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# Professional development reform: a shift from traditional practices to a new paradigm

Janine Anderson

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REFORM: A SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL  
PRACTICES TO A NEW PARADIGM

By

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Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Rowan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

In

Education Leadership

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Glassboro, NJ

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## DEDICATION

*For my husband and son. Your unwavering love and support has made this all possible.*

*And to Patricia Noonan, a beloved mentor whose encouragement is still felt.*

## ABSTRACT

Janine Anderson  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REFORM: A SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL  
PRACTICES TO A NEW PARADIGM

2011

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Educational Leadership

The purpose of the study investigated a shift in professional development program delivery that incorporated adult learning theory and PLCs. The study included opportunities for collaboration, self-reflection, and empowerment of teachers, intended to improve attitudes and increase classroom quality. The research questions tested these outcomes along with the impact of the researcher's leadership. The participants were a sample of preschool teachers in a large urban school district. The data were collected through quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The data resulted in favorable attitudes towards the program model and increased classroom quality was reported. Finally, the participants indicated the leadership style contributed to these outcomes. Research that identifies best practices for professional development can allow for policies that lead to implementation in school districts. Continued studies with various grade levels and diverse school districts will continue to affirm these findings.

*Keywords:* professional development, adult learning theory, professional learning communities

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“Nearly half of all US teachers are dissatisfied with their opportunities for professional development” (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). While reading literature regarding Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), it was revealed that typical professional development programs violate principles of adult learning (Seng, 1998). Traditional forms of professional development are characterized as having a linear perspective. This model usually follows the sequential order of developing skills similar to the Piagetian model of developmental stages (Fleet & Patterson, 2001). It is based on a deficit model, and focuses on the delivery of knowledge. The model does not consider cultural differences and it places emphasis on the idea that qualifications equate to ability. By refocusing and utilizing a social construction of knowledge, it is suggested that a Vygotskian perspective be taken (Fleet & Patterson, 2001). This method focuses on the professional as a learner, which leads to professional development through peer collaboration. The focus of staff development should be on an individual teacher’s skills and on a systemic improvement of the collective group (Seng, 1998).

The research on adult learning theory and PLCs challenges previous practices and makes connections to the adult as a learner. Too often professional development is driven by a hierarchical entity and does not support the needs of the teacher. The literature reviewed emphasizes change and the implications that occur in a paradigm shift. It supports the idea that professional development is the cornerstone of school reform (Haslam & Seremet, 2001). The shift in professional development toward collaboration,

self-reflection, and empowerment of teachers is instrumental in improving teaching practices, resulting in higher quality preschool classrooms.

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) (2001) suggests that schools and districts align learning communities with their professional development goals. Standard two of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) also encouraged the promotion of staff growth through collaboration, trust, and adult learning (Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2008). The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) (2009) followed suit by including the following in their professional development standards:

Professional development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals result from clear, coherent, strategic planning, aligned with school and school district goals, that is embraced and supported by the school district's governing body and by all levels of the school system. (p. 1)

The NJDOE also required teachers to participate as active members in a professional development program that includes collegial relationships and reflective practices (NJDOE, 2004).

To attempt a paradigm shift educators “. . . must develop deeper, shared knowledge of learning community concepts and practices . . .” (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005, p. 10). This deeper understanding and application starts with the collaborative process. Collaboration, reflection, and inquiry are characteristics of adult learning theories and are essential in a PLC (Drago-Severson, 2009; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). It is the foundation of the structure for continuous transformation. To fulfill

collegial collaboration the personal and social dynamics must promote respect, trust, and mutual engagement (Morrissey, 2000). The process of teamwork should be developed to impact and improve professional practice. Therefore, the effectiveness of the collaborative process should be assessed on results rather than positive intentions. Fullan (2001) stresses the importance of collaborative teams by stating, “. . . in short, without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for social improvement” (Fullan, 1993, p. 17). The shift toward this alternative form of professional development encompasses changing current attitudes and practices.

### **Local Context of the Study**

Every year a team of peer coaches, referred to as lead teachers, work on professional development plans for an early childhood department in a large, urban, school district. They often included a mélange of workshops, with limited follow-up visits intended to support the application of content. The results of this format had an inadequate impact on classroom quality. With this in mind, the early childhood department began to question how professional development program reform could improve teaching practices and classroom quality. As an investigation began, literature on alternative professional development strategies was discovered. The idea of andragogy, or adult learning theory, and the formation of a professional learning community (PLC) were introduced. Eleanor Drago-Severson (2009) reports on the belief that educators must consider new ways of delivering staff development to better serve adult learners. In *Learning by Doing*, Richard DuFour states, “professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students

is continuous job-embedded learning for educators” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 23).

The need for improving professional development grew out of discussions between the early childhood lead teachers and the department’s administration while reviewing the data from classroom assessments. The change was also necessitated by the school district’s staff development plan, which included developing professional learning communities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to initiate a shift in professional development program delivery, intended to work towards increasing teacher’s attitudes towards professional development and improve classroom quality. The professional development program utilized adult learning theory and PLCs providing the opportunity for a team of educators to be empowered and reduce the long-established isolation of past practices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework provides an overview of practices, within a project, based on ideas and research of others. It is important to identify a framework in the context of a study because it outlines why a project is done a certain way. Using a path previously tested can provide building blocks for positive outcomes. Although there are numerous change models available, this research related to the theories of Fullan (2001) and Kotter (1996). These two models link the change model to emotionally intelligent leadership. It makes connections to adult’s learning needs and the experiences of the change process.

Fullan (2001) reports that there are five components associated with reinforcing positive change. They include: moral purpose; understanding the change process; relationship building; knowledge creation and sharing; and coherence making. Within the discussion of professional development reform a sense of moral purpose was developed. This was driven by the need for improved classroom practices, which can lead to student achievement (Fullan, 2001). Relationships were built through the development of a shared vision and the use of an emotional intelligent leadership style. Emotional intelligence also contributes to change theory because the personal and social competence required is effective in influencing culture and performance. Creating and sharing knowledge was provided through the methodology of the research.

Kotter (1996) also outlined steps to assist staff through a change process. His steps include establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering employees, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring new approaches in the culture (Kotter, 1996, p. 21). This change model related best to the idea of empowering others to act on the vision as in step 5, because it coincides with research on adult learning theory and PLCs. It encouraged collegiality, which is essential for the learning community to thrive. The steps were used to manage the initiative and address the needs of the participants.

According to Kotter (1996) the sense of urgency must be embedded in the desire to improve teachers' attitudes towards professional development and a need to increase classroom quality. The participants became the guiding coalition and together created and communicated a vision. Risk-taking was encouraged and short-term wins experienced.

Consolidating the wins assisted the shift in professional development delivery to take hold. Anchoring the change would have to be observed through the continuation of the professional development program beyond the parameters of the research.

### **Research Questions and Why**

Effective professional development is ongoing, focuses on content, and is embedded in a learning community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). It also focuses on “concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 598). Richard Elmore (2000) suggests it is necessary to find ways to support continued adult learning (as cited by Drago-Severson, 2009). “Educational researchers and practitioners emphasize the need to reassess what constitutes professional development” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 19). It is further advocated that alternatives to the traditional delivery of staff development be implemented in an effort to better serve adult learners (Drago-Severson, 2009). This led to a study that sought to answer the following questions:

1. Can a professional development program that utilizes adult learning theory improve classroom quality?
2. How will utilizing adult learning theory affect staff attitudes?
3. How will utilizing PLCs affect staff attitudes and practice?
4. How does the researcher’s leadership affect the outcomes of the professional development program?

The purpose of the research is to determine current professional development experiences, and how initiating a program that includes the characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs lays the foundation for improved classroom quality. The goal

was to inform and change professional development practices for the purpose of improving classroom quality.

The purpose and focus of this research is to employ adult learning theory in partnership with a PLC to improve the professional development program in two of the schools within a large urban school district's early childhood department. The goal is to increase classroom quality through improved instruction using the program's curricula. The plan is intended to empower teachers to be reflective practitioners through peer collaborations and contributions from their own development. It satisfies the idea that adult learners need instructional practices that scaffold their learning and respect the prior knowledge and the experiences they bring to the profession. It is an attempt to encourage the administration to support and recognize the process, and allow the collaboration to be created at the school and ultimately the district level.

The use of PLC could also utilize the expertise in the field to help guide teachers' practices in a collegial way. Utilizing this approach should build a better understanding and execution of the curricula. In this study, to implement a successful initiative building school capacity, department capacity has to be considered. Fullan (2001) describes meeting the capacity through five components. The components include: "1) teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions; 2) professional community; 3) program coherence; 4) technical resources; and 5) principal leadership" (p. 64).

The implications for practice include initiating a professional development plan through which teachers rethink their own practices and unlearn traditional perspectives of instruction. It is an opportunity for teachers to be empowered and reduce the long-established isolation of past practices. Developing a PLC can provide the opportunity for

a team of educators to work together to improve teaching practices. This is achieved through supportive and shared leadership. It requires a shared vision, the promotion of personal reflection, and opportunities for team collaboration.

### **Scope of the Study**

The context for study was a large urban district that services nearly 30,000 students, grades Pre-K through 12. The district consisted of 27 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, and 6 high schools. In addition to the schools, there are a variety of departments housed in the central office to support students and staff. The researcher works in an instructional supporting role within the Early Childhood Department.

The Early Childhood Department services 2,000 3-year-olds and 2,000 4-year-olds in a mixed delivery system. The classrooms are housed in many of the public schools and nearly 40 contracted daycare centers. The department consists of 600 classroom staff and 70 support staff. Support staff includes a parent coordinator, nurses, social workers, preschool intervention teams, and lead teachers. The researcher is a lead teacher whose primary role is to monitor classroom quality, provide in-class curriculum support, and design and implement professional development. The position provided the opportunity to revisit current professional development practices and implement changes based on adult learning theory and PLC structures.

The objectives for the study were achieved through an action research model. This approach is a cyclical form of problem solving that includes asking questions, collecting data, reflecting on teaching practices, and planning solutions. The focus of this type of study is on a particular organization and some aspect of activity. In this case the activity was professional development. The method is also best for the participant

observer who is involved with the activities being studied. It provided the opportunity to use quantitative and qualitative forms of data collection to analyze attitudes, understanding, and implementation of professional development before and after the initiative. The quantitative data came from surveys and questionnaires. The qualitative approach was an observational case study. The data acquired was from workshops, collaborative meetings, interviews, focus groups, and related artifacts. The analysis was developed from the themes revealed through coding the data.

The research began with district approval and communication with the participants. Data were gathered on current attitudes and practices of the professional development program. The groundwork was established by developing collaborative group relationships through a shared vision and mission. Activities developed were intended to create an environment where teachers worked towards improving classroom quality through the use of professional development that utilizes adult learning theory and PLCs.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following is a list of vocabulary words that need to be defined for purposes of the research.

1. Professional development- Opportunities provided to increase the knowledge and skills of its staff.
2. Adult learning theory (andragogy)- Learning focused on the developmental needs of an adult (Conner, n.d.).

3. Professional learning community (PLC)- Educators working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for students (DuFour et al., 2006).
4. Standards- Knowledge and skills an individual should possess measured by a list of items identified by the organization.
5. Mixed delivery- For purposes of this research mixed delivery is defined by the combination of a public school and a private daycare center providing preschool services for one school district.
6. Constructivism- Theory based on how people learn. It suggests that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflecting on those experiences (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).
7. Preschool quality assessment (PQA)- An assessment tool used to evaluate the quality of a preschool classroom and to identify the training needs of staff published by the High/Scope curriculum (Epstein, 2003).
8. Observation feedback- A tool used to mentor and support teachers' reflective practices through the observation of classroom students published by the High/Scope curriculum (Epstein, 2007).

### **Limitations**

The sample size was small and could create results that are unique to the setting designed for the study. The sample was also one of convenience, which indicates a relationship between participants and researcher. The study also took place with limited

time during the weekly meetings and over a 6-month period. This too could generate results unique to the research study.

### **Following Sections**

The paper continues with Chapter II, a review of the literature relevant to this study. Theories about the needs of the adult learner are explored and connections to professional development are made. This chapter discusses some of the findings and additional insights into the themes that present themselves within a PLC. Mirrored to adult learning concepts, the history, process, and characteristics of PLCs are reviewed. The chapter also reveals information to support organizational change and leadership.

Chapter III outlines the methodology of how the research was conducted. This chapter details the actions taken to observe and study participants, how data were collected, and their analysis as answers to the research questions were sought. The next chapter reports the findings produced by the research. Connections to the literature are discussed, as well as the answers to the research questions. The implications regarding the theoretical framework, the limitations and insights gained for the field of study are reported. Finally, the paper reports on implications for future studies and the professional impact on the researcher.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review suggests recommendations including the implementation of adult learning theory and the structuring of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as methods for reshaping professional development program models. Most common learning opportunities in the U.S. include short workshops that trigger little change in practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Standards and educators have documented the evolution of patchwork workshops to more systemic practices that build internal capacity. Darling-Hammond and McClaughlin (1995) stated that an attempt to shift methods:

. . . signals a departure from old norms and models of “pre-service” or “in-service” training. It creates new images of what, when, and how teachers learn, and these new images require a corresponding shift from policies that seek to control or direct the work of teachers to strategies intended to develop schools’ and teachers’ capacity to be responsible for student learning. (para. 4)

Fullan (2007) best sums up the challenge stating, “Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when teachers returned to their classrooms” (p. 286). The literature also includes the process of change and inculcating the process into the culture of the organization.

Researchers demand a stop on the assault with single unrelated in-service sessions (Fleet & Patterson, 2001). Rowland and Patterson (2004) found that school-based staff development was most successful when attention was paid to six factors. Those related to

a learning community include: organizational support structures; creating school-based staff development plans; selecting their own staff development content; and delivering the content. Although the change requires time and energy, with cooperation from all levels of education it will promote teacher learning and student achievement (Rowland & Patterson, 2004).

A review of the literature questions previous practices and offers suggestions for including professionals in the process of their own development. Seng (1998) states that “. . . teachers are more likely to benefit from different types of training structures if they learn on their own” (p. 3).

### **Professional Development Reform**

Professional development can have a significant impact on school reform, but many educators are not experiencing professional development opportunities that support knowledge and skill development (Haslam & Seremet, 2001). Hence, information on professional development indicates a global shift in program design intended to improve instruction. A common thread woven throughout the research indicates the need for cooperation from three stakeholders: policy makers, school districts, and teachers. Three things policy makers can do to initiate change are to create significant professional roles for teachers; provide funding directed to those components of the infrastructure; and focus on rich, high quality environments that offer relevant topics (Darling-Hammond & McClaughlin, 1995). Policies can initiate the required changes and can set permanent additions to the infrastructure of professional development opportunities, particularly those that provide occasions for critical reflection (Darling-Hammond & McClaughlin, 1995). Often, those policies include state and federal mandates.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) extrapolated standards of effective professional development programs from a variety of research. Included in the standards are: an active learning approach that includes interaction with others, an opportunity for application and reflection, and the opportunity to plan one's own development (NAEYC, 1993). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) (2001) has identified standards for professional development that include learning communities. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) (2009) added professional development standards and stated "it is the goal of these new regulations to shift the focus from district-level one shot in-service workshops to collaborative professional learning within schools" (p. 7).

Once policies are in place, schools have a responsibility to provide the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practices. For professional development to be effective, Darling-Hammond and McClaughlin (1995) suggest that teachers need to be treated as learners and further list the following characteristics: 1) engage teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection; 2) ground them in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that is participant-driven; 3) provide collaborative opportunities; 4) connect to and derive professional development from teachers' work with their students; 5) professional development that is sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling and coaching; and, 6) connection to other aspects of school change. Ultimately, adults build knowledge through their interactions with the world and this should be reflected in professional development (Williams, 2001).

After a school initiates a professional development program, teachers must rethink their own practices and teach in new ways. This happens only if teachers embrace

the new vision and unlearns some of the traditional perspectives of instruction they have been presently practicing (Darling-Hammond & McClaughlin, 1995). It is an opportunity for teachers to be empowered and reduce the traditional isolation of past practices. The newfound collaboration requires teachers to develop their identity, not just as an individual, but as part of a community, leading to an exchange of experiences (Van Huizen, Van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005).

### **Change**

As with any attempts at change there are those who question the impact of shifts from traditional practices. Advocates of competency-based teacher education recognize that it defines a public standard for teaching and acts as a framework for teacher education. It purports that it includes explicit objectives and assessment criteria and that it emphasizes the need for teacher education to be effective (Drago-Severson, 2009). Furthermore, some believe that the problem with too much reflection and inquiry is that it denies that teaching depends on accepted definitions, standards, and established knowledge (Van Huizen et al., 2005). Despite these concerns, a combination of teacher as researcher and reflective practitioner is regarded as core qualities of the professional teacher (Van Huizen et al., 2005).

Williams (2001) suggests, “The link between staff development and successful educational change calls for a consequential ‘rethinking’ of the traditional approach” (p. 4). The current paradigm shift in support of staff development contains three powerful transformations. They include results-driven education, systems thinking, and constructivism (Williams, 2001). Results-driven education defines the success of staff development, not by how many teachers and administrators participate in staff

development programs, but by whether it alters instructional behavior in a way that benefits students (Sparks, 1994). Changes in systems thinking- “. . .even relatively ‘minor’ changes-can have significant effects on other parts of the system, either positively or negatively” (Sparks, 1994, p. 1). Constructivism incorporates the perspective that staff development includes “. . . activities such as action research, conversations with peers about the beliefs and assumptions that guide their instruction, and reflective practices like journal keeping activities which many educators may not even view as staff development” (Sparks, 1994, p. 1).

These three ideas have created a shift in thoughts regarding professional development. Some of these thoughts include individual development such as personal professional development plans. A second thought is clear, coherent, strategic plans, which resemble formal development plans related to a specific goal. Thirdly, the study of teaching and learning processes enables plans based on pedagogy. Finally, job-embedded learning links professional development plans to practices to which teachers can relate (Sparks, 1994).

### **Adult Learning**

The idea of professional development often creates a visceral reaction from teachers because it is viewed as synonymous with passive workshops planned and implemented by the school or district. They are filled with new ideas later assessed by how well the presentation was given, not on its affects on teaching methods. Often professional development is driven by a hierarchical entity and does not support the needs of the teacher. Darling-Hammond and McClaughlin (1995) state:

Because teaching for understanding relies on teachers' abilities to see complex subject matter from the perspectives of diverse students, the know-how necessary to make this vision of practice a reality cannot be prepackaged or conveyed by means of traditional top-down 'teacher training' strategies. (p. 597)

Wadlington (1995) further reports that there are four basic principles regarding the characteristics of adult learners. The principles include: 1) self-concept is one of independence and self-direction; 2) teachers are more likely to learn in a critical and reflective manner when it is based on their own experiences; 3) adults' readiness to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and 4) adults' perspective on learning is one of immediate application of knowledge rather than on future application. These characteristics are echoed in Billington's (1996) four-year study that examined the type of learning environment that best suits adult learners. Findings included positive results when professionals felt safe and respected, were actively involved with content, were in control of their learning, and reflected on practices.

Teachers are active learners, but often do not view their own education as a lifelong process (Wadlington, 1995). Snow-Renner & Lauer (2005) state that active learning opportunities allow teachers to transform their teaching and not simply layer new strategies on top of the old (as cited by Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). These opportunities often involve modeling the new strategies and constructing opportunities for teachers to practice and reflect on them. However, through critical thinking, reflection, and collaboration, a teacher can look at the work of children and share accordingly. This can be fulfilled through a shared vision and a school district's promotion of personal reflection and team collaboration. "Engaging staff in a

collaborative process to develop shared values, or ‘collective commitments,’ is one of the most powerful tools for changing behaviors that can, ultimately, transform the culture of a school or district” (Eaker & Keating, 2008, p. 15).

Teachers respond to professional development better when they assume the responsibility of planning their improvement. There is greater impact when teachers serve as researchers or peer reviewers (Darling-Hammond & McClaughlin, 1995). Feger and Arruda (2008) further support this by writing that adult learning is enhanced when teachers participate in developing their professional development through self-directed and problem-centered approaches.

Malcolm Knowles formulated a comprehensive adult learning theory asserting that adults require certain conditions to learn, and also utilized the term andragogy to define these conditions (as cited in Conner, n.d.). Lieb (1991) reports on Knowle’s six principles of adult learning and begins his list with adults as autonomous learners. He indicates that life experiences and self-direction are vital to supporting the adult learner (Lieb, 1991). These principals provide the opportunity for a team of educators to work together to improve teaching practices and student learning through relevant and practical professional development. This is achieved through trust, motivation, and the opportunity for teachers to share what they know and refine implementation (DuFour et al., 2005). These characteristics can sometimes challenge the leadership but can be addressed through a commitment to best practices.

Adults have responsibilities that can interfere with motivation to learn. Lieb (1991) discusses the need to identify the barriers that hinder learning while utilizing six factors that are included in adult learning theory. The factors include: social relationships,

external expectations, social welfare, personal advancement, stimulation, and cognitive interests (Lieb, 1991). Abraham Maslow explains that a “person’s behavior can be understood primarily as directed effort to satisfy one particular level of need in a hierarchy” (as cited in Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995, p. 329). Therefore, a leader is more likely to motivate followers when considering their needs within the hierarchy (Hughes et al.). Herzberg suggests that a supportive environment enhances motivation, but to maximize motivation a leader must provide recognition, responsibility, and possibilities for advancement (as cited in Hughes et al., 1995).

### **Constructivism**

Attempts to educate adults using practices best suited for their learning have created a variety of theories and accommodations to current theories. Constructivism has been at the forefront of best practices for educating young children, and displays characteristics that facilitate adult learning as well. Constructivism is the idea that “people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflecting on those experiences” (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).

Jean Piaget and John Dewey developed theories of child development and education that led to constructivism, and shaped the foundation for constructivist education (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). John Dewey included the idea of inquiry as a key component of constructivism. Many educators and psychologists added new perspectives to constructivist learning theory and practice. Lev Vygotsky introduced the social component to the theory, and Robert Kegan used his predecessor’s research to develop a more formal constructivist theory for adult learners (as cited in

Drago-Severson, 2009). Kegan believes that development continues through adulthood and is a life-long interactive practice (as cited in Drago-Severson, 2009). In a study conducted in Sydney, Australia, Fleet and Patterson (2001) reported findings that supported collaboration through the constructivist approach of professional contributions. Paramount to its success was administrative support through a shift from culture to inquiry.

Through the application of Piaget's cognitive developmental stages, positions of development are similar in that they build on a sequential pattern of thinking and are tied to the mentoring relationship (Williams, 2001). It is suggested that focus be placed on the professional as learner, and that a social construction perspective be utilized. Van Huizen et al. (2005) write:

...in neo-Vygotskian theory, 'activity' is the most fundamental and comprehensive concept suggesting that the functioning and development of human individuals is to be studied in the context of their participation in sociocultural practice and, more concretely, in a variety of activity systems, of which the field of teacher education is but one example. (p. 271)

Vygotskian theory formulates a standard for teacher education including a variety of principles. Two of the principles include learning through participation in social practices, and the reflective practice (Van Huizen et al., 2005). Although Piaget and Vygotsky both represent a constructivist perspective, Vygotsky's approach suggests teachers participate collaboratively in activities such as action research, conversations with peers, and reflective practices (Williams, 2001). Feger and Arruda (2008) report the use of Vygotskian theory examines "... how individual appropriation of ideas and

transformation of practice can become publicly shared and conventionalized, creating a culture of professional learning” (p. 6). Consequently it highlights the learning processes of teachers and their colleagues engaging in job-embedded professional development.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

Shirley Hord (2008) suggests that students’ learning is equated to quality of teaching. With this in mind, traditional forms of staff development retain teachers in isolation. A shift from isolation must take place in order to improve teaching practice and student learning (Feger & Arruda, 2008). The initial attempt at departure from this isolation first represented itself as grade level meetings for the purpose of classroom orders and planning trips. Today these are often mistaken for PLCs. Feger and Arruda (2008) suggest the term travelled faster than the concept and schools rallied around with superficial implementation. As teachers began to share instructional strategies, districts saw the value of collaboration (Hord, 2008). Hord (2008) further notes:

A professional learning community is not just a place where faculty meets regularly or groups come together to work collaboratively. A true professional learning community is a way of organizing the educational staff to engage in purposeful, collegial learning. (p. 13)

Ultimately, a PLC becomes a place to review student data and plan purposeful interventions and strategies (Hord, 2008).

In the early 1990s a number of Australian states moved the focus of staff development to the school level. The research followed the process to determine best practices in providing school-based staff development. Rowland and Patterson (2004) found that school-based staff development was most successful when they paid attention

to factors related to PLCs. Morrissey (2000) suggests that professional learning communities offer an infrastructure and provide a context of collegiality. Teachers and administrators learning are deeper in a social setting. The structure supports improved teaching practices through learning new instructional strategies and methods for interacting meaningfully with each child. The new methods create differentiated instruction, which can lead to improved student achievement. Morrissey (2000) summarizes with the following:

In other words, professional learning communities provide opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and to learn how to become more effective in their work with students. Teacher learning comes *first* in such communities. (p. 3)

To begin to address student learning, a common vision and mission must be developed. This process creates a dialogue and leads to reflection and collaboration. Feger and Arruda (2008) reinforce this notion when they state:

Among the practices that define learning organizations are the active participation of employees in creating a shared vision and culture to support collaboration so that they can work together more effectively in identifying and resolving problems. (p. 3)

In the early 1990s a number of Australian states moved the focus of staff development to the school level. The research followed the process to determine best practices in providing school-based staff development. Rowland and Patterson (2004) found that school-based staff development was most successful when they paid attention methods related to PLC

It is necessary to examine results to discover strengths and weaknesses in individual teaching in order to learn from one another (DuFour et al., 2006). In addition to positive interactions, collaboration allows novices to acquire the behaviors of experts (Feger & Arruda, 2008). Collaboration provides the opportunity for teachers to share student data, analyze their practices, and share strategies: “To build professional learning communities, meaningful collaboration must be systematically embedded into the daily life of the school” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p.118).

Along with collaboration, teachers need to be empowered. Empowering teachers allows them to be intellectually and emotionally invested in the development (Fleet & Patterson, 2001). Utilizing a teacher’s working knowledge allows for contributions from prior experiences. This means that teachers are active learners and less resistant than we think. Part of empowering teachers is supporting ownership in the process. Through ownership, teachers become reflective practitioners (Fleet & Patterson, 2001). When children self-initiate they learn best, so it is important for teachers to use self-evaluation and self-direction to have successful professional development experiences. Teachers can create a self-development plan, which leads to intrinsic motivation. This supports individual needs rather than teaching competencies. Leaders should be accommodating in order to allow for comfort as information is relearned. The theories suggested by the literature support the idea that PLC recognizes the professional as a learner, which then equates to successful teaching outcomes.

A final piece of the structure crucial to development is the role of administrators. In some cases administrators view PLCs as a trend with short-term intentions (Feger & Arruda, 2008). In studies of successful PLCs, administrators saw themselves as change

leaders and prioritized professional development. Feger and Arruda (2008) report that administrators who advocate for PLCs are obligated to create the structure that makes teacher collaboration meaningful. The configuration allows for teachers to meet, establish clear goals and expectations, differentiated training, and access to models to inform their work.

Administrators must also adjust to a shared leadership model which supports collaboration in the process of questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions to school issues. They model their own development and provide the resources for staff development. Administrators provide the necessary organizational and structural supports and must be willing to share the responsibilities with staff (Morrissey, 2000).

### **Characteristics of High Quality Professional Development**

High quality professional development cultivates skills and knowledge and leads to improvements in teaching practices (Haslam & Seremet, 2001). Useful professional development emphasizes active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection rather than abstract discussions (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). It is more effective when schools incorporate it as part of reform and reduce incidents of isolation (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Research on effective professional development also highlights the importance of collaborative learning environments that help develop communities of practice to promote school change beyond individual classrooms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This has led to research creating recommended characteristics that define a high quality experience.

Haslam and Seremet (2001) suggest four characteristics that include: focusing on content knowledge and content-specific pedagogy; engaging teachers and principals as

active learners and problem solvers; providing learning opportunities that are embedded in the daily work of teachers; and establishing a basis of research and examples of best practice (p. 5). It is further suggested that there are organizational factors that contribute to quality. They include teacher leadership, time, and organizational culture (Haslam & Seremet, 2001).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) report the following to support teacher development:

1. Sustained and intensive professional development for teachers is related to student achievement gains.
2. Collaboration approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond individual classrooms.
3. Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers (p. 5).

The status report also found that teaching practices are influenced when professional development includes application of knowledge to teachers' planning and instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Through a five-state study, Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Berman (2002) found that professional development that focused on specific instructional practices increased teachers' use of those practices in the classroom. To ensure effective professional development and significant and sustained educational improvement, Thomas Guskey (2002) suggests three principles for consideration. They include: recognizing that change is a gradual and difficult process for teachers, ensuring

that teachers receive regular feedback on student learning progress, and providing continued follow-up, support, and pressure (Guskey, 2002).

Researchers define typical characteristics within the structure of PLCs that support quality professional development while emphasizing its purposeful nature and focus on continuous inquiry and improvement (Feger & Arruda, 2008). Hord (2008) lists five such components as: 1) shared beliefs, values, and vision; 2) shared and supportive leadership; 3) supportive structural and relational conditions; 4) collective intentional learning and its application; and 5) shared personal practice. In addition to these, a recent review of the literature identifies an additional three: mutual trust, inclusive school-wide membership, and networks and partnerships that look beyond the school for sources of learning (Feger & Arruda, 2008). Additional theorists include characteristics such as: reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice, professional growth and mutual support, and obligation as other important themes for developing PLCs focused on school improvement (Feger & Arruda, 2008). The authors also discuss similar characteristics based on their research that include a focus on learning, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results.

In addition to PLC characteristics, a community of learners goes through stages of development. The stages begin with the formation of the group and identification of norms of interaction. Groups begin to navigate the challenges and negotiate tensions. Finally, and hardest to reach, is the development of communal responsibility for individual growth (Feger & Arruda, 2008). Stowell and Mead (2007) suggest there are challenges that confront leaders when developing learning communities in attempts to gain unified energies, talents, and a focus on aligned goals. The combination of purpose,

vision, values, strategies, and goals helps the team focus in on its direction, and allows for positive results (Stowell & Mead, 2007).

### **Change in Organizational Culture**

Upon entering a school it is easily recognizable that there is a specific feeling in the environment. It is often described as the climate or atmosphere of the site. More accurately, researchers refer to it as the culture of the organization. The culture consists of the unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that seem to permeate the way people act and what they talk about (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Whether a leader is stepping in to a new position or the current leader plans a change initiative, understanding the organizational culture is essential. To affect sustainable change, emotionally intelligent leaders must look first to the organizational reality, identifying the issues with the full involvement of the members (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004).

Organizations that have developed routines may find that establishing new routines may cause distress, and could be difficult to learn. According to Edgar Schein (2004) a model of transformative change that includes unlearning as a legitimate stage, must underlie any culture change. “Any change that holds great promise for increasing teachers’ competence and enhancing student learning is likely to require extra work, especially at first” (Guskey, 2002, p. 386). Professional learning communities will have little impact on schools unless practices are more than structurally changed and become embedded in the day-to-day school culture (Eaker & Keating, 2008). It is suggested that collaboratively developed shared values and commitments can be a powerful tool for shaping school culture (Eaker & Keating, 2008; Kotter, 1996).

New initiatives often include a variety of new terms. Although, these terms may travel easily, actually transforming a school into a professional learning community requires much more than a superficial understanding of the concept (Eaker & Keating, 2008). It is impossible for a school to develop the capacity to function as a PLC without undergoing profound cultural shifts, and therefore an intentional process to impact culture is required (Eaker & Keating, 2008). To make these critical cultural shifts, Eaker and Keating (2008) describe the need to shift the fundamental purpose from teaching to student learning. They also recommend a shift toward teachers working collaboratively and a shift in focus from inputs to outcomes. Graham and Ferriter (2008) further note:

Like many, we found that the work of professional learning teams progressed from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning. Helping teams make that progression, however, and emphasizing effective dialogue and reflection along the way are key components in building a professional learning community.

(p. 39)

Just as we develop through stages associated with cognitive development, we also develop through stages of change as PLCs develop. According to Graham and Ferriter (2008) typical stages include: filling the time, sharing personal practices, planning, developing common assessments, analyzing student learning, differentiating follow-up, and reflecting on instruction. Although many groups fail to move beyond sharing their personal practices, when teams become adept at analyzing student data, they can serve as collaborative partners in ongoing conversation about teaching and learning (Graham & Ferriter, 2008).

Fullan (2007) recommends that educational change occur in practice and include revised materials, new teaching approaches, and alternative beliefs. His recommendations include demonstrating moral purpose, understanding of the change process, building relationships, creating and sharing knowledge, and developing coherence (Fullan, 2001). Sergiovanni (2001) draws many of the same conclusions for change and suggests the components in concert are crucial to reaching the goals of an initiative. Altering beliefs are essentially the most difficult dimension to incorporate. However, through open communication and discussions of systems thinking, the initiative can shift beliefs towards the common goal (Senge, 2006).

Additional research proposes that the change process must include a model that includes specific tasks. Kotter (1996) offers a model that outlines steps to create successful change initiatives. Kotter's first stage is creating a sense of urgency. This requires overcoming complacency to drive interest towards a change initiative. Kotter continues his stages with creating a guiding coalition that has the right composition, level of trust, and shared objectives. Kotter's next two stages of change are developing and communicating a vision. Vision refers to a picture of the future of the organization and serves three important purposes. An effective vision clarifies the direction for the change, motivates people to take action, and helps coordinate the action (Kotter, 1996). Stage five is empowering employees. Along with collaboration, teachers need to be empowered. Empowering teachers allows them to be intellectually and emotionally invested in the development (Fleet & Peterson, 2001). Creating wins provides the coalition with concrete feedback about the validity of the vision (Kotter, 1996). Finally, consolidating and producing more changes that can then become anchored in the culture finalizes the stages

of the change model. The final stages connect the change to the norms of the organization. Stowell and Meade (2007) concur with the belief that a shared vision and common goals helps the organization move in a universal direction.

### **Leadership**

Bolman and Deal (2008) explain how leaders need to recognize that they are working against a paradox. The paradox consists of established routine systems that allow members of an organization to carry out their jobs and the attempts to fundamentally change how people operate.

In addition to utilizing change theory, leaders need to be involved with professional development and understand their role. Whether leaders are developing a PLC initiative or maintaining current professional development structures using adult learning principles, they must recognize that the efforts come from the faculty. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state that the principal is a crucial component in the creation and support of learning communities. They describe the following characteristics necessary for success: lead through a shared vision; involve faculty members in decision-making, and empower individuals; provide information, training, and parameters necessary to make decisions; establish credibility by modeling behavior that is congruent with the vision, and is results-oriented.

Leaders matter because they have the authority to shape conversations and shape school culture in ways that promote learning, collaboration, and respect (DuFour et al., 2005). Leaders provide the organizational structure necessary for staff to meet, analyze student data, and share instructional practices. They assist the staff in developing a vision that they can articulate and model for students and parents (Morrissey, 2000). Principals

provide the opportunities for collaboration and view the staff as a resource for school improvement. Leaders must understand that utilizing a PLC is a collective effort and “. . . the notion of principal omniscience be ‘ditched’ in favor of principals’ participation in professional development. Administrators, along with teachers, must be learners: ‘questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions’ for school improvement” (Hord, 1997, p. 15).

“Sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 1). In recent years the standardization of school reform has created negative affects on schools. According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006) teachers experienced an erosion of the professional community and an amplified resistance to change. Reformation of professional development through action research must utilize the leadership theories that best support teachers’ learning and incorporate the principles for sustainable change. Successful implementation of these theories is imperative for second order change.

The leadership theory that is best for addressing adult learning through the creation of Professional Learning Communities includes emotional intelligence, moral purpose, and sustainable leadership. These models recognize the process of student learning and “. . . promotes learning among adults in order to find continuing ways to improve and expand the learning of students” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 27). In an effort to develop a professional development program a vision must be created. Followers must act as leaders and their strengths utilized to develop a plan that should continue even if the leadership changes. Sustained change would be a legacy worth leaving behind. Furthermore, leadership must display trust, compassion, stability, and hope.

These characteristics were identified by a Gallup poll as essential for followship (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

Change brings with it enormous challenges. Therefore, a leader must utilize change theory throughout action research. Expectations must be communicated clearly, and the participants must be included in all levels of the process. Following change theory steps ensures that small successes lead to a shift in practice. Finally, the following quote can guide leaders throughout an action research initiative. “Change leaders in schools know that we are engaged not only in the work of education but also in a complex enterprise of people, with all the human drama that accompanies personal pride and identity (Reeves, 2009, p.87).

### **Conclusion**

As information is gathered on reforming professional development through the use of adult learning theory and PLCs, one realizes there are many variables to consider. To implement a true modification requires a shift in school culture in order to open educators’ minds and challenge techniques from past practices. A vision needs to be communicated with the full participation of all levels of a school, school district, and community. Teachers must be active in their development plans and must use reflective practice to consider their teaching practices. Finally, one must consider adult learning theory in the strategies used to implement the collaborative activities that intend to affect student outcomes.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

There is often a central theme in the reactions of staff toward professional development. Regardless of how well organized, presented, and interesting the trainings are, staff members often comment that workshop content is easily forgotten. Attempts to implement and institutionalize new knowledge are sometimes difficult in an isolated environment. This rejoinder and content implementation does not create the desired results, nor do staff developers generally anticipate it. In an effort to apply the information learned from the literature review, further research needed to be done.

An initial quantitative investigation by this researcher revealed staff displeasure with the current professional development program. The information from a pre-survey (see Appendix A) unveiled that respondents had limited opportunities to plan topics for training and partial knowledge of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The respondents indicated that they were interested in developing a collaborative model within their grade level. The information gathered assisted in the development of a qualitative study to understand the group dynamic and the actions needed to influence current practices.

The philosophy of the Early Childhood Department espouses the use of developmentally appropriate practice to teach young children. Based on that belief we should also consider professional development practices that best support adult learners. The trend to improve professional development utilizes adult learning theory to produce improved outcomes for students. A shift in the process can be enhanced through action research, which can evaluate current practices and monitor implementation.

To determine the results of this change initiative, procedures and outcomes needed to be followed through data collection and analysis. The research for a change in the professional development program consisted of three cycles and was conducted in two schools. It included opportunities for staff to choose their training content, be reflective practitioners, and work with peers in a collaborative environment. Through the information provided in the literature review, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways can a professional development program, that utilizes adult learning theory, improve classroom quality?
2. How will utilizing adult learning theory affect staff attitudes?
3. How will utilizing PLCs affect staff attitudes and practice?
4. How does the researcher's leadership affect the outcomes of the professional development program?

### **Research Design**

The design of this study was practical action research. Hinchey (2008) defines this type of action research as “research that focuses on improving practice” (p. 39). In an attempt to improve professional development techniques this type of research uses the intelligence and knowledge of the practitioners and does not look to generalize its results (Hinchey, 2008). It is recommended for use with professional development for those who consider teachers as reflective practitioners (Hinchey, 2008). An action research model for a change initiative is further supported by Simmons (1985) who writes, “. . . action research projects influence teachers' thinking skills, sense of efficacy, willingness to communicate with colleagues, and attitudes toward professional development and the

process of change” (as cited in McKay, 1992, p. 29). This type of research allowed me to assist teachers to reflect on their practices in a supportive and collaborative manner and attempt to improve the current professional development model.

Action research is cyclical in nature and includes observation, reflection, and action (Glesne, 2006). Early observation and reflection of an ineffective professional development program drove the action component of the study. The action phase of the process includes planning, implementation, and evaluation (Glesne, 2006). A research cycle was planned and implemented, and through reflection of the data two additional cycles were created.

### **Data Collection**

There were three research methodology paradigms used to collect data. They included quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed research. Quantitative research includes structured instruments such as surveys and questionnaires. These data are analyzed with statistical relationships and seeks to generalize results. Qualitative research includes open-ended data such as interviews and observations. The researcher, using coding themes, analyzes these data and its purpose is to inform, not generalize, outcomes. Mixed research combines quantitative and qualitative styles and is ideal for an action research model.

This study included a mixed model of quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative data came from surveys and classroom quality assessments. The data were put into *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) software and descriptive analysis provided information on frequency counts and trends in the results. The qualitative approach was an observational case study. This type of study focuses on a

particular organization and some aspect of activity (Glesne, 2006). In this case the activity was professional development. The method is also best for the participant observer who is involved with the activities being studied. Data acquired were from observations, focus groups, interviews, and related artifacts.

In an effort to minimize ambiguity, it was essential to collect several forms of data in a process called triangulation. Triangulation combines several forms of data and relates them to one another to counteract threats to validity (Glesne, 2006). To triangulate the data information was collected from the assessments, observations, interviews, and focus groups. Artifacts were collected, which included meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and observation feedback forms. The success of the shift in professional development was measured by using post surveys and the reevaluation of areas of need using the classroom quality assessment tool.

### **Setting**

The school district is a large urban district that services nearly 30,000 students, grades Pre-K through 12. The district consists of 27 elementary schools, 5 middle schools and 6 high schools. In addition to the schools, there are a variety of departments and programs located in a central office to support students and staff. The researcher works in a supporting role within the Early Childhood Department.

The Early Childhood program, in both the public schools and the private daycare centers, employs 600 preschool teachers, teacher aides, and prep teachers in 293 classrooms. The department services 2,000 3-year-olds and 2,000 4-year-olds in a mixed delivery system. A mixed delivery system consists of classrooms housed in a public school setting and privately contracted daycare centers. The classrooms are housed in 24

public schools and nearly 40 daycare centers. The department consists of 70 support staff, which includes a parent coordinator, nurses, social workers, preschool intervention teams, and lead teachers. The researcher's primary role is to monitor classroom quality, provide in-class curriculum support, and design and implement professional development. This role provided the opportunity to revisit current professional development practices and implement changes based on adult learning theory and the mirrored characteristics of a PLC structure.

### **Sample Design**

The sample design utilized was a non-random sample of convenience. A sample of convenience consists of subjects in close proximity or easily accessible to the researcher (Patten, 2001). The subjects chosen for the study included 22 teachers, 23 teacher aides, and 2 prep teachers. (Prep teachers relieve classroom teachers during their period of preparation.) There were four 3-year-old classes, seven 4-year-old classes, and one self-contained, mixed age class in a public school. A self-contained classroom includes children with profound special needs with a small teacher/child ratio. The ages ranged from three to five years old. There were nine 3-year-old classrooms in a contracted day care center. The sample represented approximately 8% of the population and is operationally defined as all of the preschool teachers, teacher aides, and prep teachers in the district's preschool program.

### **Description of Study**

Prior to the research cycles planned to implement professional development reform, issues were addressed that arose during a previous qualitative inquiry. The results necessitated addressing collaborative relationships. Fullan (2007) cites research from

Kruse, and her colleagues, which identifies collaboration and shared norms and values as critical elements in successful adult learning and PLCs. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) report that “collective work in trusting environments provides a basis for inquiry and reflection, allowing teachers to raise issues, take risks, and address dilemmas in their own practice” (p. 47). Therefore, The participants in the public school developed a group agreement (see appendix B) and a mission and vision statement (see appendix C). The employees of the contracted daycare center felt they did not need a group agreement and created a mission and vision statement (see appendix D). The development of a mission and vision represented the first two building blocks of a PLC and afforded the opportunity to unify the groups (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). After the group developed common goals the focus shifted to the collective improvement and the development of relationships that aided in collaboration.

The research was done during grade level meetings and daily classroom interactions by providing workshops, classroom support, opportunities for reflection, and collaborative discussions. In the public school the meetings were bi-weekly and occurred as part of the regular daily schedule. These meetings took place with teachers and teacher aides from 8:00 a.m.-8:30 a.m. and were located primarily in one of the classrooms (teacher aides had morning duties which limited attendance). The daycare staff met weekly with teachers meeting 12:50 p.m.-1:20 p.m. and teacher aides from 1:20 p.m.-1:50 p.m. during the staff break in a conference room. The data were collected by written and tape recorded interviews and focus groups, taking field notes during classroom observations, and keeping meeting minutes.

The research took place over a 6-month period of time. The first two months included initial approval, quality assessments, and a needs assessment. Each cycle consisted of one training topic with collaborative opportunities and a self-reflection tool. The first two cycles lasted one month each. The final cycle included post assessments and accounted for the last two months of the study.

**Cycle 1.** The research began with district approval and communication with the participants through an informed consent form (see Appendix E). The informed consent included an outline of the activities planned in the research and an explanation of the assessment tools. It also included an anticipated time line (see Appendix F) and the anonymity of the data collection. The letter of transmittal acted as informed consent from the participants, in addition to the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) process.

The first cycle began with a classroom quality assessment. The High/Scope Foundation publishes The Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA) and is a rating instrument designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs (Epstein, 2003, p. 2). The PQA is appropriate for all early childhood settings, including but not limited to those using the High/Scope educational approach. “The PQA can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of staff development initiatives by assessing program quality before and after in-service training activities” (Epstein, 2003, p. 2). The assessment is currently being used with the sample group as part of district policy. The results will be shared with the classroom staff only and used as a self-reflection tool to indicate desired trainings on a needs assessment survey

(see Appendix G). This survey was filled out by the participants and generated specific training topics.

The first cycle included training on the first topic chosen by the participants. Due to the short meeting times the trainings were broken into three parts. The first part consisted of workshop meetings that covered content and theory on the topic and hands on experiences with teaching strategies. The second part included materials to brainstorming of teaching strategies that reflected the theory covered. The third part included an opportunity to reflect on the implementation. During the training process, participants were provided with information on the characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs.

While the participants attempted to apply the content, related lessons were videotaped for purposes of the reflective process. To determine attitudes and opinions of this initial cycle I interviewed staff on a volunteer basis (see Appendix H).

**Cycle 2.** The next cycle included a workshop on the second topic identified by the needs assessment. The meetings were broken into three parts. The first part covered content and theory; the second part included materials and how to apply the content. The third part included the opportunity to reflect on the application. The instrument used for the purposes of reflection was the Observation Feedback (O/F). Observation feedback is designed by the High/Scope curriculum and the process allows trainers to identify strengths in teachers' styles and challenges where growth can occur (Epstein, 2007).

Epstein (2007) states:

This process may be initiated by the supervisor or teaching team and occurs in response to a specific question or concern about the curriculum implementation.

The [observer] writes an extensive narrative based on the focus of the observation . . . makes the relevant curriculum notes . . . and then discusses these in a mutual feedback process. (p. 96)

This procedure also included interviews to monitor the progress of the professional development plan (see Appendix I).

**Cycle 3.** The final cycle included a workshop on the third topic identified by the needs assessment. The original topic choice was changed after teachers requested the modification based on more urgent needs. The meetings were broken into three parts. The first part included content and theory; the second part included materials and how to apply the content. The third part included the opportunity to reflect on the application. The final reflection was guided by student assessment data. “Attentiveness to student learning represents a core characteristic of schools where there is a strong professional community” (as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 152). The collaborative component provided a forum for the staff to discuss strategies and the data their student assessment tool produced.

The student assessment tool the teachers used was the Child Observation Record (COR) published by the High/Scope Foundation. “The COR is an observation-based instrument that provides systematic assessment of young children’s knowledge and abilities in all areas of development” (Epstein, 2007, p. 196).

The cycle ended with a focus group (see Appendix J), a reassessment of the three chosen training topics using the PQA, and two surveys. A focus group allows for a group dynamic that encourages disclosure not experienced in an individual interview. Staff processed and discussed the professional development initiative and the opportunities

afforded through the development of the collaborative model. The PQA tool was used to reassess the items covered in the three cycles. A post-survey determined if attitudes and practices have changed since the onset of the research (see Appendix A) and a leadership survey (see Appendix K) was utilized to inform on the leadership skills demonstrated.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of organizing raw data to determine useful information. The data are organized to determine patterns and themes that will suggest outcomes of the research questions. The quantitative data were put into SPSS software and descriptive statistics were used to determine trends in responses from the post-survey. To analyze the qualitative data, patterns of reoccurring answers and opinions were found and common categories developed. The categories were defined and aggregated by coding the data. Coding is “a system to identify individual pieces of data as belonging to a particular category” (Hinchey, 2008).

The process began during the research collection process. Field notes were reviewed on a weekly basis and categories were identified that lead to the codes. Once the data had been sorted, findings were formulated. The findings include specific data from the research collected. Finally, the findings allowed for interpretation based on socially constructed knowledge and did not seek to prove a specific outcome.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study is to determine if a shift in the focus and delivery of professional development would impact teachers' attitudes and classroom quality.

Findings in the literature reviewed indicated that adult learners need instructional practices that scaffold their learning and respect their prior knowledge, as well as value the experience they bring to the profession. Adult learning theory describes learners as autonomous, self-directing, and in need of practical connections. Similarly, PLCs allow adults to develop collaborative relationships built on a shared vision and shared outcomes. The research was designed to incorporate these characteristics and included the following research questions:

1. In what ways can a professional development program that utilizes adult learning theory improve classroom quality?
2. How will utilizing adult learning theory affect staff attitudes?
3. How will utilizing PLCs affect staff attitudes and practice?
4. How does the researcher's leadership affect the outcomes of the professional development program?

The methodology integrated quantitative and qualitative data in an action research model. Using questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and a collection of relevant artifacts triangulated the mixed methodology and data. The process began with an investigation of attitudes towards the current professional development program. Classroom quality assessments were also done to identify teachers' areas of strength and

need. The body of research was conducted within the context of reformation of professional development. Included were the characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs. Throughout the process data were collected from workshops, grade level meetings, interviews, and focus groups. The final cycle provided post-questionnaires and a post-classroom assessment. The quantitative data were analyzed through the use of SPSS software to identify frequency distributions using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were coded for trends (see Appendix L).

The research produced 13 categories that can be summarized under five major themes: personal improvement, relationships, professional outcomes, attitudes and efficacy, and leadership. The first theme, personal improvement, revealed teachers' motivation to initiate learning and inform their personal journey towards deep scholarship. The second theme, relationships, is tied to working with others and adult connections. The third theme, professional outcomes, corresponded to practical classroom application, prior knowledge, and goals. The fourth theme, attitudes and efficacy, reported teachers' overall satisfaction toward the professional development program and the impact on classroom quality. The final theme, leadership, connected the opinions of the participants towards the researcher's leadership. Each theme is further defined by subcategories.

Under personal improvement, coding included intrinsic motivation, active learning, self-direction, and self-reflection. Relationships were represented by shared vision, collaborative environment, and respect. The categories under professional outcomes were practical experiences, knowledge, and goal-orientation. Attitudes and efficacy produced answers to the research questions under the categories of program

satisfaction and classroom quality. The final theme produced information under the category, characteristics of leadership.

The following sections begin with a definition of each theme as they are defined by the literature. The theme is followed by each category, which is further defined. The findings are reported under their respective category, followed by findings and discussion intended to make connections to the literature review. The section ends with research limitations and biases.

### **Personal Improvement**

Personal improvement is the development of one's mind, character, and education through one's individual efforts. The categories represented under personal improvement symbolize the forces acting within a person that create the direction and persistence of goal-directed, voluntary effort (Reference for Business, n.d.). It is concerned with the processes that explain why and how human behavior is activated (Reference for Business, n.d.).

**Intrinsic motivation.** Intrinsic motivation, a characteristic of adult learning theory, can be defined as personal satisfaction derived through self-initiated achievement. Specifically, as it is related to motivation of learning, it is derived from the sense of empowerment developed through the achievement of a goal (Lieb, 1991). Lieb (1991) reminds us that there are factors that contribute to adult motivation, and they are most often driven from within. These factors include social relationships, social welfare, personal advancement, stimulation, and cognitive interest.

**Findings and discussion.** In the interviews conducted in the initial cycle, teachers identified how they were motivated. In question one, regarding choosing training topics,

a teacher stated, “When you are a part of the decision, you become motivated toward wanting to learn more and do better for yourself.” In question four, about self-reflection, three teachers responded about how the process stimulated them to continue to improve their teaching practices. In Cycle 3, focus group question number three asked how a successful professional development experience matched the characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs. Three of five focus groups included intrinsic motivation as one characteristic.

Lieb (1991) identified factors to support adult learners and three of the factors connect directly to intrinsic motivation. They are personal advancement, stimulation, and cognitive interests (Lieb, 1991). The findings indicated that teachers were motivated when their interests were incorporated into the professional development program. Their ability to make decisions on specific training topics further provoked enthusiasm. This resulted in the teachers’ desire to improve further. Fleet and Patterson (2001) support this point when they discuss that empowering teachers allows them to be intellectually and emotionally invested in the development. This investment drove the research participants’ intrinsic motivation.

Teachers were afforded the opportunity to self-reflect through videotaped lessons and they developed plans according to a needs assessment. This led to the motivation to learn more as communicated in the collected data. This is endorsed by the research that suggests individuals are motivated when their needs are considered (Maslow as cited in Hughes et al., 1995).

**Active learning.** Active learning research suggests that students must read, write, discuss, problem solve, and most importantly, engage in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). “Within this context it is proposed that strategies promoting active learning be defined as instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, para. 2).

**Findings and discussion.** In Cycle 1 interviews teachers were asked if active learning was incorporated into the training they were provided. One teacher stated that she experienced the impact of utilizing materials and its connection to active learning with children. Another teacher stated that the active learning experience led to more successful teaching. In Cycle 2 interviews teachers were again asked if the training provided opportunities for active learning. One teacher answered the “hands on” activities helped to solidify understanding. Another answered that it helped her to understand how to support active learning with her students.

In Cycle 3, focus group question number three asked how a successful professional development experience matched the characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs. Four of the five focus groups cited hands on experiences as one of the characteristics. When unsuccessful experiences were discussed during the focus groups, some participants reported use of lecture and discussion as a negative practice.

All three cycles provided training that incorporated active learning. Participants discussed how they had opportunities to use materials related to the training topics. They manipulated the materials and discussed their use in the classroom. The facilitator

supported the dialogue by referring teachers to one another. Five teachers also requested modeling of the activities, which provided further support.

Active learning identified by the findings can be found in The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards for effective professional development programs (NAEYC, 1993). Williams (2001) discussed that adults build knowledge through their interactions with the world and this should be reflected in professional development. Teachers in this study identified how interacting with materials assisted in their understanding, and supported new strategies in the classroom. Ultimately, teachers were active learners, and those opportunities allowed teachers to transform their teaching and not simply layer new strategies on top of the old (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Haslam and Seremet (2001) further support the findings when they included engaging teachers as active learners and problem solvers as examples of best practice (p. 5).

**Self-direction.** Adults are autonomous and need to be involved in their learning process. Lieb (1991) states that it is important to include participants' perspectives regarding topics that should be covered, and they should be allowed to work on projects that reflect their interests. He also suggests that adults should assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership (Lieb, 1991). Malcolm Knowles (as cited by Smith, 2002) suggests a process:

... in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (para. 30)

*Findings and discussion.* Interview question 2 of the initial cycle asked participants if choosing their own training topics was preferable to district assigned topics. One teacher stated, “As a group we know what our needs are. When Early Childhood Department staff chooses professional development topics, many teachers feel that time is wasted because the chosen topics are not truly useful to the group.” Another teacher reported that choosing their own topics was better because it met their individual needs. An additional comment was, “We can design training to meet our needs.”

In Cycle 2 the public school staff requested that the assigned topic be switched to a topic they believed was more important. The second interview asked how they felt about the change. One teacher explained that she was glad to change the topic because she needed, and wanted, the information from the new topic based on the needs of her classroom. Two other teachers responded positively to the change because it focused on the curriculum and it was a preferred topic.

In Cycle 3 a post questionnaire was given to compare teachers’ responses from before the onset of the action research project. Table 1 focuses on a comparison of the frequency of responses from the pre and post questionnaires with items related to the category of self-direction. Respondents reported an increase from 34% to 81% in “Strongly Agree” and 47% to 19% in “Agree” in the item, the current program supported their Professional Improvement Plan (PIP); 34% to 71% in “Strongly Agree” and 33% to 29% in “Agree” in topics matching areas of interest; and 36% to 67% in “Strongly Agree” and 39% to 33% in “Agree” for planning their own professional development.

Table 1

*Staff Development Response Frequencies: Pre/Post Comparison*

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
The training topics presented responded to my Professional Improvement Plan (PIP).	34%	81%	47%	19%	11%	0%	8%	0%	-	-
The training topics presented responded to my areas of interest.	34%	71%	33%	29%	22%	0%	11%	0%	-	-
I have an opportunity to plan and implement my ongoing professional development.	36%	67%	39%	33%	17%	0%	8%	0%	-	-

During interviews teachers indicated opportunities for self-direction, which tied directly to the NAEYC standards of effective professional development programs. Included in the standards is the opportunity to plan one's own development (NAEYC, 1993). Wadlington (1995) further reports that one of the four basic principles regarding the characteristics of adult learners is that teachers are more likely to learn in a critical and reflective manner when it is based on their own experiences.

Teachers responded to professional development better when they assumed the responsibility of planning their improvement. As evidenced from Table 1, teachers affirmatively viewed an increase in creating their learning opportunities. Research states there is greater impact when teachers serve as researcher or peer reviewer (Darling-Hammond & McClaughlin, 1995). Feger and Arruda (2008) further support this by writing that adult learning is enhanced when teachers participate in developing their professional development through self-directed and problem-centered approaches. It is

through the use of self-evaluation and self-direction that successful professional development experiences are inherent.

**Self-reflection.** Donald Schön (as cited in Ferraro, 2000) states that reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline. Ferraro (2000) further notes “the collaborative model of reflective practice enriches students’ personal reflections on their work and provides students with suggestions from peers on how to refine their teaching practices” (para. 5).

**Findings and discussion.** In Cycle 1 interviews participants were asked if self-reflection was important. One teacher said, “I may think I’m changing something, but if I have not reflected then I have not thought it through and consciously decided what was good or bad and what different strategies I will use in the future.” An additional quote was, “In order to improve the quality of one’s teaching, self-reflection is important. The observer and the professional can focus more on the areas where help is needed and it also meets the individual needs.” Further comments included self-reflection as the only way to continue learning, a means to find resolutions to issues within oneself, and a positive form of self-analysis.

In Cycle 3 one of the members in the focus group stated that it was easy to fall back into the “status quo” after training. Self-reflection provided the opportunity for her to challenge herself and her practices. Another teacher felt she began to question practices and self-reflect while presenting a lesson.

In Cycle 3, the post questionnaire yielded comparison responses for opportunities for teachers to engage in personal reflection. Figure 1 demonstrates the responses

“Strongly Agree” increased from 36% to 67%, responses for “Agree” increased from 31% to 28%, “Neutral” responses decreased from 19% to 5%, and responses for “Disagree” decreased from 14% to 0%.

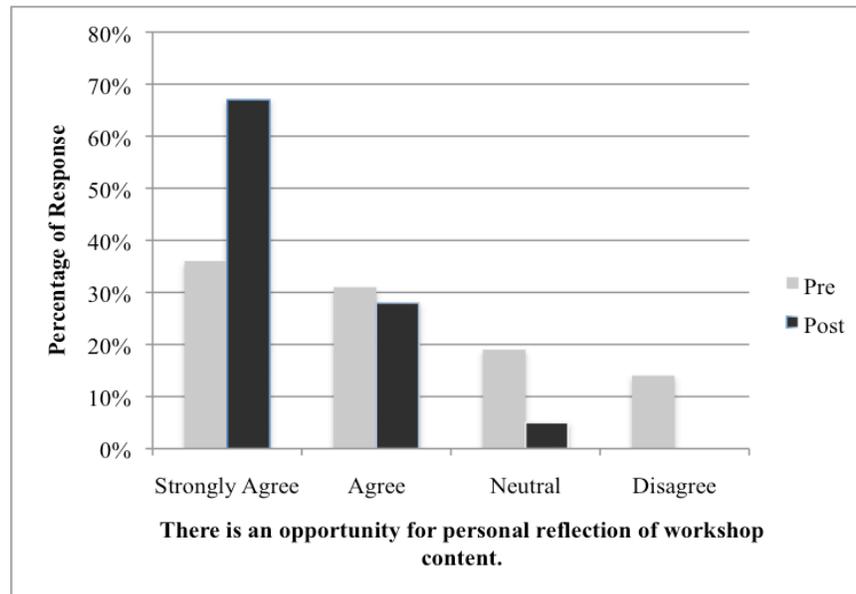


Figure 1. Pre/Post Response for Self-Reflection

Teachers responded that personal reflection opportunities increased. The opportunities were provided in response to NAEYC standards of effective professional development programs that included an opportunity for application and reflection (NAEYC, 1993). Darling-Hammond and McCloughlin (1995) further report that professional development is most effective when there are opportunities to engage in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection. Additional theorists include reflective dialogue as an additional theme for developing PLCs focused on school improvement (Feger & Arruda, 2008).

The teachers reported that performing the task of reflection challenged the status quo. Sparks (1994) writes how the activity of reflection is a constructivist task and should be part of staff development. Constructivism incorporates construction of one's own

learning. Vygotskian theory, a component of constructivism, formulates a standard for teacher education including the principle of the reflective practice (Van Huizen et al., 2005).

### **Relationships**

As previously discussed, motivation is an essential component to adult learning, and a social relationship is one of its six factors. This theme represents the connection between adults as they work together. Relationships can be connected to the idea of team learning. Heisenberg states, “Collectively, we can be more insightful, more intelligent than we can possibly be individually” (as cited in Senge, 2006, p. 221).

**Shared vision.** Senge (2006) describes shared vision as the development of one vision based on individuals’ visions of the organization. He continues with the explanation that a shared vision assists in a commitment to organizational goals. Shared vision is also a component of professional learning communities and is defined as “a collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the people in the school believe and what they seek to create” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25).

**Findings and discussion.** Early in the investigative process the research participants developed a vision statement that represented what they wanted for children. While developing the statement, teachers were surprised to find how they had very similar expectations for the delivery of the preschool program. The shared vision was hung at all subsequent meetings and the teachers stated that it helped keep them focused on the outcomes.

During an interview in the first cycle, one respondent reported that “the more we shared and discussed, the more we found we had common concerns.” The focus group’s

statements indicated that having a shared vision and being on the same page led to improved outcomes. It also produced comments about a desire to want the same things for all of the stakeholders.

Teachers indicated that developing a shared vision allowed them to see their mutual expectations for children. The research began with the development of the shared vision because, according to Eaker and Keating (2008), the development of shared values is essential to changing the school culture. Feger and Arruda (2008) reinforced the importance of developing a shared vision when they discussed the impact a shared vision has on the ability to develop a collaborative culture. The combination of purpose, vision, values, strategies, and goals helps the team focus on its direction and allows for positive results (Stowell & Mead, 2007).

**Collaborative environment.** Collaboration is included in the characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs, and requires teachers to come together to discuss and share teaching practices. Stein (1998) writes,

Participation describes the interchange of ideas, attempts at problem solving, and active engagement of learners with each other and with the materials of instruction. It is the process of interaction with others that produces and establishes meaningful systems among learners. (para. 10)

**Findings and discussion.** This topic produced a considerable number of responses in the interviews, focus groups, and post-questionnaires. In Cycle 1 interviews teachers responded that sharing strategies was more positive and beneficial than what had taken place previously. They discussed how advantageous it was to learn from one another and how everyone took an interest in discussions and feedback. One teacher said,

“Idea sharing helps me to add more to my plans and focus on skills I might need more ideas for.” Additional comments were that the collaborative process was one of the best ways to improve, and allowed for a “bigger bag of tricks.” Although receiving ideas was communicated, one teacher felt it was great to give ideas as well. At the end of a grade level meeting, while returning materials to a classroom, a teacher stated how she saw such great teamwork with her colleagues. An additional comment made the point that meetings have shifted from verbalizing complaints to focusing on curriculum.

In Cycle 3 a post questionnaire was given to compare teachers’ responses from before the onset of the action research project. Table 2 focuses on a comparison of the frequency of responses from the pre and post-questionnaires with items related to the category of collaborative environment. Respondents reported an increase from 56% to 71% in “Strongly Agree” and 31% to 29% in “Agree” under the item, enjoy working in teams; 56% to 71% in “Strongly Agree” and 33% to 19% in “Agree” for enjoy sharing lessons; 42% to 67% in “Strongly Agree” and 44% to 28% in “Agree” for discussing teaching with others; 50% to 67% in “Strongly Agree” and 39% to 23% in “Agree” for implementing suggestions from peers; 36% to 67% in “Strongly Agree” and 22% to 14% in “Agree” for time for collaboration provided; and 42% to 62% in “Strongly Agree” and 30% to 28% in “Agree” for opportunities to share with colleagues.

Table 2

*Adult Collaborative Experiences Response Frequencies: Pre/Post Comparison*

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
I enjoy working in teams.	56%	71%	31%	29%	8%	0%	5%	0%	-	-
I enjoy sharing lessons and ideas with other teachers in my building.	56%	71%	33%	19%	8%	10%	3%	0%	-	-
I discuss teaching with other teachers in my building.	42%	67%	44%	28%	14%	5%	-	-	-	-
I implement teaching suggestions from my peers.	50%	67%	39%	23%	8%	10%	3%	0%	-	-
Time is provided for me to meet with the teachers in my school after a training session.	36%	67%	22%	14%	6%	9.5%	33%	9.5%	3%	0%
I have the opportunity to share teaching experiences with colleagues.	42%	62%	30%	28%	14%	10%	14%	0%	-	-

Developing a professional development program that includes collaborative opportunities was derived initially from the standards recommended by NAEYC (1993) and the NSDC (2001) and required by The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) (2009). Secondly, collaborative opportunities were included based on research that identified it as a characteristic that supports teachers as learners (Darling-Hammond & McClaughlin, 1995). Through the use of morning workshops and follow up group discussions, a shift from isolation emerged in order to improve teaching practice (Feger & Arruda, 2008).

Included in the constructive perspective, Vygotsky's approach advocates that teachers participate collaboratively in activities such as action research and conversations with peers (Williams, 2001). This task was evident during the weekly grade level meetings. Feger and Arruda (2008) further reported that the use of Vygotskian theory allows for a culture of professional learning through the sharing ideas.

To ensure that the staff were developing a true learning community, the meetings were purposeful through the use of agendas related to the training topics. They also maintained collegial discussions by honoring the group agreement and sustaining a curriculum focus. The discussions around curriculum topics ensured that teachers looked deeply at the teaching and learning process to maximize effectiveness (Morrissey, 2000). Feger and Arruda (2008) further purport, collaboration allows a learning team to work together more effectively in identifying and resolving problems. This was evident in the positive comments in the shift to purposeful meetings.

**Respect.** Respect can be defined as challenging ideas without threatening people (Smith, 2002). Smith (2002) reports it is the attitude on which all human relations depend. Professional developers must "acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in the areas of experience and knowledge, and they should be allowed to voice their opinions freely" (Lieb, 1991, p. 2).

**Findings and discussion.** In Cycle 1, a teacher responded to questions regarding the collaborative process with the comment that much can be learned from one another when the group feels safe to be honest and open. The same question also generated the response about the strengthening of the relationships the collaborative opportunities

provided. Another teacher shared that the more they discussed common concerns, the less tentative they were about speaking up. An additional participant said that the relationships allowed members to admit when they needed help. In a focus group a teacher offered that the improved relationship allowed for increased sharing. After the grade level meeting on June 2, a teacher stated that since the meetings have become more “comfortable” it helped with communicating information.

Supportive structural and relational conditions are components indicative of quality professional development programs (Hord, 2008; Lieb, 1991). In addition, research includes mutual trust as a characteristic for supportive sources of learning (DuFour et al., 2005; Feger & Arruda, 2008). This was evident in the comments shared by the school staff and the discussions that continued without the researcher’s facilitation.

### **Professional Outcomes**

Professional outcomes relate to the understanding and potential impact on professional practices created by a professional development program. This theme impacted teacher knowledge and application of teaching strategies based on professional development. It incorporated categories that support job skill enrichment and conditions in which participants experienced the complexity and ambiguity of learning in the real world (Stein, 1998). Smith (2002) reports that one of Malcolm Knowles’ crucial assumptions was that “as a person matures his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles” (para. 19).

**Practical experiences.** Teachers must see a reason for learning and how it applies to their work (Lieb, 1991). Theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to participants, and staff developers must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be

useful to them on the job (Lieb, 1991). Stein (1998) explains that “learning is grounded in the actions of everyday situations... knowledge is acquired situationally and transfers only to similar situations” (para. 3).

***Findings and discussion.*** In Cycle 1, teachers were asked how the classroom quality assessment mirrored their areas in need of support. Responses included affirmation that their needs were evident and that professional development driven by these needs matched their daily use of the curriculum. Another teacher said it assisted in identifying areas needing improvement, and related exactly to what is happening in the classroom.

During a grade level meeting, in Cycle 2, a teacher said, “Although [the process] is a lot of work, it works and is worth it.” Another participant stated that the sample activities were used the very next day and worked well.

In the focus groups teachers were asked to describe an unsuccessful professional development session. All of the focus groups answered that unsuccessful experiences included topics that were uninteresting, not tied to the curriculum, not aligned to their needs and interests, and chosen without their consultation.

Sparks (1994) reports that job-embedded learning links professional development plans and practices in a way teachers can relate. Effective programs engage teachers in concrete tasks and connect pedagogy to the daily work of teachers (Darling-Hammond & McClaughlin, 1995; Haslam & Seremet, 2001). Teachers indicated the importance for the connections from training to practical application. Through their responses, professional development programs were most successful when content was

related to classroom practices. Additionally, teachers communicated how they implemented new strategies immediately in their classroom practices.

**Knowledge.** Knowledge represents teachers' prior experiences and draws connections to the training topics. Trainers "must relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning" (Lieb, 1991, p. 1). Knowles further states, "As a person matures he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning" (as cited in Smith, 2002, para. 19).

**Findings and discussion.** In Cycle 1, interview question two asked opinions on choosing training topics. This question elicited the response, "We know what our needs are and how they connect to our classrooms." Another teacher discussed how choosing topics allowed for alterations based on the needs of her current classroom challenges. During the focus groups teachers were asked about sustaining a learning community. Three of the focus groups discussed individuals with strengths and opportunities for them to lead training topics and to facilitate collaborative opportunities. Another teacher explained that she began to reach out to a proficient colleague and the exchange was successful.

After teachers had an opportunity to do video taped self-reflections in Cycle 1, three teachers suggested we use videotaping to share colleagues successful classroom practices. During a grade level meeting training session, a teacher reported having additional information on the topic being discussed. It was from a source different than the curriculum, but had clear connections. The group requested the information and the teacher presented the information at a subsequent meeting, satisfying Fullan's (2001)

recommendations for knowledge creation and sharing.

Utilizing a teacher's working knowledge allows for contributions from prior experiences. This means that teachers are active learners and less resistant than we think. Wadlington (1995) writes that teachers are more likely to learn in a critical and reflective manner when it is based on their own experiences. Teachers expressed through the interviews the importance of respecting the knowledge they bring to the profession. Life experiences are vital to supporting adult learners (Lieb, 1991).

**Goal-orientation.** Teachers respond best to an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements (Lieb, 1991). Lieb (1991) continues to indicate that it is imperative that adult learners see how the content will help them attain their goals. Knowles concurs by explaining that adult learners prefer to apply information immediately and the learning shifts to problem centeredness (as cited in Smith, 2002).

**Findings and discussion.** In a Cycle 2 interview, a respondent commented about how the complete process of choosing topics, training, reflection, and collaborative opportunities provided the tools to share solutions with others and to focus on the bigger problems. An additional comment mentioned how self-reflection assisted in focusing on goals. Another teacher stated that using student outcomes for reflection helped to determine goals and needs for individual children.

During a grade level meeting a teacher discussed how using an activity from the previous session generated several activities. Another discussed how they were able to differentiate the tasks based on the educational goals of each individual child.

Williams (2001) recommends a current paradigm shift in support of staff development that includes results-driven education. This shift in thought includes

coherent strategic plans, which resemble formal development plans related to a specific goal. Eaker and Keating (2008) further recommend a shift in focus from inputs to outcomes. Teachers indicated that the professional development plans aided in providing strategies that were directly linked to goals for children. They explained that the content allowed them to support the needs of specific children.

### **Attitudes and Efficacy**

In an attempt to improve professional development programs, action research was done to focus on improving practices (Hinchey, 2008). Research questions were answered through the study by influencing teachers' attitudes towards professional development programs and the efficacy of its outcomes (McKay, 1992). The research conclusions represent the implementation of best practices according the current examination of the literature.

**Program satisfaction.** Teachers' attitudes towards professional development programs have an affect on the impact on classroom outcomes. "The development of ownership and commitment to improved practices is important in ensuring positive participation by faculty in the professional development process" (Speck, 1996, p. 36). A supportive and complete professional development program enhances motivation, which leads to improved program outcomes (Speck, 1996).

**Findings and discussion.** In Cycle 3 a post questionnaire was given to compare teachers' responses from before the onset of the action research project. Table 3 focuses on a comparison of the frequency of responses from the pre and post-questionnaires with regards to the overall satisfaction with the professional development program. Respondents reported an increase from 33% to 81% in "Strongly Agree," responses

remained the same at 19% for “Agree,” responses decreased to 0% in “Neutral,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.”

Table 3

*Program Satisfaction Response Frequencies: Pre/Post Comparison*

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
I was satisfied with the professional development experience.	33%	81%	19%	19%	25%	0%	25%	0%	20%	0%

The final cycle questionnaire indicated that the teachers were satisfied with the implementation of professional development programs that included adult learning theory and the characteristics of PLCs. At the conclusion of the research, as communicated during Cycle 3 focus groups, teachers preferred to participate in a professional development program that followed the process they had experienced.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) found that teaching practices are influenced when professional development includes the application of knowledge to the teachers’ planning, and is generated by staff satisfaction. Stowell and Mead (2007) reported that through the combination of purpose, vision, values, strategies, and goals, teams could focus on its direction and allow for positive results.

Research questions two and three asked how utilizing adult learning theory and the characteristics of PLCs affected staff attitudes towards the professional development program. The methodology for this study provided a professional development experience that utilized adult learning theory and the characteristics of PLCs. As indicated by the table above, participants satisfaction increased by 48% after receiving the treatment of this professional development program design.

**Classroom quality.** A quality professional development program seeks to improve educational practices, and support teachers' needs. Training should then translate to classroom quality and can be evaluated through assessment. Although program quality, like child development, is complex and multidimensional, classroom assessment can assist in planning for training (Epstein, 2003, p. 11).

**Findings and discussion.** The teachers participated in the treatment outlined in the methodology and a post-quality assessment (PQA) was completed for the purpose of identifying the impact of the treatment on classroom practices. The assessment is calculated with a five-point scale. A numeric value of 1 demonstrates low implementation, and a numeric value of 5 indicates high competence.

The public school staff chose training topics related to the curriculum that included the daily routine components, small group time, and large group time. They also chose conflict resolution, which is High/Scope's problem solving approach. PQA item #21 measures small group time; #22 measures large group time; #36 measures adult-child interactions during small and large group time; #37 measures materials used for small and large group time; and #41 measures conflict resolution. Figure 2 illustrates the comparison scores for the topics in which the public school staff participated. The average score for item #21 increased from 4.45 to 5.0; #22 increased from 3.45 to 4.88; #36 increased from 3.91 to 4.75; #37 increased from 4.36 to 5.0; and #41 increased from 3.40 to 3.66.

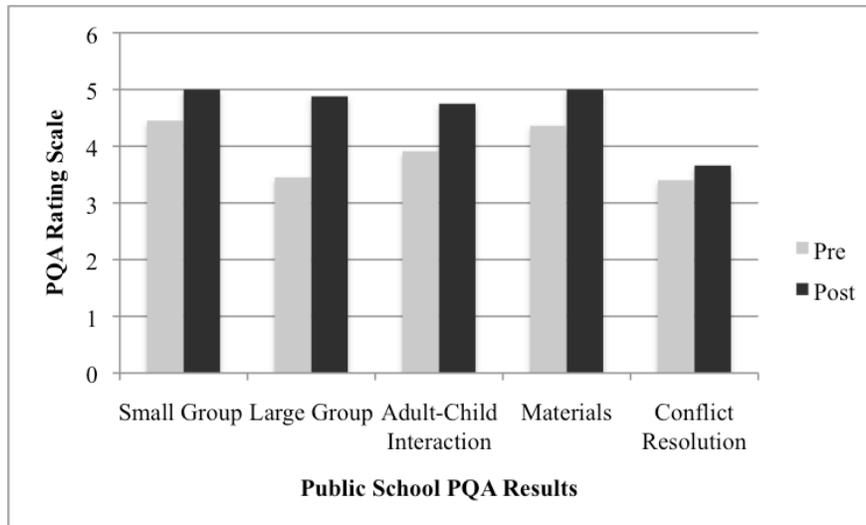


Figure 2. Public School Pre/Post PQA Results

The daycare center staff chose training topics related to the curriculum that focused on components of the daily routine including small group time, and daily activity transitions. They also chose conflict resolution, which is High/Scope's problem solving approach, and encouragement vs. praise. PQA item #21 measures small group time; #36 measures adult-child interactions during small group time; #37 measures materials used for small group time; #23 measures transitions; #38 measures encouragement vs. praise; and #41 measures conflict resolution. Figure 3 illustrates the comparison scores for the topics in which the daycare center staff participated. The average score for item #21 increased from 3.33 to 4.33; #36 increased from 2.56 to 3.78; #37 increased from 3.78 to 3.78; #23 increased from 2.33 to 3.44; #38 increased from 3.33 to 4.11; and #41 increased from 2.71 to 4.0.

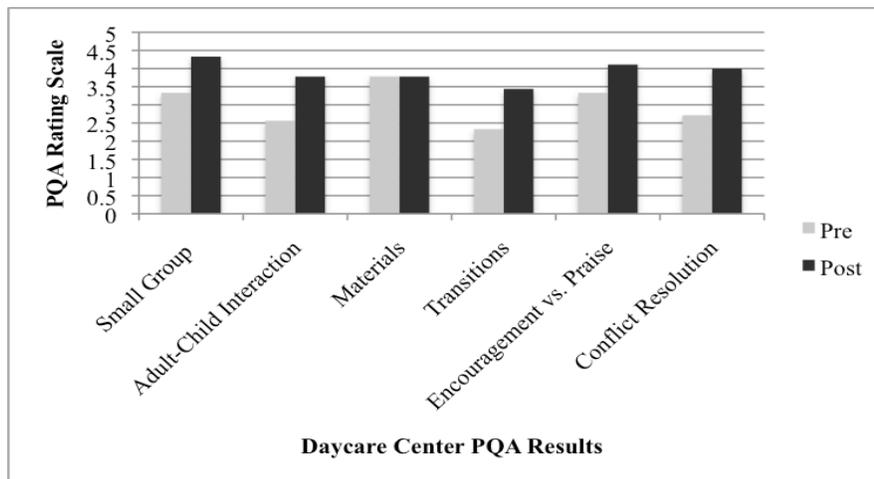


Figure 3. Daycare Center Pre/Post PQA Results

Research questions one and three asked how a professional development program that utilizes adult learning theory and PLCs, improve classroom quality. The questions related to the research that reports high quality professional development cultivates skills and knowledge, and leads to improved teaching practices, particularly when it deemphasizes abstract discussions (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Haslam & Seremet, 2001). The research created a program that followed the recommended characteristics of a high quality experience, highlighting the importance of collaborative learning environments, which promote change beyond the individual classrooms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The study produced results that were obvious in the classroom assessments. In both settings, the post PQA scores indicated growth in the areas where training followed those characteristics.

### **Leadership**

Leadership is defined as the act of guiding or directing a group or an organization (Hughes et al., 1995). They have the ability to affect change by encouraging the group to join efforts to realize a vision and actively assist in reaching the goals (Goleman et al., 2004).

**Role of the leadership.** Leaders define the vision for the organization they lead. Effective leaders are able to motivate their group towards the achievement of a common goal. Successful leaders utilize a variety of strategies to empower those people who are relied upon to achieve organizational goals Evans (1996).

**Findings and discussion.** In Cycle 3 a questionnaire asked participants to identify the level at which the researcher demonstrated seven characteristics of leadership traits using a Likert scale. The characteristics, defined by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), included knowledge of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment; the extent to which the leader inspires others and is the driving force for the implementation of change; provides intellectual stimulation; is an agent of change; monitors and evaluates change; is flexible; and maintains and communicates ideals and strong educational beliefs.

Table 4 represents the frequency of responses from the participants in both settings. The results reported 86% “Strongly Agree” and 14% “Agree” in knowledge of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment; 76% “Strongly Agree” and 24% “Agree” in inspiring others; 81% “Strongly Agree” and 19% “Agree” in intellectual stimulation; 76% “Strongly Agree” and 24% “Agree” in being a change agent; 71% “Strongly Agree” and 28% “Agree” in monitoring and evaluating change; 81% “Strongly Agree” and 19% “Agree” in being flexible; and 81% “Strongly Agree” and 19% “Agree” in maintaining and communicating educational beliefs. The results highlighted the researchers strength in leadership characteristics throughout the study.

Table 4

*Leadership Attributes Frequencies*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Leadership Attributes</b>				
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.	86%	14%	-	-
The extent of a leader to inspire others and being the driving force for implementation of change.	76%	24%	-	-
Providing intellectual stimulation.	81%	19%	-	-
Being a change agent.	76%	21%	-	-
Monitoring and evaluating the change.	71%	29%	-	-
Being flexible.	81%	19%	-	-
Maintaining and communicating ideals and strong educational beliefs.	81%	19%	-	-

The fourth research question inquired how the investigator's leadership affected the outcomes of the professional development program. The information in Table 4 indicates the use of the leadership characteristics and contributions to the outcomes of the professional development program. Another measure to indicate if this was evident was an item in the questionnaire that asked if the lead teacher provided support after a workshop. Figure 4 indicates responses were nearly 70% "Strongly Agree" and nearly 30% "Agree". The support was offered through collegial discussions, informal conversations, and guidance during reflective opportunities. This data indicates that the

researchers interactions assisted in the positive outcomes.

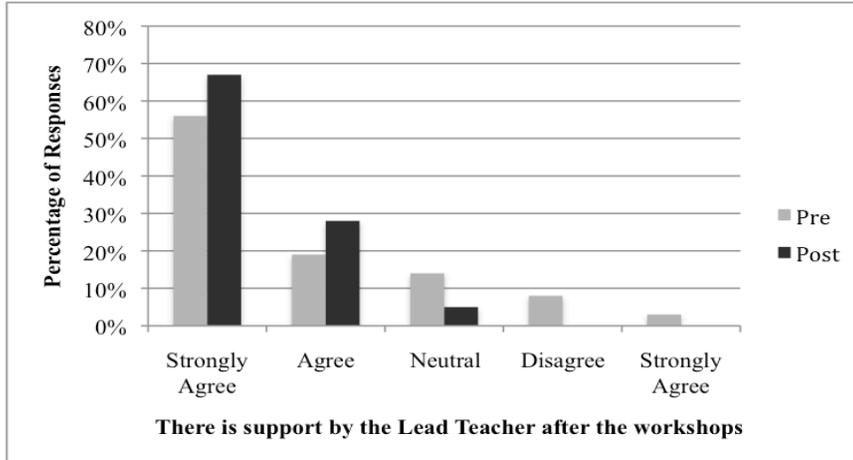


Figure 4. Pre/Post Response for Support from the Lead Teacher

In an effort to ensure best practices for the education of young children, a commitment to supporting adult learners was made. It is that obligation that allowed the researcher to embrace the field of early care and healthy development of young children, as well as fulfill the responsibility of the role of educator of adults (NAEYC, 2004). That role includes providing a professional development program that balances between nurturing adults and establishing active experiences that improve their learning. The data indicated that the researcher utilized these characteristics and it contributed to the affirmative outcome of the research questions.

The sense of urgency was evident in the respondents' initial responses to the professional development surveys. The participants were the guiding coalition who communicated and maintained the vision. As each cycle was completed, participants communicated the positive experiences, which contributed to short-term wins. Continued change in the organization's culture will develop through continued use of the professional development program provided throughout the research.

**Limitations**

The researcher's role is that of a peer leader, and not of a supervisor. The public school staff recognizes the equality in the role and honest answers were likely. The daycare staff views the role as supervisory and answers to questionnaires may be affected by the relationship. The researcher also provided the professional development experiences in a way unique to her personality and abilities as an experienced peer leader.

Finally, the public school and daycare center leadership supported the initiative and allowed the researcher to independently run the study. Leadership impacts any change initiative; therefore, the leadership could have influenced the outcomes. Consistent leadership can produce continued results.

**Biases**

The researcher has worked with both groups for over two years. Since there is a close working relationship with all of the staff the researcher had to be conscious of the biases embedded in the research. The working style of the staff and relationships among them was already known. The researcher anticipated the change resistors and those that would be open to implementing a PLC. To contend with biases that may affect the research, interview questions were provided prior to meetings. This gave staff the opportunity to think about their answers without reacting to body language. Notes were also taken during observations with the guidelines used for anecdotal note taking. These include writing just what is seen and heard, and writing without judgment words. Finally, documentation was collected that could have influenced objective analysis.

**Validity**

Validity was addressed throughout the research. Glesne (2006) recommends verification procedures to ensure validity. The procedures utilized in this research were triangulation, peer review, self-reflection, and a check of final reports with the participants.

The sample is a small representation of the population from an urban district. Therefore, the study is not able to be generalized and will need to be replicated in additional settings. Continued research needs to be done on adult learning theory and professional learning communities as they are utilized in professional development programs.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In an effort to impact educational reform, teachers need to continue to develop their skills and improve teaching strategies. Historically, professional development practices included in-service trainings intended to increase knowledge. These traditional practices produced little enthusiasm and even less improvement in classroom quality. National organizations and state departments of education reacted to the lack of impact traditional professional development offered by developing a set of standards based on professional development policies. The professional development standards addressed the needs of adult learners and incorporated learning communities (NAEYC, 1993; NSDC, 2001; NJDOE, 2009). Therefore, this action research pursued the application of characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs to measure teacher's attitudes and classroom quality. This reformation intended to develop "cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities that enable a person to manage the complexities of work" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 11).

Review of classroom quality data associated with the local context of the study highlighted the need to consider changes to professional development. Past practices included an array of disjointed workshops with little to no follow up. Teachers should experience learning related to the characteristics of adult learners. Hayes and Mizelli state "The more often educators engaged with their peers in effective professional learning, the more they will learn and the more likely it is their practice will improve" (as cited by Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 7). Roland Barth suggests that the personal and professional growth of teachers has a greater impact on students than just developing skills (as cited

by Drago-Severson, 2009). Professional development supports teachers to develop the new learning and strategies that can improve student achievement (Cook, 1997). With the urgency of reform and a communicated vision teachers were ready for the study (Kotter, 1996). This research provided opportunities to a group of early childhood educators to test these theories through practice, revised materials, and new teaching approaches (Fullan, 2007).

### **Methodology Review**

To fulfill the requirements of an action research initiative, a study of a shift in professional development delivery was done. The research was completed in one public and one private preschool program in a large urban school district. The investigation utilized quantitative and qualitative methods. The staff participated in choosing training topics, attended workshops that included active learning activities, utilized self-reflection, and collaborated with peers. A classroom quality assessment tool measured the outcomes of the program. Throughout the shift in delivery teachers were interviewed, participated in a focus group, and filled out questionnaires. The research questions inquired whether or not the treatment of professional development, with the characteristics suggested by adult learning theory and PLCs, improved teacher's attitudes and classroom quality.

### **Review of the Findings**

The research achieved the goal of improving attitudes towards professional development and classroom quality as outlined by the findings. After the introduction of the professional development program, teachers believed it provided them with an opportunity to take a more active role in their learning. They reported positive feelings towards the chance to digest workshop content coupled with time to attempt application.

The ability to talk and reflect with colleagues about implementation and their own practice, and make necessary adjustments, influenced classroom practices and propelled continued participation in the program. Additional early childhood support staff, responsible for providing professional development, observed that the public school teachers had more positive attitudes and were more engaged in workshops than in the past. A veteran teacher, who began as a resistor, was excited about the collaborative opportunities. She revealed that she began to reach out to a new teacher. The experienced teacher explained that the new teacher seemed to apply workshop content and she liked her ideas. The experienced teacher realized that the information was readily available to her, but through the research was motivated to seek it out. Several teachers reported how they enjoyed the meetings that focused on curriculum, rather than complaining about things not related to children. Teachers asked if the program could continue the following school year. They demonstrated the desire to adopt the new program when they inquired whether we should do another needs assessment and began to plan for more topics.

The final research question asked about the researcher's leadership. With any school change initiative the leadership is instrumental in developing a vision, empowering staff, and guiding the learning process (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). Teachers discussed how the process developed trust in the researcher's leadership during the initiative. They also reported they would have higher expectations for future professional developers.

The results are important because New Jersey state professional development standards require local school districts to report how they are incorporating learning communities into professional development programs (NJDOE, 2009). This study

included the current research recommendations, as well as standards for professional development. To truly effect student outcomes, strong teacher learning must be evident through effective professional development. For this to happen, active learning, observation, and reflection are important tasks to accomplish (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Additionally, in a time of reduced resources, learning communities can provide the adult learning necessary through the expertise of colleagues. This replaced the idea of quick fixes of a particular content area to improved overall clinical practices of teaching (Collins, 2001).

In the age of education reform, improvements to classroom quality must be realized. Traditional forms of professional development have proved to be unsuccessful. Recommendations have been made to shift traditional professional development programs to include opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and staff empowerment. National and state professional development standards have begun to include learning communities as part of the recommendations for best practices. In a time where schools and staff are accountable for improved practices, professional development must provide experiences that impact outcomes. Educational researchers such as Darling-Hammond (1995), Drago-Severson (2009), and DuFour and Eaker (1998) emphasize and encourage professional development reform.

### **Implications**

**Research.** The study examined the effects of professional development on classroom quality and teacher's attitudes towards the program. National, state, and local research can further assess and evaluate the use of adult learning theory and PLCs and its impact on student achievement. As school districts are expected to reform their

professional development practices and incorporate PLCs, the process and successes should be measured. Researchers recommend using evaluative tools to determine if professional development is achieving its purpose (Cook, 1997; Guskey, 2002; Speck 1996). An assessment tool can measure the inclusion of characteristics associated with adult learning theory and PLCs. It can also go beyond evaluating individual workshops to assess the quality of the outcomes of a complete program.

Research on best practices for professional development can drive and be the focus for policy development that requires their implementation in school districts. This research is backed by the current review of the literature and has implications for replication in local and state contexts. Although standards have been developed, application in schools has only just begun. Continued support from stakeholders can facilitate the guidelines and process for improved professional development, which will lead to improved outcomes for students.

**Professional development.** Additional research may provide protocols for forming and sustaining effective professional development. Studies need to be conducted to further evaluate how to organize and structure successful professional development programs through common characteristics, supportive environments, and tools to support various stages. The scope of the research was limited to 42 participants in an urban school district's early childhood program. In order to validate the study further investigations need to occur. Therefore, it is recommended to replicate the study in alternative districts and with various grade levels.

**Administrators.** To succeed in offering programs that utilize best practices requires leadership. In an effort to plan, provide, and evaluate professional development school leaders must recognize the needs of adult learners. They also need to be able to share leadership roles with staff and become competent in supporting the reflective process (Drago-Severson, 2009). It is through their organizational structure that will influence the outcomes of a professional development program. This requires training the leadership and providing the tools necessary for implementation. The impact of the leadership's role would benefit from further studies.

### **Limitations**

Research findings could be unique to this study due to the relationship with the participants, the sample size, and the duration of the data collection. The researcher's employment is to provide professional development and curriculum support as a peer leader. The relationship with the participants was established prior to the onset of the study. Professional development experiences were also presented in a way unique to the researcher's personality and abilities as an experienced peer leader. Without formal supervisory responsibilities, participation was based on the collegial relationship of the participants. Finally, the data collection took place over a 6-month period and must be replicated for a longer period of time.

### **The Change Process**

Organizations are complex and often experience periods of change. The study has provided the opportunity to understand a great deal about the culture of the early childhood organization and how to effect sustainable change. The cyclical nature of

action research allowed for the observation and reflection of each step and to make the modifications necessary to guide the participants through the change process.

Leadership relies on the styles with which we are most comfortable and most allows fulfillment of goals based on situational needs. Similarly, it was best to choose a change model that best fit this particular initiative, and a combination of theories were used. Following change theory's stages contributed to the effectiveness of the initiative. Reflection throughout the cycles supported evaluation of the change process.

The groupthink phenomenon was evident during the initial attempts at rethinking professional development. Several resisters influenced the group's ability to question decisions and limited communication interfered with discussions of alternative methods. I observed through personal reflection how motivating the participants supported the building of relationships. I began by building a positive group dynamic and created an environment that allowed open communication and adult learning between all of the members.

To realize sustainable change Goleman et al. (2004) explain that leaders need to recognize they are working against a paradox. The paradox consists of established routine systems that allow an organization to carry out their jobs and the attempts to fundamentally change how people operate. In the early childhood department this was represented in the embedded professional development program and conviction in the way professional development had been implemented. Before the change initiative began I had to consider four essentials when tackling the change process (Reeves, 2007). The four essentials assisted in supporting the transformation experienced by the teachers.

The first element was to define what would not change. It was imperative that the shift in professional development delivery be thoughtful and did not convey that everything that had been done in the past was wrong. Teachers are highly qualified and the intentions were to reach higher levels of instruction, not to compromise current practices. The second element was the recognition of the importance of actions. This was represented in the collegial design of the inquiry groups, which is also a characteristic of adult learning theory. The research provided an opportunity for analyzing current practices and allowed for making changes necessary to support the initiative through a reflective process. Thirdly, the right change tools had to be used for the specific situation. It was my intention to help communicate the vision of the early childhood department, along with one developed by the participants, and to utilize Kotter's (1996) stages as described in the introduction of this study. Finally, the leader has to be willing to do the "scut work." When all of the stakeholders participate, a vision is more likely to be realized through actions rather than speeches (Goleman et al., 2004). I participated in lessons and inquiry discussions to truly be a part of the change process.

To sustain change I kept a lucid vision of the desired end. In addition, I had a clear commitment to making a personal investment in developing and building dedication to an inspirational vision (as cited in Beckard & Pritchard, 1995). According to Goleman et al. (2004), participants must understand that inclusion is a sign of admiration of their abilities. Therefore, throughout the process participants' recommendations and requests were honored.

Another way I attempted to shift to more successful outcomes was to work in the realm of reality, not the reality in which we wanted to work. By understanding what was

actually happening, we worked on truths. In the groups I worked with, they often were distracted by their preexisting belief of the way professional development should be implemented. The research focused energy towards working on goals dictated by the reality of the situation we were in, allowing for more successes. We knew we could not change the amount of time allotted for the weekly meetings. Therefore, we arranged the professional development program around the fixed meeting schedules.

In any change process, particularly those requiring expeditious implementation, it is important to follow the tasks of transition. It became necessary to “unfreeze” staff and be particularly supportive in moving them through the problematic aspects of change. Teachers need help moving to commitment, competence, coherence, and consensus and the application of the change models assisted in reaching compliance. Evans (1996) discusses that the people going through the change need to be in control. This means that if the change agent tries to bypass or suppress what teacher’s value, and hurries things along with a hard sell, the result will likely create stronger resistance. The research methodology remedied this by incorporating the participants in the process. Staff developed the vision, picked topics, and made suggestions throughout the research.

People become more actively involved in change when an initiative is introduced to the group and the anticipated stages of implementation are communicated. Providing greater access to information enabled the organization’s ability to evoke contributions through freedom, trust, and shared responsibility (Wheatley, 2006). Communication consisted of developing a common language and vocabulary that permitted the participants to understand what was being said. From my experience, lack of open, honest, two-way communication can completely derail a change initiative no matter how

small. Communicating the vision was a good start but stakeholders want to know all of the details. I provided the intended timeline, anticipated activities, and definitions to common study vocabulary words, to ensure the members had a clear understanding of the study.

Changing the status quo requires rethinking how we react to change. The diverse world is proficient at change and we can harness the idea to affect organizations.

According to Wheatley (2006), we must work with the whole system. Although we may work on individual parts, accounting for the whole operating system is essential. The early childhood department recognized the influence this study had on the participant's attitudes and classroom quality. The department intends to include adult learning theory and PLCs in the professional development program provided district wide. The program will also be included in the recommendations for school wide professional development.

### **Reflections of my Leadership**

Effective leaders often have the ability to switch fluidly between leadership styles based on situational needs and the recognition of members of the group's diverse abilities. They are able to motivate and inspire as well as listen and reflect. "Empirical studies tend to show that there is no normative (best) style of leadership; that successful leaders are those who can adapt their leader behavior to meet the needs of their followers and the particular situation" (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995, p. 148). The authors continue by writing, "In managing for effectiveness a leader must be able to diagnose his own leader behavior in light of his environment" (Hersey & Blanchard, p. 148).

As I reflected on these statements, I recognized the steps toward defining a leadership platform were to first define my core values, which then informed my

leadership style. It was important for me to take into account the personalities of those I was asked to lead, so I was better equipped to adapt my leadership style to the group. I also had to consider the types of leadership styles that would best suit a change initiative centered on a shift in professional development.

**My leadership beginnings.** Prior to the onset of the study I viewed my work in early childhood education as not just my job, but also my vocation. I was passionate about providing experiences that were developmentally appropriate for children. I knew it was fundamental to develop children's emotional intelligence and motivate and inspire their learning. I believed that children learned best by being actively involved with their learning and sharing control of the environment. Ultimately this represented the emotional intelligence domains and the related competencies defined by Goleman et al. (2004). I soon realized the values I held for developing children were good practice for supporting and leading adults as well.

I knew from the beginning that I was committed to acting on what I believed was right. I was always sensitive to people's needs, and recognized the values of others. I was devoted to fulfilling my role in affecting change through an organizational vision. I recognized that respect and honesty was vital to delivering and supporting the mission and successful outcomes of a change initiative. The research required me to be responsive to the environment and the needs of members. It was important to build trust and commitment through the communication of the vision. This behavior was demonstrated throughout the research study. It was fundamental for me to demonstrate collaboration with the participants and assist in introducing the shift in professional development.

It was important for me to display characteristics that supported visioning, energizing and enabling followers. Envisioning is communicating the “big picture” and generating excitement for that vision (as cited in Nadler & Tushman, 1995). As I began to implement a shift in the professional development I discussed the expectations of a successful Professional Learning Community with those who participated. Energizing occurred when, through direct contact, I acknowledged and used successes to celebrate progress towards the vision. Finally, enabling began to take hold when the participants lead group discussions. This style also helped the staff see how their contributions met loftier goals.

**Context of leadership throughout the study.** In the past three years I have learned to define leadership through formal theories. I recognized the correlation of those theories to characteristics I possess and practice. I further developed skills through the use of an action research initiative and its reflective component. I learned who I am as a leader and what continued erudition can accomplish for preferred outcomes. It was through the connections with the research participants that challenged me to grow further than originally anticipated. It was during this experience that has expanded my understanding of my leadership and its application.

Throughout the study review the various leadership theories provided me with the insight to recognize how my characteristics matched specific styles. I found several theories that matched my personal style, and supported my role as a peer leader, professional developer, and technical model. These theories assisted me in the fulfillment of the program initiatives by focusing on emotionally intelligent leadership. This aided in

my ability to inspire, arouse passion and enthusiasm, and keep people motivated and committed to the shift in professional development delivery (Goleman et al., 2004).

The first theory that fit my leadership characteristics was Emotional Intelligence Theory (EI), or Primal Leadership. If the emotions of workers are pushed toward the range of enthusiasm, performance can soar. If people are driven toward rancor and anxiety, they will be moved off task (Goleman et al., 2004). I had observed how the leader's mood impacted the performance of teachers. I often found myself in the role of diplomat when a leader had created a dissonant environment. I began by employing empathy and restated the concerns brought to my attention. After working through their wants, I supported the organizational goals. Coaching teachers through this process enabled me to motivate people to focus on our shared vision. I assisted the group in developing solutions to challenges presented by their school leadership. The solutions were often used and the relationship among the staff was strengthened.

Within the EI theory, I utilized characteristics of the human resource style. I did this by recognizing that teamwork and good interpersonal relationships empowered others. I knew that the culture of an organization must also be considered for sustainable change. While working with the small school communities, I introduced teachers to one another to build the group dynamic and created an environment that allowed open communication. I observed when teachers rallied together towards the vision we developed they attempted to strive for higher quality classrooms.

Emotional Intelligence Theory follows a lasting path to motivation by evoking positive resonance. EI is tied to supporting positive group dynamics. This is essential for molding a group into a learning community. These characteristics were also important for

me to effectively lead and empower followers to participate in leading collegial discussions during the implementation of the change initiative.

Servant Leadership was another theory I adopted during the research process. Servant leadership encourages collaboration, trust, foresight, and listening. A servant leader also emulates the change they want to see in others. I recognized that people's needs had to be met before change occurred. I modeled the vision created by the participants in practical application and, through my enthusiasm I encouraged teachers to follow my lead. I was able to diagnose and use strategic and tactical reasoning to plan for the shift in professional development design. As the district moved to fully implement a research-based curriculum, I sought these challenges and viewed them as new opportunities. I believed my strengths in this style moved teachers in a positive direction.

Finally, through self-assessment, I found that I displayed a structural orientation to leadership. I was rational, logical, and analytical. I clearly thought through the process and designed a plan that accomplished the task of reformation of professional development delivery. I utilized the professional development characteristics outlined in the literature to create a clear organized program. This program was designed in a format that others could follow.

**Ethics and values.** The more we find and build on shared values, the greater our motivation. Ultimately, it takes the talents and commitment of all involved to make an organization thrive. Leaders who utilize these values know their own values and are able to help others recognize and act accordingly (Bender, n.d.). This was executed by video taping teachers' curriculum strengths and incorporating them into the collaborative events.

Core values that define my personal and professional code of ethics include passion and authenticity. Passion is defined as a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire for anything. This pertains, first to my family and friends, and second to the work I do for teachers and students. Passion encompasses values such as love, happiness, and loyalty, which are essential to me in my personal and professional life. Developing authentic relationships includes truth, honesty, and justice and is the foundation for building partnerships. It is the real relationships with people, and the integrity we maintain as educational leaders, that make us authentic. This behavior continued to maintain a study based on concern for the needs and feelings of others, a demonstration of trust and respect, and treating people fairly (Ciulla, 2003).

**Vision.** To develop and communicate organizational values it is recommended that the members of the organization create a vision statement. A vision statement is a grand idea that represents the espoused beliefs of an organization. It is the direction you envisage the organization moving toward in the future. The vision doesn't dictate the action plan, but it ensures that organizational goals remain a central focus. I assisted the participants in developing a vision as we rethought current goals of professional development. It was this vision that was hung at every meeting to maintain focus.

The mission statement is an operationalized statement that represents the vision. The mission statement is communicated outside of the organization and addresses the purpose of the organization. Usually succinct, it represents the image the organization wishes to project to the public. I also guided the staff in developing their own mission statement. This statement was used to communicate to parents and aid in accountability.

**Followers and leaders.** I am both a follower and a leader and I recognize as a follower the need to be empowered. Kotter (1996) suggests that the leader should be able to delegate tasks and this will create personal wins for the staff and drive a cultural shift to a partnership the leader will benefit from. Progressive organizations empower their employees, as well as invest in their development (Bolman & Deal, 2008). As a leader, I was conscious of delegating training tasks to participants who had information to share. When teachers presented their information it strengthened the team and united the efforts towards successful application of content.

One sure route to long-term success is investing in employees and responding to their needs (Bolman & Deal, 2008). It is understood within successful organizations that a human resource approach is the key to their success. I recognized that responding to employee's needs produced a relationship founded in an understanding of human needs.

**Group dynamic.** Examining group dynamics and development allowed me to reconstruct how norms of behaviors were conceived. Group formation is part of the structural concept of organizational culture and is essential to move from the beginnings of group building to real group work (Schein, 2004). When working as a cohesive unit, organizational goals can be met and an organization thrives. Teamwork is an important variable in that success but requires the group to "...become better at listening, conversing, respecting on another's uniqueness, because these are essential for strong relationships" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 39).

Prior to the shift in the professional development program, relationships needed to be nurtured. I knew that developing trust, commitment, and attention to results would unify the group as we shifted professional development practices. Creating a group

agreement for meetings set the guidelines to build a safe environment for collegial discussions. Purposeful planning of training topics, through group tasks, assisted to develop the relationships necessary to develop the participants as a great team. When groups or teams work well, they elevate the performance of ordinary individuals to extraordinary heights.

**Reflective practitioner.** I have had the opportunity to act as coach in the reflective cycle used in my district. I have been trained in two reflective cycle models: the first through the New Jersey Department of Education recommendations and the other necessitated by the district's preschool curriculum. Through this training I experienced, and executed, the process of developing trust with teachers, worked on common goals, and reviewed outcomes. The experience opened communication about most effective practices and has created reflective practitioners in the research participants.

In addition to developing reflective practitioners, I began to understand how I was able to implement and reflect upon my leadership style. Goleman et al. (2004) suggested looking into oneself, applying intuition to observe and interpret clues about what was really going on, and connecting it to people emotionally. I realized how my continuous learning assisted in perfecting leadership skills and becoming versed in utilizing the style needed based on situations and member needs. I understood that I could help staff "...focus on concerns on issues of effectiveness, on reflective questions of what happened and what actions might have served us better" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 37).

As a life long learner, I have experienced that a working leadership platform allows for continuous revision and the opportunity for a style preference to be altered based on experiences, followers, and situational needs. Goleman et al. (2004) suggested

connecting the kind of vision that can move a culture toward resonance requires emotionally intelligent leaders to start by looking inside. By knowing our personal drives we can then apply the professional passions.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrated a successful reformation of a professional development program when characteristics of adult learning theory and PLCs were incorporated. The participants of the research contributed their commitment to improved practices with full participation and inclusion in the methodology. They communicated the positive impact of the professional development model. Improved scores on the classroom quality assessment tool were also experienced. In an effort to fulfill standards of professional development, and to realize the greatest results, educators need to be a part of their learning. They must participate in collegial experiences and use self-reflection methods to refine teaching practices.

The study also has implications for the early childhood department and the local school district. The results of the action research were recognized as a model to replicate first with the department and then within the district. The theoretical rationale was realized through the collection of data and its basis in current literature and state standards.

This study further established the need to execute and reflect on leadership that can support adult learners. The study incorporated and measured methods that connected closely to employees' needs. The leadership also adhered to change theories to ensure a smooth transition of an initiative. Ultimately, supportive leadership and shared control of

professional development programs can have a positive impact on classroom practices, resulting in improved classroom quality.

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## Appendix A

### Survey on Professional Development

## SURVEY ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of this anonymous survey is to determine the attitudes and effectiveness of the current professional development program. Your opinion is valuable; as your responses will inform how to make programs better meet your needs. Please fill out the survey and return to the grade level facilitator in the attached envelope. I will pick them up at our morning meeting. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your participation.

Janine Anderson

732-501-1678

JAnderson@jcboe.org

1. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. *(Please mark one for each item.)*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>2009-2010 Professional Development Program</b>					
The training topics presented responded to my Professional Improvement Plan (PIP).	5	4	3	2	1
The training topics presented in the 2009-2010 school year responded to my areas of interest.	5	4	3	2	1
Time is provided for me to meet with the teachers in my school after a training session.	5	4	3	2	1
I have an opportunity to plan and implement my ongoing professional development.	5	4	3	2	1
There is an opportunity for personal reflection of workshop content.	5	4	3	2	1
I have the opportunity to share teaching experiences with colleagues.	5	4	3	2	1
I was satisfied with the 2009-2010 professional development experience.	5	4	3	2	1

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Follow-up Support</b>					
There is support provided by the <b>Lead Teacher</b> after the workshop.	5	4	3	2	1
There is support provided by the <b>Principal</b> after the workshop.	5	4	3	2	1
There is support provided by the <b>Supervisor</b> after the workshop.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Collaboration</b>					
I enjoy working in teams.	5	4	3	2	1
I enjoy sharing lessons and ideas with other teachers in my building.	5	4	3	2	1
I discuss teaching with other teachers in my building.	5	4	3	2	1
I implement teaching suggestions from my peers.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)</b>					
I understand the characteristics of PLCs.	5	4	3	2	1
I want to know more about PLCs.	5	4	3	2	1
I want to be a part of a PLC.	5	4	3	2	1

It would be helpful to me if you provide the following information. Your answers will be held in the strictest of confidence.

2. How many years of teaching do you have in the **preschool** program? (*Mark only one.*)

- Less than 5  
 5-10  
 11-15  
 Over 15

3. What is your job title? (*Mark only one.*)

- Teacher/Prep Teacher  
 Teacher Aide

4. What population do you work with? (*Mark all that apply*)

- 3-year-olds  
 4-year-olds  
 Inclusion classroom/Self-contained classroom

*Please place the survey in the attached envelope and return to the grade level facilitator.*

*Your participation is very valuable to future professional development opportunities.*

*Thank you for your participation.*

Appendix B  
Public School Group Agreement

## **Public School Group Agreement**

- Stay on Topic
- Buddy system for missed information along with emailed meeting minutes
- Focus on improving children's learning
- Share curriculum items
- Use "I" messages
- Be mindful and respectful of others thoughts and opinions
- Agree to disagree
- Respect group decisions
- Limit side conversations
- Be punctual to meetings

## Appendix C

### Public School Mission and Vision Statements

## **Public School Mission and Vision Statements**

### **Mission Statement**

All stakeholders will use active learning to support children's development and problem solving. Through children's interests and a consistent daily routine, we will develop life-long learners. We will support our multilingual families through education programs.

### **Vision Statement**

Our vision is to create a safe and developmentally appropriate environment, where children have the opportunity to develop language, independence, gross motor skills, peer relationships, and the basic skills necessary to become successful learners. We envision children will have first hand experiences through active learning and families will be supported through communication in their primary languages.

Appendix D

Daycare Center Mission and Vision Statements

## **Daycare Center Mission and Vision Statements**

### **Mission Statement**

Through a developmentally appropriate curriculum, a supportive learning environment, and an active learning experience, we will enhance independence and academic development. With parents as partners we will promote social skills, support diversity, and create life-long learners.

### **Vision Statement**

Our vision is to create a safe environment where children's needs are met at all developmental levels. We will assist children in developing moral values, independence, open-mindedness, and the academic skills to excel in life. We envision a culturally diverse experience for children and their families in an effort to enhance the home-school connection.

Appendix E

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study

*“Nothing was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

### **Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study**

As you are aware, I am currently seeking a doctoral degree through Rowan University. Part of my course work includes doing an action research project. The purpose and focus of this research is to enhance instruction through an improved professional development program. The plan is intended to empower teachers to be reflective practitioners through peer collaborations and contributions from their own development. It satisfies the idea that adult learners need instructional practices that scaffold their learning and respect the prior knowledge and experiences they bring to the profession. It is an attempt to encourage the administration to support and recognize the process and allow the collaboration to be created at the school, and ultimately district level.

While there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that I may gain valuable information about utilizing adult learning theory as we work towards implementing professional learning communities. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

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I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Janine Anderson  
732-501-1678  
JAnderson@jcboe.org

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Investigator Signature

Date

---

Participant Signature

Date

---

Dr. Joanne Manning  
Rowan University Advisor  
Manning@rowan.edu  
215-901-1460

Date

Appendix F  
Timeline of Activities

## **Timeline of Activities**

I want to thank you in advanced for agreeing to participate in a study to improve the professional development program provided to you. The following is the anticipated timeline and activities provided in the shift in the delivery of professional development. Each task will be explained during our initial grade level meeting.

January: Preschool Quality Assessment (PQA)

February: Needs Assessment

March: Training Topic #1

- Workshop Content

- Hands on Experience

- Self-Reflection

- Group Discussion

- Interviews

April: Training Topic #2

- Workshop Content

- Hands on Experience

- Self-Reflection

- Group Discussion

- Interviews

May: Training Topic #3

- Workshop Content

- Hands on Experience

- Self-Reflection

- Group Discussion

- Focus Group

June: Post-Survey for Professional Development

- Leadership Survey

- Preschool Quality Assessment (PQA) on topics covered

Appendix G  
Needs Assessment

## Needs Assessment

*“Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do.”*  
*Peter Senge*

Name (optional):

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We know professional development workshops work best when they are based on topics of interest. In an effort to plan professional development based on your needs, please fill out this checklist indicating topics you would like to receive for training.

Some of your colleagues have communicated interest in topics found on the PQA. Those items have been included in this list.

Thank you for your time.

**Encouragement vs. Praise** \_\_\_\_\_

**Transitions** \_\_\_\_\_

**Conflict Resolution** \_\_\_\_\_

**Key Developmental Indicators** \_\_\_\_\_

**Active Learning** \_\_\_\_\_

**Small Group** \_\_\_\_\_

Although there is a full day training planned for the COR assessment, check here if you would like further support on this topic.

**Group COR Support** \_\_\_\_\_

**Individual COR Support** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Topics of Interest**

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Appendix H  
Cycle 1 Interview Protocol

## Cycle One Interview Protocol

Provide a copy of the interview questions to the interviewees.

Arrange meeting a time and place.

Provide a copy of the Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development written by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Ask and take notes on the following questions.

Questions:

1. Did the results of the PQA mirror areas you feel needed support?
2. Do you think choosing your own training topics were a better method for professional development than topics chosen by the early childhood department?  
Why or why not? (See NAEYC principle 9 on page 9)
3. Do you think the training on Small Group included the ingredients of active learning?
4. Do you think self-reflection is important? Why or why not?
5. How did you feel about video taping your lesson as a means of self-reflection?
6. How did you feel the collaborative process worked when sharing strategies during the grade level meetings?

Appendix I  
Cycle 2 Interview Protocol

## Cycle Two Interview Protocol

Provide a copy of the interview questions to the interviewees.

Arrange meeting a time and place.

Provide a copy of the Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development written by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Ask and take notes on the following questions.

### Questions for Public School

1. How did you feel about changing the next topic for training from COR to Large Group Time?
2. Do you think the training on Large Group included the ingredients of active learning?
3. How did you feel about using Observation Feedback with your lesson as a means of self-reflection?
4. How did you feel the collaborative process worked when sharing strategies during the grade level meetings?

### Questions for the Daycare Center

1. How did you feel about changing the next topic for training from COR to Encouragement vs. Praise?
2. Do you think the training on Encouragement vs. Praise included the ingredients of active learning?
3. How did you feel about using Observation Feedback with your lesson as a means of self-reflection?
4. How did you feel the collaborative process worked when sharing strategies during the grade level meetings?

Appendix J  
Focus Group Protocol

## Focus Group Protocol

Arrange a meeting time and place.

Include 5-8 participants in each focus group. Three focus groups will be conducted.

Begin with an introduction of the objectives.

Rules of the focus group will be presented.

- Discussion will be kept confidential
- Every statement is right
- Don't hesitate to respectfully disagree with someone
- One person responds at a time

Open with an icebreaker to help participants feel comfortable with one another.

Ask questions and record data.

Questions:

1. Describe an unsuccessful professional development experience.
2. Describe a successful professional development experience.
3. How did the successful experience match the characteristics of adult learning theory and Professional Learning Communities?
4. How important is it for teachers to share ideas, assessments, strategies, etc. with other staff?
5. How important is self-reflection in the process of acquiring workshop content?
6. Describe how a team/learning community would function and what they could discuss.

Appendix K  
Leadership Attributes Survey

### Leadership Attributes Survey

The purpose of this anonymous survey is to determine the attitudes and effectiveness of my leadership attributes. Marzano (2005) identifies seven key attributes educational leaders possess in order to complete second order change. Second order change is defined as doing something significantly or fundamentally different from what we have done before that becomes embedded in practice.

Your opinion is valuable, as your responses will inform how I can better meet your needs. Please fill out the survey and return to the grade level facilitator in the attached envelope. I will pick them up at our morning meeting. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your participation.

Janine Anderson  
732-501-1678  
JAnderson@jcboe.org

1. Indicate the extent to which you think I have demonstrated the characteristics listed below. *(Please mark one for each item.)*

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Leadership Attributes</b>				
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.	5	4	2	1
The extent of a leader to inspire others and being the driving force for implementation of change.	5	4	2	1
Providing intellectual stimulation.	5	4	2	1
Being a change agent.	5	4	2	1
Monitoring and evaluating the change.	5	4	2	1
Being flexible.	5	4	2	1
Maintaining and communicating ideals and strong educational beliefs.	5	4	2	1

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Appendix L

Code Book

## **Code Book**

### Personal Improvement

IM- intrinsic motivation

AL- active learning

SD- self-direction

SR- self-reflection

### Relationships

SV- shared vision

CE- collaborative environment

RT- respect

### Professional Outcomes

PE- practical experiences

KD- knowledge

GO- goal-orientation

Research Conclusions

PS- program satisfaction

CQ- classroom quality

LR- leadership