as this lies. Our final workshop in the series was continued in-depth training in this area.

## **Cycle II Summary**

At this phase in the action research process, ensuring stakeholder buy-in through transparency of process and open communication is vital for both the success of the endeavor, and for ensuring the integrity of this dissertation (Killion, 2002; Tschannen-

Moran, 2004). Cycle II was a highly collaborative process consisting of a series of three two and a half hour meetings during the months of September and October. As the researcher, this phase was vital for controlling researcher bias, establishing a common understanding, vision, and purpose, and of course, gaining a new perspective on the research data from Cycle I (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Kotter, 1995).

The open discussion of problems shared by our committee regarding education issues at the local, state, and federal level enabled both teachers and administrators to air their priorities in an appropriate venue; a place where constructive progress could be made by both sides. All in attendance were in agreement that this research project was only a first step, and must be continued over the course of the next several years if a self-sustaining feedback loop if second order change is to be achieved (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990).

### **Cycle III**

#### **Cycle III Overview**

Cycle III was comprised of a series of workshops that took place during the week of November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. These workshops were designed based on feedback received from teachers that was collected during Cycle I. This immediately followed the completion of Cycle II, which consisted of a series of three meetings during the month of October 2010. Thirty-four Kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers attended a total of five different workshops on a rotating basis over the course of three days. Upon leaving the workshops, teachers were required to fill out an evaluation form, which allowed the Staff Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee to collect necessary information, while also ensuring a 100% response rate for the Cycle III participant surveys. Following is a brief

description of each workshop, and who participated in each training session. A more in-depth description follows in the Cycle III Survey Results and Analysis section.

**Curriculum Mapping.** A total of 12 teachers attended training in which curriculum maps would be piloted as lesson plans. The focus of this workshop was to help an important, district wide initiative gain more instructional relevance in the eyes of the teaching staff, while also meeting the district goal of improving our performance under state monitoring requirements. Two teachers from each grade level district wide participated. Six of these participants were grade level team leaders from Kindergarten through fifth grade, and the second teacher was chosen on a volunteer basis. In this workshop, each teacher brought one month's lesson plans and worked with the curriculum supervisor, correlating their previously designed plans to a corresponding mapping template that would be available for online access. As team leaders, participants provided their grade level peers with usable samples that demonstrated a clear connection between curriculum maps and instruction. This activity also provided teachers who attended other workshops with a template to use next year when they will be required to utilize the system themselves.

**Differentiated Instruction & Responsive Classroom.** Thirty teachers participated in Responsive Classroom and Differentiated Instruction training. Two different levels of training were provided for these two initiatives. Sixteen teachers from grades Kindergarten through 2 attended phase-one introductory trainings. Fourteen teachers from grades 3 through 5 attended phase-two trainings, which were a continuation of the training they had begun the previous year. Responsive Classroom workshops were facilitated by contracted, licensed service providers. Differentiated

Instruction workshops were provided through turnkey trainings by our district literacy and math coaches.

**Map Testing.** Eighteen teachers participated in the data analysis training for MAP Testing. The participant group was comprised of all district teachers from grades 3 through 5, as well as basic skills instructors from each elementary school. The Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee believed it was vital that all teachers responsible for working with students on a remedial basis, even those who were not classroom teachers, attend this training. The MAP test is geared towards raising standardized test scores on the NJASK test, and basic skills teachers work with individual students on specific skill sets that are identified within the test taking subgroups. In this workshop, teachers learned how to interpret, analyze, and apply information gleaned from the MAP test so they can apply that knowledge to their classroom instruction, with the desired outcome of improving test scores.

**Lucy Calkin's Writer's Workshop.** Lucy Calkin's Writers' Workshop Training was provided for all 14 teachers from grades 3 through 5 throughout the entire Cedar Creek District. It was structured as a turnkey training run by our district literacy coach and two teachers who had attended the original training in New York last summer. Each grade level attended their own session, and were provided with demonstration lessons that utilized Writer's Workshop strategies appropriate for their own grade level, and linked to their literacy curriculum. This workshop has received necessary follow up trainings at monthly grade level meetings over the course of the school year.

### **Cycle III Participant Survey Results and Analysis**

The Cycle III participant survey questions were structured as a combination of five questions based on an opinion scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, with corresponding sections where teachers could elaborate upon their answers. The questions were general in nature and asked participants to share opinions about the clarity of objectives, the usefulness of the training as it pertains to student learning, overall district goals, and whether or not they felt further development on that particular topic would be valuable. The same survey was given for each workshop. Using concurrent triangulation strategy, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed together to provide the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee with a clearer picture of the workshop participants' views (Creswell, 2009).

**Differentiated Instruction.** Training the Cedar Creek Elementary staff in differentiated instruction strategies was first established as a priority within the strategic plan four years ago. In 2007, four district teachers were sent to Chicago for a week to receive certification from a national organization as Trainers of Differentiated Instruction. Several thousand dollars were spent on this, and then the district shifted priorities. Due to other district obligations and financial restrictions regarding our use of professional development funds, the first staff trainings in this area did not begin until last year. The initial staff training cohort was our group of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers. The idea behind the trainings was to provide them with the strategies to reach every type of learner: kinesthetic, visual, and auditory. These trainings provide teachers with ways to make the learning experience more interactive and project based (Benninghof, 2006; Howard, 2007). These strategies in differentiation are recommended

and often developed by researchers who study the effects of the achievement gap, and the importance of accounting for cultural diversity within the classroom setting (Anyon, 1981; Klingner et al., 2004; Orrill, 2002; Snell, 2003).

The initial Cycle I survey comments regarding differentiated instruction training brought to the committee's attention just how many teachers were not able to participate in the first phase of trainings. We were also made aware through these surveys that certain turnkey trainings were more successful than others. In addition to the opinion scaled responses (see Table 4), we were able to identify, through the narrative response component of the Cycle III survey, what exactly constitutes a successful turnkey training in the eyes of several Cedar Creek teachers:

Over the last year and a half, we have moved away from the self-contained special education class, to an inclusion model. Some of us who are not dual certified and have never worked with special education students before are not used to having to teach many types of learners. Although I have 12 years under my belt, I confess to being lost when it comes to certain segments of my student population, particularly my autistic students. I don't have a team teacher with a special ed. background to work with- my IA [instructional assistant], who is a recent grad, knows more than I do about this stuff. I need more of these strategies!

A shift in district instructional priorities and a rapidly increasing special education population has created a need for training in this area. Obviously, targeting the right teachers for the right trainings is going to be an important component for the continuation of our differentiated instruction sessions. The one size fits all model of professional development is not something that is going to meet the learning needs of teachers in our changing school districts (Orrill, 2006; Penuel et al., 2007). Many teachers at Cedar Creek are being introduced to new strategies for instruction, and new methods for teaching familiar curricular content.

Other teachers, who expressed a high level of satisfaction with the differentiated instruction training, commented on the trainer’s awareness of how these strategies could be directly incorporated into specific grade level and content area lessons:

User friendly! Differentiating content for so many different students is very time intensive, but finding a strategy that works for all students is worth it, because then you aren’t re-teaching the same thing over and over.

The techniques and strategies we saw today merge really well with what we learned in the writing workshop yesterday. Consistency of strategies in the classroom builds fluency in younger students.

For our committee, understanding that linking the vital components of classroom instruction directly to the workshop content, and back to the overall district goals, will no doubt factor into the design and adoption of our future trainings. Whether or not this workshop content is being successfully integrated into the classroom setting was evaluated in Cycle IV, Assessment and Evaluation.

Table 4

*Differentiated Instruction Survey Results*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Program objectives were made clear	9	21			
Questions & concerns were addressed		23	7		
Material useful to improve student learning	5	25			
Will help accomplish district goals	2	24	4		
Further development needed	7	20	3		

**Responsive Classroom.** The results of the responsive classroom training in Cycle III were overwhelmingly positive. There were a few participants who wrote positive comments regarding this workshop. “Easily translates to effective classroom use” and “helps bring disciplinary problems under control as children become adjusted to the new system” was the most common feedback given. The participants who did provide commentary were more frequently the ones who had a negative perception of the program, even though the quantitative data shows that the overwhelming majority of participants believed this training to be effective (see Table 5). Two negative comments from two different participants stood out to the committee as we reviewed the surveys. Neither comment related to the training itself, but rather the philosophical premise behind the program and the financial investment by the district during a time of financial crisis:

I’m not sure I agree with the basic fundamental premise behind RC [Responsive Classroom]. Their philosophy seems naïve and theoretical. Our kids don’t live in a utopian society; they learn very young to manipulate their surroundings, and the value of rewards versus punishment. How can we have a program that tells us not to instill values, show our opinions, or pass judgment on anything anyone does, and then have an anti-bullying or character education program the next day?

I don’t think the exorbitant cost of this program merits its expansion. Good classroom management can be learned for free by sharing ideas between colleagues. Cheap PD can be just as effective as expensive PD.

The two preceding comments are useful in gathering teachers’ foundational beliefs about what our philosophical underpinnings as educators within the Cedar Creek community should be, and whether or not we may be sending programmatic “mixed messages” to students. The second comment also describes something that leaders in professional development programming can aspire to: a professional development model sustained and driven by teacher leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Tschannen-Moran,

2004). Another comment reiterated the concerns found in many of the Cycle I surveys about full implementation of programs, and the importance of embedding a program fully into the school culture before it can become highly effective and bring an organization to second order change:

The main value in this program is classroom and behavior management, but it can't work unless it is effectively implemented by all personnel who interact with students during the school day (recess aides, cafeteria workers, etc.) This is where most of our disciplinary issues happen, and they carry over into the classroom from there. We need to target the problem areas first, not last. Are paraprofessionals going to be trained at some point?

Our Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee acknowledged the needs of paraprofessionals as well. Implementing training for them at present will be difficult, as they are hourly wage employees in the Cedar Creek District. As a result of this, they are not contracted to come in for in-service days. Contractual and union issues often create many layers of complication when trying to implement professional development, or change initiatives in general. Organizational change must be bartered for until agreements are reached that are amenable to the interests of all stakeholders (Stevenson, 2007). This is an issue we will look to address for next year, when we have a clearer picture of our funding situation for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

Table 5

*Responsive Classroom Survey Results*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Program objectives were made clear	8	22			
Questions & concerns were addressed	2	23	5		
Material useful to improve student learning	15	9	6		
Will help accomplish district goals	28			2	
Further development needed	28			2	

**Curriculum Mapping.** As mentioned in the introductory section of Cycle III, this workshop was a pilot for using an online lesson plan template which would allow teacher’s current lesson plan format in the Cedar Creek District to be replaced with highly detailed daily and weekly versions of curriculum maps. The data from the participant surveys, shown in Table 6, illustrates that this collaborative attempt to make mapping instructionally useful was relatively successful. The initial Cycle I survey results had show curriculum mapping to be the most poorly perceived of all the professional development training experiences at the Kindergarten through Fifth grade level. Teachers felt overwhelmingly that maps were being done solely for bureaucratic purposes, and that they were “disconnected from instruction.” Changing teacher’s opinions of their professional development experiences in the Cedar Creek School District is not just about providing quality trainings, but also helping teachers understand why the workshops are vital, and what the district’s ultimate purpose is in providing those trainings. The vital

leadership component of establishing a common vision had been missing from our professional development leadership, especially with regards to initiatives that are top down in nature, and mandated by the state (Kotter, 1995). The Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee sought to rectify these problems through this pilot initiative.

Table 6

*Curriculum Mapping Survey Results*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Program objectives were made clear	3	8	1		
Questions & concerns were addressed	1	7	3	1	
Material useful to improve student learning		6	2	4	
Will help accomplish district goals		12			
Further development needed	2	5	3	2	

Of the total participants in this pilot study, 66% agreed or strongly agreed that further development on this topic was needed by the district. One hundred percent of the respondents believe that this program will help the district achieve its goals. Most importantly, a full 50% of the respondents believe that using these maps as plans will be useful in improving student learning; only 33% of participants disagreed with this. Considering how negative the opinions of curriculum mapping were district wide this is a significant turnaround from the Cycle I results, before the concept of “maps as plans” was introduced. There were many narrative comments, both positive and negative, that were shared with the committee.

Many participants saw the benefits of using maps in this manner:

I think maps will eventually improve instruction because they will align teachers within a given grade level, regardless of which building their in. This will help to solidify scope and sequence.

Converting maps into plans at least brings more instructional legitimacy to the table. The real benefits of this program lie in the realm of QSAC and CAPA approval.

For subject areas that don't have a developed curriculum, this helps to establish expectations of rigor if a new teacher or sub comes in. We need to see where the holes are in our curriculum. Continue to monitor and adapt Maps as standards and curricular needs change, these should not be stagnant.

There were also several comments of a critical nature, though not necessarily critical to the "Maps as Plans" initiative, but on the mode of delivery. These criticisms focused on a belief that we needed to take this to a higher level, and look into certain technicalities or legal issues with regard to publishing teachers documents online. Several of these comments, while critical, show a high level of commitment and willingness on the part of the participants:

I am still not clear on the copyright situation that could arise from making this information public. Textbook companies often "shop" for teacher plans online; can Curriculum Mapper© assure us that our info is only available to system users?

We must make sure that this is done at all grade levels and subjects; participation should not be voluntary- where's the leadership???

Implementing anything halfway will be ineffective. We've piloted things before- will this take?

Using maps as plans is useful for making our curriculum more public, but may not help teaching. I can see maps that function as plans eventually making our jobs easier, but a long term investment on the part of the district will be required for this to happen. Other teachers, including subs, could look to see what they should be doing at any point in the year, or any week in the month.

District goals should be to improve classroom instruction, not merely to meet state requirements and mandates, which are often conflicting and politically motivated.

It is clear from these narrative comments that teacher participants understand the complexities of the initiative, as well as the long term needs of the district. The teachers who are piloting the “Maps as Plans” initiative are the first to see the vision behind, and the long-term importance of, curriculum mapping in the Cedar Creek School District. Using maps as lesson plans also serves a very practical need within our district, as we do not have curriculum guides that specify how to implement a curriculum through best practices. Cedar Creek also has a higher than average turnover rate of professional teaching staff, although that has steadily improved over the last few years. This turnover has had a negative impact on the development of curriculum, and many teachers are beginning to see the consequences of this.

**Lucy Calkins Writers’ Workshop.** The Cedar Creek School District Strategic Plan targets literacy improvement as a major initiative, particularly for grades 3 through 5 within our three elementary schools. Participant opinions of this turnkey workshop experience corroborated what our committee had initially seen in the Cycle I survey results. This training was rated highly effective by the small group of teachers who participated in the initial training cohort last year. Due to the positive response on the part of the staff, it was decided by the committee to expand the training to include all teachers from grades 3 to 5. Full scale implementation of effective, instruction based classroom programs that are sustained over time is the best way of bringing about organizational change at the student level (Little & Houston, 2003; Lohman, 2000). The only way to accomplish this goal practically was to have our own experienced teachers turnkey the content; first to the whole staff, and then, over the course of the next year, to individual

grade level teams. The first whole-group turnkey results from the November in-service are listed in Table 7, and show a very high level of staff satisfaction with the training.

Table 7

*Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop Survey Results*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Program objectives were made clear	12	8			
Questions & concerns were addressed		12	8		
Material useful to improve student learning	9	11			
Will help accomplish district goals	9	11			
Further development needed	6	14			

Narrative response comments from participants were also very positive. Most comments focused on the importance of bringing best practices into the classroom, and relayed teachers' beliefs that the students find writers' workshop to be highly engaging and motivating, even inspiring some students to write outside the classroom. Many teachers also echoed the refrain that having our own staff members' turnkey this particular training was beneficial because "an effective writing strategy in one district is not necessarily an effective writing strategy in another district." Another teacher stated:

Turnkey from other staff members made this even better than the other training we had on this topic last year. Our own teachers understand the unique needs of our district and how the writing units tie in with the various components of our literacy series, as well as strategies for our Social Studies curriculum which incorporates a lot of writing.

There were many comments that gave our committee feedback regarding effective ways to continue to promote this training in the future. The participant comments also showed an awareness of the importance of embedding this training into the instructional culture of the school by continuing to make the training broader and deeper (Killion, 2002). This is significant as an element of systemic organizational change, and will be vital to the development of a self-sustaining feedback loop (Senge, 1990). Teachers' positive comments included: "Continue! It's a good, solid program, but don't stop providing the trainings. This is just a snapshot of what we need to know. Keep it coming!" and "Continue this discussion in a small group setting so that we can share ideas with grade level colleagues."

This workshop was about taking an already popular and effective program and making it accessible to as many teachers as possible. This was not a program that we needed to "sell" to the staff; we simply needed to determine how to go about implementing it in a way that the district could logistically afford to sustain it over an extended period of time. Barriers to effective implementation are frequent due to the fact that the best professional development is widely viewed as being locally driven, site-specific, and designed "in context," which ensure that the professional development experience is well equipped to serve the unique needs of a particular staff or school (Baker et al., 2004; Ransford et al., 2009; Santangelo, 2009; Wayne et al., 2008). Such locally situated professional development achieves the greatest degree of second order change in an instructional setting, because it addresses the district and staff needs in their true context (Fullan, 2001, 2007; Lohman, 2000).

**MAP Testing.** All Cedar Creek teachers from grades 3 through 5 participated in MAP Test training. Of all the professional development initiatives taking place in Cedar Creek, MAP testing is the most closely aligned with improvement of standardized test scores. Basic introductory trainings have been occurring over the past year and a half, but the material covered thus far had not been consistent or incrementally delivered. The results of the survey question regarding clarity of program objectives shows that Cedar Creek teachers understand, without question, that test score improvement is a major district priority. These survey data also show that teachers are in agreement about the sheer importance of this initiative (see Table 8).

The following narrative response data show a high degree of comprehension on the part of the teaching staff. The benefits of this technology have been effectively articulated and demonstrated through our attempts at “spreading our leadership vision” (Kotter, 1995). Some participant comments also show a consciousness of one’s personal limitations with regards to this program (Helsing, 2007). There is evidence of reflective thinking on the part of teachers that our committee has decided to factor in to future training needs:

I’ve been teaching 3 years. Up till now, I haven’t been able to do anything with the MAP results even though we spend a lot of time on them each year. All it ever told me was which students were high or low in math and literacy. Now I can determine what the specific weakness is and equate it with a skill set that needs to be reviewed in order for that students score to improve. This equals an impact on instruction++++.

Some things were clarified and useful, but I still feel I have a lot to learn about this system- data analysis is not something I’ve had prior exposure to and I think it will take me a while to understand it fluently. Good info, though.

Keep showing us more things to do with these tests! This is good because we waste four weeks a year in instructional time taking these tests, and it just isn't worth it if they are merely predictive and not diagnostic.

The biggest high point was that I understood the system better. The more familiarity I gain, the more useful it becomes.

Table 8

*Map Testing Survey Results*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Program objectives were made clear	20				
Questions & concerns were addressed	18		2		
Material useful to improve student learning	7	13			
Will help accomplish district goals	4	16			
Further development needed	7	13			

**Cycle III Summary**

Cycle III represented the first layer of assessment in this action research dissertation. The workshops presented in this cycle focused on the five major elementary level initiatives in our strategic plan, which was first implemented three years ago. The success of the Cycle III workshop series was determined by the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee based on the results of the workshop participant surveys.

In Cycle IV, assessment of these trainings took on a higher level. Our committee determined the level of success teachers have had at implementing the workshop learning into their classroom instruction thus far through the use of non-evaluative teacher observations. These observations focused on identifying Responsive Classroom and

Differentiated Instruction strategies as they have been integrated within the culture of the classroom. Our committee also looked for evidence of lesson alignment with curriculum maps, and a demonstration that areas of need identified through map tests are being reinforced through math and literacy lessons. The success of this leadership initiative in Cycle IV was also evaluated through input from the committee that was collected in the form of surveys. These surveys gave committee members an opportunity to elaborate on what they learned from this experience, what they believe the initiatives level of success was, and how we should proceed with our future actions as a team. As a researcher, this data was useful to me when reflecting upon my own leadership, and when contemplating the future actions of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee.

## **Cycle IV**

### **Cycle IV Overview**

In Cycle IV of this dissertation, data were collected in three forms: surveys, interviews, and teacher observations. Cycle IV represented an opportunity to evaluate the process and results of this dissertation study, the effectiveness of my own leadership, and the degree to which our workshop content had been integrated into the classroom setting thus far. Members of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee played two roles in this phase of the action research study: that of observer and critic. Each committee member observed workshop participants' instruction to determine if implementation of the workshop content had been successful within the classroom setting. Every committee member was surveyed and 57%, or four out of seven committee members were interviewed to determine the overall success of this leadership initiative. During the interviews and survey responses, committee members assessed the effectiveness of the

collaborative professional development experience that they had been involved in since the spring of 2010. In doing so, they provided vital feedback to inform our process and procedures as a committee for the coming year, and allowed the researcher to assess her strengths and weaknesses as a leader (Goleman et al., 2002).

All workshop participants had been surveyed after their initial experiences in the Cycle III training sessions to provide our committee with input regarding the success rate of the workshops, but during Cycle IV, 35%, or twelve out of 34 participants, were interviewed to find out how the workshop content and professional development changes in Cedar Creek had impacted their classroom instruction and their overall outlook on professional development over the span of the prior two months. These interviews were conducted individually and privately within the teachers' classrooms, and they were transcribed through the use of audio recordings. The interview questions for both workshop participants and committee members can be found in Appendices G and H.

### **Classroom Observations**

The first Cycle IV data were collected in the form of teacher observations (see Appendix D). As the researcher, I secured permission for our committee to observe a cross section of teachers at each grade level, and we looked for evidence that the professional development experiences in Cycle III had translated into effective instruction. These observations were non-evaluative peer observations, and were only conducted by the members of our committee that work in a non-supervisory capacity in order for these new learning strategies and processes to become positively embedded within the school culture and to avoid any appearance of punitive judgment

(Deal & Peterson, 1999). For this reason, our curriculum supervisor opted out of the observation process.

As the researcher, I chose not to participate in the observation component of the trainings. I came to this decision in an effort to limit my bias as a researcher, and also because I am not certified to teach the content area that was to be evaluated (Creswell, 2007). If we are to truly create an open system feedback loop in which our professional development programming is self-generated by the people who are intended to be the recipients of the knowledge and skills delivered, then my role as a leader should be largely as facilitator, not a participant (Senge, 1990; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). It is up to the members of our Cedar Creek professional staff to determine if our process was successful in addressing the needs identified in Cycle I of this research study.

The classroom observations correlated directly to the professional development workshops that were held in November. Each member of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee conducted a peer observation within the classroom of a workshop participant. These observations were non-evaluative in nature, and followed the mold of peer observations. Our committee also came to the consensus that individuals with a strong instructional background in a given content area would be able to give better feedback to peers, and know what to look for in a successful lesson that is being delivered within their own content area (Killion, 2002). Our literacy coach, whose main function is as a teacher resource due to her extensive knowledge and experience on the topic of Kindergarten through eighth grade Language Arts, conducted the observations for the Writers' Workshop lessons. Our math coach spent several years as a turnkey trainer working for Dr. Mel Levine's Schools Attuned Program, and is very experienced

in the integration of multiple intelligence theory within the classroom setting (Beninghof, 2006; Levine, 2002). She accepted the role of observing lessons taught by teachers who had participated in the differentiated instruction trainings. The veteran teachers on the committee each observed their grade level peers to look for evidence of Responsive Classroom implementation. A relationship of trust has been built over the years between these veteran teachers and many of the younger staff members, due to their respective roles as new teacher mentors within the Cedar Creek School District. This relationship of trust also helped to bring the post observation conferences to a deeper level of dialogue than a traditional, compulsory observation would have allowed for. During an interview, one committee member commented about the observation she had completed in the classroom of a workshop participant:

I know when I went in to observe the lesson, it went really well. In the post conference, the teacher said she was going to try to incorporate some of the other strategies and that I was invited back to see those being implemented. Not for me to observe formally like last time of course, but the fact that she wanted me to watch her teach just for the heck of it says a lot.

Working with the trust, which has already been established between groups of teachers, can help to ease staff into the idea of peer observations, particularly when it is not a fully embedded practice within a given school district (Killion, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). This phase of the data collection allowed us to capitalize on relationships already established between peers, and to develop them further through a common instructional purpose (Penuel et al., 2007).

Our committee designed the observation tools as a group, based on the content we were looking to assess. We were careful to include the basic components of differentiated instruction, writers' workshop, and responsive classroom within the

respective observation formats (Baker et al., 2004). Each observer was looking for certain commonalities in addition to evidence of workshop content implementation. The committee members checked to see if lesson alignment to curriculum maps was evident. During their post observation conferences, observers conversed with the teachers about how their lessons addressed the needs that had been identified through MAP testing in the areas of math and literacy. Although workshop content such as Curriculum Mapping and MAP testing cannot be directly assessed through classroom observations, the influence and impact of both professional development experiences could be discussed and identified after the lesson took place during peer conferencing (Olmstead, 2007). In addition to direct observation, evidence of embedded learning can also be determined through identification of participants' decisions making skills and the thought process that underlies them (Goldberg, 2004; Helsing, 2007).

Finally, members of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee were surveyed to determine whether or not they felt this leadership initiative was successful, and to determine what sort of improvements would be needed when we implement our professional development initiative next year (see Appendix F). The survey contained six questions, each with a quantitative and qualitative component. This allowed participants to elaborate on the answers checked in each box. The questions within the survey were both direct and reflective, prompting participants to describe the general and personal level of success they experienced throughout the initiative, and how they see this process proceeding in the future. Participants were also asked about what they had learned regarding the implementation of professional development, and to describe what practical considerations they would need to make for next year.

During Cycle IV, a total of seven observations were conducted. The ultimate goal of our committee was to provide teachers with professional development experiences which they perceive as being valuable and effective within the classroom setting so that they may improve their instructional performance and consequently, improve student learning. This small series of observations allowed our committee to determine the impact on instruction that our November in-service series had on instruction thus far.

Our Differentiated Instruction program was assessed through two observations: one first grade math lesson, and one fourth grade Social Studies lesson. Both of these observations were performed by our district math coach, who is a certified differentiated instruction trainer. She observed for evidence of differentiation within the lesson, and for evidence that the needs of different types of learners were being effectively addressed in the classroom. Our district literacy coach conducted two observations looking for evidence of effective Writers' Workshop lessons. One observation took place in a first grade classroom, the other in grade 3. Three classroom teacher representatives each conducted one peer observation in which they looked for implementation of Responsive Classroom techniques. These observations were conducted in grade level classrooms two, three, and five.

## Peer Observation Results

**Differentiated Instruction.** The differentiated instruction observation format designed by our math coach contained both a checklist and a narrative section (see Appendix D). The checklist consisted of the eight performance indicators within Howard Gardner's model for multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999). This format allowed the observer to check how many different types of intelligence were used throughout the course of the lesson. The elements listed were logical/mathematical, bodily/kinesthetic, visual, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and naturalistic. The narrative component of the observation contained descriptions of the lessons that had been observed, which documented the actual differentiation strategies used and these techniques had been incorporated for instruction and assessment. According to the results of these peer evaluations, both lessons observed included very high degrees of differentiation, and effective usage of several instructional and assessment strategies appropriate for the content area and grade level being taught. The observers chose to sit in on the lesson of one veteran teacher and one novice teacher for evidence of the incorporation of Cycle II workshop content. The following tables (four and five) shows how many of Gardner's performance indicators were present during the observed lesson, and provides a brief description of how those indicators were addressed within the lesson.

Table 9.

*Gardner's Model for Performance Indicators (MI)-Observation One*

Indicators	Grade One -Mathematics
Logical/mathematical	Students learned about money-denominations of coins.
Bodily/kinesthetic	Strong use of manipulatives; produce shopping, wipe boards, Velcro coin boards, movement to different activity stations.
Visual	Teacher demonstration and visual modeling with wipe boards.
Musical	N/A
Interpersonal	Students worked in pairs while shopping at the produce stand.
Intrapersonal	Reflective challenge questions as closing activity: each student answered independently.
Linguistic	Students wrote a brief story as a reflective challenge, and were required to describe their process at the produce stand.
Naturalistic	N/A

The first of the two observations took place in a first grade classroom, during a math lesson about money. The teacher being observed had 31 years of experience as a first grade teacher. During this one-hour lesson, the observer found evidence of six out of eight performance indicators. Educators who place an emphasis on developing the full range of potential within a child's abilities will be more successful in educating the whole child, and increase a child's intellectual capacity over time (Gardner, 1999). The only two performance indicators not addressed in this lesson were musical and naturalistic, which were marked as not applicable to the content of the lesson.

The next section of the observation focused on lesson design, and an identification of the teaching strategies that were used. An effective use of age and

content appropriate differentiation strategies for both instruction and assessment reinforces the likelihood that the content and skills being taught in the classroom will reach students from all walks of life and at all levels of learning readiness (Beninghof, 2006). Our observer found evidence of both interactive and individual group work through the use of Velcro coin boards and miniature dry erase boards, which were used through the teacher's anticipatory set. The use of these manipulatives allowed the instructor to informally monitor and assess the accuracy of her students' calculations as they reviewed the adding and subtracting of different coin denominations. This innovative use of manipulatives engaged students in the kinesthetic, visual, and logical/mathematical realm (Gardner, 1999).

The next component of the lesson was even more interactive, and engaged the interpersonal and intrapersonal realms as the students used play money to spend at a make-shift produce stand that had been set up at the back of the classroom. The teacher was able to assess for understanding with each individual student as she played the role of cashier. The closing activity of the lesson addressed both the linguistic and visual realms of student learning. As children returned to their seats, the teacher described the reflective challenge questions (Beninghof, 2006) for the day. Students were instructed to imagine the day's math lesson as a story. They were told to draw a picture of the characters in the story, and come up with a title that would reflect that experience. These reflective challenge questions take a linear concept like math, and bring it into the creative realm (Beninghof, 2006). This technique is also consistent with strategies that are used within our literacy program, and helps to provide a cross curricular component

to the lesson. The observer described the strengths of this lesson as she perceived them in the narrative component of the observation reflection:

Beyond promoting reflective thinking, I was impressed by how these challenge questions take a linear math concept and bring it into the creative realm. With an older group of students, these questions would even make an effective writing prompt for a literature circle. This is one of the most highly differentiated lessons I have ever seen, and was effective on many levels. Throughout the hour long observation, this lesson touched on almost all of Gardner's multiple intelligences. We are very fortunate that an experienced teacher like ----- had volunteered to be one of our turn-key trainers. She is an invaluable resource with a wealth of creative ideas for younger teachers.

The true ideas behind differentiating within the classroom setting are based in preparing all types of learners to absorb multiple forms of curricular content in whatever way works best for their own unique abilities and capacities (Beninghof, 2006). Having a peer model these types of techniques so successfully for her colleagues has no doubt aided in the successful implementation of this workshop content (McCarthy, 2000).

Table 10

*Gardner's Model for Performance Indicators (MI)-Observation Two*

Indicators	Grade Four- Social Studies
Logical/mathematical	N/A
Bodily/kinesthetic	Team scoring for game, use of buzzer device to answer questions to get points.
Visual	Use of Smart board for game display, graphic organizers.
Musical	N/A
Interpersonal	Teamwork
Intrapersonal	Reflective challenge questions
Linguistic	Writing and comprehension demonstrated in reflective challenge.
Naturalistic	N/A

The next lesson observed was that of a fourth grade social studies unit. The observer was looking for many of the same strategies and techniques, but with the obvious relevance of content area and grade level differences. The teacher in this particular classroom is in his second year of teaching fourth grade. His first training in differentiated instruction strategies was during our November in-service session. Five out of eight performance indicators were observed; the mathematical/logical, musical, and naturalistic were non-applicable due to the content area of the lesson. This lesson focused on Colonial America, and was set up as a mid-unit review of information learned thus far. Through the effective use of a Smart board, the teacher had devised a game of Colonial Jeopardy in which students were grouped into teams, and had to “buzz in” to score

points. This type of activity is kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, while functioning as a fun assessment at the same time (Gardner, 1999).

Our fourth grade teacher had incorporated several of the strategies that had been modeled during the workshop. The first was the use of a graphic organizer given to each student to help them organize content and information in a way that helped them to pull out the most pertinent information and save it as a review for tests. During the game, students were jotting down correct answers into this pre-designed study guide so that they would have them for future reference. In addition to this graphic organizer, students were presented with reflective challenge questions. The observer described these reflective challenge questions in the following way:

This is a differentiated instruction strategy which is used as an informal assessment at the closure of a lesson. Not only does it help students to synthesize information, but its use generates higher order thinking skills as they synthesize previously learned content with their own views and opinions. All in all, it is an excellent closing activity for a highly differentiated lesson.

Both lessons observed by our math coach demonstrated a successful integration of workshop content into the classroom setting, and demonstrated higher than average levels of differentiation (Benninghof, 2006).

**Responsive Classroom.** Three committee members conducted one observation each in which they looked for evidence of Responsive Classroom integration (see Appendix I). There are 10 classroom practices which are seen as integral to the success of the program: morning meeting, rule creation, interactive modeling, positive teacher language, logical consequences, guided discovery, academic choice, classroom organization, working with families, and collaborative problem solving. Each of these

elements was listed on the peer observation sheet that was designed and used by our committee members. Several of these elements have been integrated into our teaching practice either on a school wide basis, or by grade level teams. This is not a system that varies greatly in technique or content from teacher to teacher, the way our differentiated instruction program does. On the contrary, the responsive classroom program is all about consistency of application between each grade level, each school, and each teacher. Responsive Classroom is focused on providing a whole school reform model that places equal value on the social, emotional, and academic development of students at the elementary level (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2010). For this reason, post-observation discussion between teacher and observer was necessary to determine exactly how the 10 criteria were being met within the whole school setting. Observers also had to determine how certain components of the program were being addressed outside of the classroom setting. Our three observers tallied their data on one sheet after conducting their individual observations and teacher conferences in the classroom at grade levels 2, 3, and 5 to make sure that techniques and practices were not only consistent from one class to another, but to ensure that all 10 elements of the Responsive Classroom approach were being met within the school. During a post observation conference, one teacher was asked about the less visible elements of the Responsive Classroom program, and how they were being implemented on a school wide basis:

Lately we have started planning a lot more activities to help parents become more comfortable and be part of the school community. Parent involvement has been pretty poor in the past; I think a lot of parents that didn't go to college still don't think of school as a place that makes them comfortable. Some of these evening sessions tie into the RC [Responsive Classroom] ideology of working with families as partners in student learning, and also just helping parents understand the RC philosophy within our schools.

In addition to the parent and teacher initiative, another aspect of Responsive Classroom which was discussed on a peer to peer basis is the aspect of collaborative problem solving (Northeastern Foundation for Children, 2010). Teachers were asked whether or not they perceived this collaborative aspect as being a genuine focus of the school:

I think that this year we have been incorporating it [collaborative problem solving], but informally, not in a structured, labeled way. We started doing monthly grade level meetings where these issues are discussed and we solve problems collaboratively, but these meetings serve many purposes, not just to talk about parent involvement. We discuss curriculum, instruction, all sorts of pertinent topics. We also have the Family Night series that has been running for a few years now, so we were already doing some of these things.

There are several elements of the Responsive Classroom approach that are visible through direct classroom observation. This program has a strong impact on classroom management, and can alter the way teachers run their classrooms (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2010). Evidence of rule creation, morning meeting activity, interactive modeling, and positive teacher language were visible to the observers in each instance.

Morning meeting is a basic premise of the Responsive Classroom program. Students spend 10 to 20 minutes each morning participating in an activity that allows students time to greet one another, share thoughts and ideas, and build relationships and trust between each other to foster mutual respect and improve the overall classroom climate. Each observer witnessed a different, grade level appropriate morning meeting activity that consisted of a greeting, a peer-share activity, and a morning message. The third grade class participated in a math facts game that encouraged students to communicate with one another to find the correct answer as a class, the second grade

group played a motivational game called “Alive, Awake, and Alert,” and the fifth grade class took part in the game “Airport” which was an exercise in trust building (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2010). One observer described watching this trust exercise take place in a fifth grade special education class:

Anyone observing this activity could tell which members of the class were liked and respected by their peers. When certain kids went up to take their turn, the student who had their eyes closed didn’t seem nervous at all. There were other students who obviously were not in the “circle of trust”, and this seemed to upset them, but the effect of the activity was that it made the distrusted students want to earn the trust of their classmates so they could participate in the game. I think it made those students think about how they handled themselves during other activities that may have caused their classmates to not trust them.

The rationale behind these morning meetings is to build a sense of community within the classroom and to encourage positive character development (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2010). This character development, combined with a consistent, school wide set of rules and a thorough behavior modification system, is one of the most important components of Responsive Classroom. Evidence of rule creation is immediately visible upon entering any Responsive Classroom. Teachers organize the physical space to set a tone for learning- school-wide and classroom rules were posted prominently, and charts for rotating student job assignments were posted. The classroom pass systems, as well as student behavioral charts, were posted at the front of the room. During the observations, all students were well versed in the expectations of the classroom management systems from room to room.

Table 11

*Use of Positive Teacher Language*

<u>Purpose in Responsive Classroom</u>	<u>Technique demonstrated by teacher</u>
Student attention control	Use of silent pause; chime for attention
Verbal cue for desired behavior	“I see that everyone is ready to line up”; “We are clearing our desks before lunch.”
Concrete speech	Eyes on the speaker; hands in laps; backs straight
Positive challenge	“Let’s see if we can spend 15 minutes reading silently before lunch.”

Use of interactive modeling, positive teacher language, and evidence of logical consequences were also evident during the peer observations. These three elements are inextricably linked, and focus on getting students to internalize both their thoughts and their actions. Encouraging students to use reflective thinking to impact these thoughts and actions, whether in an instructional or behavioral capacity, is part of the basic philosophy of this program, and is reinforced by teachers through the use of non-judgmental language. In order to encourage students to follow a given set of actions, teachers in a responsive classroom will demonstrate that behavior themselves in order to illicit the desired behavior from their students. All three observers noted specific comments and situations in the comment section that reflected this philosophy. The combined observations of positive teacher language are shown in Table 11. One observer also described in her post conference observation notes how a teacher described her own use of the logical consequences concept, and what that meant to her:

Evidence of Logical Consequences helps us respond to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity. If you break it, fix it; take a break; and loss of privilege are the main ones we focus on at the elementary level. I feel that this technique helps students take ownership of their own behavior and learning.

Peer conferencing was necessary to determine the impact of collaborative problem solving, guided discovery processes, and family/community outreach strategies. During their peer conferences, all three teachers described strategies they were using to bring the community into schools, and to establish closer relationships with parents. One teacher was running a district wide family night series for parents of third grade students. These are interactive two-hour workshops in which parents attend with their children, and usually have an instructional focus or an activity in which parents and students work together to create a project. The other two teachers both described the same strategy to improve teacher/parent relationships. Each teacher would make a positive phone call a day to a different students' parent or guardian. These were not calls of a disciplinary nature or to discuss schoolwork, but to establish a friendly relationship of trust between teacher and parent, and would always focus on something positive that child had done recently in school.

Guided discovery processes were discussed between teacher and observer, and were being implemented in creative ways. Each teacher had employed an exploratory system that was set up using centers with different activities that all related to a larger instruction theme or concept. Students worked independently or in pairs to use these centers materials to find answers to the written assignments. Taking this instructional approach encourages students' independence, cooperation, and productivity (Northeast

Foundation for Children, 2010). It was clear from these observations that Responsive Classroom techniques and strategies are being implemented to a great extent within the classroom setting at Cedar Creek.

**Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop.** Our district literacy coach conducted the peer observations for both a first grade and fourth grade Writers' Workshop. For her observation format, she structured the template based on the overall components and elements of a full Writers' Workshop Session (Appendix J). In each observation, she took note of the introductory lesson, the status of the class, the writing and conferencing component, and the sharing aspect. There is significant variation in how a writers' workshop lesson is run in a first grade classroom versus a fourth grade classroom. The first grade lesson focused on only the first three elements of the observation form. Writers' Workshop encourages primary students to think about what it means to be a writer, and to view themselves as an author (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2005). This process results in an illustrated and "published" book for every student. Early modeling of the writing process encourages appropriate writing behaviors and creates a comfortable climate that is conducive to the writing process.

The first observation was done in the classroom of a teacher with seven years experience, but was new to using the writers' workshop technique. The November in-service had been her first training on the topic. During this first grade lesson, the teachers stated goal was to model the personal story technique. This process uses visual images as prompts for student writing and idea development. The introductory/mini lesson began with the teacher modeling the process of choosing a personal topic. She told students about a funny thing that had happened to her that morning before she came to

school. She proceeded to draw the story on the board, in a sequential format. After completing the visual model, she began to label the various components of her story. Each student was then instructed to turn to a neighbor and describe an experience they would like to draw and write about. After this modeling exercise, the teacher began to circle the room and check for student progress. Once students had moved into the writing phase, they became quiet and worked individually. This writing/conferencing session lasted for 20 minutes. At that point materials were collected, and students were informed that they would be able to share their stories in front of the room, with the whole class during the next lesson.

This observation showed a solid, effective first attempt at implementing a writers' workshop. The observer noted the importance of checking for cumulative progress of students' writing skills and implementation of this program again in the spring when the next phase of trainings are delivered to the teaching staff at Cedar Creek.

The next lesson observed was taught by a teacher who was part of the initial summer training that took place last year. The fourth grade lesson under observation focused on the theme of "writer's point of view." Students were instructed to choose an object, such as a shoe, a rock, a car, etc. and write a short story from that objects point of view in two pages. They were also instructed to include an opening and closing paragraph.

This teachers' familiarity with the routine of the writing program was evident in the implementation of the material. The students were arranged in groups of four for conferencing purposes at the end of the session. Each student was given two different color highlighters for the purpose of editing their peers for spelling and punctuation.

After the introductory lesson in which the teacher had explained the writing prompt and the rubric for grading, she immediately led the class into the brainstorming session and the writing of their “sloppy copy,” or first writer’s draft. Students were then provided with a 30-minute silent work session. At the culmination of the work session, students traded papers with a “peer editor” in their group. Students were instructed to edit for spelling and punctuation for two of their peers. A second draft, or “clean copy,” was worked on the following day. Both lessons observed showed a level of implementation that would reasonably be expected for the amount of training experienced by each teacher, both lessons were successfully delivered and showed a high level of implementation of workshop content and strategy.

### **Peer Observation Summary**

Findings in each of the main observation areas were positive overall. Teachers who were new to differentiated instruction techniques demonstrated a reasonable level of progress with regards to workshop content implementation in the two months following the workshop. The teachers who were already highly experienced in this area remained consistent in skill level, but stated in their post observation conferences that they benefited from the experience of observing novice teachers and sharing their knowledge with their peers, and enjoyed the benefits derived from lifelong learning:

No matter how long I teach (I’m going on my 31<sup>st</sup> year) working with new teachers keeps me engaged in the profession. Remembering what it was like as a new teacher changes my outlook- for the better. When I never step out of my environment as a teacher, the blinders go up, and it is harder for me to maintain interest.”

Observers who looked for evidence of Responsive Classroom implementation focused on consistency: from grade level to grade level, and from classroom to

classroom. During peer conferencing, it was discovered by observers that Cedar Creek teachers were utilizing Responsive Classroom strategies appropriate for their level of training with this program. Those who were new to the program cited that having exposure to peers who had reached the second phase of the training was beneficial, and helped them learn the strategies at a quicker pace. One phase-one workshop participant cited that:

The classroom management aspect of Responsive Classroom is fairly simple and easy to master in one year, but having enough strategies to achieve the level of fluency where I can just change things up so my students don't get bored with some of the morning meeting activities is what I need. My more experienced colleagues have been able to give me ideas and resources to add to the workshop experience we had in November.

During the Writers' Workshop lessons, the observer saw lessons taught at the first and fourth grade level. One teacher was new to the Lucy Calkins program; the other had been part of the initial summer training. Both lessons were grade level appropriate and demonstrated a full application of the lesson content that had been presented in the November workshop session. During a post observation conference, one of the teachers discussed the benefits of the program in regard to teaching writing to young children:

I find writing in general difficult to teach. I find that with this program, as the students get used to it, they don't get hung up on grammar and spelling. Not that they don't need to know those things, but Writers' Workshop frees up kids to focus on the development of their ideas, rather than the technicalities of the writing. It emphasizes the idea of writing as a process, not an end result.

Over all, the peer observations have shown that our workshops in November were successful in providing teachers with professional development content that had a positive impact on instruction, and were perceived as useful by the teachers who were intended to benefit from the trainings. These results will

no doubt help to redirect teachers' perceptions of the overall professional development programming within the Cedar Creek School District.

### **Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee Survey Results**

Like the previous participant surveys disseminated during earlier cycles of this research study, the Cycle IV survey given to volunteers of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee contained both quantitative and qualitative components. Consistency of the data collection methods has provided both the researcher and the committee with a greater ease of comparison when evaluating both participants' comments, and the success of our endeavor (Creswell, 2007). Each participant was asked to describe the rate of success they experienced with this research study, to assess the degree to which they believed teachers' perceptions would change, and the extent to which they believed this committee, with continued commitment by the members involved, could become embedded in the culture of the three elementary schools in Cedar Creek (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

From a leadership standpoint, I wanted to identify the degree to which this team of teacher leaders believed their input could serve to redirect the course of our professional development programming, and whether or not they also believed the trust in this process could be built and sustained over time through continued and consistent implementation. A belief in the success of this process is particularly vital among these committee members, who have become the primary stakeholders in this process. The genuine systemic change that will be derived from a responsive open feedback loop system can ultimately serve to improve teacher instruction, and therefore student achievement (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990). This, however, will not be possible without the

continued shared leadership of this committee. Identifying important areas of focus for the coming year through their feedback will help to ensure that this goal is achieved beyond this research study. Determining the degree of impact on teachers' perceptions at this point in the research study will help to assess how far we have come.

Each of the six survey questions were analyzed using the same method of concurrent triangulation strategy that was used in previous cycles, as this method lends itself best to mixed methods research surveys (Creswell, 2007). All eight original committee members were surveyed: five classroom teachers, two academic coaches, and the curriculum supervisor. In the quantitative component of the survey, participants were given a scale of choices ranging from “not at all,” “a little,” “pretty well,” to “definitely” in order to describe their level of belief in the success of the process. The two forms of data were paired with the corresponding question, and were analyzed concurrently. The data from question one in the survey is shown in Table 9.

Table 12

*Cycle IV Survey Question One*

Question One	Pretty Well	Definitely
The collaboratively designed professional development workshop met the needs originally identified by our needs assessment committee.	6	2

While it is evident from the question one responses that the committee, over all, believes the initiative to be a success, it is also clear that they understand the significance

of sustained effort and long term commitment to the process if this is to create a systemic change that can become embedded in our school culture and instructional practice. Both participant comments use terms such as “long term,” “consistent,” and “continued” to describe what they felt would be necessary for real second order change to take place (Fullan, 2001). The first comment also shows a high level of cognizance that communication of one’s leadership vision is essential for the long-term success of that initiative (Kotter, 1995):

I think it did, but that was not just due to the workshops. It was also the fact that we articulated our long term vision to the teachers so that they would understand the rationale behind some of the programs we are choosing. No one is going to be receptive to having a bunch of seemingly bureaucratic work thrown at them if somebody doesn’t tell them there is a good reason for doing it.

I think this committee was an excellent first step! Seeing as this was our first attempt to allow staff members to drive their PD choices, I think it was very successful, but will need to be very consistent and continued if we are to address the systemic needs of our district.

The responses also show a cognizance that teachers are highly pragmatic, a belief that is backed up by the information gathered in the literature review (Quick et al., 2009; Reeves, 2009; Runyon, 2009). Question two asked committee members to write specifically about their own perceptions of professional development, and to predict how future committee actions would impact their views and opinions. Although this question is somewhat hypothetical in nature, an effective assessment of teacher’s attitudes and perceptions throughout the course of a change initiative can provide insight into not only a teachers’ outlook on both individual and organizational learning, but whether or not the collective building of a vision and participation in leadership experiences have resulted in a positive outlook that can continue to promote systemic change within the organization

(Helsing, 2007; Kotter, 1995; Senge, 1990). Statements such as “Only time will tell. I’m optimistic” and “Yes, I think perceptions will change if we stay the course,” as well as the other qualitative and quantitative data (see Table 10) indicate that committee members believe this leadership model for professional development can work given the necessary time, resources, and support.

Table 13

*Cycle IV Survey Question Two*

Question Two	Pretty Well	Definitely
My perceptions of professional development delivery in the Cedar Creek School District will change for the better if professional development is delivered using this collaborative model in the future.	6	2

In addition to the emphasis on continuity and consistency that arose in the question one data, the responses to question two show an understanding of the importance of staff leadership when it comes to moving an organization towards second order change (Fullan, 2001).

I think it will take years of consistency for perceptions to change. With staff leadership we have a better chance of that happening, because administrative turnover always seems to get us off track.

I think this is the way professional development should ideally be done- I’ve spent several years on professional development committees and I always feel as if decisions are too politicized- at the district and state level. PLC’s are mandated because we are supposed to be driving our own learning?! Then the state tells us to take all of our professional development hours and pour them into one initiative we didn’t choose?! Which is it? I think we need to focus all of our energy into these types of targeted initiatives and block the rest out- as best we can.”

In Cedar Creek, and in much of the research, personnel changes at the decision making levels of the organization have frequently been blamed for the discontinuation of popular programs (Desimone et al., 2002; Lohman, 2000).

Question three sought to determine committee members' level of comprehension regarding the factors that play a role in the successes and failures of professional development, in Cedar Creek and in general. During the Cycle II Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee meetings in September and October, Cycle I survey data had been shared with the committee, as well as the findings of the literature review within this dissertation project. Providing stakeholders with a transparent system in which they can see the connection between the relevant body of research and the proposed change initiative is an effective way of achieving buy-in, and helped the committee members understand the need for this professional development change within the wider scope of educational change and systemic reform (Kotter, 1995; Stevenson, 2007). Ensuring educators have a sense of context for necessary change can bring clarity and perspective to one's outlook, and allows teachers to see the final outcome of what they are working towards. The qualitative and quantitative survey data (see Table 11) show that teachers believe they learned a lot about what factors determine professional development success, and that localized decision making that is developed from the bottom up can have the greatest impact on school change (Wayne et al., 2008; Youngs & King, 2002)

Table 14

*Cycle IV Survey Question Three*

Question Three	Pretty Well	Definitely
Through this collaborative effort, I learned about factors and variables that can and do contribute to the success or failure of our professional development programming	7	1

Committee members stated:

So many of these factors are political: local, federal, state- too many hands in the pot. Let the people who have the knowledge of education (not politicians) control the decisions on how to run schools.

I feel like a lot of these factors are common sense (lack of time, funding, administrative support, etc.) but that could be because I've been teaching for a million years. It was interesting to see that so many of the problems are similar nationwide, regardless of the state or type of district.

Common organizational roadblocks such as state and local politics that interfere with instructional decision making on the local level are pragmatic concerns that must first be acknowledged and then addressed by teacher leaders, so that new avenues of success in professional development implementation can be achieved. These are problems that are not going to go away with a change in any particular political administration. Politics and the funding of public education are inextricably linked, and in order to contend with this, teachers must become advocates as well as instructors (Killion, 2002). Issues such as contract technicalities, scheduling conflicts, and limited training days within the school calendar are just a few of the local issues our committee faces when trying to bring about a change in instructional programming (Stevenson, 2007). The need for quality staff development is linked to the topic of large scale

organizational change in much of the research on the topic (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006).

Question four asked committee members to evaluate their own personal level of comfort with translating the knowledge gained during this research dissertation, and applying it to other leadership initiatives they are involved in. How this experience affected their own desire or ability to lead, most certainly will have an impact on the outcome of this committee as we progress into our second year, and hopefully other district committees in the future. Instilling an organization with “bottom-up” leadership requires that the readiness level and individual capacity of each member within an organization be nurtured and encouraged so that each person involved has both the skill level and the confidence to view him or herself as a leader (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). This type of individual and organizational readiness sets the stage for systemic change, creating an open feedback loop in which each member of the learning organization plays a vital role in the reevaluation of the change initiative at the end of each cycle (Senge, 1990). Some members found the technology of the SPSS system to hold potential within our organization, and others cited that the general knowledge about the findings within professional development were a motivating factor.

The SPSS system you showed us was interesting, I think it would be worth purchasing something like this if we could use it district wide, and we could try to promote action research within our staff.

I think the knowledge gained has had more of an overall impact on my opinions toward PD [professional development]. I don't know specifically how I will use it in the future, but the understanding I now have about the importance of teacher's guiding their own learning has increased my desire to become more involved.

All eight members of the committee responded that they felt “pretty well” prepared to serve as a leader in a collaborative capacity (see Table 12). Two committee members elaborated on how they could see this knowledge being implemented in the future. Encouraging action research among Cedar Creek staff members is an idea that had been casually discussed during professional learning community meetings the previous year. Very few individuals (including those in administration) throughout the Cedar Creek School District have any experience with conducting any form of actual research or using this type of technology, and due to the wide spread unfamiliarity with the process, the idea was backed away from fairly quickly. The use of a quantitative computer system to aide teachers in applying strategies that are data driven and research based can have a direct impact on teacher performance, instructional outcomes, and promote a staff initiated research and inquiry model (Lachance et al., 2007; Penuel et al., 2007).

Table 15

*Cycle IV Survey Question Four*

Question Four	Pretty Well
I now feel prepared to apply this knowledge when involved in future collaborative leadership initiatives. Describe in the section below how you think you may use this knowledge in the section below.	8

Prior to this committee’s investment in identifying and utilizing teachers’ perceptions to inform professional development programming, teacher feedback was not used in this capacity or at this level. Question five sought to determine the extent to which committee members believed they could replicate this process for both the future

needs of this committee, and any other committees they might join within the Cedar Creek District (see Table 13).

It is evident from the participant responses that this committee of teacher leaders feels prepared to take this process to the next level in Cedar Creek. The comments show how one individual is beginning to strategize ways in which the process could be expanded throughout our Kindergarten through twelfth grade district, taking this well beyond the Kindergarten through fifth grade scope of this dissertation. Despite situations that have arisen from funding cutbacks over the past year, the will to make educational reforms and bring about instructional improvement within Cedar Creek is still present among the staff. The difference between teachers who integrate professional development content successfully into their classrooms and those who return to the use of former classroom methods and practices often lies in whether or not those practices were self directed, or from a top-down model (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008).

Table 16

*Cycle IV Survey Question Five*

Question Five	Pretty Well	Definitely
I now have a better understanding of how to use staff input to improve professional development programming as a result of this collaborative process.	7	1

A will to integrate the foundational elements of this dissertation project into other areas of the school district is a positive sign that our committee’s practices have the potential to become embedded within the culture of Cedar Creek, as evidenced in one committee member’s statement:

I think this system could work very well the way we are doing it now (K-5). Since we are a K-12 district, we would have to work out a way to apply this differently for grades 6-12. I think we would have to figure out the logistics of how this would be run, since department chair positions were eliminated last year. Who would bear the responsibility?

The last survey question encouraged participants to think about the entirety of this committee experience, from the analysis of the Cycle I data and the planning and implementation of the professional development workshop series all the way up to the present. This question also invited them to think about what went wrong, what went well, what they would keep, and what they would do differently the next time around. Reflecting on one's experiences as leaders is important to increase our ability to visualize successes, improve critical thinking, and to help us organize our thoughts in an effective manner (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). This reflection from one cycle to the next is also important for developing a self-sustaining feedback loop that is able to change, grow, and adapt with the needs of our committee and the Cedar Creek School District (Senge, 1990).

Most committee members stated that they felt "pretty well" prepared to avoid any pitfalls they might encounter in future leadership initiatives (see Table 14). The comment below shows the insights and emotional intelligence of one member who demonstrated a cognizance of the high degree of complication and the many variables involved whenever teams are formed, and when the need to find common ground arises (Goleman et al., 2002). A large factor in the success of any leadership initiative is the prioritization and commitment level of everyone involved in the implementation of the project. This participant describes, essentially, a focus on a common vision and an overcoming of conflict as the root of our perceived success as a team:

This committee worked because everyone at the table had the same agenda, plain and simple. This is unusual! Usually people sign up for a committee for many different reasons. Some have hidden agendas, especially when you have mixed teacher/ administration committees. The difference here is that the teachers truly want things to be different, and the administrators really want teachers to take over some of this stuff. Everyone is so overworked and overstressed because of the RIF's last year, that they have no choice but to start delegating these responsibilities. This experience has been very positive, and I think it has real long term potential, but I'm not sure it will help me on other committees because I can't assume future committee members will have a common vision.

In the book, *Leadership on the Line* (2002), Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky describe what is called "a holding pattern" for conflict. The holding pattern is described as:

A space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart. Creating a holding environment enables you to direct creative energy toward working the conflicts and containing the passions that could easily boil over. (p.102).

During the first committee meeting in Cycle II, committee members used this venue as both a physical and emotional place to air their concerns openly with each other to establish group parameters. This honesty among participants was part of a necessary process that helped to establish our mutual tolerance level for open, candid discussion between members. Without having a space for conflict, a constructive working relationship could have never been built by our committee, or a sense of common purpose established (Goleman et al., 2002; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Table 17

*Cycle IV Survey Question Six*

Question Six	A Little	Pretty Well
Going through this collaborative process from the initial research phase through to the implementation of a needs-based professional development workshop has helped me understand, as a stakeholder in the system, how to avoid the pitfalls of professional development program implementation when working on committees in the future.	1	7

**Interview Results Overview**

In addition to the observations and surveys, interviews were conducted at the end of the Cycle IV data collection phase. These were unstructured, open-ended interviews, which were audio taped and then transcribed by hand. This type of interview allows the researcher to uncover the meanings people assign to their experiences, as opposed to the meanings we would project onto them (Creswell, 2007). These interviews gave committee members a chance to provide feedback about their experiences in an unstructured manner, allowing them to focus on what they felt was important. Four out of seven Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee members and 12 out of 34 workshop participants were interviewed in total, privately in their classrooms over the course of a week. According to Glesne (2006), it is beneficial for a researcher to conduct what is known as topical interviewing “in search of opinions, perceptions, and attitudes” towards some issue of concern to determine the perceived impact of a change they have recently experienced. Committee members were asked about how they viewed my leadership throughout this dissertation project, and workshop participants were asked to describe the

impact that the resulting professional development changes have had within their classroom (see Appendices G and H). Occasionally, it became necessary for me as the interviewer to redirect respondents through additional questioning, or a redirection of the topic, which the respondent had identified through his or her descriptions. This type of redirection became necessary during the span of some interviews in an attempt to keep the respondent focused on discussing the topic of leadership over the course of the year, and the impact the professional development changes had on their teaching and instruction (Creswell, 2007). Interview participants in both subject groups were probed at appropriate times in order to glean more detail from their answers, or to encourage them to elaborate upon areas they had only briefly touched upon in the beginning of the interview (Glesne, 2006).

**Committee interview results.** Four out of seven, or 57% of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee members were chosen randomly for personal interviews. These interviews were conducted solely by the researcher, in the privacy of the committee members' classrooms. I felt it important to maintain the relationship of trust that had been built up over the past year by providing an environment of confidentiality (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The main purpose of these interviews was to assess the leadership style and effectiveness of the researcher as perceived by the committee members with whom I had worked closely over the past year. The interviews were transcribed by hand from audiotape, and annotated for themes and descriptions of specific leadership styles as they were demonstrated throughout the research cycles. I also looked for evidence regarding how these committee members viewed their own leadership from the perspective of participating in this committee. This was not a formal

question asked of the respondents, as these interviews were conducted in an unstructured fashion (Creswell, 2007). The views about committee members' leadership were accessed instead through a probing technique as topics arose naturally through the interview process (Glesne, 2006).

There were several themes that were evident in the transcripts as I looked to identify committee members' descriptions of the leadership dissertation as a whole. Committee members described the process in many different ways. The main themes identified in the interview data regarding my leadership were demonstration of a deep understanding of district needs, a sense of pragmatism, an inclusive and transparent approach. Another theme identified regarding the overall leadership dissertation, as opposed to my leadership specifically, is the sense of optimism that was evident in many of the responses. There is an overall identifiable belief on the part of committee members that this change initiative is on its way to becoming "embedded" and systemic, and that second order change can be achieved (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990). Several interviewees mentioned the practical or pragmatic nature of what I had selected as a leadership project, and also the practical approach that they believe defined my leadership.

I think your experience in the district led you to do something for your dissertation project that was very practical and realistic for what the district's needs were. You didn't take a controlling or top down attitude, but when the situation demanded it and you needed to step in to get people to finish their observations within a reasonable time frame, you didn't have any trouble keeping them on target. There was a lot of work to be done and a limited time to do it, and sometimes you have to turn up the heat to make sure people get their responsibilities accomplished by a certain deadline. I guess I would say your methods were really balanced, in a good way.

I think this quote illustrates the application of the situational leadership style.

According to Hersey & Blanchard (1985), one must apply the necessary mode of

leadership that is necessary at a particular time based on the specificity of a given situation and the readiness level of the group or individual one is trying to lead. The experience level, motivation, and abilities of the followers are critical factors to consider when determining the appropriate course of action as a leader. In the quote above, this committee member described how they noticed that as a leader, at times I would allow people the freedom to bring their own priorities into the process, but at one point I had to approach certain committee members who had not completed their responsibilities within an agreed upon time frame. This interviewee appeared to understand the necessity of a change in approach from a leadership standpoint.

Several of the interviewees also mentioned their belief that my intimate knowledge of the organization had a profound impact on the success of this leadership initiative. The general consensus among interviewees seemed to be that this type of an undertaking could not have been accomplished by an outside researcher, because it required an extensive knowledge of the institutional history of the organization, as well as the specific needs of the community we serve in Cedar Creek. Full knowledge of the history of an institution and an understanding that organizational leadership is intrinsically complex, non-linear, and interconnected, and is a necessity for what Schein (2004) refers to as a “Learning Leader” to understand before that leader can instill systemic organizational change (Senge, 1990). A learning leader is not only able to understand that change must become embedded into the culture of an organization, but also understands how to nurture and develop the members of that organization to become learning leaders as well, so that they may become leaders in their own right (Schein, 2004). Most importantly, the following quote from a committee member shows that this

individual believes this professional development programming model has the potential to become embedded in our organizational culture, and result in systemic change:

You knew when other people knew best and let them take the reins, and I think that is something a lot of people appreciated, including me. We are constantly having more and more stuff thrown at us that is supposed to improve the school or improve test scores but it just ends up being more busy work, and doesn't end up changing anything anyway. That is probably because our administrators have come from other districts that were very different from Cedar Creek. They are looking at our problems from the outside based on their own experiences, which are not our experiences. This didn't feel that way. It felt relevant. I also think that as we keep going next year, the process will become routine and we will become even better at organizing and managing future workshop sessions and analyzing the data. I guess at some point the ideal would be that this whole process could go on whether you are there or not, but that may be a ways down the road?

The transparency of the process, and the inclusive nature of the leadership dissertation also appeared to have created a sense of ownership among committee members; which is an important factor in the readiness level of leaders within an organization (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). This committee member described how both the leadership opportunity and the data analysis process empowered her, and enabled her to analyze the thought processes of her colleagues as she read the Cycle I data, and compared them to what we collected and analyzed in Cycle III.

I feel really good about what you did; what we all did this year. I think that was what I like most about this is that you didn't make it about your leadership, you made it about ours. You took the surveys and instead of just telling us what you found in them, you let us actually see the input and decide how we wanted to act on it. I honestly was surprised by a lot of the input in the surveys. If you hadn't shown it to us and instead just reported out what you had found, I may not have believed our teachers wrote half the things I read! It sounded like a lot was just venting. I think that's a symptom of the problems we had. A lot of misdirected anger. Maybe we helped to direct it, because the feedback we got after the workshops was much more pleasant. I don't know if pleasant is the right word. Content, maybe? Satisfied?

Another committee member chose to describe the leadership dissertation's overall impact on the organization, and her general reaction to the process and the people involved both administrators and teachers alike. From her perspective, the change initiative played a role in building relationships between teachers and administration towards a common purpose: instructional improvement. She described how the attitude and priorities of the staff committee members shifted in the middle of Cycle II, and her reaction to watching those events unfold:

This was my first time being involved in anything administrative in nature. I have a new appreciation for the dark side. Just kidding! Seriously, this was really effective! Teachers like to complain about everything, this committee could have gotten out of hand really easily. You stayed really focused during the committee meetings; I don't know how with some of the tangents people were going off on in the beginning. It seemed to subside after the first two meetings- people got it out of their systems or something, because once we looked at the survey data and decided what we needed to do nobody wasted anytime whining about anything. I don't know if you noticed, but the process seemed to give the curriculum supervisor some credibility during her first year-she got to come in and play a big role in a committee that helped her look good to the staff- I'm just saying, I think the process was bridge building. That's an interesting side effect!

The most notable change in this interview data, when comparing it to the survey data collected in February 2010 during Cycle I, was a marked tone of optimism and confidence in many of the interview responses. The leadership readiness level of our committee members had increased as reflected in the confidence displayed in the interview data (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). In the book, *The Situational Leader* (1985), this leadership readiness is defined by Hersey and Blanchard as "a follower's ability and willingness to lead other members of their organization" (p.143). Comments of this nature show that participants have a shared vision and a sense of what this process can

become given the time, dedication, and continued support and involvement of both staff and administration. This optimism is a stark contrast to the pessimism that pervaded the Cycle I survey responses, and correlates to the participants' realization that our program enjoyed administrative support. Lack of administrative support was identified in both the literature review and the Cycle I data as a major contributor to whether or not a program would be implemented successfully (McCarthy, 2000; Santangelo, 2009; Youngs & King, 2002). One interviewee summed it up best when describing how overwhelmed she had felt in the beginning about taking on a leadership initiative of this scope and magnitude:

I admit I had my doubts any of it would get finished because it seemed like such a big job. I mean, it *was* a big job, but now it seems like a doable big job, you know what I mean? I couldn't visualize the whole process at the beginning of the year, or what this was going to look like at the end, or even what the workshops were going to look like, especially how we would fund them. Once it became obvious that we had administrative support when we planned the workshops, then I started to realize that maybe this would get done after all.

**Workshop participant interview results.** Workshop participants were asked to describe, in general, the changes in professional development programming that had taken place over the past year. They were also asked to elaborate specifically on how those changes have impacted their own classroom practice (see interview questions, Appendix G). These unstructured interviews followed the same model as the committee interviews, in that they were conducted privately within the participants' classroom, and recorded via audiocassette. These interviews were conducted briefly before and after school to maximize convenience to the participants (Glesne, 2006). All interviews were

then transcribed by hand, and coded for specific themes and commonalities that arose within the responses. My goal as a researcher was to find out, first if teachers had perceived positive changes within professional development programming, what those perceived changes specifically were, and if they had noticeably affected classroom practice. I also needed to find out from these interviews what, if anything; had been left out of our professional development efforts. Were there additional needs expressed by the Cedar Creek staff that we had not foreseen, either for logistical reasons or out of simple oversight? I considered this information important to learn, as the feedback would serve to inform our future actions as a committee.

When reviewing the interview responses for commonalities, one noticeable aspect participants remarked about was the organizational and structural changes that had come to pass as a result of the changes in professional development programming. In each instance this was cited as being an improvement in and of itself; the workshops were described as “efficient,” “well thought out,” and “effectively planned.” In an organization where time is the most valuable commodity and always in short supply, there will always be an appreciation for maximizing its potential (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2008; Negroni, 2003). Several of the comments even demonstrated that participants were thinking ahead about how the workshop content could be incorporated in the future, and described the type of impact they thought it could have. This respondent summed up the description of the comments most succinctly:

Normally these things [workshops] take forever and you walk away feeling like you haven't learned anything useful or that wasn't already common sense. I've actually been able to use a lot of the stuff we got during the November workshops; some of it I haven't yet but I intend to. It's just been a time issue so far. I definitely plan on getting to it next year. When we have planning committee in June for next year's strategies

and curriculum changes where the whole grade level gets together and shares ideas I think we will really be focusing on a lot of this stuff. Some of the teachers I know really dove into it this year, but they had already been in some of the trainings the previous year and kind of knew what they were doing. This was my first go, so I'm not in a rush. The take away activities from the DI [differentiated instruction] trainings that were already designed by the teachers who ran the workshops are the only ones I've started using fully. These are ideal- I know this is a lame excuse but I'm so busy that having a lesson already designed complete with resources and strategy descriptions and everything I need to use makes it work for me. If it's a strategy that looks interesting or useful, but requires me to reinvent the wheel, I just never seem to get to it. There is just no time to think anymore. We are always doing, doing, doing. Everything we learned at the workshops in November has the potential to affect what goes on in my class; I just have to find time to get to the rest of it.

While the previous participant focused on how time impacted her degree of content implementation, she also touched on what was, in her opinion, the most successful component of her professional development experience this year: fully designed, pre-planned demonstration lessons modeled by our academic coaches and veteran teachers. The coaching model has been shown repeatedly in research to have a direct impact on classroom instruction and teaching practices (Baker et al., 2004; Orrill, 2006; Quick et al., 2009). Several of the interview respondents shared the same level of approval when it came to this style of workshop. While the previous participant spoke of the benefits of ready-made differentiated instruction lessons that linked specifically to grade level instructional units, another interviewee articulated how she derived those same benefits from the writers' workshop sessions:

I think the trainings were great; we were given a lot of options with what we can implement in our classrooms. I liked the fact that the Lucy Calkins workshops were run by our Literacy Coach. She knows our K-5 curriculum. The advantage with her doing it was that she was able to model specific lessons the exact way we would need to do them when we were in class; no matter what grade level we teach. She is also there as a resource later on- we can go to her office and ask a question if we don't remember a specific thing or need more information, unlike when we

have out of district workshops and you never see the person again. It was like, there is absolutely no excuse for you not to implement this, here I'm handing it to you; you don't have to think just do it. Me, I'm going to use all of them. The more strategies I have to help me teach, the better a chance I have at getting through to my students. I have the inclusion group this year; I need all the help I can get! I think we should do more to encourage best practices.

Regardless of the specific content area being addressed in a given workshop, virtually every teacher described a preference for “ready-made” lessons that are already tried and tested, ultimately reducing their learning curve. Specifically, what the teachers found to be valuable content appears to have a correlation to their respective experience level. The two teachers quoted above have both been in the field for five years or less, and expressed a high degree of preference for the instructionally based workshops, which showcased Lucy Calkins and Differentiated Instruction techniques.

Some of the veteran teachers who were interviewed had other preferences in the November workshop series, however. Teachers who stated they had been working at the same job or had been “playing the same role” for many years derived more benefit from the workshops that familiarized them with newer strategies or technologies, or took what one participant referred to as, “the latest phase” like MAP Testing or Curriculum Mapping and made it useful and relevant. Their needs and concerns were less about instructional strategies, and more about needs that have come about as a result of recent changes in education over the past decade, for instance, the heavy focus on test scores and external mandates (Penuel et al., 2007; Wayne et al., 2008). As described in Cycle I, the majority of the previous year's professional development hours had been devoted to the curriculum mapping initiative and the survey data compiled at that point had been uniformly negative in regards to the relevance of the program. The Cycle IV interview

response below shows that perceptions of curriculum mapping have changed for this veteran teacher:

I've been teaching for a while now, so there were some workshops I found a lot more valuable than others. I think over all the PD choices this year were a vast improvement over the way things had been done over the last 3 or 4 years. Everybody got something out of it whether they were an experienced teacher or a new one. For me, the curriculum mapping session was the most valuable. Our curriculum supervisor knows what she's doing, and is able to explain why we need to do these curriculum maps and how to make it seem like there is a point behind the process. At least using them [maps] as lesson plans helps with alignment from one building or grade level to another. It's also great if someone is suddenly switched to another grade level, which has happened more frequently than I would like with all the budget cuts we've had. You never know from one year to the next what grade you're going to be teaching, we have several teachers who've switched grades 3 years in a row now. They never teach the same unit or the same lesson twice! After listening to them talk about how they found the curriculum maps helpful, I started to realize why we needed them. I hadn't thought about that aspect of it before. In my classroom, nothing much ever changes, but I've been teaching third grade for 19 years now.

Another veteran teacher described how she had derived benefits from learning how to analyze MAP Test data and that she believes the knowledge gained in the workshop will ultimately have a positive impact on the ASK scores of her students:

The MAP test training I had mentioned was good for me. We take all these standardized tests and it's so hard to keep track of the various subgroups in our classrooms, and then understanding how the scores correlate to the MAP data is really complicated. I'm used to administration dealing with that kind of information, so to see how what I'm teaching corresponds to the test scores it is interesting. I didn't realize how just one or two students, if they happen to fall within a certain subgroup, can prevent an entire grade level from scoring proficient or advanced proficient. The system is obviously flawed, but that has nothing to do with the trainings you guys provided us with! It was useful to understand this information better, and I think as a result of it I know what to zero in on to improve my class' performance on the ASK Test.

In addition to unlocking the potential of the MAP Tests for the instructional benefit of her students, this interview respondent touched on an element of this research dissertation as it pertains to second order change (Fullan, 2001). She describes how a task that was viewed as an administrative role was taken and made accessible to teachers. Leadership building through a deeper understanding of data use, state mandates, and how to affect organizational change is an important element in building change from the bottom up (Kotter, 1995). It also begins the cycle of using data analysis to drive instructional decisions within the classroom setting (Desimone et al., 2002). In order to develop an open-system feedback loop which ultimately results in second order change, small alterations in leadership behavior, such as entrusting an individual or group inside that organization with a task that encourages them to become vested in both the leadership and outcomes of said organization, can begin the process of redirecting organizational priorities and goals towards a desired systemic change (Senge, 1991).

Another interview respondent noticed the same impact of organizational change, but expressed surprise at the involvement level of certain veteran teachers whom she had previously labeled as “change resistant.” The ability to turn around organizational resistors is a positive sign that real change is happening within an organization, and can be improved by developing the readiness level of the employees within an organization (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985):

First of all, I like the changes. These workshops this year felt more like when you go to one of those out of district placements that you sign up for yourself; I mean it feels like what I would have picked to learn about myself if I had planned it. I thought it was interesting that teachers from each building said they were happy with the choices of the final workshop series, usually teachers at the -----school are complaining about the differentiated instruction because a lot of them have been teaching for a long time and don't like change. I was shocked that one of

them was actually on the committee you formed. I was just surprised she had volunteered. I am curious to see what sort of impact these trainings have long term, I think the more we focus on professional development that has an instructional focus the more likely it is that student learning in our classrooms will increase.

It could be interpreted from this statement that the cross-district collaboration brought about by this committee had the desired effect of establishing a common sense of purpose from grade levels Kindergarten through 5, regardless of which school in Cedar Creek a particular teacher is associated with. One problem that can be attributed to the site based management roots of Cedar Creek is the slight sense of competition that still exists among some of the teachers (Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Runyon, 2009). When viewed in conjunction with the following quote, it is also evident that an overall improved outlook was noticed by teachers as a result of this dissertation study:

I notice that the whole staff is reacting differently to the trainings this year. They are a lot less critical, for one thing. They know their peers worked really hard putting this program together and it wasn't an afterthought, and the decisions on what to do came from what they wrote on those surveys last year. I think there is still some skepticism, but it's a new thing to be doing our professional development this way, and nobody is sure yet if this is just a phase, or an actual change. The changes were good, but are we going back to the same old thing next year? From what I've heard through word of mouth from committee members, they are already talking about how to continue to adapt this for next year, so I'm guessing that it's not going away. I think this is the type of professional development change that can become part of our instructional dialogue when we have faculty meetings, grade level meetings, and during summer planning committees.

When taking the history of Cedar Creek into context, this concern that some teachers have expressed about this program not continuing on is an understandable one. Nationwide, the incidence of failed leadership initiatives is pervasive, and a problem that has plagued many school districts (Lohman, 2000; Santangelo, 2009). This teacher

articulated specifically how these concerns have been reinforced in Cedar Creek over the last several years:

I hope you're planning on continuing this process next year. It would be a shame to put all that work in and let it slide off. Of course, I can't imagine the teachers letting that happen. *They* worked really hard too and I think they would pitch a fit and take over the process themselves if it stopped for some reason. I don't want us to go back to stupid workshops that have nothing to do with our curriculum or what we are supposed to teach. The state makes us do enough time wasters; we don't need to add to it. When ----- got her doctorate, we did all these activities in our faculty meetings that related to racial identity and community building and that was the only thing administration cared about for a whole year and then after she graduated she left the district, and that was it. I was thinking, OK, am I still supposed to use this stuff? What's next? Nobody really got upset when it was dropped, though; because I think everybody knew it was her baby and they didn't really feel like it had anything to do with them anyway. This is different though. People felt the consequences of this process and liked what happened, so I don't think they will let this go away.

It is clear in this respondent's description of a prior leadership initiative that the program they are referring to had not become successfully embedded into the school culture and that a lack of involvement on the part of staff had allowed the program to become dispensable (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999). This interviewee made a clear distinction in this statement as to how, for her, this leadership initiative differs from the previous experience. Several of the other respondents reinforced what committee members had said in their interviews about my being "an insider," or having the advantage of organizational knowledge, and that they believed I had an understanding of how to embed the process so that I could ensure long term staff involvement. From the early phases of this research dissertation the committee and I have worked to ensure stakeholder buy-in, and to ensure teachers understand this is meant to be a long-term commitment (Kotter, 1995). This effort is recognized by one participant's statement:

The fact that teachers are driving the ship so to speak, tells me that this is something that might actually be around for more than a year or two, which hasn't been the case of most of the new programs that come into our district. Things are always initiated by administrators, the administrator goes to another district a few years later, and we are on to something else. The teachers aren't going anywhere.

### **Interview Summary**

The interviews that were conducted with 57% of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee Members described how I, as a leader, and this dissertation project in general, were viewed by others within the Cedar Creek School District. There were several themes that were evident in the transcripts as I looked to identify committee members' descriptions of the leadership dissertation as a whole. Committee members described the process in many different ways. The main themes identified in the interview data regarding my leadership were demonstration of a deep understanding of district needs, a sense of pragmatism, an inclusive and transparent approach. Another theme identified regarding the overall leadership dissertation, as opposed to my leadership specifically, is the sense of optimism that was evident in many of the responses. There was an overall identifiable belief on the part of committee members that this change initiative was on its way to becoming "embedded" and systemic, and that second order change can be achieved (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990). Several interviewees mentioned the practical or pragmatic nature of what I had selected as a leadership project, and also the practical approach that they believe defined my leadership.

A positive, though unanticipated outcome that was evident in the interview responses was an increased readiness –level of the committee members regarding their own leadership capacities, and a noticeable willingness to take this dissertation project to the next level of implementation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). It is obvious members

have a sense of the strong level of investment they have made over the past year, and that even without the improvements to classroom instruction they had desired, would function as a substantial motivator for them to continue.

The workshop participant interviews also revealed interesting information about how this leadership initiative was viewed by staff members who were not directly involved in the planning phases of the process, but were able to experience the workshops that resulted from the committee's decisions. Interviewees were probed about how they believe it had impacted their classroom practice as teachers, and several main points were revealed. All teachers, regardless of experience level, noticed a drastic improvement in the structural and managerial aspects of the changes. Respondents stated that the workshops were "efficiently run," "well thought out," "highly organized," and "logistically impressive."

In addition to the improvements regarding the overall implementation, it was found that the teachers with less classroom experience perceived the greatest benefits from Differentiated Instruction training and Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop. The fact that these trainings were both directly linked to curricular units and involved demonstration lessons from veteran teachers and academic coaches played a substantial role in their success. Veteran teachers with a substantial amount of teaching experience derived the most benefits from newer strategies and technologies like using the MAP tests to drive instructional changes in their classrooms, and learning about update uses for the curriculum maps they had designed the year before. Both groups of teachers commented that there was a vast array of needs to be met within the realm of Cedar

Creek's Professional Development, and that they felt our committee had done a good job of addressing all of them.

Many teachers, both new and veteran, made connections between this overall dissertation project, and systemic change within Cedar Creek. These connections were picked up on by teachers from two different angles: through the use of data analysis to drive instructional decision making, and through their own perceptions about the results of the collaborative leadership experience that had taken place with our Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee. Overall, these interviews have shown that this leadership initiative has been successful thus far, and if continued, holds the potential for real systemic change.

### **Reflection on Research Questions**

#### **Question One: Successful Professional Development in Cedar Creek**

Throughout the cycles of this action research project, our committee has not only learned what type of professional development (and what mode of implementation) has the greatest level of success within the Cedar Creek elementary schools, but we have also been able to apply the previously gained knowledge from researchers in other districts through the review of the literature when determining what the best practices in professional development implementation are for our schools (Baker et al., 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001; Hoff, 2001). The reason teachers' perceptions are so vital when it comes to deciding whether or not an instructional methodology will take hold in a classroom is due to the distinct relevance of implementation issues (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; Goldberg, 2004). Individuals and leadership teams who take the time to develop training programs from the ground up within their organizations understand, on a deep

level, the complexities of the change inhibitors which impact the success rates of these programs, and often come up with more cost effective solutions to addressing them (Negroni, 2003; Quick et al., 2009). It is this bottom up, systemic capacity development within an organization, that leads to an effective feedback loop and will, given time, attention, and commitment, lead to second order change (Fullan, 2001, 2007; Senge, 1990).

### **Question Two: Impact of Implementation on Professional Development Success**

In Cedar Creek, the inhibitors identified by our elementary staff members in Cycle I were multi-dimensional and reflected many of the same roadblocks that had been identified in the research. These issues (time, funding, scheduling conflicts, lack of administrative support, etc.), transcend individual school districts, but the uniqueness of how to go about addressing each one of these factors in a given school is extremely site specific, and can only be improved by the people who are directly involved in the application of the process (Klingner et al., 2004). By and large, the programs that received negative feedback from staff during Cycle I were the programs that were either state mandated, or had been implemented at the district level with no staff feedback on how or why the program was necessary. Even the unpopular programs such as Curriculum Mapping and MAP Testing were required, however; and as a committee we decided to improve their lot by making them more relevant to instruction. By taking a negative and turning it into a positive, these programs could achieve something more than an administrative bureaucratic status in the eyes of our staff, and hopefully even be viewed as useful down the road.

### **Question Three: Greatest Successes within the Strategic Plan**

Programs like Lucy Calkin's Writers' Workshop and Differentiated Instruction were quite popular from the beginning, but still received criticism because little or no thought was put into who could participate in the training, when it was offered, or how and if there would be any follow up. Many quality, well received professional development programs have failed to take hold in school districts simply because there was no long term logistical planning regarding how the program could effectively take root within the organization (Orrill, 2006; Runyon, 2009). The formal trainings for these programs were not only very expensive, but also not local. It was important to take content that we knew was beneficial to the staff and not only make it more cost effective, but also make it work within the time constraints of our district contract year. Our task as a committee in promoting these programs was to find an appropriate and effective vehicle for passing along this workshop content from one teacher to another. This is how turnkey workshops came to become a major component of our Cycle III training series.

### **Question Four: Replicating Successes within the Strategic Plan**

Our Strategic Plan in the Cedar Creek School District is revised on a five-year basis. It is necessarily wide in scope, as it encompasses programs and professional development for the entire Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Part of our committee's future actions will be to make recommendations as to how our findings can be applied to other areas of need within the district, and to other training programs. Replicating the successes in professional development programming and organizational change initiatives have a greater chance of succeeding when those expansions are attempted within environments that are either identical or similar to the original site in

which the success was derived (Desimone et al., 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006). One positive of using a district developed process and format is that our committee will have the added benefit of knowing who the key stakeholders will be when it comes to expanding this program into other areas of the district, and possibly even other instructional departments. Part of the success of any change initiative comes from having the right people placed in strategic positions within committees, departments, and leadership roles. This type of organizational impact can only occur through a change effort that is developed from within a system which enjoys the privilege of external organizational supports, paving the way for the mental model perceptions shifts of its members (Senge, 1991).

#### **Question Five: A Self-Sustaining Feedback Loop for Second Order Change**

This dissertation study stemmed from an identified area of need within the Cedar Creek School District. Utilizing teachers' beliefs and perceptions toward professional development initiatives through the development and implementation of a self-sustaining feedback loop has moved our staff out of a first order change mental model perspective (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990). These changes are evident through the open-minded candor that was found in the survey data collected during Cycles III and IV, both from workshop participants and committee members alike. There are, understandably, still comments that display a healthy dose of realism or skepticism, which would be expected from a group of educators who have experienced many failed or discontinued change initiatives over the years (Fullan, 2001, 2007). One committee member wrote that,

It will take years of consistency for perceptions to change; it is not a process that has a clean beginning and a clean end. With staff leadership, and consistent application, we have a better chance of this change taking place.

With collaborative leadership by our committee over the next several years, I believe the skepticism will give way to trust, which is an absolute necessity for genuine organizational change to take place (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

The ultimate goal of achieving second order change in our professional development programming is to improve the quality of instruction in our classrooms and, in turn, improve student learning. The Cycle IV classroom observation data collected by our committee volunteers showed a successful implementation of workshop content that has been set up to be sustained and continued over time. Committee members have demonstrated a dedication to continuing this process for years to come, and are even discussing ways we can expand this process to include middle school and high school departments. When brainstorming these solutions as a group, our committee members are demonstrating the site-based, bottom up leadership that research has shown to be effective and sustaining over time (Goldberg, 2004, Lachance et al., 2007; Reeves, 2009).

In my personal opinion as a researcher and an educator, our future actions as a committee are the most important part of this dissertation study. Over the course of the past year, Cycles I through IV have been the foundation layer for an initiative which will bring our district closer and closer to second order change in professional development programming that can ultimately improve the quality of instruction in our classrooms, and there are several ways in which our committee has decided to address future needs for this program (Fullan, 2001).

One issue to be addressed next year is the need for more grade level planning meetings and common planning time. If we cannot find a way to address this need through monthly planning meetings, then a day will be designated next year for teachers

to take turns modeling best practices with lessons pulled directly from their own curriculum. This will give teachers a chance to showcase what they have learned to their peers, while increasing the frequency of idea exchange for best practices within the district. It will also enable the teachers who do not have time to “reinvent the wheel” to gain more useful instructional ideas for their classroom (Killion, 2003).

In addition to increased common planning time, we will be working to expand the peer observation model as a result of this year’s success. There are enough teachers who had a positive experience with this practice that they are willing to work with other teachers on a volunteer basis and take turns going into each other’s classrooms to not only get new ideas for themselves, but to give feedback to others (Baker et al., 2004; Beninghof, 2006).

We will also be continuing and expanding the “Maps as Plans” training to include 10 more teachers for next year, with the goal of achieving full implementation over the course of the next three years. We determined from the interview and survey data in Cycle IV that feedback was positive enough to increase the level of involvement for next year, but committee members felt it was best done gradually, and with the inclusion of a couple new committee members who would like to be involved in the coming year.

#### **Question Six: The Role of Teacher Involvement in Systemic Change**

Teacher involvement in the planning, implementation, and organization of professional development programming on the local level is vital to overall systemic change within a school district, and within any large-scale organizational reform. Through surveys, interviews, and observations, our Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee has determined that a consistently implemented cycle of data collection,

analysis, planning, and implementation will over time, lead to systemic second order change in the Cedar Creek School District (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990).

Through the involvement of dedicated teachers, and with the support of administration, Cycle IV observations, surveys, and interview data showed that our committee was successful in developing a system to affect a positive impact on teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions within the Cedar Creek School District. While committee members and workshop participants showed an awareness of the long term nature of this change initiative, it is evident in the Cycle IV data that a certain degree of change has already occurred, and that a positive impact has been experienced by stakeholders within the Cedar Creek School District.

#### **Question Seven: Impact on Leadership**

My position within my district and the nature of the leadership experiences that I have had over the last several years has determined the type of leadership I have had to display. For this reason, I have always thought of myself as a "Situational Leader" (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995). The idea of situational leadership is more an effect of consequence than a characteristic of my personality, however. As a leader I have always had a tendency to look at the larger picture and take a wide-angle view, as opposed to focusing on the details and the specifics of a situation. This comes primarily from the wide scope (but shallow depth) that my job responsibilities entail. Throughout my career, I have been a district level teacher. At the beginning of this dissertation project I was a Kindergarten through fifth grade art teacher in three different schools, working with three different teaching staffs, and three different principals in addition to a curriculum supervisor. Now, I am a Kindergarten through eighth grade art teacher working with four

distinct groups of teachers, five principals, and two curriculum supervisors. It is very likely that at the midpoint of 2011, I will be teaching at the high school level and developing an Advanced Placement program for my department. All of these changes and additional responsibilities have created changes within me, and my processes as both a leader and a teacher. These changes have also presented great challenges within this overall dissertation process over the past year.

In March of 2010, our staff was impacted significantly by a reduction in force (RIF) that took place within our district. This RIF coincided with the end of Cycle I, just as I had finished soliciting volunteers for the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee. One of the non-tenured teachers who had volunteered lost her job last year, and another had to suddenly change grade level and was no longer teaching at the elementary level. Trying to keep a change initiative on track with a high degree of organizational instability occurring created many new inhibitors that I could never have planned for or foreseen when I first began to conceive this action research project, and has given me a tremendous amount of new insight into the problems our district will continue to face down the road. Despite the unfortunate happenings within our district, this change in professional development programming was something teachers wanted to see happen. Two veteran elementary school teachers volunteered to participate in the committee and the subsequent trainings due to their appreciation for what I was still trying to accomplish in a time of adversity for both myself and others. In a way, the problems and inhibitors created from the RIF caused teachers who had expressed no prior interest in this committee to seek out participation in something that they viewed as an act of leadership, which would help guard against the negativity happening all around

them. Reflecting upon this at this point, facing this adversity when we did had a transformational effect on this dissertation process (Fullan, 2001).

I am sure that as of yet I have still not fully processed all of the changes that have happened, and continue to happen this year. Despite the institutional evolution Cedar Creek continues to go through with budget cuts and staffing, we have enough teachers with secure jobs involved in the Staff Needs Assessment and Professional Development Committee at this point to ensure its continuation, and an administrative team that is willing and able to provide us with the time and space to make it happen.

## **Chapter V**

### **Leadership Platform**

#### **Introduction**

My philosophy of education and leadership became more fully developed when I realized how my beliefs and knowledge as an educator (or follower) converged with my experiences as a leader in the public school system (Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Robinson, 2001; Snell, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). I believe that active community involvement, quality professional development, and solid instructional programs that show educators how every child can succeed are the key to not only fixing the problems in America's classrooms, but will help instill in teachers a new found optimism in their own abilities to succeed in this era of seemingly unachievable (and unrealistic) national standards (Anyon, 1981; Beninghof, 2006; Gardner, 1999; Levine, 2002; McCarthy, 2000; Negroni, 2003).

My reasons for wanting to be an educational leader (particularly in the area of staff development) stem from a desire to fill a "moral void" that I have seen in certain schools in which I have worked (Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Goleman et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). This void is particularly noticeable in schools that serve an economically disadvantaged clientele, as there tends to be very little community support for schools or a love of learning from the students (Anyon, 1981; Howard, 2007; Runyon, 2009; Snell, 2003). These missing elements can only be made up for through strong school leadership that provides inspiration, an effective and substantial vision for instruction, and a sense of empowerment to its teachers. I strive to model myself after the administrators I have known who are strong unifying forces, and have exhibited an ability

to maintain efficient organization (which builds a consistent and positive school culture) while still maintaining a larger vision for the school (providing teachers with a common purpose and sense of direction). These leaders are also open and honest about their strengths and weaknesses, which enable them to continue to grow within their job capacity (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 2003; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Goleman et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

### **Leadership Theories and Approaches that Inform My Practice**

As an educator, much of my own training and focus has revolved around brain-based learning and the implementation of professional development programs that help educators meet the needs of diverse learners through individualized instruction (Gardner, 1999; Levine, 2002; Robinson, 2001). I have also been heavily invested in programs that engage parents and community members from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in the instructional process (Gardner, 1999; Levine, 2002). A child's attitude towards school is largely dependent on the prevailing attitudes in her home environment. These attitudes are cyclical and generational, and as an educational leader I consider it my responsibility to redirect these negative attitudes through relationship building. Establishing a cohesive school vision requires collaboration from *all* stakeholders within the school community, not just school employees (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001, 2007).

Over the last couple years, I have been involved in several district level initiatives that reflect these values. In April 2007, I was privileged to host the first All Kinds of Minds Fair in the state of New Jersey. The All Kinds of Minds Fair is based on the Schools Attuned program, a professional development initiative that trains teachers in

data collection and analysis through the use of Multiple Intelligence Theory and brain-based learning. Schools Attuned is a differentiated instruction program in which most of our elementary teachers hold certifications. The fair was a highly successful attempt to articulate this school vision for the benefit of the community as a whole. It also provided motivated students with an opportunity to act as ambassadors to their families, guiding our guests through the activity stations and in turn building their confidence in their leadership abilities. It was also a manifestation of my beliefs as a leader regarding the importance of establishing a vision for school and community alike, and substantial professional development experiences for teachers so that they may effectively meet the needs of every type of learner in their classroom (Anyon, 1981; Beninghof, 2006; Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Gardner, 1999; Hoff, 2001; Levine, 2002; Robinson, 2001).

My attempts at individualizing the learning experience for every student have also led me to work with a committee towards the development of student-led conferences as part of our district level strategic plan. This will provide students (from the primary grades through to high school) with the opportunity to learn goal setting techniques and, at the upper grades, reflect upon their progress from one year to the next. Over the course of five months, our action research team investigated the topic and identified other successful local and state programs, narrowing down the best options to meet our elementary, middle, and high school needs. Working as a team, we managed to develop a detailed, cohesive plan that would serve the needs of our small, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade district (Hoff, 2001; Quick et al., 2009).

I have also worked in conjunction with my curriculum supervisor to develop a Family Night series, in which grade level teachers host fun and informative activities in the subject areas of math, literacy, music, etc., once again bringing parents into the instructional process. Teachers in various grade levels and subject areas were instrumental in brainstorming topics and themes for the Family Nights. These have proved very popular with staff and parents alike, and we are moving into our fourth year of the series.

I also served as the group leader for the NJQSAC Operations Committee. In this capacity, I was required to work with board members, the school business administrator, principals, and other teachers in the capacity of group facilitator as we worked collectively to determine our districts compliance level in the areas relevant to building management and facilities. This area of QSAC focuses on making sure that facilities are adequate to support effective teaching and learning, as well as whether or not the district is using accurate and effective collection of student data and record keeping. This was a true group effort encompassing participation from many different levels of the organization, and all members of the committee were instrumental in conducting the research, referencing policies, and interviewing appropriate district personnel (Bolman & Deal, 1999; Schein, 2004).

In addition to serving as the Operations group leader, I also served as a member of the QSAC Personnel Committee. I was responsible for compiling information on our district fall report relevant to the Highly Qualified Teacher Act, No Child Left Behind, and information regarding staff licensure. As a team member I collected policies, samples of staff evaluations, and procedure manuals to help determine our relative standing as a

district. These experiences on the QSAC team gave me a lot of exposure and experience to different types of district level administrative tasks that I was unable to have during my administrative internship with my mentor principal (Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Goleman et al., 2002; Hinchey, 2008; Schein, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

More recently I have been presented with other opportunities that have enabled me to expand my capabilities as a leader (and as a doctoral student) within the public school setting. This past year I received certification from Staff Development for Educators as a Differentiated Instruction Trainer. I spent a week in Chicago learning many strategies and techniques for classroom instruction that have enabled me to serve as a staff trainer within my district, presenting turnkey workshops to both new and veteran teachers. This has been an excellent experience for me as both a future leader within the public school system, and as a way for me to gain further instructional expertise in subject areas that I have not taught as a classroom teacher. In this day and age, a good principal must have a solid understanding of instruction so that he or she can effectively provide their staff with the assistance and expertise needed in order to raise test scores (Anyon, 1981; Beninghof, 2006; Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Desimone et al., 2002; Gardner, 1999; Levine, 2002; Robinson, 2001).

This year I have also served as a district leader in the area of curriculum mapping. This experience was useful as a future educational leader for a variety of reasons. The only area of QSAC in which my district fell below the required 80<sup>th</sup> percentile was the area of Curriculum and Instruction. As a small, pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade district, we do not have many of the lower level supervisory positions many larger districts have, such as subject area supervisors, or even grade level coordinators. This had

caused a lot of curricular gaps to appear in our district wide scope and sequence over the years. Curriculum mapping was brought about as a way to correct this serious deficiency in our instructional program. As one of a core group of teachers to receive training in the mapping process, I was able to improve the scope and sequence of my own curriculum, as well as serve as a resource to my colleagues who were not able to participate in the training themselves. This experience helped me learn about the varying needs and specifics of different subject areas, as well as the uniqueness of individual grade level curriculum design. It also allowed me to gain more experience with utilizing the servant leadership model (Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Goleman et al., 2002; Greenleaf, 1995).

Over the last year and a half, I have gained more and more experience using research in the capacity of an educational leader. Serving as a member of our district wide K-5 Literacy Committee, I conducted action research on the latest trends in literacy, and helped to organize site visitations around the state for our grade level teachers so that they could observe various literacy programs in action, as they are being used in other districts that have a similar socioeconomic and demographic makeup as our district (Hinchey, 2008; Hoff, 2001; Orrill, 2006). I believe very strongly in the power of peer mentoring and observational learning, and also that the best way to learn is through doing something yourself, or actually watching others do it. I feel that if teachers can see instructional programs in action and not just through a textbook presentation by a company representative, they are more likely to make informed decisions about which programs are right for them, and will best suit the needs of their students. This difference is akin to the difference between theory and action. Providing teachers with an

opportunity to see a curriculum in action is also preferable to the concept of piloting a program, which holds the potential for a lot of wasted instructional time (Beninghof, 2006; Killion, 2002).

I have had many additional experiences that have helped me grow and develop my skills and knowledge in the realm of educational leadership. My experience writing my Literature Review for Introduction to Research Literature Analysis and Writing has also been helpful for me (Hinchey, 2008). As a staff leader within my district, much of my work revolves around the implementation of professional development initiatives. My own personal experiences as a staff leader with experiencing many of the roadblocks to successful implementation led me to the choice of my literature review topic (Garet et al., 2001; Lohman, 2000; Wayne et al., 2008).

### **Personal and Professional Code of Ethics**

An important component in my leadership development has been my personal and professional code of ethics. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) highlight the importance of the Ethics of the Profession as an overarching factor that combines with our personal value system, and our own sense of who we are as individuals within our decision making process as leaders. My own code of ethics has been built upon my beliefs and views as an educator, a leader, and a member of a democratic society.

As an Educational Leader, I:

1. Shall consider the needs of others before self when I make a decision that affects everyone within the educational community (students, teachers, and community members).

2. Shall safeguard the honor and integrity of my coworkers and my students by not exposing them to embarrassment or ridicule, and always protecting their confidentiality.
3. Shall provide students with access to as wide a range of learning opportunities as is within my power and sphere of influence.
4. Shall insure that all students have equal access to programs and benefits within my power and sphere of influence.
5. Shall not misrepresent my professional qualifications.
6. Shall continue to pursue activities that develop my professional growth as an educator and a leader.
7. Shall respect the values, cultures and viewpoints represented within my community and classroom.
8. Shall work with the belief that quality education is the common goal of the public, boards of education, and educators, and that cooperative effort is essential among these groups to attain that goal.
9. Shall maintain a positive and active role in school and community relations.

### **My Research Connected to my Leadership Theory in Use**

Investigating the research base for the successes and failures of professional development initiatives has enabled me to view my own districts' successes and failures through a clearer lens, as I am now able to see my leadership team making several of the mistakes that have been documented in much of the data I have read this semester (to be fair, there are also many things my district is doing well). Having this research knowledge has helped me to gain insight and peace of mind for why things may not be

working out the way administration had intended, and also, how I might choose to do things differently when I am in a leadership position myself someday.

As of April 2009, I was appointed to the district level Professional Development Committee in Cedar Creek. The knowledge and training I have gained through my doctoral studies allowed me to be of greater use to my district in this capacity. Having greater control over my district's professional development initiatives also served to guide me toward an action research project (as a dissertation) that could truly create change to prepare us for a global future, and make a permanent impact on the way things are currently being done in Cedar Creek (Burns, 2003; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Hoff, 2001; Robinson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Whether I am working in an instructional capacity within my district, working independently on a research project, or functioning as a team leader for a district-wide initiative, all of these experiences have taught me the importance of using the appropriate leadership style for the appropriate situation (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Goleman et al., 2002; Hersey & Blanchard, 1985; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). I have found the tenants of situational leadership to be very important to my success as a teacher and a leader thus far (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). While I believe that my natural inclination is to seek input from others and function as a collaborative leader, I have found it necessary for my leadership style to change depending on the circumstances and the ability level of the members of my group.

In yet another leadership function, I have served as a district representative to the Southern New Jersey Achievement Gap Consortium, sponsored by the Penn Center for Educational Leadership (Anyon, 1981; Beninghof, 2006; Hersey & Blanchard, 1985;

Hoff, 2001). This is a network of schools in the region that are collectively committed to reducing the underachievement of economically disadvantaged minority and ESL students. Listening and learning from the vast array of visiting speakers, as well as local administrators and teachers trouble shoot ways to address these pertinent issues has been an eye-opening experience. It has also been helpful to know that other districts are struggling with the same problems as Cedar Creek, and being part of a network where school leaders can share ideas that are working for them (or not working for them) is invaluable when trying to solve these complex social problems. Over the past year, Cedar Creek has been consolidating its in-house efforts to coincide with our district's strategic plan.

For instance, while leading the NJQSAC committee, I functioned merely as a facilitator, collecting and communicating needed information, setting up meetings, etc. The majority of my committee members were administrators, and as a teacher I did not have the "expert power" in the group. I had to rely heavily on their knowledge and abilities, and take on more of a servant leadership role. While developing the All Kinds of Minds Fair (which was my most challenging experience to date), I feel that I employed several different leadership styles over the four-month period of development. The initial stages involved highly directive training of staff members and students, while auxiliary committees (set-up, publicity, etc.) were much more collaborative. I was able to delegate a lot of these responsibilities to other people due to their willingness and expertise. I believe the ultimate aims of the Fair and the Family Nights are transformational in nature and inspired many parents and staff members to get involved in various

instructional programs within the district (Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Hersey & Blanchard, 1985).

In my capacity as a staff trainer in Differentiated Instruction and Curriculum Mapping, I find that I have to use a much more directive style of leadership, particularly when I am running new teacher workshops. In these situations, I am significantly more likely to be holding the expert power in the group, and therefore the intention is to impart a certain amount of information to other staff members who are at a significantly lower readiness level than me. As much as I like being a collaborative leader, and I am fully aware that there is a lot of information which I know very little about, there are times when it is not appropriate for me to use this style of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Goleman et al., 2002).

### **Reflective Practice Philosophy**

#### **Connections to Kotter**

Reflecting upon my own leadership, I could see connections to John Kotter's Eight Steps as they are described in his 1995 book, *Leading Change*. The steps were not exact or sequential, but I found similarities nonetheless. Some steps I cannot take credit for the deliberate planning of, as the staff was predisposed to desire the type of change which left them ripe for the action research project I proposed for my dissertation. The first step of creating a sense of urgency was already part of the organizational climate, as was obvious from the malcontent voiced in the Cycle I qualitative surveys.

Forming a coalition proved a bit more complicated due to unforeseen obstacles, which arose from the previous year's school district budget cuts. Two of the individuals who had volunteered to participate in the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee

lost their teaching positions due to a reduction in force (RIF), and were replaced by two veteran teachers who were determined that this initiative not fall by the wayside. Whether due to their loyalty to me, their desire to see genuine change, or some combination of both, this collective adversity faced by our teachers seemed to increase their level of determination, not dampen it.

Creating a vision for change and communicating the vision effectively was done partly by me early on in my staff presentations at faculty meetings in each district school. I communicated the vision by describing the change I desired to see in order to gain buy-in from the staff in each school that participated in the study. Creating what that vision would look like in terms of implementation and application was a task that was decided jointly by me and the Cycle II Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee.

Many of the components of this research study were designed in a way that could ensure the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee had a minimum amount of obstacles in their way. Involving stakeholders in all phases of the process, from data analysis in Cycle I through to the assessment of workshop content integration in Cycle IV assured that those involved (principals, supervisors, and teacher leaders) had a vested interest in following through on the success of the initiative. The scope of this project was something that I had support for right from the beginning, which automatically lessened the roadblocks that otherwise may have been put in my path.

The idea behind creating short-term wins was to maintain participant motivation in the process. I believe that the same idea was achieved through the transparency of this initiative right from the beginning, and it helped to maintain a high degree of stakeholder

buy-in throughout the year. Cedar Creek teachers saw their input turned to action, and experiencing the trainings they requested was perceived as a short-term win on their part.

Building on the change we have initiated is an integral part of creating a self-sustaining feedback loop (Senge, 1990). The reason behind developing this second order feedback loop from the bottom up and allowing the stakeholders themselves to determine the form and direction that this professional development program would take was to assure that each yearly reevaluation of the program would be done by the people who are closest to the classroom instruction: the teachers. As cyclical adjustments are made to improve this open system over time, staff trust in the system and buy-in in its validity will increase also (Senge, 1990; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Whether we are looking at corporate structures, businesses, or school districts, many organizational theorists agree that most large scale organizations are essentially change resistant (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1995; Senge, 1991). When a change is sought by individuals within an organization, who are also the intended recipients of the resulting change, the probability of the success of the change initiative increases greatly (Fullan, 2001). This change initiative was designed to function within the culture of our school district to ensure its longevity within the organization.

### **My Leadership Progression**

One reason I can successfully analyze my leadership style throughout this action research dissertation has to do with the leadership heuristics taken during my Leadership Theory course. I found each assessment to be interesting in different ways. Certain assessments, however, were much more helpful in gaining an understanding of “me” than others were. Of all the self-assessments I took, the Jung Typology was the most

interesting and the most useful. I have taken other personality assessments in the past that were not very convincing, but I was surprised by the accuracy of this test. I was classified as an INTJ, otherwise known as a “rational mastermind.” I identified very strongly with most aspects of the INTJ description. The only exception was my choice of career (apparently, INTJs normally go into the fields of strategic analysis, scientific systems work, or contingency planning).

Despite my difference in career choice, I do feel that I use many skills of strategic analysis and contingency planning when I am functioning in a leadership capacity. These skills become particularly noticeable when I am put in charge of coordinating events, curriculum, or people (family nights, professional development activities, testing schedules, committee chair assignments, etc.). Another character trait of the “Rational Mastermind” that I feel I possess and use regularly is my strong ability to understand the correlation between theory and action. I tend to be theoretically minded, but my real strength is in predicting the outcomes of implementation in a highly pragmatic fashion. I understand the consequences of applied theory, and potential problems or road-blocks that I may be confronted with as a result of a poorly thought out implementation process (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Goleman et al., 2002; Schein, 2004).

While I feel that I am really an optimist, I sometimes have to mask my “matter-of-factness” when speaking. One of the drawbacks of my personality type is that I can sometimes sound negative to people who are more emotive in their decision-making styles. I have to be very careful to remember that not everyone is as strong-willed as I am, or as comfortable with “constructive criticism” and the open sharing of ideas. This is something I have learned to be very conscious of when I am in settings where emotions

run high, people are on the defensive, and the atmosphere is politically charged (Goleman et al., 2002).

I also have to tone down this “individualizing” tendency when I am working collaboratively; it can sometimes shut down a committee member who may not be as decisive, and will interfere with my goal of getting as many people to contribute as possible.

The next assessment that I found to be insightful and informative was the Bolman/Deal Leadership Orientations Questionnaire. This test rates the individual’s leadership ability in four major areas: Structural (ST), Human Resource (HR), Political (PL), and Symbolic (SY). I find it very telling that my scores in each section were almost equal to each other: ST= 16, HR= 16, PL=14, SY=14

The equality between these four main areas reflects my predilection for situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). My view of myself as a situational leader was reinforced through the feedback I received during the Cycle IV surveys and interviews which were gathered following my leadership study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One other point I had to consider within the wide range of variables in this action research study was the limitations I have been confronted with as a researcher thus far. Due to the fact that I have worked with all of these teachers for a while now, some for as long as 10 years, all of the research participants already knew they could trust me with sensitive information. I believe that this worked to my advantage as I progressed through the research cycles.

This “advantage” could have turned out to be a double-edged sword, however. My familiarity with the research subjects, the issues they are confronted with, as well as my history in the district held the potential for bias. I had to work to remain cognizant of this and look at the data objectively, without any preconceived notions. This is one reason why I used a mixed-methodology study. This aided me in triangulation of the data I had collected in Cycle I. It is also the reason I incorporated member checking and a committee approach to this dissertation study (Glesne, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

An additional limitation I see only after looking back upon this dissertation is the level of trial and error involved in any major undertaking. Each attempt at implementing an ideal model of professional development is a step towards the ideal model. Successful leadership is a process, and sometimes a scientific one that requires a level of experimentation with different variables in order to get it exactly right (Garet et al., 2001). While the research findings show that this initiative was largely successful, there are certain components of the study which will continue to be “tweaked” and re-evaluated as our change initiative continues into next year. One thing our committee will pay closer attention to is the format of the observation tools that are used during the peer observations. As a group, we should determine specific priorities about what we are looking for when we go into our peers’ classroom, and what form the resulting data should take. As we widen the scope of the practice, it will become important that we are looking for consistent data in each classroom, so that we can ultimately compare the degree of implementation success.

Another major limitation of this study is that it only reflected the beliefs, perceptions, and opinions of the staff at the elementary level. The junior high and the

high school staff were not represented in the research. These two schools have programs, cultures, needs, and instructional issues that are completely unique to themselves, and the staff in these respective schools do not make use of the same professional development initiatives as the elementary schools do. Within the scope of my dissertation project this type of analysis was not possible, but might be something to investigate for another study in the future.

### **My Dominant Leadership Philosophy**

I have never felt that I had one dominate leadership style, rather I fluctuate between them depending on situation, environment, etc. When asked what I believe my style is, the best descriptor I have been able to come up with is to label it situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). The best leadership style is task specific, and the leaders who experience the highest degree of success are the ones who adapt to the needs and maturity of the group that they are attempting to lead. The higher the maturity, ability level, and willingness of the individuals, the less directive my leadership needs to be, and the more I can successfully delegate responsibility to others (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). I really believe that no leadership can be effective if it does not start with an honest assessment of where that organization (or group of people) is at that moment, and what the specific needs of the stakeholders are (Goleman et al., 2002). For instance, if I were an elementary principal in a school with low test scores, low rates of community involvement, and the majority of my staff were first and second year teachers, my choice of leadership style would probably need to be more directive in nature, even though I may have a personal preference for collaboration. I see no merit in labeling myself a facilitator, a politician, or a directive-controlling leader, and then blindly following the

dictates of that style if it is not going to work in a given situation, or with a particular group of teachers or stakeholders (Burns, 2003; Goleman et al., 2002; Hersey & Blanchard, 1995; Robinson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

For the most part, I think my predilection for realistically and pragmatically assessing situations and solving problems has served me well in my career. I even believe it has helped me to function as an agent of change within my district. While coming to grips with certain realities is not always pleasant (and can sometimes be downright painful), I believe it is necessary if we are to effectively implement change. Only after our collective group has a full realization of the scope and magnitude of our district's problems can those problems finally be addressed in a constructive fashion. We must be open-minded to all possibilities for progress, and have the courage to let go of systems that are broken (Burns, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Goleman et al., 2002; Robinson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

### **My Role as a Leader and a Follower**

During my 10 years in public education, I have worked in two vastly different school districts, and within those districts I have worked in six individual elementary schools. Each school had varying types of staff, as well as different needs, different strengths, and different weaknesses. Within those six schools, I have worked under the leadership of 11 different principals and 4 different superintendents. I have seen phenomenal leadership and terrible leadership. I have lived through laissez- faire, and survived the dictatorial. I have seen hardworking, well intended superintendents hit a wall, because his or her vision for staff leadership was not articulated to anyone except the building principals.

As one may imagine, this perspective of being “on the balcony” and working in several schools simultaneously has made for excellent observational opportunities as a future administrator (Schein, 2004). I have often thought, “That principal’s leadership style would have a real impact if only he were in the *other* school.” The main thing I have learned through my observations is that some principals fail simply because they choose a leadership style that does not take into consideration the group they are trying to lead (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995). I think my experiences have caused me to aim for balance when I take on leadership initiatives, to be receptive to people’s needs and reactions, and then adjust accordingly. Ultimately, leadership (in its essence) is about people. When I see myself having problems or difficulties handling certain situations in a leadership capacity, I remind myself of this and the solution to my problems can usually be determined (Goleman et al., 2003).

I am constantly striving to incorporate new learning into my leadership and I feel that this ties back to the relevance of situational leadership in my day-to-day practice. My role is constantly in flux, even if my job title or description is not. I volunteer for any experience that I believe will serve to round out the scope of my leadership knowledge, or add to my repertoire of skills. These experiences are important to make us more compassionate, well-rounded leaders, as well as human beings. Over the past year, gaining exposure to wider areas of research has been the largest leap in my continued growth as a leader.

In March, my research presentation entitled “*Arts Education and the Role of School Leadership in a Diverse Society*” was accepted by The 4th International Conference on the Arts in Society. At the end of July, I flew to Venice, Italy to be one of

the parallel session speakers at the conference. This was an exciting opportunity for me to share my research, and get feedback from a global community with the similar interests and concerns (Burns, 2003; Fullan, 2001, 2007; Hoff, 2001; Robinson, 2001; Schein, 2001). I was able to learn so much from this international community, and returned to share my experiences with my colleagues in Cedar Creek. Many of the international researchers in attendance were fascinated to learn about the achievement gap, and the direction of America's public school system from a perspective that was unfamiliar to them. I hope to be able to participate in more events of this nature in the future, and to glean as much knowledge as I am able through my doctoral studies and work done within my school district.

I have been told by coworkers and administrators alike that my strong points are my willingness to collaborate and my ability to motivate others into doing the same. I want to be in a position to provide teachers with the badly needed encouragement, direction, and motivation they deserve for the important work that they are doing; public school educators rarely get positive feedback from the students and the communities they are trying to help. If this pattern continues, we will not have anyone left who is willing to take on the challenges in our neediest classrooms.

This ability and willingness to collaborate with, and advocate for, teachers so that they may successfully educate every student will be necessary for me to pursue my research path of improving professional development practice within my district.

### **Leadership Reflections on the Dissertation Process**

The experience of this dissertation has brought about significant growth within me, as a leader and an educator. I now have a solid belief in the impact of staff

leadership, and I am confident enough in my leadership abilities to know that I can adapt them to certain situations, even ones that were previously unfamiliar to me. The data collected in the Cycle IV interviews, as well as the survey data, were useful in that they helped me gain a clearer picture of how I am viewed by others. This was very useful in determining whether or not my perceptions and beliefs about myself as a leader were accurate in the eyes of other people. Due to the wide range of my experiences and circumstances over the past several years, I had come to view myself as a situational leader, but I was not sure whether or not this was due to character or circumstance (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). I had always been described as “flexible” and “adaptable” by colleagues and supervisors, and at some point I began to internalize this definition and step into new roles on a frequent basis. After looking at the interview data for Cycle IV, I found significant evidence that my fellow Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee members also view me as a situational leader. Various terms were used to describe my leadership throughout the course of the action research cycles over the past year (Table 15). When looking at all of the terms used to describe my leadership, many appear to be conflicting and contradictory on the surface. When taken in context, however, one can see that these descriptors are tied to unique tasks and specific phases of the overall leadership dissertation, and that they actually demonstrate a shift in my leadership behavior based on the needs of that particular cycle of the research.

Table 18

*Leadership Descriptors from Cycle IV Interviews*

Transparent	Inclusive
Balanced	Task specific
Consistent	Facilitative
Hands-on	Does what is needed
pragmatic	Practical
passive	aggressive
effective	realistic
Good sense of what's missing	Lead by Example

The interview data from the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee interviews clearly reinforce my views of myself as a situational leader (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985). In the Table 15, I have shown all of the specific terms which were used in the four interviews conducted at the end of Cycle IV. Taken out of their context and presented in chart form, they appear to directly contradict each other. When taken in phrases as they were described in conversation during the interview, it is clear that the interviewees believed my leadership style changed depending on what I was trying to do at a given time, as expressed in the following statement:

From a standpoint of leadership, I think you did what was needed. It wasn't flashy or for show, it was practical and simple. I guess sometimes depending on what you are trying to do you have to be more passive, other times more aggressive.

There were times over the past year when I felt that I had to be more aggressive than others in order to assure that the dissertation project was a success. Even though I believe in delegating certain things to individuals who are more qualified to complete a given task than I am, sometimes I found it necessary to oversee the completion of certain

activities to make sure that we stayed within our allotted time frame for the completion of the overall initiative:

In general, you did not take a controlling or top –down attitude, but when the situation demanded it and you needed to step in to get people to finish their observations within a reasonable time frame, you didn't have any trouble keeping them on target.

One aspect of situational leadership as described by Hersey & Blanchard (1985) is the ability and need to identify both the willingness and readiness level of one's followers, and to adapt ones leadership style to achieve the desired results. Certain members of our committee needed more help completing their tasks than others, and helping them learn how to conduct a peer observation was part of my responsibility in those instances. Bringing staff members into leadership roles within an organization requires an effective modeling of the desired behavior, and a more directive, instructive form of leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1985; Killion, 2003).

### **Conclusions about My Leadership**

When viewing the progress and growth of my leadership over the past couple of years, particularly as a result of this doctoral dissertation, I have reflected back upon my initial leadership theory, which I developed in the winter of 2008 and made some interesting connections. As part of an introductory course, I had taken a leadership heuristic known as the Jung Typology. While I had found the experience of taking the test to be interesting, and even found the results of my INTJ description to be surprisingly accurate, I had not thought those components of my personality type factored into my leadership behavior, or my day-to-day role as a teacher. I realize now that this is because I had such a subjective view of my own leadership. Reading the results of the Cycle IV surveys and hearing the interview participants' opinions allowed me to hear, for the first

time in my life, how other people viewed me, and my leadership. The descriptions that they provided me with described very clearly the INTJ leader:

You were very hands-on; but you had to be- this project required a tremendous amount of organization and coordination and the direction of so many different people and events simultaneously, with so many different logistical concerns to think about, yet nobody was lost. The whole time, people knew their roles and it went off without a hitch.

Several participants remarked about the high degree of organization and attention to logistical considerations, which they felt had been previously overlooked. INTJs are also described as “systems thinkers,” and this description is reflected in my desire to create a systemic change within Cedar Creek through the development of a self sustaining feed-back loop for the purpose of achieving second order change in professional development programming (Senge, 1990). In pursuing this dissertation project, I have had the privilege of providing teachers with the resources necessary to become part of the change process, now and in the future.

Although I have participated in and led many different types of leadership initiatives, this was the first time that I have used an in-depth, research-based approach to guide both the process and the outcome of an initiative. This dissertation aimed to change instructional outcomes over time by making immediate changes to the very nature of our professional development programming model. These immediate changes, when sustained over time, will change the culture and practice of our professional development. Using prior research knowledge already accumulated by those working in the field gave me a solid framework with which to approach the topic of professional development implementation, and learn from the experiences of others (Desimone et. al, 2002; Engstrom & Danielson, 2006; Lohman, 2000). When studying that research, I realized

how important the connection between localized implementation concerns and program success really is. The qualitative data analysis shown in Cycle IV illustrates just how much this leadership initiative, although just approaching its second year of implementation, has taken hold within the culture of the district. As a leader I believe the best ways to create instructional improvement and bring about school change are usually the most pragmatic ones, and designing a self sustaining system that is set up to grow and change with the needs of our organization during an era of uncertainty at both the state and local level is the most realistic, practical way to approach professional development reform. We cannot, as leaders, always predict what the future holds, but we can set up organizational mechanisms, like open-feedback loop systems, that have the capacity to adapt as those changes continue and lead us in ever expanding directions (Senge, 1990). With constant staff feedback and open communication between our committee and our teachers, this shared leadership model will become an invaluable part of our learning organization.

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## Appendix A

### Teacher Survey

<u>Professional Development Components</u>	<u>Specific Initiatives &amp; Participant Information</u>				
<b>GENERAL</b>					
	<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	less than 5 years	5-10 years	More than 10 years	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		Generally Very Positive	Somewhat Positive	Adequate	Less than Adequate
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>OPINIONS OF SPECIFIC PD TRAININGS</b>		Training has been highly effective for use in classroom instruction.	Training has been somewhat effective for use in classroom instruction.	Training has been inadequate for use in classroom instruction.	I do not feel this particular training/initiative is relevant to my teaching.
	<b>Differentiated Instruction</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Writer's Workshop/ Lucy Calkins</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>MAP Testing</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Strategic Plan</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Curriculum Mapping</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Responsive Classroom</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>PD 360</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>RESOURCES &amp; MANAGEMENT</b>	To what degree do you believe each of the following factors influence your success when it comes to receiving quality PD?				
		Significant Impact on my success.	Some impact, but does not ultimately	Little to no impact on my success	

			undermine my success.		
	Class coverage to receive Training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Adequate Funding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Scheduling Issues & Conflicts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Administrative Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Lack of training altogether	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Lack of time for planning out the implementation of new trainings already received	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>QUALITY OF EXPERIENCES</b>	Do you perceive a difference in quality or relevance of your PD training depending on who the provider is?				
		Has been very effective so far.	Has not been effective so far.	Both types of training have been beneficial to me at some point.	Neither type of training has been beneficial
	<b>In-house trainings (run by Cedar Creek Staff)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Contracted Service Provider trainings (or out of district workshops)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





## Appendix C

### CYCLE III WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT EVALUATION FORM

Session Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Session: \_\_\_\_\_

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

\_\_\_\_\_ The objectives of the program were made clear.

\_\_\_\_\_ My questions and concerns were addressed.

\_\_\_\_\_ The material covered will be useful in improving student learning.

\_\_\_\_\_ Program has overall value to help accomplish district goals.

\_\_\_\_\_ Further development on the topic is needed.

1) What were the high points of this workshop for you?

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2) What could be done in the future to enhance this program or activity?

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3) For future programs, what topics would be most helpful in improving student achievement?

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**Appendix D**

**Cycle IV Teacher Observation & Evaluation Forms**

**Differentiated Instruction Peer Observation Form**

**Grade level:**

**Content Area:**

Gardner's Model for Performance Indicators

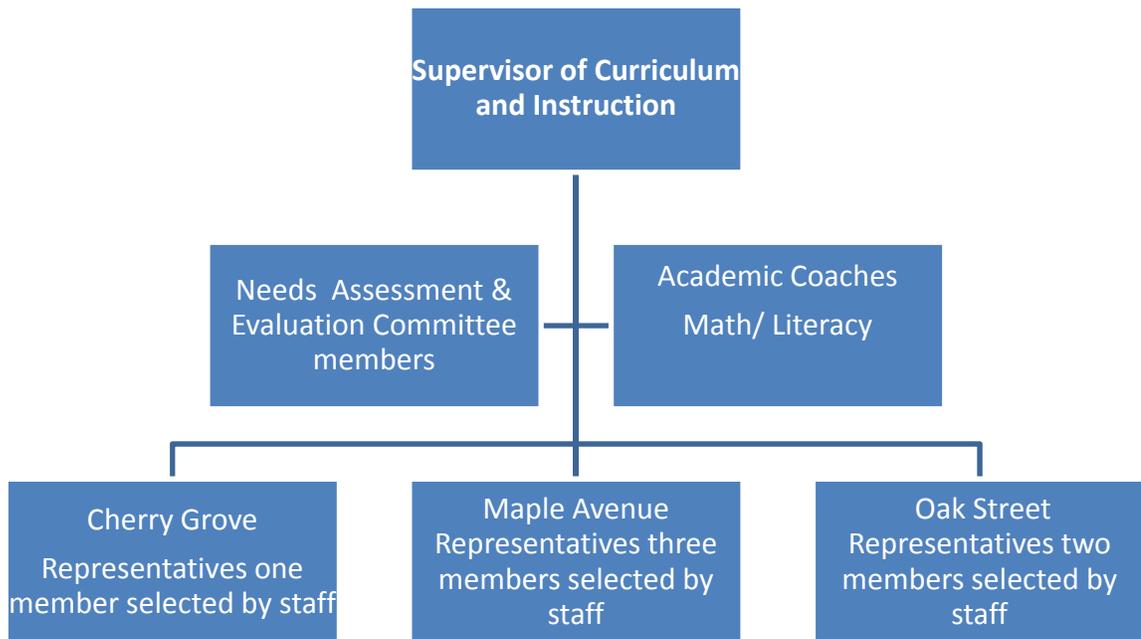
<b>Elements</b>	<b>Present</b>		
<u>Logical/mathematical:</u>	Yes	No	N/A
<u>Bodily/kinesthetic:</u>	Yes	No	N/A
<u>Visual:</u>	Yes	No	N/A
<u>Musical:</u>	Yes	No	N/A
<u>Interpersonal:</u>	Yes	No	N/A
<u>Intrapersonal:</u>	Yes	No	N/A
<u>Linguistic:</u>	Yes	No	N/A
<u>Naturalistic:</u>	Yes	No	N/A

Observations as they relate to differentiation of content and instructional delivery:

## Appendix E

### Structure of the Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee

### Structure and make-up of the Cycle II Staff Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee



## Appendix F

### Cycle IV Program Evaluation Follow-Up

#### Survey for Staff Needs Assessment and Evaluation Committee Members

As a member of the core group of teachers who were involved in the development, design, and implementation of this collaborative professional development training, I would like to invite you to participate in a follow-up survey. This survey, like all of the previous surveys you have participated in, is anonymous, and will be kept completely confidential. By participating in this survey, you are giving the Cedar Creek Professional Development Committee the opportunity to reflect upon the training opportunities we have provided you with, so that our cycle of needs assessment can be continually developed and improved at every stage. In order for us to do this, your honest and detailed input is needed. Thank you for your help!

**\*Please read each item carefully. Check your responses to the questions, and then provide written specifics or examples in the corresponding lines below.**

	Not at All 1	A little 2	Pretty Well 3	Definitely 4
1 a. The collaboratively designed professional development workshop met the needs which were originally identified by our needs assessment committee. * Please elaborate in the space below marked 1b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My perceptions of professional development delivery in the Cedar Creek School District will change for the better if PD is delivered using this collaborative model in the future? * Please elaborate in the space below marked 2b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Through this collaborative effort, I learned about factors and variables that can and do contribute to the success or failure of our professional development programming. * Please elaborate in the space below marked 3b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I now feel prepared to apply this knowledge when involved in future collaborative leadership initiatives in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

the future. Describe how you think you may use this (or not use this) knowledge in the section below marked 4b.				
5. I now have a better understanding of how to use staff input to improve professional development programming as a result of this collaborative process. * Please explain in 5b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Going through this collaborative process from the initial research phase through to the implementation of a needs-based professional development workshop has helped me understand, as a stakeholder in the system, how to avoid the pitfalls of professional development program implementation when working on committees in the future. Elaborate on lines 6b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1b.

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2b.

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3b.

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4b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix G**

### **Interview Questions Workshop Participants**

- 1) During our November in-service session, which workshop do you think was the most effective? Why?
- 2) Tell me about your overall experiences during this workshop session.

## **Appendix H**

### **Interview questions Committee Members**

- 1) How would you assess and describe my leadership regarding our district professional development changes over this past year?
- 2) How do you perceive my leadership from one cycle of our change initiative to the next?
- 3) As this change in professional development programming continues, are there any changes you would like to see as we progress?

## Appendix I

### Responsive Classroom Peer Observation Form

#### Grade Level:

Main Elements of the Responsive Classroom Approach:

Morning Meeting Activity:

Evidence of Rule Creation:

Evidence of Interactive Modeling:

Use of Positive Teacher Language:

Evidence of Logical Consequences:

Encouragement of Guided Discovery:

Collaborative Problem Solving:

Family/Community Outreach:

Additional Comments:

**Appendix J**

**Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop Peer Observation Form**

**Grade Level:**

Mini Lesson Intro:

Status of the Class Check:

Writing/Conferencing:

Sharing:

Additional Comments regarding Observation: