

8-1-2012

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Dana Walker

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**THE CULTURE OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AMONGST
PRINCIPALS: A PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
COMMUNITY'S EXPLORATION OF
UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN**

by

Dana E. Walker

Submitted to the

Department of Educational Leadership

College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Education

at

Rowan University

April 10, 2012

Dissertation Chair: Gini Doolittle, Ph.D.

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Dana E. Walker

Dedication

Without a doubt, I have the most supportive family imaginable! From the beginning of this seemingly crazy notion, my mother admitted that she knew I would naturally take this step during my career. Be it her words of encouragement or my dad's trips to meet me in the parking lot to pick up Jada and Shawn Q, I always knew that I could count on their parental support.

During this process, our family also gained the support of the Stanleys as they helped to "parent" on Saturday mornings when class caused a conflict with choir rehearsal, Praise Dance, or karate practice. Jada, Shawn, and Aliana have grown into special childhood friends that time will never erase. I also deeply thank my family, "sisters", friends, colleagues, RPS teachers, and Alpha Baptist Church members who spoke words of encouragement into my life from the beginning of this journey.

The growth of my children has been all too fast! Jada and Shawn Q, I thank you for allowing me to work for hours on end. It is my prayer that my example is one that will encourage you each to commit to your own growth and to always finish what you start.

Ultimately, I thank you Shawn for being a remarkable husband. I thank you for hand delivering my application to Glassboro and driving me to the interview. I thank you for the initial trips to the bookstore, for the firewood, for the "brain food," and for the daily understanding that you showed as I tried my best to do it all. You made this process as easy as it could possibly be for me. Your words of encouragement and trust in my ability helped me to earn this Doctorate of Educational Leadership!

Being confident in this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6.

Acknowledgments

It has been such a wonderful opportunity to take this journey with the Rowan University, NJPSA 2nd Cohort. Over the past three years, I have gained incredible professional colleagues, and a few exceptional friends for life. Each of us, like all human beings, are bound by a common thread. A few of us share the strand of being parents, mothers, and administrators. Although we chose the “road less traveled,” it is a journey that will continue to bring infinite rewards and blessings.

I am also most grateful to the principals and coach in “Journey Township” for their spirit of collaboration and willingness to embark upon change when everyone’s plate was already running over with personal and professional responsibilities. I must also acknowledge the leadership of the Superintendent of Schools, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, and Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent. You each fueled my project with your professionalism and enthusiasm.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Gini Doolittle for agreeing to serve as my chair for this dissertation. Since we did not know each other beforehand, I am even more grateful for her willingness to help guide an unknown student. Her professionalism and dedication is encouraging and impressive. Moreover, I thank Dr. Doolittle for recommending Dr. Evelyn Browne to also serve on my committee. Again, though initially a stranger, Dr. Browne is a true professional and was supportive throughout this entire process. Lastly, I must thank Dr. Gerry Schaller, whom I had met, but did not know personally. Yet, again, he was open and willing to help me earn my degree. The

professionalism of these educators is inspirational and truly an example of 21st Century learning beliefs – a world without doors or limits.

Abstract

Dana E. Walker

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COMMUNITY'S EXPLORATION OF
UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

2011/12

Gini Doolittle, Ph.D.

Doctorate in Educational Leadership

The overloaded role of the principal is a reality in every district (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2008). Principals are second only to teachers among school-related factors in student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) yet professional learning opportunities for principals suffer at the expense of seemingly more important tasks. In order for principals to be successful in the expected role of instructional leadership (NAESP, 2008), districts must create opportunities for both content and leadership learning (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010). Experts are beginning to realize that professional development for principals is essential to a school and district's success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

The participants in this study formed a Principal Professional Learning Community to strengthen their knowledge of Professional Learning Communities (DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Hord & Sommers, 2008), Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and coaching techniques (Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010; Kise, 2006). The Action Research in this mixed methods study advocates for job-embedded professional development and provided the elementary principals in Journey Township with horizontal learning opportunities (Blankstein, 2010) that will facilitate the

reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2000) that is needed as districts work to build capacity. Though context specific (Creswell, 2009), this study will help the reader draw conclusions on whether a Principal Professional Learning Community is an effective infrastructure to support individual and organizational learning (Senge, 2006).

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Chapter I

Introduction

The role of a school principal has become increasingly complex and challenging in the past decade (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Fullan, 2007; NJDOE, 2008) yet, the most common structure of schools continues to assign a single principal to lead all staff and students within a building. Individual school buildings can be staffed using few employees to literally hundreds of certified and non-certified staff. Certified, building-based staff can include the principal, vice-principal(s), teachers, counselors, child study team members, and specialists. Non-certified staff often includes paraprofessionals, secretaries, aides, and custodians. The expectations of the principalship span from being an educational visionary, change agent, evaluator, and data analyst, to being a master scheduler, budgeter, facility manager, community relationship builder, and state and federal report filer (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Miller, 2004). These needs can derail a principal's focus from her most important responsibility – the cultivation of high quality instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Research on how principals view their roles and commit to instructional leadership and personal and professional development requires a thorough investigation.

Problem Statement

Education has been built and maintained under the premise of training children for independence in their adult lives. However, the scope and projection of what the future holds for today's youth has vastly changed to a world of unknown needs and careers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; NAESP, 2008; Senge, 2006). For the first time in history, educators are knowingly challenged to prepare students for jobs that do not yet

exist (NAESP, 2008). Twenty-first century advancements, increased exponentially by technology and the job market, have changed the needs of the learner. No longer are educators preparing students for the job or career in which they will spend their working lives. Today's educators must prepare students for a dynamic workforce in a global setting. These changes command the development of critical thinking skills as students will be required to transfer their learning to new and unknown situations (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The shift to results, supported by state and federal policies (Bracey, 2004), strong public support (Rose & Gallup, 2004), and noticeable professional advocacy (Schmoker, 1996) has raised considerable pressure in the principalship (NAESP, 2008).

Since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, to the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002), and its reauthorization under President Obama's administration, *A Blueprint for Reform*, the term accountability has been closely aligned to student achievement and even more than ever to professional practice (USDOE, 2011). The federal government under President George W. Bush, refocused the law with a emphasis on accountability for student achievement of academic standards; increased flexibility and local control; a greater role for parents in their children's education programs; and greater emphasis on the use of scientifically based instruction (NAESP, 2003). These measures changed the role of the principalship. From ensuring the hiring of highly qualified teachers, to the guidance of instructional methodologies and professional development, principals must now create and sustain an environment where disaggregated data on local and state assessments substantiate their

instructional choices (NAESP, 2003). If principals fail, both teachers and students are likely to fail.

A major problem that all principals face is the reality of conflicting demands that leave limited time daily to devote to instructional leadership (Blankstein, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2008). This problem is compounded by another reality that is built upon false assumptions. It is presumed that principals possess content knowledge and leadership expertise to evaluate and influence the teaching and learning within their schools. Principals are expected to be instructional experts yet they do not always have sustained learning opportunities in district instructional initiatives/reform efforts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Too often, instructional reform is sabotaged when teachers are introduced to new programs, learn new pedagogical techniques, and advance their craft while principals remain untrained and therefore unprepared as instructional leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). While there are often concerted efforts to improve teachers' abilities (e.g., collaboration, professional development, coaching, etc.), opportunities for principals' leadership development remains limited or even ignored in many districts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Teachers close their doors to single classrooms with perhaps 25 students and principals close front doors that isolate hundreds of students and staff. The physical, organizational, and learning structure of the education system leaves the principal, the second most influential staff member on student achievement, to operate in professional isolation. Educational reform must be deliberate with focusing on the responsibilities and needs of principals as learners (Blankstein, 2010). In addition to giving principals more

responsibilities, principals must be given intentional, instructional support if they are going to lead and transform schools (Burns, 2003).

The notion of the principal as an instructional leader, beyond an organizational manager, disciplinarian, and politician, is now widely recognized (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Principals are called to ensure access to a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; NAESP, 2003). The realities of the principalship require expertise in instruction, leadership, and change. A single, “super hero” like person, does not exist and success cannot be accomplished in isolation. In order for the organization to advance, it requires an understanding of the interconnectedness of the entire system. Reciprocal commitments between personal learning and organizational learning set the framework for change through systems thinking (Senge, 2006) and reciprocal accountability (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010; Elmore, 2008).

Therefore, a district must have a plan to support principals and ensure that their beliefs and abilities are aligned to the larger vision. The efforts and support that is invested in the cultivation of instructional leaders will help ensure principals as knowledgeable instructional leaders. Change efforts must be supported through an infrastructure that is strong, supportive, and clearly collaborative (Fullan, 2007).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are one vehicle used to connect meaning with actions (Fullan, 2007). When developed purposefully, PLCs can bridge present methodologies with current needs as determined through individual data and current research. Sustainable, district-wide advancements require that all schools within the district develop as a team (DuFour et al., 2010). Although hesitant to suggest PLCs as a universal remedy, Fullan’s definition of PLCs advocates for the need to build capacity

and collaborative cultures within and across the three levels of school and community, district, and state (Fullan, 2007, p. 152). PLCs are understood to be the larger organization which requires collaborative cultures including cross-school learning or lateral capacity building and not just isolated, individual teams (DuFour et al., 2010). PLCs require systems thinking (Senge, 2006).

In large-scale reform, lateral capacity building can be used as a mechanism to discourage isolation (Fullan, 2007). Fullan uses leadership research on new principals to support his view with an examination of Leithwood's multiyear fellow's program on leadership research. Leithwood and colleagues, with the support of the Wallace Foundation noted as an important factor in the success of novice principals, "the availability of opportunities to continuously discuss and examine programs and practices, to incorporate feedback from fellows, to nurture the network among fellows and otherwise act as stewards of the mission" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 23, as cited in Fullan, 2007). Although this action research project does not necessarily research novice principals, it will explore on a small scale, a district network of principals who create opportunities to discuss and examine programs and practices, as they act as district stewards through a Principal Professional Learning Community.

Purpose of the Study

To advance instructional leadership beyond rhetoric, examinations of practices and goals to improve principals' effectiveness must become a priority. Within the past decade, New Jersey has also recognized the increased responsibilities of school administrators. Structures such as the Leader to Leader mentorship are requirements that are designed to support new principals transition into a job that can be overwhelming and

confusing. However, in addition to novice principals, all principals need continuous, job-embedded support to be leaders in the 21st century. Principals need support to decrease the isolation and autonomy that have characterized education. In a rapidly changing world, it is impossible to be the expert in all fields. Principals must learn, together with one another, through the sharing of best-practices. Research by the HOPE Foundation, 2009, indicates that school district readiness is critical to long-term success (cited in Blankstein, 2010). The purpose of this action research study is to examine how a Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC) will impact instructional leadership choices and unify district efforts to utilize teaching practices that are consistent with Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) philosophies.

This action research project transpired in a suburban district, centrally located in New Jersey. Journey Township (a pseudonym) has experienced considerable development and growth over the past 20 years. Within the administration, retirements over the past five years have led to multiple changes in the administration. At the initiation of this study, tenure of the principals ranged from less than one year to over 20 years. The five elementary principals in Journey Township committed to individually and collectively examine their acquisition of instructional leadership practices and its impact on their leadership choices. Each principal is responsible for the full daily operation of an elementary school. The schooling configurations vary slightly, with a split between primary and upper elementary grade levels. Two of the buildings educate pre-school – second graders, two serve grades 3 to 5, and one houses kindergarten – grade 5 students.

This action research project developed as two principals engaged in a brainstorming discussion about what is worth studying in the district. Together they came

to the conclusion that principals have had limited job-embedded professional development. Subsequent to that conversation, each of the remaining three elementary principals was individually approached by the researcher (also a principal and participant in this study) about his/her willingness to establish a Professional Learning Community. After several individual follow-up conversations to confirm voluntary interest, a spontaneous focus group discussion led to a shared instructional need. Principals decided a more thorough understanding of how they should proceed with a push toward Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) philosophies was needed and practical. While administrative responsibilities require each of the principals to monitor practices that bring students to advanced levels of “understanding” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), each of the principals admitted to a different level of comfort with this espoused district initiative. The estimated commitment of this action research would begin in the spring of 2011 and last for approximately 10 months (through the winter of 2012). This timeframe would encompass the final months of one school year and provide opportunities for growth and change into the following academic year.

Change Efforts

In an effort to improve their professional practice through collectively engaging in a Principal Professional Learning Community, the principals in Journey Township agreed to participate in a Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC) with a goal to be better leaders of Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) philosophies. These principals expressed an understanding in the responsibility of school leaders to work collaboratively, from the center, to influence student achievement and implement research-based curriculum and instructional strategies (Goduto, Doolittle, & Leake,

2008). While Professional Learning Communities can be comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and university professionals, this PLC was established with a limited constitution of principals (with the exception of one coach who is a district employed staff developer). The closed, secure nature of the intimate group was designed to create a safe, trusting environment. Principals were not at risk of being uncovered for lacking in any instructional or leadership areas with upper administration, nor with the teachers they supervise. The Journey Township Principal Professional Learning Community was developed to equip principals with knowledge and strategies to monitor teaching and learning through collegial support.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study and the research questions are as follow:

- What choices do principals make to advance a district initiative to utilize Understanding by Design philosophies?
- What do principals need in order to be effective instructional leaders?
- How is my espoused leadership as a participant researcher impacted through involvement in a Principal Professional Learning Community?

This study will help the reader draw conclusions on whether a Principal Professional Learning Community is an effective infrastructure within Journey Township to support principals' understanding of Understanding by Design. This study will add to the research on Professional Learning Communities and specifically a PPLC – a Principal Professional Learning Community.

Definition of Terms

In order to move forward with this study, salient points from noted researchers should be understood.

Espoused beliefs (Schein, 2004) are the declarations that an organization and culture profess. These non-discussible assumptions are based on prior learning and supported by articulated sets of beliefs, norms, and operational rules of behavior.

Espoused theories (Argyris & Schön, 1974) are the pronouncements of a group, although they may contradict the actual practices.

Instructional leadership means that the principal's primary day-to-day responsibility is to guide teaching throughout the building. Such a leader has a strong knowledge of what good instruction looks like, observes teachers regularly for continuous improvement feedback, and evaluates them against high standards for instructional excellence. Effective leaders and teachers are knowledgeable about research on learning and engage students in purposeful learning through a relevant and rigorous curriculum (NAESP, 2008).

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) have been defined by numerous researchers and is a term that is used, overused, and even misused according to Fullan (2007). Multiple definitions are included in the review of the literature in Chapter II, but one guiding definition is included here. Professional Learning Communities, as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998) incorporate the following criteria:

1. Establish a shared mission, vision, and values;
2. Respect collective inquiry;
3. Build collaborative teams;

4. Expect action orientation and experimentation; and
5. Seek and examine continuous improvement.

Understanding by Design (UbD) is a philosophy that uses standards and ending goals as the anchor. Understanding by Design is a method of designing teaching and learning that uses “essential questions” to get to the “big ideas.” The emphasis is the purpose of content and knowledge and the learner’s ability to transfer learning to new situations (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Significance

The close monitoring of education as reflective of educational practices in 2012 has been chronicled since 1965 with the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In 1983, the famous report, *A Nation at Risk*, criticized the American schools for not doing an effective job of educating students – with an emphasis on minority and poor students. Nearly 20 years later, President George W. Bush illustrated his commitment to reforming education when he reauthorized the ESEA. President Bush stunned states and school districts with his authority to focus on solutions for a failing system based on accountability, choice, and flexibility in federally funded education programs (USDOE, 2001). It had become increasingly clear that while poor and minority students were entitled to a better education, all United States students were deserving of a better education. To address this issue on a national level, President George W. Bush and legislators asserted authority through the No Child Left Behind Act. This was President Bush’s attempt to ensure that all children receive an education that will prepare them and the United States for success into the 21st century.

In 2008, President Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States. President Obama continued with a focus on education with a reauthorization of No Child Left Behind which President Obama's administration renamed A Blueprint for Reform (USDOE, 2011). President Obama's goals extend beyond the K-12 school completion to an aspiration that by 2020, the United States will once again lead the world in college completion. Further revisions to the NCLB law specifically led to proposals to increase teacher accountability. President Obama makes an implicit call for, "Great teachers and leaders in every school" through a focus on recognition, encouragement, and rewarding excellence (USDOE, 2011, p. 4). States and districts have been charged to develop and implement systems of teacher and principal support, evaluation, and identification of effective and highly effective teachers and principals on the basis of student growth. Underperforming students as assessed on local, state, and international assessments have prompted changes to curricula, pedagogy, standards and the educator's ability. An examination of principal effectiveness is a change prompted by its link to student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

The purpose of qualitative research, action research, and professional learning communities are all context specific and designed to meet individual needs and goals (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research methods will tell the story of how a PPLC used action research to influence Journey Township. The position of the principal within the educational structure means that teachers, coaches, and central office administrators, will feel the impact as principals change. Although outcomes are specific to Journey Township, implications and recommendations may also be of interest to wider audiences for individual adaptations.

Limitations and Delimitations

The overloaded role of the principal is a reality (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2008). Therefore, any study that involves principals as the participants will be a study that is based on a professional who is divided due to multiple responsibilities. The daily workload of teachers, students, and paperwork limits the opportunities that most principals have to focus on their professional development. Additionally, since there is only one principal per building, studies that observe the interaction of principals occur with less spontaneity than studies that examine teacher and student interactions. Principals do not have daily interactions with colleagues for immediate feedback; yet, principals are second only to teaching among school-related factors in student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The geographic layout alone of most schools, equates to principal isolation – especially elementary schools that do not have vice-principals, supervisors, or department chairs. According to Elmore, “Privacy of practice produces isolation; isolation is the enemy of improvement.” (Elmore, 2000, p. 20). Environments must be established to change this paradigm.

The purpose of research is to both present current conditions and situations for individual circumstances. When possible, readers may also try to generalize findings and try to fit them within their individual contexts. The specific purpose of this study is to develop an Action Research plan with a group of elementary principals that has the potential to transform their understanding of the district’s expectations of teaching practices that are consistent with Understanding by Design philosophies (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The participant researcher of this study chose to limit the study to elementary principals within the same district. This structure certainly presents a

delimitation. The findings were very specific and not necessarily generalizable (Creswell, 2009). While each principal is different, each principal has some shared interests within the same district and shared directives and constraints. Locally, while this study will prove to be an asset for the principals, assistant superintendent, and superintendent, it is context specific. Even data triangulation has a bias as these are the alternate data providers. A backyard, qualitative, action research study has layers of biases but will provide a rich exploration of the research questions.

Organization of the Study

The format of this research dissertation is as follows: Chapter I served to launch the topic by providing an overview of global educational concerns and the principal's role in creating a system of change. Chapter II is comprised of a review of the literature. Chapter III includes an explanation of the chosen methodology and choices for data collection and analysis. Chapter IV will describe the context of the study. Chapters V-VII detail each of the three action research cycles and Chapter VIII will include implications from this study as well as recommendations for future studies.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Throughout many states, counties, and districts, accountability has become more than rhetoric, it is a reality. Educators must analyze and reflect upon their performance in an effort to meet the needs of an ever changing society, including state and national legislation. States have recognized the need to collaborate and as of June 2010, 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia, have adopted the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics as the guiding force of consistent, student preparation for college and/or the workforce (CCSSI, 2011). Elmore (2000) argues, the decision of “standards-based reform violates the fundamental premise of loose coupling – buffering the technical core from interference by external forces” (p. 8). Districts can no longer protect principals nor can principals protect teachers. As expectations are centralized through the adoptions of Common Core Standards, Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLCC) standards, and legislative bills such as No Child Left Behind Act and the Reauthorization of Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the accountability and vulnerability of all schools is heightened. Locally, districts are still responsible to develop and adopt individual curricula but the external scrutiny requires decisions that are data-based and depersonalized (Blankstein, 2010).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are one structure that have been established to support educators and their responsibility for teaching and learning. Much of this job-embedded professional development has been geared towards the support of teachers, with a mention of the role of administrators in supporting them. Of utmost

importance is the reality that administrators must ultimately respond to student achievement levels. Districts need a framework that creates synergies and cohesion across the district (Blankstein, 2010, p. 23). Principals are largely unequipped (Elmore, 2000) and inadequately supported (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). This responsibility bears the desperate need of the types of learning that a focused PLC can provide. To this end, the qualitative study presented in this research will examine PLCs and a specific study of what happens when principals engage in a Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC). Literature in the following areas will be researched and included to support the need for this study: effective leadership, accountability and principal evaluations, professional learning communities (PLCs), effective leadership, Understanding by Design (UbD), Schooling by Design, and change concepts.

Effective School Leadership

In *School Leadership that Works from Research to Results*, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) credit their work with being the first in the history of leadership research in the United States to pinpoint competencies for leaders that are research based. Within this text, these researchers identify and explain 21 categories that are referred to as behavioral responsibilities of the school leader. Each of the 21 responsibilities has been identified to have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement and each of the 21 is a portion of an effective principal's role in the advancement of schools and ultimately student achievement. Upon review of the descriptions and examples, for the purposes of this research, the following responsibilities appear to have more of a direct correlation to a principal who might engage in her own Professional Learning Community:

- Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment;
- Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment;
- Intellectual Stimulation;
- Ideals/Beliefs;
- Focus;
- Change Agent;
- Optimizer;
- Resources

Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) gathered research around the importance of leadership to school and instructional improvement. Two primary pathways were substantiated: direct influences, such as teacher development, and indirect influences, such as organizational conditions. Effective instructional leadership components involve (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010, p. 14):

- Working directly with teachers to improve effectiveness in the classroom, through evaluations, supervision, modeling, and support;
- Providing resources and professional development to improve instruction;
- Coordinating and evaluating curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
- Regularly monitoring teaching and student progress; and
- Developing and maintaining shared norms and expectations with students, staff, and families in the school.

Each of these qualities, no matter the researcher, centers on a principal's responsibility to be a "student of best practice" (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 54). Though not a guarantee, organizational learning hinges on the learning of its individuals (Senge, 2006). A focus on knowledge, application, development, goals, resources, and change are emphasized. With this acceptance, experts are coming to realize that professional development for principals is essential to a school and district's success (Darling-

Hammond et al., 2010). As districts move to revise evaluative practices the following questions linger – is the federal government exercising too much power and/or are state or local agencies exercising too little power (Epstein, 2004, p. 56)?

Responsibilities and Accountability of Principals

Principals bear an enormous responsibility in an increased age of accountability (Fullan, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act became law with a focus on accountability for student achievement of academic standards and greater emphasis on the use of scientifically based instruction closely support the idea of a PPLC. *The K-12 Principals Guide to No Child Left Behind* (NAESP, 2003) highlights the impact that this law ultimately has on the role of the principal. “NCLB adds substantially to the principal’s responsibilities and accountability for student achievement, staff quality, the quality and legitimacy of the school’s curriculum and instruction...” (p. 2). This law led to a major shift in the daily operations of a principal from a building manager to a visionary (NAESP, 2008). While principals are certainly accountable for the management of their schools, they must also be instructional leaders. This dual role requires a transition from transactional to transformational characteristics. With an overarching fear of being deemed a failing school, principals are forced to more closely examine curricula, teaching, and learning and its connection to standardized testing data. The analysis of such data naturally leads to questions about teaching and learning. No Child Left Behind and the Reauthorization of ESEA have certainly infiltrated the principal’s duties.

Acceptance of federal funds require school districts to demonstrate that the instructional strategies, materials, and staff development opportunities lead to evidence-

based education that integrates professional wisdom and empirical evidence (NAESP, 2003). Principals must take an active role in advising, monitoring, and even providing staff development to their teachers. They “will need to aggressively pursue opportunities to educate themselves about research on the effectiveness of instructional programs and practices as a critical first step in reviewing both existing and proposed school programs” (NAESP, 2003, p. 44). The specific needs of the school and teachers must be identified to ensure appropriate support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; NAESP, 2003).

As we prepare students for independence into the 21st century, the theory of local control and flexibility that NCLB mandates (NAESP, 2003) requires a knowledgeable principal who is able to lead a staff through sustainable efforts despite continuous growth and anticipated change. For instance, in September 2011, 11 districts throughout the state of New Jersey were named to participate in piloting a new teacher evaluation system, Excellent Educators for New Jersey (NJDOE, 2011a). Although this change in the teacher evaluation system began with failing and voluntary pilot schools, reform is on the horizon for all schools. Such extreme changes will continue to be added to the responsibilities and duties of the building principal -adding to the challenge of successfully managing an increased workload in a high quality manner.

Leadership Standards

The Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards were developed out of the realization that the role of the school leader has changed and has unique needs in comparison to corporate or behavioral sciences at the university level (Murphy, 2005). The ISLLC standards are divided into six domains:

- Vision, mission, and goals

- Teaching and learning
- Managing organizational systems and safety
- Collaborating with families and stakeholders
- Ethics and integrity
- Larger political, economic, and cultural contexts

In detail, Standard One addresses the stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and Standard Two advocates for a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. Both of these standards are at the core of instructional leadership practices and should be observable in the daily actions of principals. The remaining four standards' emphasize organization, families and community, ethics, and politics. Combined, all six standards advance continuous improvement in leadership, teaching, and learning. Specific to this study, the first two standards easily transfer and advocate for principals as a focus of Professional Learning Communities.

Within the past decade, New Jersey has recognized the increased responsibilities of the school administrator and their connection to student achievement. New Jersey believes so strongly in the serious implications of professional development that the administrative code was updated to include specific language (N.J.A.C 6A: 9-16: Subchapter 16 Required Professional Development for School Leaders). In 2003, New Jersey updated its existing standards to incorporate new ideas presented in the ISLLC standards. In 2005, New Jersey mandated the implementation of Professional Growth Plans (PGPs) to endorse continuous, job-embedded learning opportunities. Under this professional development initiative, all staff practicing under principal, supervisor, or school administrator certifications (including interim administrators) must participate in

ongoing professional learning. Professional Growth Plans must be aligned with New Jersey Standards for School Leaders and be explicitly linked to specific district and/or school objectives to improve the quality of teaching and learning and increase student achievement (NJDOE, 2008). This requirement highlights New Jersey's quest to meet the challenges of the continuous professional learning of its leaders.

The New Jersey Professional Standards for School Leaders articulate core understandings and design principles of school leaders. Core understandings address quality professional development while design principles outline professional learning expectations for school leaders. Although developed to be flexible, both intend to promote quality education through specific links to individual needs that connect to district and school goals. Both thoroughly stress collegiality and a process for collaboration. Professional learning and collaboration require more than passive professionalism. Collective inquiry supports reflective dialogue, addresses challenging issues, and analyzes needs to improve organizational learning and student needs (Leithwood et al., 2004; NAESP, 2008).

In addition to the adoption of The New Jersey Professional Standards for School Leaders, New Jersey also defines quality professional development for school leaders through the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) Standards. Among the 12 standards, Learning Communities is listed as the first standard, leadership as the second, and resources is the third. Additionally this set of standards includes collaboration skills and quality teaching. At its onset, New Jersey offered training sessions to support leaders as they created and then implemented Professional Growth Plans.

New Jersey and Principal Evaluations

Acknowledgement of principals' accountability for creating the conditions needed for effective teaching and learning (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Kaplan, Nunnery, & Owings, 2005) are entering the policy agendas. New Jersey is in the process of revamping their educator evaluation systems (NJDOE, 2011b). In addition to changing and monitoring teacher evaluations, principal evaluations are also being scrutinized for accountability. These revisions are multi-faceted and include the incorporation of ISLLC standards, as well as tangible measures such as student achievement. The proposed evaluation for school principals is changing to mirror the proposed expectations of teachers. Three proposed components and their weights towards principal evaluations are:

- Measures of effective practice: 40%
- Differential retention of effective teachers (hiring and retaining effective teachers and exiting poor performers): 10%
- Measures of student achievement: 50%
- Student achievement; aggregated performance on assessments – 35%
- Student achievement; school-specific goals – 15%

Virginia and Principal Evaluations

Every state has had to respond to NCLB with a focus on benchmarks for academic standards (Glidden, 1999). While there is a recognized need to explore principal's evaluations, there has been limited evaluation of administrative assessment instruments (Catano & Stronge, 2006). To that end, a mixed methods study was conducted in Virginia which examined 100 evaluation instruments from 97 school districts. The purposes were to determine the degrees of emphasis that are placed on

leadership and management behaviors expected of school principals and to explore the congruence of principal evaluation instruments to instructional leadership and management attributes (Catano & Stronge, 2006). Noted assessment approaches that Glasman and Heck (1992) recommend included role-based, outcome-based, standards-based, and structure-based formats. As the evaluations were analyzed, the ISLCC standards were used with a focus on vision, instructional program, organizational management, community relations, and the larger society. It is noteworthy that language related to integrity, fairness, and ethical responsibilities did not exist and were not measured. A comparative analysis of principal standards and principal evaluation instruments as reflective of ISLLC standards revealed that school districts expected principals to oversee the instructional programs in their schools, to address organizational management issues, to develop strong community relationships, and to facilitate a vision for their schools. Responsibilities to the larger society were reflected in less than half of the evaluation instruments analyzed (Catano & Stronge, 2006).

Georgia and Principal Evaluations

Georgia is another example of a state that recognizes the importance of principal quality. In the authorization of Title II-A funds, in addition to supporting teachers, funds are also marked to provide school principals with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead their schools' efforts to increase student academic achievement (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2003). The statute allows for developing and implementing mechanisms to recruit and retain highly qualified principals, provide professional development to improve principals' knowledge, involve principals in

collaborative administrator groups, provide parental involvement training to principals, and provide support to new principals.

Delaware and Principal Evaluations

Delaware has an evaluation Performance Appraisal System (DPAS II) that has been implemented since 2005 which was piloted in four districts and three charter schools. The five components are linked to the ISLLC standards and include goal-setting based on data, management of resources, fostering a professional environment for teaching and learning, promotion of family and community involvement, and improvements in achievement. Leaders are scored as effective, needs improvement, or ineffective. In the case of ineffective ratings, the evaluator and the principal create an improvement plan for monitoring. Delaware's state department of education posits a commitment to monitoring and evaluating the system. Outside consultants, as well as two retired Delaware administrators, are utilized to gather continuous feedback and monitor for adjustments (Maxwell, 2008).

Professional Learning Communities – PLCs

Professional learning communities have been defined for over two decades by various scholars. Each of the definitions and themes share common expectations of stakeholders working together to examine teaching practices that will improve student learning. Hord & Sommers' (2008) definition of PLCs is built upon Hord's earlier work in establishing Professional Learning Communities and includes shared beliefs, values, and vision, supportive and shared leadership, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. The work of DuFour and Eaker (1998) also suggests professional learning communities develop a shared mission, vision, and values; engage

in collective inquiry; establish collaborative teams; behave with action orientation and experimentation; and seek continuous improvement. A review of Putnam, Gunning-Moton, and Sharp (2009) provides a simple definition of Professional Learning Communities as a group of educators (teachers, administrators, consultants, support staff, and/or parents) who focus their work on the formal study of instructional practices in order to improve their students' learning (p. 6).

The straight forward, almost simple assumptions of Professional Learning Communities can lead educators to a false sense of application if student achievement and continual planning does not remain the focus. Professional development, leadership teams, and calls to establish a shared vision are not new to education. Yet, PLCs are receiving attention as though the notion of student improvement had been unchallenged. One difference between PLCs and traditional study groups, formal courses, or traditional in-service trainings is the role of accountability that is a part of the PLC culture (Putnam et al., 2009). In PLCs, there is a distributed leadership expectation. Everyone is encouraged to pursue individual learning and then contribute to the group knowledge. Unlike traditional learning experiences where there are one or two experts, in PLCs members feel a sense of obligation to contribute to the team. In an attempt to further clarify the true meaning of a PLC, DuFour et al. (2010) argue this definition: A PLC is an “ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p. 11). A PLC under revised thinking requires job-embedded, school-wide or district-wide efforts (DuFour et al., 2010).

PLCs in Action

Much of the work about Professional Learning Communities is similar to the processes of Action Research (Lewin & Cartwright, 1951). Like Action Research, PLCs are not a program, but work that must be determined and implemented by the staff themselves. Both PLCs and AR require action and are embedded in ongoing, continuous cycles. The commitment to improvement is recognized in job-embedded cycles which become a part of the culture. Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning; developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning; implementation of those strategies and ideas; analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not; and applying new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement becomes the systematic process (DuFour et al., 2010). However, prior to this possibility, there must be a mindset of collaborative inquiry based on habits of inquiry. Teams must invest time in establishing a vision, creating goals, and building group norms. Sagor (2010) names habits that indicate a culture: clarifying a shared vision for success; articulating theories of action; acting purposefully while collecting data; analyzing data collaboratively; and using informed team action planning.

Admittedly the early works of PLCs largely focused on the work of the teachers. DuFour et al. (2010) in recent work, now more directly discuss what was previously underrepresented – the need for the superintendent, principals, and central office staff to be a part of the global PLC. These instrumental administrators are greatly needed to improve the success throughout an entire district beyond individual schools. Superintendents must build the capacity of principals and principals must build the

capacity of key staff members. Reciprocal accountability requires leaders to provide teachers with the capacity to meet challenges and expectations (DuFour et al., 2010; Elmore, 2006). However, in order for this to happen, administrators must have an understanding of student and staff member needs. Leaders must be responsible for supporting the demands that they expect. Professional learning communities must become the culture of the entire district. Every person and each aspect of the school's operation must change (DuFour et al., 2010; Hargreaves, 2004).

The work of PLCs becomes a transformation in culture and therefore requires the participation of every level within a district and across a district. PLCs must establish commonalities in language, key terminology, and knowledge base (Blankstein, 2010; DuFour et al., 2010). Due to the private nature of teachers, Sagor (2010) advises school leaders to model action research focused on their own learning and leadership. A focus on leadership shifts the attention from student performance to instructional decision making and thereby has the ability to impact the deprivatization of teaching (Sagor, 2010). Through reflective practices (Lambert, 2003) and action (DuFour et al., 2010) collaboration, relationships, and PLCs can become the new culture in education.

The understanding that “principals must know instruction well if they are to act as effective instructional leaders” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 232) rests within our ethical code to critique and challenge the status quo (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Principals are responsible for being the curricular leaders (Glatthorn, 1997). States, such as New Jersey, are suggesting the implementation of PLCs to help meet achievement goals. The development and maintenance of PLCs will support both staff and students' needs. Paramount to PLCs is the clear intention to improve student learning. If educators allow

themselves to become derailed by the many questions of why, what, how, and when, the PLC work of improving student achievement will never actualize. As Peter Block (2003) says, “We act like we are confused, like we don’t understand. The reality is that we do understand –we get it, but we don’t like it” (as cited in DuFour et al., 2010, p. 5). The success of PLCs is reliant upon the willingness to ask and then act upon these questions (DuFour et al., 2010).

What is Understanding by Design?

Within the last decade, many districts, educators, and researchers have incorporated practices and embraced philosophies that align with the teachings of Understanding by Design (UbD). Wiggins and McTighe openly disclose that similar assertions to theirs were advanced decades ago and therefore do not profess to inventing their principles. In Polya’s famous book (1945), *How to Solve It*, problem solving dating back to the Greeks discusses “thinking backward” as a strategy. John Dewey, in *How We Think* (1933) discusses transferability as he points out that general meanings in different instances provide the conceptualization to carry learning over to the better understanding of new experiences (Dewey, 1933, p. 153).

Later, Ralph Tyler, a student of John Dewey, laid out the basic principle of backward design when he focused on the learner’s and not the expert’s sense of order. In *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949) Tyler proposed three criteria for effective organization – continuity, sequence, and integration. Additionally, the ultimate display of understanding, the goal of transfer, draws parallels to Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy. The higher order thinking skills that require application and synthesis (Bloom, 1956) are consistent with Wiggins and McTighe’s (2005) advisements.

While perhaps considered a program by some or a philosophy by others, Understanding by Design is a way of thinking more purposefully and carefully about the nature of any design that has “understanding” as the goal (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 7). Specifically in *Understanding by Design*, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe have examined methods in which curriculum are framed, teachers instruct and assess students, and students learn to understanding. Understanding is the type of knowledge that equates to making sense of what one knows, being able to know why it is so, and having the ability to use that base in various situations and contexts (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 353). Wiggins and McTighe focus on the need to design instruction and teach to “big ideas” and “enduring understandings.” A big idea is a concept, theme, or issue that gives meaning and connection to discrete facts and skills (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 5). Enduring understandings are the specific inferences, based on big ideas that have lasting value beyond the classroom, are central to a discipline, and are transferable to new situations (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 342). In order to provide students with teaching that will last beyond the lesson, Wiggins and McTighe believe that educators must begin their thinking and planning with the end in mind – a “backwards design” approach.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) also recognize several modern initiatives that are compatible with *Understanding by Design*: Universal Design, Backwards Design, teaching to state content standards, Problem-Based Learning Across the Curriculum (Stepien & Gallagher, 1997), Socratic seminar, 4MAT (McCarthy, 1981), Dimensions of Learning (Marzano & Pickering, 1997), Core Knowledge, the Skillful Teacher (Saphier & Gower, 1997), and materials from the Project Zero team at the Harvard Graduate School of Education entitled *Teaching for Understanding* (Blythe & Associates, 1998;

Wiske, 1998). Each of these styles has compatible philosophies. Additionally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2008) recognize “meaningful learning” that enables critical thinking, flexible problem solving, and transfer of skills and use of knowledge in new situations. Researchers such as Wiggins and McTighe, and the previously mentioned researchers and philosophies, do not advocate for any one commercially published curriculum, instead they offer formats that require educators to understand the expectations and the purposes of learning for future connections.

Understanding by Design’s Reliance upon Leadership

Like all philosophies, programs, and initiatives, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) recognize that UbD cannot succeed without instructional leadership. When arguments arise over content versus skills and basics versus deep understanding, schools must be equipped to demonstrate how both knowledge and skills can be taught together (Darling-Hammond, 2010). For some, this may be a mind shift (Senge, 2006). Therefore, Wiggins and McTighe have also developed a plan to move beyond the responsibilities of the classroom teachers and curriculum planners to the school leader. As students need years of consistency when depth is chosen over breadth, *Schooling by Design* was developed to devote specific attention to the jobs of an academic leader with the claim that “much of the current writing about academic leadership focuses far too much on style, process and inputs, and not on the leader’s reason for being – guiding the educational institution to achieve specific goals related to its mission.” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007, p. 172). To that end, Wiggins and McTighe (2007) define six primary job responsibilities of individual instructional leaders or entire school districts: mission and learning principles,

curriculum, results/gap analysis, personnel, structures, policies, resources, and culture.

Leaders are guided to a systematic approach to UbD.

The overlap among the first five functions of a leader is clear, but the sixth function, culture, permeates everything within a school. Cultural norms must go beyond structure and into the social and relational daily interactions (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Specific efforts are required to “ensure that the culture of the school is mission focused” (p. 193). The individual cultural goal is to impact job-related behaviors until they are natural. A change in culture can refer to a leader’s need to act intuitively and refers to the goal of impacting teachers’ beliefs and practices. A comprehensive, holistic approach is best utilized.

Change and Leadership

According to Schein, “leadership creates and changes cultures” (Schein, 2004, p. 11). Whether the change is a shift of mind (Senge, 2006), a shift of roles and responsibilities (Covey, 2004), or a global shift (Darling-Hammond, 2010), leaders play a significant role in whether changes will be transformational (Burns, 2003). Many researchers examine change, what makes it successful in organizations, or what leads to refusal or temporary changes. Fullan asserts, “Leaders are needed for problems that don’t have easy answers” (Fullan, 2001, p. 2). While John Kotter’s (1996) theory on change was not constructed in schools, it presents a technical-rational approach to many of the needs in education and the specific needs of a principal. Centered on a philosophy that begins with creating a sense of urgency, Kotter (1996) emphasizes the leader’s role in the change process. When Jim Collins (2001) examined how to move good companies to great, he discovered that great companies confront the brutal facts of their current reality.

The type of change that is needed is “reculturing,” which involves how teachers come to question and change their beliefs and habits (Fullan, 2001; 2007). Kotter’s eight stage process then follows with creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, and empowering employees for broad-based action. It is during the change process that collaborative cultures are built and shared (Fullan, 2007).

Principals Must Plan for Instructional Reform

The decision to participate in a Principal Professional Learning Community stirs from a recognized need in instructional reform. Teachers are afforded opportunities to learn, while principals receive limited growth opportunities despite their primary role to align all aspects of schooling toward the goal of improving instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Principals who have devoted their time to sustained learning, recognize the need for collaboration and focus. This is in essence the establishment of Kotter’s (1996) guiding coalition; Senge’s systems thinking (2006); Newmann and Wehlage’s (1995) circles of support; and Hord and Sommers’ (2008) and DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) collective learning and collaborative teams. Professional learning communities dismiss the conscious and subconscious beliefs that great leadership must come from a single, larger-than life person (Kotter, 1996; Senge, 2006). The establishment of a core team that consists of administrators has the ability to impact the cultural shift of an entire district. Individual principal and building needs can be determined, emphasized, and analyzed to change practices (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). An informed view can shape the vision for the future student learning.

Kotter (1996) warns that often the vision is lost between the guiding coalition (in this case the PPLC) and other needed members (the teachers) due to the discrepancy between the number of hours that the core team spends developing the vision and the number of hours in which the rest of the team is expected to understand and unite. To avoid this destructive mistake, once the principals have received sufficient training in the PPLC, a strategic long-term plan must be implemented to turnkey the training to individual schools. Subsequent PLCs which continue to use data to focus on student needs will be formulated through exemplary leadership findings with the understanding of the needed time for collaboration. Practices of distributed leadership that focus on large scale improvement which are grounded in instructional practice and performance, regardless of role; instructional improvement based on continuous learning; modeling; expertise required for learning and improvement, not from formal dictates of the institution; and reciprocity of accountability and capacity (Elmore, 2000) can be used to support the continuation of PLCs.

The literature and research regarding principals and change, individual programs, and states' measures of accountability have been shared in books, journals, reports, and shared at conferences. Although philosophies differ, it is the responsibility of leaders to seek professional knowledge and make a difference. The pursuit of the meaning of change and the moral purpose of change in education could span our lifetime (Fullan, 2007, p. xiii). The combination of "meaning" and "action" is the continual pursuit of Michael Fullan's advocacy. In his revised fourth edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan calls for, "strong actionable concepts in combination: capacity building, learning in context, lateral capacity building, sustainability, and

systems leaders in action – leaders at all levels engaged in changing the system, changing their own context.” (Fullan, 2007, p. xii). A Principal Professional Learning Community, with an instructional focus on a philosophy such as Understanding by Design, has the potential to be a powerful change agent that transforms the practices of leadership and then teaching and learning in Journey Township.

Chapter III

Methodology

Even within a single district, the instructional decisions of principals remain as dynamic as the number of schools they serve. This is no different in Journey Township (a pseudonym). Leadership choices vary based on individual strengths, perception, understandings, school culture, and student and staff needs. Though flexibility allows for principals to build upon individual strengths, principals must be afforded strategic opportunities to improve practices. For these reasons, action research and a Principal Professional Learning Community were combined to study leadership changes in Journey Township. The Superintendent of Schools and each of the participants completed a Superintendent and Participant Consent form (see Appendices A and B). As the researcher is most interested in individual and collective perceptions, a mixed methods study was used to explore the following research questions:

- What choices do principals make to advance a district initiative to utilize Understanding by Design philosophies?
- What do principals need in order to be effective instructional leaders?
- How is my espoused leadership as a participant researcher impacted through involvement in a Principal Professional Learning Community?

Methodological Rationale

The premise of qualitative research relies upon the views of each of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Open-ended questions, interviews, and observations are utilized as major sources of data in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006). It is the job of the researcher to record the data and bracket his/her own experiences when

personal biases become infused within the research (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006; Herr & Anderson, 2005). It remains clear in qualitative research that the researcher's findings and interpretations are socially constructed through his/her own experiences and background (Crotty, 1998). Recognizing Social Constructivists' beliefs, qualitative research permits the infusion of personal meaning and reality (Creswell, 2009). Familiarity, opinions, and experiences with the participants, their environment, and personal experiences become a part of all qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006) and any action research project.

Within education, action research has primarily been used by teachers as a framework to monitor change and evaluate student progress within a specific setting. Kurt Lewin's work in the 1940s advanced action research in the social sciences as a technique to examine individual incidents of change (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Lewin, 1946). Over the years, action research has also changed to include continuous organizational learning in more fluid cycles (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Today action research as a practice to implement change continues to be used in many fields.

The physical set up of America's K-12 public education system uniquely places principals as a middle level manager, yet in an essential position for change (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Principals have a level of autonomy that can maintain the status quo or spark transformation. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Since principals are often the sole administrator on site, opportunities to develop leadership practices by sharing in other principals' experiences are limited. Leaders must be given horizontal opportunities to learn from one another across their schools (Blankstein, 2010). Therefore, this study was

developed with the premise that each principal employs individual leadership practices that are valid and best explored through qualitative methods. Historical and cultural norms, along with the current context that contribute to each of the participant's construction of knowledge (Creswell, 2009) will become the research. The subjectivity of qualitative research creates its purpose in contextualizing present reality through inductive approaches that do not seek to offer generalizable norms (Glesne, 2006). The study of Journey Township will be deemed context specific. It will become the responsibility of the reader to make generalizations or maintain isolation.

Terminology

Existing terminology includes participatory action research (PAR); practitioner research; action science; collaborative action research; cooperative inquiry; educative research; appreciative inquiry; emancipatory praxis; community-based participatory research; teacher research; participatory rural appraisal; feminist action research; feminist, antiracist participatory action research; and advocacy activist, or militant research (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 2). Additionally, self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) or autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Reed-Danahay, 1997) are familiar terms associated with styles of action research. The iterative process (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008) of action research can promote a non-threatening level of security with implied levels of opportunity for anticipated growth and change through trial and error, cycles and stages. Action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders, to and organization or community, but never *to* or *on* people (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3). This philosophy supports those who are interested in being researchers or willing to be subjects.

Although action research can vary depending upon the context, the framework for the adaptation of cycles generally follows similar steps:

1. Develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening;
2. Act to implement the plan;
3. Observe the effects of action in the context in which it occurs; and
4. Reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and on, though a succession of cycles (Anderson & Herr, 2005; Kemmis, 1982, p. 7).

The Participatory Action Research Model which can also be used in education and suggested by Bucknam (2005) includes the following cycles:

1. Diagnose factors that contribute to the status quo;
2. Act with the intent of moving status quo to an increased level of effectiveness;
3. Measure the results of actions taken –work to achieve student level outcomes; and,
4. Reflect on the process and brainstorm situation and additional steps with others.

Richard Sagor (2010) has combined Collaborative Action Research with the modern practice of Professional Learning Communities. His work develops five habits of professional problem solving through:

1. Clarifying a shared vision for success;
2. Articulating theories of action;
3. Acting purposefully while collecting data;
4. Analyzing data collaboratively; and
5. Using informed team action planning.

While action research can be conducted in isolation or within a group, according to Herr and Anderson (2005), the best results occur with the understanding that all members recognize how the problem impacts them personally. Each cycle causes the

researcher to examine change within themselves, the setting, or both (Herr & Anderson, 2005). James et al. (2008) advance Participatory Action Research as professional development that considers both the context and the content of the issue and builds a community of practice that engages participants to seek solutions for unique problems (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Action research can utilize the collection of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods of data. This study is largely qualitative with one pre and post survey administered for principals to self evaluate their readiness and growth. Additionally and largely, qualitative research allowed the researcher to gather fluid data, and exercise professional flexibility of the questions without pre-conceived notions and/or assumptions of the findings (Creswell, 2009). The goal was to include detailed descriptions of each of the principals and changes within each cycle.

Glesne (2006) advances that the perception of participants is their reality. Hence, in qualitative research it is critical that the researcher dedicate herself to understanding each of the participants. In action research, individual or group data collection can easily become a mix of both the researcher and the participants. As is often the case when a researcher is a doctoral student, the researcher is an insider who seeks to deepen her own reflection and contribution to her own setting with practice toward problem solving and professional development that can be met through action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 29).

Within this PPLC study, two concepts apply: Insider (researcher studies own self/practice) and Insider in Collaboration with Other Insiders. Both positions have been validated by the research of Anderson and Herr (1999); Bullough and Pinnegar (2001);

Connelly and Clandinin (1990); Heron (1996); and Saavedra (1996). Each role makes contributions to the researchers' knowledge base, improved/critiqued practice, professional self and organizational transformations, and the traditions embedded in practitioner research, autobiographies, narrative research, self-studies, feminist consciousness raising groups, inquiry/study groups, and teams (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 31).

Participants and Sampling Methods

Journey Township is located in a suburban community in central New Jersey. The township is considered middle-upper class, with a "G" rating, according to the state District Factor Group (DFG) rating which is primarily a socio-economic assessment of income, class, and education assigned to every district in New Jersey. Journey Township has experienced considerable growth over the past 20 years and has evolved from farmlands, to many new, single-dwelling communities with large luxury homes. While much of the teaching staff remains stable, upper administration has experienced many changes over the past few years. The Superintendent of Schools was hired two years prior to the start of this study from another district. There is an Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction who was promoted from within three years ago after serving as the middle school principal. There are five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The administrative team has varying years of principal experience with a range from one year to 20 years. The administrative team works as colleagues and accepts individual styles and choices. Meetings are always professional and veteran principals often comment on the new instructional focus that the superintendent has

brought to the district, which is a huge change from the previous culture – according to veteran administrators.

This action research study was initiated by a principal who was new to the district, but not new to administration or the role of the principalship. After a combined Parent Teacher Association Meeting one evening, the principals of two sister schools (which means the lower elementary school feeds its students to the upper elementary school) were discussing realistic needs that could possibly serve as a study for school improvement. Since four of the district administrators were in Educational Doctoral programs, although focusing on different topics, these kinds of conversations were commonplace in Journey Township. One principal (not the researcher in this study) advanced the idea of a Professional Learning Community for principals. After reflection and analysis, the principal (myself/who ultimately became the participant researcher), individually spoke to each of the remaining three elementary principals. The conversation was then revisited several times in an effort to ensure buy-in and interest. After a monthly principal's meeting with the superintendent, a spontaneous focus meeting established a need for the principals to delve deeper into teaching practices that are concurrent with Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) philosophies. UbD was a model direction for the district with five classrooms the previous year engaging in a teacher PLC with a focus on Differentiated Instruction.

The composition of this study will be comprised of one sample of a Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC). This homogeneous group was chosen in an effort to establish a trust worthy environment, reduce professional isolation, combine

expertise, and establish consistent expectations throughout the district. Each of the principals will be studied as an individual and a member of the collective PPLC.

Though primarily a learning community developed to meet the needs of students through principals, to triangulate the data, additional data sources beyond the principals were included in the study. A district coach/staff developer was used to train the principals in professional learning community practices, Understanding by Design philosophies (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), and coaching strategies (Kise, 2006; Reiss, 2006). Focus group notes were collected during planned PPLC meetings and/or collected spontaneously. All data sources were used to confirm validity and triangulate findings.

Due to the nature of insider action research, it may be difficult to determine a clear beginning for an entry point (Herr & Anderson, 2005) into the study. As mentioned, the Superintendent of Schools is focused on teaching and learning and had already begun discussions during administrative cabinet meetings about Understanding by Design. Also, the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction worked with a group of teachers that had already begun to teach independently created Understanding by Design/Differentiated Instruction units of study. This Principal Professional Learning Community/action research study parallels preceding efforts of the Assistant Superintendent of Schools.

Methods

Individual, face-to-face interviews allowed the participants to feel comfortable and speak honestly within their own environment. Both planned and spontaneous, open-ended questions were utilized. Continuing in the natural setting, on-site meetings served to gather additional, natural data. Field notes on the behavior and activities of participants

were kept. Public documents, such as mission statements, newsletters, meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and school goals were compiled to substantiate interview transcriptions and triangulate claims. To add to the collective inquiry of the Principal Professional Learning Community, field notes were collected and journal reflections were utilized.

Data Management and Analysis

Before, during, and after multiple methods of data collection, rich descriptions of the principals' accounts were one of the goals of this study. The descriptive responses to the open-ended questions and reflective notes from the complete observations were conveyed and coded. Responses during one-on-one interviews were obtained via long hand techniques. Following transcriptions, member checking ensured that participant meaning was conveyed accurately and in context (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was also done incrementally to support cycle planning (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Focus group interviews followed the same procedure and also utilized member checking to ensure accuracy. Individual and focus group interviews occurred according to schedule and spontaneously to allow for reflection and new cycles. In an effort to triangulate the research, additional participants were also interviewed. As themes emerged, such as principal preparation, on-going learning needs, changing district and state mandates, and building isolation, codes were cross checked and the researcher moved beyond rich descriptions to theme connections (Creswell, 2009).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Embedded in the philosophies of qualitative research is the realization that situations are not generalizable, but rather individualistic (Toma, 2005). It is up to the researcher to present detailed evidence and thorough explanations. With the belief that

there is no way to truly make correlations or predictions when dealing with the unpredictable, subjective nature of human beings, qualitative researchers present a story. The trustworthiness of the whole is embedded in the detailed process. Yin's (2009) work presents various studies that also allow opportunities to accept multiple conclusions.

Role of the Researcher

Another important factor in this study was the admission and clarification of researcher bias. Biases are evident for several reasons. Action research is done on-site and has a direct impact on the researcher and involves her colleagues. It is therefore impossible to ignore preconceived assumptions about myself as a principal and the research. Due to these contributing factors, the internal beliefs that differ at the core of a principal's job responsibility must be noted in the summary.

Cycle I Preview

Herr and Anderson (2005) acknowledge that the entry point into an action research study may be difficult to pin to one exact action or moment. This claim was actualized as the study of a PPLC almost naturally emerged from existing espoused beliefs in Journey Township. The initial decision to pursue a PPLC developed as the result of a dialogue between myself (participant researcher) and one other principal. As we discussed our professional needs, we began a dialogue about the district's expectation for classroom teachers to begin to utilize instructional philosophies consistent with Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In the two years prior to this beginning dialogue, 75% of the teaching staff in Journey Township had already received training in Understanding by Design via the district's professional development plan. As per Journey Township's existing professional development model, voluntarily, teachers

received training via two day focused mini-courses (substitute coverage was provided for two consecutive days) and/or year-long professional development classes that met incrementally during three full day and three half-day, district-wide in-service days, and/or through the developed Year 2 novice teachers' professional development/new teacher training that specifically focuses on an introduction to Understanding by Design. Additionally, each of the seven schools within the district have two teachers who are members of a teacher Understanding by Design/Differentiated Instruction PLC. Overall, it is the district's plan to have all teachers trained in Understanding by Design principles by the end of the 2011-2012 school year.

An opening look at the principals in Journey Township reveal varying levels of experience, training, and knowledge in Understanding by Design principles and philosophies. By way of formal, collaborative learning, in the spring of 2010 the administrative team in Journey Township was trained by one of the district staff developers in a two day in-service. It is noteworthy that I was hired in the summer of 2010, and thereby was not a part of this training. Despite this initial training and individual experiences, when I individually questioned the principals about their thoughts of developing a learning community, everyone expressed an open willingness to participate. I asked each principal several times independently before broaching the topic collectively. The collective decision in the spring of 2011 was to develop an exclusive elementary Principal Professional Learning Community that would specifically examine UbD and instructional leadership practices.

In May of 2011, the Journey Township PPLC naturally and formally emerged from the need to strategically focus on the particular instructional needs of a building

leader. Journey Township employs 1.5 staff developers. I approached the part-time staff developer about her willingness to lead the five elementary principals in training throughout the next school year. Collectively, the group determined that she would be an effective match for our needs. It was also decided that the group would be exclusive to the five elementary principals in an effort to develop trust, honesty, and an atmosphere of openness, to express similar needs and individual strengths and weaknesses.

Prior to the first PPLC, the staff developer emailed a brief questionnaire for the principals to rate their comfort level with UbD as an instructional design. Using that information, the staff developer created initial training that would focus on Professional Learning Communities and Understanding by Design. The training on PLCs established norms, expectations, and protocols for this PPLC. Understanding by Design training focused on concepts of backwards design, big ideas, enduring understandings, and essential questions. Due to the curricular framework, the training also examined Knows, Understands, and Dos/KUDs (Tomlinson, 2003). Although formal training is listed here as a portion of Cycle 1, throughout each of the PPLC meetings, there were specific learning points delivered by the staff developer to deepen our understanding of UbD and improve our instructional leadership focus as we observe and evaluate our respective teaching staff. Concluding interviews and final PLC meeting data was used to determine self-perceived academic growth in principals' understanding of the practices of PLCs and UbD as an instructional model.

Cycle II Preview

The purpose of action research is to monitor and make changes that will improve the participants' natural setting. The focus of Cycle II was to determine an administrative

strategy that would combine the principals' understanding of UbD with technique(s) that would foster teachers' abilities to become improved practitioners. The staff developer suggested that the principals consider "coaching" as a strategy to utilize with teachers during the observation process as opposed to the traditional practice of making recommendations after an observation. In this manner, principals would be able to focus on the district's goal to utilize UbD methods along with our instructional responsibility to observe, evaluate, and improve student outcomes. Coaching as an instructional leadership strategy would also represent a change as none of the principals consistently uses coaching as a purposeful strategy to alter leadership practices.

During June 2011, each principal scheduled a time to observe a teacher in her building teach a lesson that was designed in a UbD fashion. The principal was then charged to formulate coaching questions that they could have used with the teacher if there had been a post-observation conference. At the June 2011 PPLC meeting, each principal shared possible coaching questions. Together the community of principals determined possible effectiveness of each of the questions. During the PPLC meeting, as ongoing and self-directed learning throughout the summer, the principals decided to engage in a professional text reading on coaching. Three principals chose to read *Leadership Coaching for Educators: Bringing Out the Best in School Administrators* (Reiss, 2006) and two chose to read *Differentiated Coaching: A Framework for Helping Teachers Change* (Kise, 2006). At the first PPLC meeting in September, each principal shared findings from his/her professional reading that can be utilized as effective practices to alter leadership choices when providing feedback to teachers.

Cycle III Preview

Cycle III provided an opportunity for principals to impact their entire school through the development of their School Goals. Each of the schools has a School Goals Committee that is formed annually. It is the responsibility of the team to create a plan to focus the teaching and learning expectations for the year. The committee meets incrementally to monitor progress. In June the goals are submitted to the Superintendent. Ordinarily in Journey Township, the goals are successfully met. This has lead to teams either creating standard goals that do not require too much thinking or risk, and require minimal levels of change and courage. This year the Superintendent challenged the principals to, "Create more meaningful goals." In the next chapter, after an introduction of the context and the principals, I will detail each of the cycles of the action research project and explain the change process through the PPLC.

Chapter IV

The Context

Principals are expected to be instructional leaders. This responsibility continually places principals in the roles of both instructor and learner. The purpose of this dissertation was to document how principals' involvement in a Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC) changes instructional leadership choices and to specifically observe how this PPLC could advance the district's initiative for teachers to utilize instructional techniques consistent with the philosophies of Understanding by Design (UbD). In Chapter I, this idea was introduced through identifying the mounting problem that in addition to managing a school, principals must lead their school through commitment to high quality instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). In Journey Township, the elementary principals formed a Professional Learning Community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008) to advance the district's instructional drive toward philosophies consistent with Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In Chapter II, literature was used to review federal and state accountability measures, effective leadership traits, Professional Learning Communities, and Understanding by Design. In Chapter III, a mixed methods study with an emphasis on qualitative research (Creswell, 2007, 2009) was advanced as the appropriate method for this action research project. Chapter IV will present a more thorough depiction of the context with detailed descriptions of the participants.

Setting the Stage

Journey Township is a small suburban district located in central New Jersey. Despite its 45 mile radius, Journey Township has less than 6,000 residents. The state economic comparison labels Journey Township with a District Factor Group (DFG) rating of G. There are five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There are approximately 600 certified staff, over 250 non-certified staff, and nearly 55 custodial and maintenance staff. The general education and inclusion class sizes range from a low of about 15 students to a high of about 30 students. There are a few self-contained, special education classes in each school.

State Reporting – A Snapshot

Within Journey Township, it is very difficult for many teachers (and even Edward, one of the principals) to see the need for change when the current practices have yielded higher results than New Jersey state averages. The 2010 NCLB Report that is located on the New Jersey Department of Education website in the “All student” elementary grade span for Language Arts Literacy reported: 22.3% of the district population as partially proficient, 68.3% proficient, and 9.4% advanced proficient, compared to state results of 37.5% partially proficient, 54.1% proficient, and 8.3% advanced proficient. In Mathematics the “All student” elementary grade span in Journey Township reported: 8.8% partially proficient, 38.6% proficient, and 52.6% advanced proficient. State averages in Mathematics were 20.5% partially proficient, 41.9% proficient, and 37.5% advanced proficient. According to these results the students in Journey Township are outperforming their state peers. Diversity in Journey Township is growing but still very limited. Across all schools, from 81%-97% of the students speak

English as their first language. Students of Asian-Indian descent represent the largest growing subpopulation and that group is primarily located on one side of town. On the NJ ASK4, a total of 18 economically disadvantaged students were tested for the entire district. The number of students with disabilities across the district range from 11%-17% within the schools.

Each of the principals in Journey Township (including Edward who has openly questioned the need to advance UbD techniques, yet was the first to think of a way to link UbD to his school goals) believes that some form of change is required to maintain above average performance. The principals believe that it will take building specific emphasis and clarity for principals to move teachers toward a district initiative. The principals seem to be more aware than the teachers of the rising performance levels connected to the Common Core Standards, likely future state assessments, and revisions to the teacher and principal evaluation systems. Teachers have been subconsciously indoctrinated to maintain the status quo and have not internalized the shift that is going to be required to maintain proficiency into the 21st century. Fortunately for Journey Township, the principals realize that major change for all educators is on the near horizon.

Meet the Principals

The small number of elementary principals offered a favorable environment to develop peer relationships and work collegially for individual and collective advancements. Beyond the five elementary principals, the only other participant in the PPLC was Stacy (a pseudonym), the staff developer who is a part-time employee of Journey Township and works with teachers and administrators. After conferring with the principals about our needs and the direction of our PPLC based on personal chemistry

and connections that each of us have with Stacy. I asked her if she would be willing to coach the principals in our PPLC. Stacy, a young Caucasian woman, was not seen as a threat and was known to approach tasks with optimism and work well with various staff. Without any hesitation that I could notice, Stacy easily agreed to facilitate the work of our PPLC.

Since this project was initially created to support the development of my dissertation, in the beginning I worked closely with Stacy, and was considered the point person throughout the project. Although I was a participant observer and researcher, I was also very new to Journey Township. Stacy's role allowed for a separation between me and the purpose of the PPLC. I worked in collaboration with the group but did not dictate the direction of the study any more than any of the other principals. I was aware that my actions could be viewed as accusatory and judgmental against the existing culture. Amongst the small group of five elementary principals, the tenure ranges from 40 to 2 years as a principal in Journey Township. Therefore, by definition and/or association, some of the principals have contributed to the existing circumstances (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Committing to the PPLC would ask participants to, "close the distance between their espoused values and their actual beliefs" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 93). The entire culture of administration, teaching, and learning was open for examination and I did not want to become a distraction.

Next, a biographical sketch of each of the principal participants is included. Interview questions were developed to learn about each participant and the questions ranged from personal and professional history, to instructional and building specific choices (see Appendix C).

Edward, “The Senior.” Edward (a pseudonym) has spent his entire career of 40 years in Journey Township. Edward is a Caucasian male who began his career in education as an Art teacher. Edward has served in various supervisory positions including department chair, district supervisor for Arts, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent, Director of testing, Director of adult education, Director of talented and gifted, public relations coordinator, and Affirmative Action Officer. His current role as principal has spanned the past 22 years. Additionally, Edward is an adjunct professor and principal mentor in New Jersey’s Leader-to-Leader program. It is through these involvements that Edward states his continued engagement in his professional development.

Edward agreed on the “principal only” model of the PPLC because of his belief that trust would be easier within this group of elementary principals. Edward stated that there has never been a format like this PPLC in Journey Township. The normal protocol for administrative meetings fell under the direction of the superintendent or individual building needs. Continuous learning opportunities were rare and the commitment to this PPLC tapped into Edward’s self-assertion that he is an avid learner who believes in the need for continuous growth. Edward stated that he entered this PPLC, “Without any biases, in hopes of learning something new, collaborating with my colleagues and staying current in my profession.” He reflected upon how the role of the principal can become an easy place to coast –especially in the later stages of one’s career such as himself. However, Edward acknowledged this would be an injustice to the district, staff, and students who deserve quality leadership. When I asked Edward whether he was coasting he replied, “Certainly not,” and clarified,

The demands on a principal are many. When you consider the many instructional and evaluative initiatives to be implemented coupled with the daily responsibilities, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. So you may not become masterful in all areas. We become exceptionally proficient but not masterful. There is so much to do daily, as well addressing short and long term goals and initiatives.

Upon further reflection, Edward noted the deluge of demands and responsibilities on a principal may lead to a propensity to become "just proficient" with the completion of all tasks, but never "mastering" them all. Edward attests, "This PPLC has afforded opportunities for the principals in Journey Township to become more collegial, friendly, and has fostered a sense of camaraderie." Edward expressed that the small group of elementary principals allows everyone to have a voice. Beyond phone calls and emails, PPLC meetings help Edward to feel connected. He believes the face-to-face meetings are a great opportunity to share, vent, learn and grow in a safe and supportive environment. And like the adage, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas," "The PPLC is strictly confidential." According to Edward, the PPLC is like any relationship and requires effort. Similar to a relationship, Edward feels that you get out of a PPLC, what you put into it. The trusting environment makes a path for individual and collective growth.

Edward believes that his biggest challenge deals with the daily routines and management of a large school with approximately 840 students. Overcrowding, staff, parents, financial cutbacks, lesson observations, and discipline preoccupy and impact his day. Edward recognizes that instructional leadership should be the goal of every principal and that principals must make time to get into the classrooms. Notwithstanding, he also believes that principals are more than instructional leaders. Edward believes,

They are also managers and as such are responsible for the entire school community, overseeing all staff, student and parent issues. Yet, the expectation is

that they must be exceptional in all areas of their principal duties in order to be deemed an effective leader.

Tina, “The Junior.” Tina has been in education for almost 30 years with experience in three different districts. Tina is a Caucasian female. During Tina’s career, she has taught primary grades 1, 2, and 3, and was a supplemental instructional support teacher. Tina was a vice-principal prior to transferring to Journey Township where she has enjoyed her role in the same building as principal for the past 10 years. Tina reflected that when she had a vice-principal, she did not feel isolated. However, under current budget cutbacks and due to the grading configuration of Tina’s school, she is again without a vice-principal and surely feels professionally isolated. During the interview, Tina answered, “I can reach out to colleagues but get so busy that I end up not doing it. The PPLC has put the rock in the jar first with a scheduled time.” To that end, Tina values the scheduled time of the PPLC and would like to increase the frequency of the meetings from once per month to every two weeks. She thinks frequency would allow for time for professional venting, in addition to focused professional development.

Tina agreed on the principal only make-up because she firmly believes in the “smaller, more intimate, and safer constitution of principals only.” She believes that too many people in a PLC would be less effective. Tina stated, “Having the exact same building role, with the exact same responsibilities, benefits the function of this PPLC.” Tina mentioned that some vice-principals may have the drive of principals, but points to the differences in the daily role which would change the dynamic of the PLC. Tina even pointed out the differences in the role of a high school principal versus an elementary principal. With regard to this PPLC, “It’s Vegas,” according to Tina.

After further learning and reflection, Tina does not believe that she has ever been a member of a PLC as currently defined in the research of DuFour and Eaker (1998). Tina has attended workshops by Grant Wiggins and has background knowledge of UbD since one of her former districts utilized UbD models over a decade ago. Like Edward, Tina discussed the difference between the superintendent's meetings and the PPLC. Tina respects the need for management and business from the superintendent's office and claims that the current superintendent is more instructionally minded than the previous superintendents in Journey Township; however, Tina still feels that the superintendent's meetings do not meet the professional learning needs of the principal.

Tina has received extensive professional development, having received a Doctorate in Education right around the beginning of this study. Tina "craves learning." Her personal vision of leading has been refined during this PPLC through our focus on coaching. Tina admitted, "My goal was always to coach but my actions have been evaluative." She believes that coaching can be a, "powerful piece" and wants to "walk the talk of instructional leadership more often." Tina keeps a folder on her desk with notes from the PPLC meetings and tries to incorporate her learning into her principal role within her building. Tina raved about the intimacy and practical nature of Journey Township's PPLC and hopes that we are able to increase the amount of time devoted monthly to our PPLC -beyond this project.

Pat, "1 of 2 Sophomores." Pat is a Caucasian female and has been in education for nearly 20 years. Pat has worked in several districts thus far in her career. Working in two districts as a teacher, Pat taught nearly every grade 1-8. Pat was first hired in Journey Township as a vice-principal who was shared between two of the elementary schools for

over three years. Pat was then promoted to the principalship in her current school five years ago. While Pat feels that the principals in Journey Township work closely together, she still expresses feelings of isolation with limited opportunities to discuss building needs, similarities, and/or differences. Pat cites time as the major opponent of the principal with so many daily responsibilities that require immediate attention. Pat lobbies that having a full time, well-versed, vice-principal could help with the daily workload. However, since full time vice-principals are now divided between upper elementary buildings, Pat must stretch her time and abilities to ensure that every job within her school is completed.

At the onset of the PPLC, Pat admitted to some apprehensions that all of the principals were not on the same page with respect to individual expectations in each respective building. In hindsight, Pat believes that this PPLC has given the principals a chance to learn together about important district initiatives. In accord with the other elementary principals, Pat agreed on the principal only model due to the “unique role of the principal as the instructional leader and the building manager.” Pat referenced the “many hats” of the principal and believes that the PPLC is a chance to talk about “special issues.” Pat says that she has never been a member of a PLC although she does have a functioning grade level PLC operating in her building with a focus on Writers’ Workshop. Within that format, Pat has played the traditional role of coordinating meeting times, providing data, and facilitating knowledge.

Currently, Pat is trying to focus on the learning of her teachers so that she can model what she expects in the classroom. This year, she is conducting workshop faculty meetings that are focused on UbD and differentiates the learning to meet the needs of the

teachers. Pat certainly expressed an interest in fostering a professional learning environment in her school – although she is still, “unclear of the district’s expectations.”

Pat has also been on an academic journey and recently completed a doctoral program in Educational Leadership with Tina. It has been through that process and attendance at state and national conferences that Pat has remained current with her own professional development. Pat has attended numerous workshops and a national conference in California in the spring of 2011 with the keynote focus on UbD, Differentiating Instruction, and PLCs. Pat has expressed repeated interest in the continuation of this PPLC beyond this defined action research project.

Tim, “The Freshman.” While the newest member to both the field of education and the role of administration, Tim still has over 11 years of professional experience in education. Tim is a Caucasian male who began his teaching career in another district as a middle school teacher. He then transferred to Journey Township as a middle school Science teacher. After a few years, Tim secured a job as a vice-principal, in Edward (“The Senior’s”) building. Two years later, Tim interviewed for and was promoted to his current principalship where he is currently serving in his second year. In contrast to the other principals, during my interview with Tim, he did not express feelings of isolation. He analyzed that having worked in the district as a teacher and a vice-principal gave him a network among employees and working knowledge of some of the inner functions of the district.

Tim highlighted that he was the assistant principal under Edward and worked one year with Pat organizing the district’s Saturday Academy for supplemental instructional services for students who were performing below grade level or considered “at risk.”

Notwithstanding Tim's initial assertion, the interactions in the PPLC have led Tim to feel "more connected to the other principals with a focus that is beyond management issues." For example, Tim now feels that he has a relationship with Tina, who is the sending school principal to Tim's upper elementary configuration. Tim expressed that overall the PPLC allowed opportunities to, "move beyond management" interactions. In addition to calling colleagues about paperwork and deadlines, Tim now feels that he can dialogue about instructional items.

Tim agreed to the principal-only grouping because of the consistent voice of the principalship. Tim believes that roles, geographic locations, and responsibilities of vice-principals and supervisors, put them in a different context than principals. Tim refers to principals as, "the consistent voice" for the staff. Tim wants to "lead the staff" and influence their thinking toward viewing him as the "educational leader as the priority and the "manager secondary." Tim is beginning to infuse the PPLC learning of coaching into his practices.

Tim has never been a part of a PLC, but unlike the other four principals, Tim has first-hand experience with teaching from the UbD framework. Therefore, Tim expressed a comfort level with UbD the philosophies from his personal teaching experiences. Tim has been involved in continuous professional development through in-district and out of district workshops. Tim has attended one day trainings with Grant Wiggins and also attended the national conference in California in the spring of 2011 with keynotes on Understanding by Design, Differentiating Instruction, and Professional Learning Communities. Tim has recently begun more intense studies through beginning his own doctoral studies less than one year ago.

Would I be considered a “Sophomore” or a “Freshman”? I am the fifth principal and the participant observer of this study. I have been in education for 18 years and have worked in several districts. I am the first African American principal in Journey Township. There are three other African American administrators, including the Superintendent of Schools, in the district, and less than 20 additional African American and/or minority staff throughout the entire district. I have taught kindergarten, first, and second grades. I have also been the supplemental reading teacher for the lowest performing first graders in a reading specialist’s role. I briefly served as a Reading Coach for the Office of Early Literacy in the New Jersey Department of Education. I have been a curriculum supervisor and a principal for four years before coming to Journey Township as a principal. This makes Journey Township my sixth educational setting and at the beginning of this study I was in Journey Township for less than one year. Like three of the four other principals, I feel the isolation of the principalship and value the opportunity to meet with the other principals for social dialogue and academic learning.

Being new to Journey Township, each of the principals have made him/herself available to me via email, telephone calls, or discussions during and/or after district level meetings. However, the decisions that I make still feel building specific. Without directives from the superintendent’s office, I utilize my professional knowledge to advance my school in the direction that I feel is consistent with research-based, best practices, and align with the district’s espoused beliefs.

In Journey Township, I agreed to the principal-only model since it seemed to be the preferred constitution of the other principals. When Pat and I first discussed “working with principals,” I did not consider other administrators in that moment. Later, I

wondered about the divide that it may cause between other administrators such as the supervisors and vice-principals. For me, it is important that all administrators work from a common understanding and/or core set of beliefs. However, I chose not to vocalize my opinion for a number of reasons. For one thing, while my years of experience as a principal are equal to Pat and outnumber Tim, I am the newest administrator to Journey Township, hence the question of whether I am a *sophomore* or a *freshman*. I do not know all of the dynamics and wanted to try to ensure a comfortable and productive environment. I recognized that while I was developing relationships with the principals, they were still in an infancy stage. Also, as the participant observer and doctoral student in search of a topic, I did not want to monopolize the direction of the study. I wanted to develop a project in which participants would engage and take ownership. I needed a group that would commit to the advised cycles of action research for a doctoral dissertation.

In the past, I have been a member of a PLC, but more so in the role of principal as a support to teachers. As the principal, I was the facilitator/instructor and also provided the structure for PLCs to take place in my building. I have not been in a PLC in the role of the learner as we designed our PPLC in Journey Township. Although I have attended workshops presented by both Grant Wiggins and workshops by Jay McTighe, I still do not deem myself to be an expert in the principles of UbD. I accept that concepts cannot be mastered in a short period of time. I have a moderate level of experience and understand the theory. The workshops provided me with an overview of the philosophies and even gave me strategies of how to analyze units of study and lesson plans from the view of UbD principles, but as stated, I do not consider myself an expert. Considering my

moderate understanding, coupled with the demands of the principalship, I thought it was best to utilize one of Journey Township's staff developers, Stacy, to facilitate the PPLC once the principals agreed to it as the initial focus.

Throughout the course of this PPLC, the focus remained on how the principals could become more effective instructional leaders. Following are the PPLC cycles with a focus on leadership plans and actions, and not teacher or student reactions. This project is about principals taking steps to advance their instructional leadership and become agents of change for Journey Township.

Chapter V

Action Research, Cycle I

As previously stated, Journey Township is fortunate enough to have one full time and one part time staff developer employed by the district. The existence of these positions attest to the district's commitment to job-embedded, professional development. The main job of these trainers is to coordinate, organize, and deliver professional development to the Journey Township staff. Journey Township usually provides as much of its own professional development to teachers as possible through district offered trainings. Most of the workshops transpire either during the normal school week or during yearlong scheduled in-service days. In both instances, many times principals are engaged in their normal workload and unable to attend and participate in the trainings. The staff developers are in a key position of working closely with both teachers and administrators.

Planning and Preparation

In order to prepare for the first PPLC meeting, Stacy and I met to discuss the format and possible cycles. I explained how as a principal, despite desires and intentions, it can be difficult to be the instructional leader when teachers typically receive the on-going training and principals have so many, seemingly conflicting, responsibilities. Without the need to use the learning as teachers do, the priorities of principals are different than teachers and hence professional development occurs in an uneven manner. When meeting with Stacy, I discussed from a principal's point of view our understanding of the superintendent's vision for the district. Stacy also shared ideas through her own perspective and dealings with teachers in Journey Township who have attended the

district-offered, two-day UbD mini-trainings, the yearlong UbD professional development course, or are a part of the model group of teachers in the district-wide UbD/DI PLC (Gorman, 2011). Stacy’s connection to both worlds serves as a great support to bridge the world of administration with the world of teaching.

In order to prepare for the first PPLC meeting, Stacy emailed a very simple pre-assessment survey to each of the principals (see Appendix D). Principals were asked to assess their ability to help teachers with the following Understanding by Design concepts. To assess training needs a rating scale of F – Formal training needed, I – Informal training needed (group discussions, one-on-one with staff developer), or N – No training needed was used. The results of the surveys are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1.

Stage 1 UbD: Identifying Desired Results

	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Big Idea	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2
Essential Questions	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1
KUDs	No training needed: 2 Informal training needed: 3	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1
Enduring Understandings	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1

Table 2.

Stage 2 UbD: Assessment Evidence

	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Pre-assessments	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2	No training needed: 5 Informal training needed: 0
Formative Assessments (Assessments for Learning)	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1
Summative Assessments	No training needed: 2 Informal training needed: 3	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1
Authentic Assessments v. Traditional Assessments v. Performance Assessments	No training needed: 2 Informal training needed: 3	No training needed: 1 Informal training needed: 1

Table 3.

Stage 3 UbD: Learning Plan

	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Differentiated Instruction (Low and high prep strategies)	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1
Data analysis - using assessments to monitor and adjust	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2	No training needed: 4 Informal training needed: 1
6 Facets of Understanding	No training needed: 2 Informal training needed: 3	No training needed: 3 Informal training needed: 2

The results of the survey indicated that most principals were somewhat familiar with UbD but do not consider themselves experts. Based solely on the results of the survey, we could have made the decision to omit formal training and allow principals to rely upon their moderate levels of self-assessment. However, as a participant-observer, and obviously being familiar with these principals, Stacy and I interpreted the results as each of the principals being open to learning and honest enough to know that there is always room for growth. Also, without full ability to devote our time to curriculum and instruction, informal training in any area would tap into prior learning and create an individual and/or collective plan for leadership decisions. The results were positive yet inconclusive. While most of the principals rated themselves higher on the exit survey, there were a few instances where principals rated themselves lower at the conclusion of the project. This is significant and an example that principals may not have been aware of what they did not know.

Leaders as Learners

Beyond the survey, in order to begin to establish our PPLC and with the understanding that most of the principals had not participated in a PLC, I felt strongly that we should not rely solely upon our prior knowledge with our understanding. Therefore, the first planned learning opportunity for the initial meeting was to review accepted definitions of PLCs and to set norms. Stacy and I created a PowerPoint to support the discussion, and communicate effectively. The PowerPoint addressed possible research questions, with possible direction for the action research cycles, allowed for the creation of norms, offered definitions of PLCs (DuFour et al., 2010), reviewed principles of Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), and Knows, Understands, and

Dos/KUDs (Tomlinson, 2003). Though a lot of information, based on the survey we trusted that each of these concepts would only require informal training.

The tone of the first meeting was friendly, collegial, and enthusiastic. The principals expressed a comfort with one another and discussions about the topics were effortless. The meeting was held in a classroom that is used for professional training in one of the schools. Everyone sat between two tables with their laptops open in front of them. I brought snacks and drinks. Portions of the dialogue revolved around the use of UbD strategies to write lesson plans versus the current lesson plan format. We also discussed whether or not the curricula is aligned with UbD philosophies, the curriculum revision timeline, and an estimation of the number of teachers who truly understand how to read a UbD written curriculum. Typically, due to the nature of general meetings and/or time constraints, this dialogue with all principals, would not have occurred. A large portion of the conversation was about an administrative decision of whether we would accept KUDs instead of lesson plans or whether we would accept unit plans instead of lesson plans. No decisions regarding lesson plan format and submissions were made regarding changes during this or subsequent meetings through December 2011. For me, this confirmed that even when you have those with the authority to make decisions in a group, it may still take time for a decision to be made. These types of decisions require time and planning. In hindsight, one of our mistakes was that we did not set a date to return to this explicit conversation. We would need the input of supervisors and teachers to make a change.

Continued Learning

The second PPLC meeting occurred one month later. We continued with our professional learning toward higher levels of UbD knowledge. Conversation centered around whether it is possible to change teachers' beliefs and philosophies. The principals agreed that teachers need to be able to measure results in order to buy into the change. The difficulty with a focus on UbD, is the semi-intangible nature of this philosophy. Finding a way to make a correlation to student learning is complicated to measure.

With the change in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and the adoption of the Common Core Standards, the curricula in Journey Township, like all schools, is in the process of being rewritten to meet the new standards. In the fall of 2011, the revised Mathematics Curriculum in Journey Township was adopted by its Board of Education. This new document was written in UbD curriculum fashion. Therefore, kindergarten through second grade teachers have a new curriculum document that guides and aligns with best practices of where the district is headed. During the second PPLC meeting we discussed some of the differences needed for understanding UbD as a curriculum writer, understanding UbD as a curriculum user, and understanding UbD as a curriculum evaluator/supervisor. We attempted to determine how much understanding is needed to follow a curriculum verses writing a curriculum. We realized that a deep understanding is necessary for both, but writers must present the information in a manner that provides guidance without ceilings. We recognized that only a few teachers and supervisors are curriculum writers, but all teachers and principals need an understanding of how to implement. Tina shared during the meeting,

Some think UbD is for curriculum writers and a year and a half ago, I may have thought the same thing. I had this twenty years ago, but I didn't get it. I'm with Edward, we need to be with the teachers. I am happy to spend my time with them compared to where I've been for the past two years. (May PPLC meeting)

A second area of the needs survey indicated that principals need informal training on acceptable uses of student assessments. We discussed how important it is for the students to understand and be able to articulate, connect, and transfer their learning.

As a group we discussed acceptable evidence of learning and making the decision to grade assessments or to use them as ungraded teaching tools. Tina shared how difficult it had become for one of her teachers amongst her peers who administered and used a pre-assessment, because it led her to skip unit one in the math curriculum. This teacher's decision apparently caused dissonance amongst this set of colleagues. Tina had to defend and support this teacher's true utilization of student pre-assessment data. Tina reassured the teacher that she was correct in skipping a unit of study if data indicated that the students already knew the skills and strategies in Unit One. Stacy added, "I loved your part about being a curriculum writer, but it's for the curriculum user. When I was a teacher, my question for my students was *Why are we learning this?*" (May PPLC meeting).

This teacher's decision to use data to inform instruction is an example of the types of decisions that teachers should make on a daily basis. It was a concrete example that the use of data based decision making can require administrative intervention. Tina's decision holds particular significance in Journey Township where we do not have a Mathematics supervisor, but instead have two Mathematics lead teachers, who are regular classroom teachers with additional responsibilities. Therefore, Tina's ability to make an instructional, administrative decision relies on the type of environment that supports

continuous learning for principals. From this situation, collectively we agreed on we learned four practical lessons.

One, as administrators we must be ready for teachers in the same grade level to be on completely different units. Second, we realized the importance of providing adequate and timely communication with teachers when dissonance rises. Third, this problem highlighted that just as we need training in assessments, our teachers need training in the use of assessments and, fourth, it confirmed that in the absence of content area supervisors, principals must be able to make instructional decisions. Each of these four lessons requires the development of teacher-principal relationships. We believe that change happens on a “two-way street.”

Change Begins with Me

Lessons like Tina’s Math situation, led us to a paramount decision to shift from being “evaluators” to being “coaches.” Stacy made the suggestion based on her relationship with teachers. As we prepared to better understand the six facets of understanding: explain, interpret, apply, perspective, empathize, and self-knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) we felt that we needed to position ourselves as a support system for teachers. As a team, we made a decision to test our knowledge and practice our abilities to be instructional leaders through coaching. Instead of leading from the top, we decided to guide from the side in an attempt to obtain teacher buy-in. Stacy advanced, “I am proposing if you build relationships with teachers, you can influence philosophy as well as actions.” Tina agreed with these thoughts and reflected how very often, “If you say I want you to give this a try...they [teachers] say yes/nodding and then you go back

and they haven't done it." Each of the principals nodded in agreement. We were all willing to shift from "team owner" to "head coach."

Chapter VI

Cycle II, Game Time

The initial principal survey results revealed that principals were knowledgeable in many facets of UbD. However, teacher implementation of UbD practices was very low. This begs the question, “If principals know it, what are they doing to support it?” As a part of the normal job responsibility, each principal has had experiences with the supervision and evaluation of teachers as their immediate supervisor. Unfortunately, in many instances, the evaluation process has created an “us” against “them” mentality. An example of this is embedded in a discussion that Pat had with me my first year in Journey Township. Pat warned me, “If you make recommendations in a teacher’s evaluation, expect a written rebuttal at the conference.” Pat was correct. During my first year, in most instances, teachers came prepared to our post observation conference with a rebuttal attached to the evaluation form. Additionally, when the Union learned that I met with a teacher directly following an observation when she was free the next period, they presented a formal grievance. It did not matter to them that the teacher requested the conference and the teacher was unaware that they grieved the matter without her personal consent! The union stated that they have the right to step in on behalf of their members. The grievance was not supported by the superintendent and did not reach the Board of Education level. The superintendent’s support revealed that he is an advocate of more supervisor-teacher interactions than typically occurs in Journey Township.

Later, I also learned that during contract negotiations, the Union pushed for a clause that stated all teachers must have their written report 2-3 days prior to a formal

conference. This language would place demands on the administrators that were more limiting than the New Jersey Code. This did not become a part of the new contract; however, it does highlight the “us” against “them” mentality that exists in some schools in Journey Township around evaluating teachers. Moving forward relationships must be built prior to the adoption of a new teacher evaluation system that all teachers in New Jersey, not merely Journey Township, will be held accountable to use. Multiple informal and formal evaluations will become the mandate and must be handled in collaboration if we are going to positively impact teaching and learning.

Pep Talk

With a clear understanding of our context, we believed that having teachers utilize UbD concepts would be difficult for many teachers. As a PPLC, we believed that teachers would have to begin to change through their own understanding, not via a set of directives. As leaders of change, we had to understand the magnitude of the change with the realization that, “Asking teachers to change their practices often means asking them to do things that sound absolutely hostile to them” (Kise, 2006, p. 10). Moving from a closed format of lesson planning where there are definite answers, to a unit planning model that relies on schema and connections will require a mental mind shift.

Stacy continued to promote coaching as a technique to improve leadership effectiveness to advance teachers in the UbD process. We began to wonder if teachers would be more open to change if they felt that instead of being evaluated, they were being coached to develop themselves. According to Stacy, “If you’re coaching – guards are down, you are helping them [teachers] create an awareness...you are working with, collaborating, and goal setting. This is hard as their supervisor.”

We also thought that coaching would benefit and reward principals with an opportunity to adopt a leadership style that many of us espouse to, but are unable to practice regularly – supporting teachers as the true purpose for observations. According to Pat’s journal, “I am more of a mentor and less of a coach.” We were hopeful that transitioning to coaching would foster a collaborative culture which will be desperately needed as New Jersey adopts new teacher evaluation requirements (NJDOE, 2011c).

What are the Rules?

A number of concerns about coaching surfaced. First, we would have to determine whether coaching would provide documentation for ineffective teachers and determine how similar or different coaching is from evaluating. One thought echoed by Edward, “By their actions they make us play the supervisor role. Sooner or later I have to be the principal.” Tina shared how difficult it had been when she had to non-renew a teacher. She shared that while coaching may serve as a support structure, she did not feel that it would provide the kind of direct documentation needed for non-renewing and firing a teacher. Stacy suggested,

If you are at the stage of firing, then it is too late for coaching. Coaching is not about remediating. The purpose is to get the coachee to be introspective and reflective to change their own practices. You have to take your opinions out of the equation. Your opinion might drive the question, but it’s about them coming up with a response. (June, PPLC meeting)

To the point, Tim recalled a teacher that may have been “coachable” if it had not been for the interference of the union. Resistance and relationship building contributed to our decision to “coach” instead of “supervise.” The goal would be to spark internal motivation. Pat suggested that we begin with those who are doing a good job and first attempt for them to get better.

The challenge and concern around the amount of time that it requires to coach was a serious consideration. Principals had to determine whether time constraints and job demands could afford principals with the necessary time commitments to coach. Edward expressed concerns about the completion of the many managerial tasks of the principal and wondered how the needed dedication of coaching would be possible on an ongoing basis. We feared that the amount of time needed for a person to evolve when left to ponder open-ended coaching questions might exceed the constraints of the formal evaluation system. Currently principals are required to conduct a post observation conference within 10 days. In many instances after this formality, it is difficult for principals to individually meet with teachers again. Typically these can be the type of challenges that prohibit a principal from coaching. However, with a goal to impact our leadership, in a safe, nurturing, trial and error environment, we decided to test our abilities to coach.

Choosing a Player

Our first decision was where to begin and how to conduct a conference as a coach. Collectively we decided that we would observe one teacher to develop coaching questions, without actually using them. The aim was to develop questions that would lead teachers to reflections and independent conclusions about their lessons. Using the Costa and Garmston's (2002) Cognitive Coaching model, our focus would be to strengthen professional performance by enhancing one's ability to examine familiar patterns of practice and reconsider underlying assumptions that guide and direct action. The purpose of this model is to enhance an individual's capacity for self-directed learning through

self-management, self-monitoring, and self-modification (in order) to produce high achievement.

Each principal connected with a teacher in his/her building and explained that they would like to conduct an observation for the purpose of creating coaching questions for our professional development. The principals explained that they would not actually conduct a post-observation interview using the questions, but needed to work on creating questions. In their journals, each of the principals commented on how they chose a teacher that they either had a relationship with and/or a teacher who they thought would be open to and understanding of our PPLC goals. Both Edward and Pat commented that this shift in role was more difficult for them than the normal observation process, while Tim wrote that it was easier without the accountability of the formal report.

At the next PPLC meeting, the staff developer provided the group with a rating form to determine the possible effectiveness of each coaching question (see Appendix E). The principals divided into two groups and shared the individual coaching questions that they developed. Each pair had to determine whether each question was “powerful.” Principals rated each question: does not meet criteria, somewhat meets criteria, or meets and exceeds criteria of a powerful question. Below are the points we considered:

- Question assumes positive intent and focuses on positive connections.
- Question is open-ended and invites multiple answers.
- Question acts as thought starters to energize the mind and consider new perspectives.
- Question focuses on solutions, not problems.
- Question empowers coachee to go to a deeper level and uncover patterns of thinking.
- Question creates greater clarity, possibility, or new learning.

- Question evokes discovery, insight, commitment, or action on behalf of the teacher.
- Question can reveal and reflect understanding of teacher's perspective.

Each principal then completed a reflective, "journal-like" questionnaire (see Appendix F) to gather data on how they developed their questions. Some reflective points were whether questions were developed during or after the observation, was a particular process used, what was the principal's mindset upon entering the observation, how did the principal prepare, how confident was the principal with the value of the questions, and whether developing coaching questions for review was perceived to be a useful action. This exercise forced each of the principals to act on the decided upon coaching strategy. The reflective component, without discussion with the teachers, advanced our personal learning.

Subsequent to this activity, Tim shared with me that he is now attempting to, "coach on the fly." As he walks down the hall, if there is a teacher walking in the same direction and he has a good rapport already established, he will inquire about the lesson he/she just taught with an attempt to frame it in coaching language. Tina also keeps a copy of the coaching questions on her desk and has tried them outside of the academic arena and also when there is a parent concern or student behavior challenge. These transitions are indications to me that principals are beginning to take ownership of coaching.

Locker Room Talk

For this scheduled observation, all of the principals expressed that they approached this observation differently than most others and in many ways found this

position more difficult. Pat views herself as a “mentor” and found it difficult not to offer advice. I felt like teachers wanted answers. After another coaching situation, a teacher that I have a relationship with directly asked, “Yeah, but what did you think?” as the conference concluded and she was leaving my office. The principals expressed that coaching is such a different mindset from the usual practices. While the technique for note taking was reflective of their normal styles, the reflective process was very different and would require many “practice” attempts.

During the discussion at our June PPLC meeting, the principals agreed that they each thought more about their leadership, goals, and how to present the questions than they would have if it were a routine observation. Each of the principals developed questions after the observation. Pat noted how difficult it was to develop questions that were not leading toward her biases and Edward thought a great deal about the type of interaction that he would aspire towards with the teacher. Although developing the coaching questions was a challenge, Tim felt a level of relief and did not mind this exercise despite the busy time of year. I shared how I developed too many questions for any single discussion or lesson. With a list of over 20 questions, I decided that I would prepare for a multitude of possible directions, specific to that lesson, in my toolbox. Of course, this will lessen once I become a better navigator during post conferences.

We Need a Playbook

After this initial round of coaching, the principals expressed a true concern about their abilities to coach teachers beginning the following September. To further prepare for the 2011-2012 school year, the principals decided to read a professional text on coaching during the summer months. Each principal agreed to gather a few salient points

and share their findings at the first PPLC meeting in September. Quickly the focus was shifting from knowledge of UbD to a process that could help principals lead in numerous capacities. We have the knowledge, but do we have the ability to lead? Our PPLC became a balance of content and application.

The staff developer made several recommendations and each principal chose a text. Three principals chose *Leadership Coaching for Educators* by Karla Reiss (2007) and two chose to read *Differentiated Coaching: A Framework for Helping Teachers Change* by Jane A. Kise (2006). At the opening PPLC meeting in the fall, the principals shared what they found to be most useful from their text. Main points in the debriefing about coaching surrounded identifying teacher beliefs, delivery of staff development, levels of collaboration, and coaching as a signal that teachers are worth the amount of time and effort that it takes to coach a professional.

Coaches are Traded

In an effort to solely develop the principals' coaching abilities, void of their role as a supervisor and evaluator, the team decided that it would be beneficial for the principals to coach a teacher in another school for the next part of the cycle. The PPLC felt that this would allow both the principal and the teacher to be more trusting of the coaching process. Although this dynamic would require strangers to work together, it would allow the principal to practice coaching without expectations associated with being the administrator. In addition, in order to tie together the principals' learning of UbD and coaching techniques, the observation would occur in a classroom with a teacher who is considered proficient or advanced in UbD strategies. Each school has at least one or two teachers who have been continuously trained in UbD and participate in a district-wide

teachers' PLC. To aid the principals, the staff developer coordinated the district schedules and gave us a reflective form to guide our expectations (see Appendix G). In advance of the observations, the principal emailed the teacher to gain insight into the subject and/or lesson.

Unlike the first coaching observation, for this portion of the cycle, the principal met with the teacher after the lesson for an immediate coaching session (see Appendix H). In each instance, the principal was careful to reiterate that the purpose of this experience was to provide the principal with practice opportunities for coaching and reflection. The observations were non-evaluative and any documentation was left with the teacher to use or discard. No permanent records exist. Again, because Stacy chose the teachers, each was receptive. The teacher, who I coached, actually admitted that she felt more comfortable with me than her building principal. She revealed that she felt relaxed talking to me and did not have any problems with me observing or asking coaching questions after the lesson. We stayed in her classroom and met during her lunch. I think she ate a yogurt and a light snack. Clearly this process was beneficial to break down barriers between principals as evaluators and teachers. At the November PPLC meeting, principals shared their reflections on both their coaching and their comfort level with observing an UbD planned lesson. Each principal shared that he/she was prepared to initiate the conference with scripted questions, but were able to navigate the conversation using coaching strategies. According to the principals, the teachers expressed a comfort level with working with a principal who was not their immediate supervisor/evaluator. Due to the non-evaluative, non-judgmental structure, both the teachers and the principals were able to develop their daily craft in a safe environment. Each knew that the other

party had been trained in a technique that is research-based and each knew that the other while competent, needs continued practice in their individual craft. The normal barriers of supervisor and employee were minimized.

Practice Throughout the Season

To further expand their learning, the staff developer continued to share principles of cognitive coaching (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Principals were challenged to reflect upon teachers' behaviors and understand whether they showed signs of efficacy, flexibility, craftsmanship, consciousness, or interdependence. The purpose was to recognize the importance of understanding the mindset of a person that one is trying to coach. Principals expanded this concept beyond contrived UbD lessons and discussed how as a principal you must always consider a person's mindset. Tina expressed the need for principals to recognize from what behavior, beliefs, and attitudes we behave. The principals agreed to explore this, perhaps through some type of behavioral assessment at a later time.

The process of continuous learning through professional readings and group sharing began this cycle. As the principals continued to invest in themselves, they determined ways to engage teachers in their learning. This cycle completed a full loop of plan, act, reflect, and plan again. Beyond the controlled setting of coaching "strangers," teachers who work in another building, principals have begun to coach within their natural setting. Moving forward, coaching techniques may be paramount as policies change throughout New Jersey with the adoption of a more standardized, competitive, teacher evaluation system – Excellence for Educators, EE4NJ.

Chapter VII

Cycle III, Home Game

As a researcher, I wondered if a devoted effort to collaboration and learning would collectively move principals to make decisions that would influence each of the schools and send a clear message that we believe in the underlying principles of UbD. For two years, the teachers had opportunities for training, but mandates for Understanding by Design unit planning in Journey Township do not exist. The superintendent in Journey Township often makes suggestions towards changes, but does not provide exact directives with the expectations that principals are professionals and capable leaders. For instance, at two principals' monthly meetings, the superintendent "challenged" the principals to develop goals that extend beyond the typical measures of increasing NJ ASK scores. The superintendent did not mandate specifics but asked the principals to think of ways that would cause more purposeful planning and engagement on the part of the teachers throughout the next school year. Therefore, with a partial directive from the superintendent, and some direct effort on the part of the principals, the principals discussed possibilities for school goals and relied upon each other for clarity at a subsequent PPLC meeting. After discussion about what the superintendent's expectations might be, each of the principals expressed comfort in knowing that each of their colleagues, too, felt unsure. During the course of this PPLC, another tangible instructional leadership change would be the development of 2011-2012 School Goals.

Team Huddle

Each of the schools in Journey Township has a volunteer stipend, School Goals Committee. Building committees typically consist of approximately five members who represent different grades, subject matter, or expertise. The purpose of the School Goals Committee is to work with the principal to develop and monitor goals for the current school year. Results from the prior year's goals are reviewed and typically used to create new goals. In high stakes testing grades in New Jersey, school goals are developed to meet the requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress. However, additional goals beyond New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge are formed at the discretion of the district. These are the discretionary goals that that the superintendent in Journey Township challenged the principals to create. In each of the School Goals Committee meetings, the principal facilitated a discussion about the district's direction to move towards UbD practices. The principals facilitated the meetings with probing questions to help each of the committees determine where the teachers are as a staff and to think of how they could advance in one school year. The individual differences, styles, needs, and comfort levels are expressed in each of the goals.

In the fall of 2011, each of the schools met to create their school's goals for 2011-2012. Listings of each school's goals are included as actions related to principal's instructional leadership choices. In each case, the principals maintained approximately two goals that would be considered typical or usual goals, that is 85% of grade 3 students will demonstrate a one point increase on the New Jersey Holistic Scoring Rubric on a June post writing assessment. However, based on the work of the PPLC and the superintendent's challenge, each of the elementary schools developed at least one

challenge goal that correlates to the district’s broad philosophy to move towards practices consistent with UbD principles. Principals shared each of their school’s goals. The goal that best correlates to the principal’s leadership influence will be referred to as a “challenge goal.”

Edward’s School Goals:

- Goals one and two focused on narrative writing in kindergarten through second grade and speculative writing in grades three through five.

Challenge goal:

- 80% of the staff will observe at least one lesson as a grade level from one of the designated UbD classrooms and complete a reflective questionnaire.

Tina’s School Goals:

- Reading goals were developed based on grade level and initial assessment data.

Challenge goal:

- All teachers will increase their level of use of Understanding by Design as determined by an individual pre and post assessment using the “Continuum of Observable Indicators” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

Pat’s School Goals:

- Goals one and two focused on student improvements in writing and mathematics.

Challenge goal:

- 100% of teachers will increase their level of use of UbD according to the Levels of Use of UbD: Typical Behaviors scale adapted from Taking Charge by Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987).

Tim’s School Goals:

- Goal one and two focused on writing and mathematical improvements.

Challenge goal:

- By June 2012, 100% of the Woodland staff will utilize the “Woodland Learning Principles” to develop engaging, flexible, individualized, and supportive 21st century classroom environment based on student data.

My School’s Goals:

- Goals one and two focused on student improvements in reading and writing.

Challenge goal:

- Every grade level will review the newly adopted Journey Township Mathematics Curriculum (that is written in UbD unit format) and chose one unit to create pre-assessments, post assessments and differentiated strategies.

To the advantage of this project, the superintendent’s goals are broad and each of the challenge goals that the schools developed meets the second bullet below:

Superintendent’s Goals:

- Raise achievement for all students paying particular attention to disparities between subgroups.
- Systematically collect, analyze, and evaluate available data to inform all decisions.
- Improve business efficiencies where possible to reduce overall operating costs.
- Provide support programs for students across the continuum of academic achievement with an emphasis on those who are in the middle.
- Provide early interventions for all students who are at risk of not reaching their full potential.

The development of a challenge goal in each of the schools was a tangible change in the advancement of UbD and the leadership of the school principals. Although each principal helped to develop and submitted different goals, each principal was able to advance their instructional leadership focus. With the changed focus of the goals away from standardized assessments, each principal would have to develop techniques to monitor and support the teachers’ learning within his/her school. Edward’s school

developed an informal, in-house reflection tool (see Appendix I). Tina's school used a rubric from Wiggins and McTighe's *Schooling by Design* (see Appendix J). Pat's school adapted a rubric from Hord et al., 1987 (see Appendix K) and my school is working on developing a tool to measure the quality of team developed assessments.

Is Every Team in the Same League?

During this action research study, we did not make a unified plan as to how we were going to implement the principles of UbD. Each principal increased his/her individual knowledge and moved according to each staff's readiness or willingness. There is still progress and at the time of this writing, each school is on track to meet their individually developed school goals. Although many principals typically relish in their autonomy, I would recommend that in our next phase of the PPLC we make some unified decisions. Despite the superintendent's trust that principals will move the teachers forward, like teachers who respond to directives, I think we would have benefitted from an "edict on high." On one hand, when addressing an adaptive challenge, answers cannot be solved by someone on high (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), but on the other hand implementation of district wide innovations are more successful when the superintendent's authority is the driving force (Fullan, 1991 as cited in Evans, 1996). The loose-tight leadership is dependent upon each context, and unfortunately in a district setting every building has its own culture (Elmore, 2000). To that end, I would advance the theory of "defined autonomy." Defined autonomy means that the superintendent expects building principals to lead within the boundaries of the district goals (Marzano & Waters, 2009). A shared understanding and clear vision is needed for sustainability.

Junior Varsity before Varsity

The principals in Journey Township recognized the need to be responsible for their instructional leadership and decided to make their own development a priority. Besides myself, during the first PPLC meeting, the remaining four principals stated that they had not previously been members of a PLC, although two schools have functioning PLCs in their schools. In my prior district, I had been a member in the common principal role of facilitator and manager. As a new learning community format in Journey Township, the actions and ongoing decisions of the principals would determine whether this work could move from first order change to second order change (Evans, 1996).

Cycle I addressed the needs of the principals to become more knowledgeable of The Three Stages of UbD work. At this literal level, the initial work of the PPLC would be considered technical (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) or first order change (Evans, 1996). Although this learning represented a thrust and focus in this philosophy, principals are accustomed to changes in programs and even philosophies. The principals certainly have the capacity to learn the essential principles of Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2007) and also have an obligation to be advocates of the curricula (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The use of the in-house staff developer tailored the learning even more to meet our needs. All of the principals reported increased understanding after a couple of months of meetings and were able to guide School Goals to incorporate an increased teacher responsibility to align their practices to UbD.

The teacher evaluation process is recognized as one of the most important responsibilities of a principal. Accepting that principals hold a significant amount of power over whether a curriculum initiative will be successful (DuFour & Eaker, 1998;

Fullan, 2007) schools have always relied upon this transactional relationship as a part of the structure. The evaluation process is even symbolic of the hierarchy of roles and relationships. The decision to become coaches represented a change of our norms and customs.

This paradigm shift would impact the principals, as well as the teachers. Coaching would alter assumptions about the principal-teacher relationship, change the norms of behaviors, and transfer the roles of responsibility. Principals found that they would need to plan differently and prepare questions that would lead the teachers but still allow self-discovery and knowledge finding. The initial shift to coaching would certainly require a change of the principals' styles and will likely require years to master before each could internalize their role and the expectations.

Concluding Thoughts

When any participant agrees to Action Research, a commitment and understanding of the multiple layers necessary to make change is inferred. The cyclical nature of Action Research requires planning, action, reflection, and adjustment. Since there was unanimous consent to develop the type of instructional leadership written about in Chapters I and II, each of the cycles required principals to commit to personal and professional learning in tandem with action. I collected data during monthly meetings and individual interviews that I conducted as the participant observer. The findings in these chapters were a construction of individual and group knowledge. Only recurring cycles and courage and commitment to extensive work will transform the principals to confident, knowledgeable change agents.

Chapter VIII

Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

Education, like all businesses, must operate in a constant state of monitoring and adjusting. The increased accountability advanced by federal, state, and local authorities subjects every educator to increased levels of evaluation. These pressures have heightened the reflective process and promote offensive as well as defensive decisions on the part of Local Education Associations. While teachers are certainly called to action, administrators are called to the actions of leadership. Teachers are expected to deliver instruction that aligns with district approved, best-practices, and principals must be prepared to support these adopted programs and monitor the implementation of standards and curricula. The relationship of reciprocal accountability within the profession must be examined as we continue to raise the achievement bar.

Each of the cycles in this action research project was based on both individual and collective needs. Principals' learning opportunities began with a focused study on UbD principles, which evolved to intentional work with coaching strategies. The PPLC focused on the act of coaching as a tool to advance instructional leadership towards UbD practices. Finally, the principals were able to lead their School Goals Committee in the development of a school challenge goal. Each of the three cycles was distinct and independent, yet connected to a bigger picture. Principals engaged in planning, acting, reflecting, and adjusting over the course of seven months.

During the November 2011 PPLC meeting, the group reflected upon their efforts and learning during the past seven months. The overwhelming concern expressed by each

of the principals at the final scheduled meeting was the need to continue to operate as a PPLC into the new year. Each principal expressed the need to continue to work together to foster collegial relationships and improve upon district initiatives. Pat expressed a concern that void of a specific project (this dissertation) the PPLC would slowly dissolve. Stacy is in the process of creating a schedule for the remainder of the 2011-2012 school year. The principals need an on-going format to meet, collaborate, and learn, due to the ever increasing job demands.

The preceding chapters have established a purpose for this dissertation using these guiding research questions.

- What choices do principals make to advance a district initiative to utilize Understanding by Design philosophies?
- What do principals need in order to be effective instructional leaders?
- How is my espoused leadership as a participant researcher impacted through involvement in a Principal Professional Learning Community?

In this final chapter I will directly answer these questions. I will also extend my thoughts to implications that arose but are certainly arguable. Finally, I will make recommendations and end with an assessment of what I have learned about myself.

Findings: Change Requires Action

What choices do principals make to advance a district initiative to utilize Understanding by Design philosophies?

The principals at Journey Township made the decision to advance a district initiative to utilize Understanding by Design philosophies through job-embedded, professional development. For over three years, Journey Township has stated its belief in

principles that are consistent with UbD; however, the implementation has been left to the pace of each individual teacher. After a monthly Superintendent's Administrators' Meeting, the principals agreed that our knowledge of UbD concepts varies. Therefore we decided that if we were truly planning to hold teachers accountable, then we should be confident with our understanding. Collaboratively, the group decided to establish a Principal-only Professional Learning Community (PPLC). The rationale for the principals-only model would serve to establish a trustworthy and safe environment. Realizing the constraints of our time, we agreed to elicit the support of one of the trusted and knowledgeable, district employed staff developers as our coach. We determined that monthly meetings, rotating through schools, would be a feasible structure with assignments in between meetings. The principals agreed to action research with the realization that action research requires planning, action, observation, and reflection for subsequent actions and succeeding cycles (Anderson & Herr, 2005; Kemmis, 1982). The dialogue amongst the principals highlighted that Journey Township's expectations have relied upon assumed professionalism of the adult-teacher learner.

Cycle I of the PPLC/Action Research project focused on the principal's content knowledge. The staff developer developed a simple survey. Principals rated their preparation to lead instruction in the areas of Big Ideas; Essential Questions; Knows, Understands, and Dos (KUDs); Enduring Understandings; assessments; differentiated instruction; data analysis; and Six Facets of Understanding. Based on the survey results, informal training was provided during the initial PPLC meetings. The staff developer created PowerPoints and incorporated examples of teacher use of strategies within the classrooms. Principals then decided that normal supervisory methods of leadership

traditionally do not have a lasting impact on instruction and teachers lack ownership.

Therefore we decide to incorporate coaching as a technique to enhance our instructional leadership abilities.

The second major decision of the PPLC was to utilize coaching as an instructional strategy. Each of the principals planned an announced observation and observed a teacher in their school. The purpose of the observation was for the principal to develop coaching questions for review and reflection. The principals did not conduct a post-observation conference with the teachers. At the June PPLC meeting, the principals shared their mock questions. In groups of two, teams rated whether the questions were powerful (Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010). While many of the questions were powerful, each of the principals felt the need to strengthen their ability to be an instructional coach. The staff developer showed a few professional texts on coaching that she uses. The principals then chose a book that they would read over the summer and report the findings in September. Three of the principals chose to research *Leadership Coaching for Educators* by Karla Reiss (2007) and two chose to research *Differentiated Coaching: A Framework for Helping Teachers Change* by Jane A. Kise (2006). At the September meeting, the PPLC engaged in a book talk and shared key points such as ways to develop relationships and collaboration and recognizing individual learning styles to differentiate our coaching techniques to match our teachers. In order to focus on our questioning and coaching and in order to help teachers feel safe and supported, for the next phase of our coaching cycle, we decided to coach a teacher in another school. Each principal identified a teacher who is a member of a year-long PLC that is also focused on UbD and DI. The principal and the coach spoke with the teachers about their willingness

to have a principal from another building observe a lesson and practice coaching. We explained to the teachers that this process was to assist in our leadership development. Each principal met with a teacher to observe an agreed upon lesson. Teachers sent principals the lesson plans in advance. After the lesson, the principal conducted a coaching session. Beyond the dialogue, no documentation was recorded. At the subsequent PPLC meeting, each of the principals shared their experience and reflected upon our perception of the coaching session. Each reported a positive experience and expressed that they are beginning to feel more advanced in coaching strategies. We realized that true coaching hinges upon building relationships, but decided upon this venue to maintain a safe environment. We are also hopeful that through these actions, the culture in Journey Township will understand that principals are also engaging in learning and work that stretches our abilities. We want all staff to know that we, too, must grow as instructional leaders.

For the final change and Cycle III, we decided to encourage a tangible change within each of our buildings. Utilizing the development of School Goals as a platform, each of the principals met their internal committee and encouraged the team to develop a “challenge” goal that would move the school towards being more accountable for advancing UbD principles and practices. Each of the schools developed very different goals. One school is expecting 80% of the teachers to observe a UbD lesson and complete a reflection form, two other schools utilized a rubric and had the teachers self-assess their understanding using rubrics found in *Schooling by Design*, a fourth school is expecting utilization of 21st century learning principles, and my school is working on developing assessments that coincide with the newly adopted mathematics curriculum. Each school

developed the challenge goal with their committee, we are therefore hopeful that more teachers will buy into the principles and understand the district's goal to move forward with UbD philosophies.

Instructional Leaders Need Content and Process

What do principals need in order to be effective instructional leaders?

While professional development is recognized as an essential component for the success of teachers, professional development as an essential component for the success of principals has not risen to the same level of urgency. Up until recently, it was still widely debated as to whether or not principals even have an impact on student achievement. Principals were the managers of schools and though they had previous instructional experience, their content expertise was often traded for operational expertise. Even as Professional Learning Communities have become commonplace and an accepted part of our espoused beliefs, the role of the principal is still often connected to management.

It has now become another job of the principals to mandate PLCs, develop schedules that support PLCs, appropriate materials to PLCs, and distribute data for use during PLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2007; NAEP, 2008). These realities have once again placed principals in a management role. The implications for this study advocate for practices that will support the ongoing learning that is necessary if principals are going to be a part of the foundation for student success. According to Evans (1996), principals who are successful change agents serve as resource providers, instructional resources, communicators, and have a visible presence. In order to be the instructional resource, we must address the knowledge gap that may exist (Evans, 1996).

Part of the success of the PPLC in Journey Township can be linked to the decision to provide the administrative team with a coach. The coach can be a district employed staff developer or a hired, outside consultant. It must be someone who is trusted and trustworthy as they will slightly change the group dynamic, but hopefully for the betterment of the team. In many instances, it is unrealistic to expect principals to have the time or perhaps the knowledge to plan on-going professional development. You want an expert. Even with my dissertation being connected to the PPLC in Journey Township, the challenge was still almost too difficult for me to lead a school, complete my graduate studies, support my family, and plan PLC meetings. The “high energy demands and expectations of effective PLC leadership require you to lead a disciplined life” (Kanold, 2011, p. 4).

Despite my personal needs and willingness to support myself, the team, and the district, the constraints of time are valid and a plan must be realistic. Having a staff developer allowed us to keep a suitable pace and maintain focus. Although she did permit for some venting and sidebar discussions, she also steered us back to the reason for meeting and we were also respectful of her presence and time. Similar to what happens with teaching, she often over prepared, and because we only met monthly, and had a timeline, unfortunately we did not experience all of the planned learning experiences. Utilizing a staff developer also permitted me to be a learner with my colleagues. We were all equals in the process and I was not expected to have more knowledge or all of the answers. Additionally, I would not be the blame if something did not go as planned.

In this study, the staff developer is a part-time district employee and there is another full time employed staff developer. This speaks volumes to the culture of Journey

Township as a district and its willingness to contribute to all employees. In a time when budgets have been cut and every position must be justified, I have never heard either of these positions up for reduction or elimination. Without hesitation, the superintendent and assistant superintendent agreed to the PPLC and supported the additional personnel. We were never constrained by a meeting time and in a town where the union frequently grieves administration, this topic was never directly discussed. We were able to use a staff developer who was trusted and could bridge the gap between the teachers and the administrators. As professional development was offered throughout the district, Stacy was able to connect the two worlds. If models such as the PPLC are going to be used, in addition to the principals facilitating change in their schools, it is beneficial to have other professionals who are seen as vested in the district who can also communicate the same messages. Teachers in Journey Township know that professional development is a part of the culture. It is an espoused theory that is a theory in use.

Despite budgetary constraints, personnel must be allocated to support principals' professional development. All funding sources must be examined, including grant options. Usually, novice principals are required to have mentors to guide their first few years. In New Jersey, newly hired principals and vice-principals with a Provisional Principal's License, work with an approved mentor from another district for two years. This is a paid mentorship. Our study supports the idea that tenured/veteran principals also need support. Creating a Professional Growth Plan is valid but another responsibility. Principals must be given options to meet their goals and the goals advanced for principals by superintendents.

Due to the increasing demands, all principals are at risk of being overwhelmed and pre-maturely burning out. Districts need professionals whose singular focus is to identify needs and provide support, including training. In Journey Township, the principals initially identified our own needs based on the direction of the superintendent. We communicated our understanding, set a purpose for learning, and allowed the staff developer to facilitate our community. Whether in-house or contracted, districts need dedicated, expert, staff developers who are committed and current with research-based effective practices. This means that the staff developers must also be committed to their own professional development to remain current with updated research. Facilitators should be a part of professional organizations and have multiple resources. If the principals in Journey Township have recognized the need, it is likely that all principals need continuous, job-embedded support.

On-going Support

Due to the amount of information that principals process daily, the frequency of interactions can be critical to a productive professional learning community. The expectations and challenges are too many and the stakes are too high. Having a PPLC within the district did bring the learning to the doorstep of the principals. The meeting place was always a school within the district which meant principals could easily return to their schools after a morning meeting without an additional drive from an out-of-district workshop. Also, in the event of an emergency, principals had peace of mind knowing that they were in town. I can only think of one meeting that was interrupted by an emergency that had taken place that morning at a bus stop, but being accessible, if not abused also makes the meetings more manageable in the minds of the principals as well

as the superintendent. Principals have the greatest opportunity to impact teachers, who in turn have a direct impact on student achievement.

Many building-based PLCs meet at a minimum every week and in some schools common planning and team meetings occur daily. If handled with direction and rigor, these meetings can also be authentic Professional Learning Communities. I agree with Tina from my study, who in the end, advocated for two meetings per month and with Pat who sulked aloud, “I hope the end of your dissertation doesn’t mean the end of our meetings.” Although it would be a challenge to a principal’s schedule, with only meeting monthly, our PPLC did not have the sense of intensity and urgency that sometimes helps to propel change. In order to have a greater impact on leadership choices, I would advocate the meetings transpire at least twice per month. In our final PPLC meeting, these were the final sentiments.

Edward proposed to, “continue in this format. Not necessarily coaching or UbD but the safe environment.”

Tina proposed to, “continue to apply the coaching model and maybe do some work, learn more about ourselves, and our preferences. Maybe we can investigate our personality type and faculty’s.”

Pat preferred to, “continue as we are, moving forward with developing training for our teachers in UbD.”

Tim’s choice was to, “continue with cognitive coaching. UbD is still needed, perhaps we could create a unit and lead the teachers by examples. If the teachers see it, they know it’s valuable.”

In order to be effective instructional leaders, principals need to be provided with job-embedded professional development. The opportunity for students to learn (Marazano et al., 2005) is a tenet by which principals are deemed to be effective leaders. The opportunity for staff to learn resides within a principal’s leadership and management,

but just as important, principals need an opportunity to learn. Principals need to be a part of a culture that supports learning and growth for all staff. Superintendents cannot implement change throughout the district unless they build the capacity of principals to lead (DuFour et al., 2010). Lateral capacity building needs to occur at the administrative level. Principals cannot trade content expertise for operational expertise. Both are required. If principals do not have the content knowledge, they must be afforded a safe environment in which to grow. The responsibilities are unique and demanding. The culture of isolation that exists among teachers is multiplied in the role of the principal. Principals must build collegial relationships with other principals in order to dialogue and reflect upon alternative methods. Upper administration must provide continual support. The confidence of the principals may dictate who is a part of the initial learning environment.

Additionally, principals need a clear understanding of the problem(s). Principals cannot be so overwhelmed by the daily operations that they do not see the bigger picture. Principal must be able to analyze conditions and create a plan. There must be a focus that is articulated from the federal, state, and/or district level. Principals must confront the brutal facts (Collins, 2001) of their reality and work with teachers to meet the needs of the students. Principals need to build relationships that will create conditions for growth.

My Leadership and Learning

How is my espoused leadership as a participant researcher impacted through involvement in a Principal Professional Learning Community?

Authentic leadership is powerful. Throughout this PPLC, I have been in constant examination of my leadership, my colleagues, and the district as a complete system.

Building partnerships with other principals was a necessary part of my professional journey. It has reminded me what it is like to work as a colleague – and not a supervisor. While I will always hold myself to a personal code that is relentless and at times can be overbearing, I am now better equipped to understand how others lead – in particular the other principals in the PPLC. My fear was that in a high performing district, it would be impossible to challenge the status quo. It was therefore my job to find a way to foster reflection, as well as projection. Leadership to me continues to be a position of authority that is given or assumed by someone but is limited by the group’s choice to follow the recommendations. Through my core values that foster honesty, integrity, fairness, and collaboration, I have learned that context, even more than situation, requires different leadership styles.

Emotional Intelligence is an underlying principle upon which I am able to build relationships. Relationships are at the core of Professional Learning Communities. We cannot dismiss the fact that people/followers behave out of their perceived treatment and designated roles (Covey, 2004). As a principal and leader I am concerned with people individually and collectively. It is important to me that I lead with ethics and purpose. As one member of the team, my servant philosophy ensures that everyone has what he/she needs to be able to contribute to student success – even if it requires me to work at the “grass roots” level.

While not necessarily a leadership style, I do operate from a Human Resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2003). I devote many hours to the needs of the staff as I perceive them or as requested. I have a clear understanding that while educating children is my goal and my passion, I cannot teach each of them myself. Therefore, I need to be a part of

a culture that believes that everyone must contribute. This also requires that I have a firm understanding of pedagogy and practices that foster student achievement. Relying on my background as a primary teacher, coach, and curriculum supervisor, on-going professional development is one of the largest components of my leadership style. Human Resource characteristics also allow me to understand that change and growth occur in intervals and differently in all professionals. Expressing expectations and being open to methods of achievement contribute to relationship building and emotional intelligence.

Since this project was action research, the work of Michael Fullan has encouraged me to examine how I promote change. Effective leadership requires team building and collaboration. Fullan (2001) establishes a framework for leadership in which moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making are surrounded by enthusiasm, hope, and energy. This research is reflective of my core values and balances my goal to be a transformational leader. Additionally, I relate to the work of Peter Senge. In addition to the overarching “Systems Thinking” of Senge’s work (2006), as an educator and a leader, I am influenced by what Senge calls, “personal mastery.” The commitment to myself as a lifelong learner contributes to me and to any organization in which I participate. I feel bound to contribute and expect a reciprocal commitment from others within the organization (Senge, 2006).

Believing in the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” I try to foster an environment where staff are reflective, creative, and work at maximum levels that yield student success. Examining the culture and creating a dynamic where needed shifts

can occur is a task that is too daunting for one principal; however, I have found that working with a community of peers makes us each accountable to one another. This positive peer pressure is another advantage of being involved in a learning community. When you feel accountable, you are more likely to follow through with the espoused vision. This is a form of Democratic Leadership.

Fullan's studies (2007) of educational leaders are grounded in the understanding that leaders must do more than simply change structure, leaders must create a culture of change. This project led me to work that will keep me connected to teaching and learning through professional development. As Michael Fullan (2003) states, "what standards were to the 1990s, leadership is to the 2000s" (p. 16). We cannot evaluate students and teachers, without evaluating the effectiveness of principals. True systems of mutual accountability are the only way that "great leaders in every school" (Obama, 2011) will move us beyond rhetoric to higher levels of learning of all students. While it was an arduous task to develop a topic, my final choice led me to challenging my role and the role of administration within the culture. An awareness and examination of the standards and 21st century needs was the impetus to my topic. At a district level, we were anxiously awaiting the revision of the Mathematics curriculum based on the recent adoption of the Common Core Standards. A review of the standards had to be more than a checklist, it had to be a close examination. Simultaneously, I was reviewing the ISLCC standards. It seemed like a natural connection that I work on a project that requires an examination of student learning, teachers' influence, and the power of leadership. In order to build successful schools, we must increase its capacity. This project had the elements to increase teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, build a professional community,

improve program coherence and technical resources, and impact principal leadership (Newmann et al., 2000 as cited in Fullan, 2007).

The onset of this action research is promising. According to Johnson (2009), the ultimate goal of action research is to use findings to make effective changes or choices. Since PLCs are usually, or should be, a response to a problem, they have been found to be effective (Putnam et al., 2009). There was a comfort level with the reliance on the human resource frame, emotional intelligence, and servant leadership. I realized through Kotter (1996) that I must create the sense of urgency in order to maintain momentum and foster change. If done with the reflection that is fundamental, the recursive nature of action research (Craig, 2009) should readily employ our sense of urgency. Overall, the long-term project of this action research study and dissertation would investigate my leadership ability to guide colleagues to take action to advance our district's espoused beliefs and shared vision.

Implications: A Choice Meets a Need

In many ways the choices of the Journey Township elementary principals to advance UbD cannot be separated from the principals' needs. The combined purpose of this study was to examine leadership choices and its impact on UbD practices. The voluntary participation gave principals the freedom to choose without district scrutiny or consequence. The choices for each cycle were the decisions of the participants and therefore based upon their perceived and recorded needs. For that reason it is natural that choices and needs would be closely tied.

Within the context of education, administration has a specific subculture with a distinct make-up and multiple layers. The superintendent's office and the cabinet (e.g.,

the assistant superintendent and the business administrator) represent one group. Supervisors constitute another group and building level administrators (e.g., principals and vice-principals) represent yet another group. The analysis of this portion of the principals' needs in Journey Township presents possibilities and specifically examines the elementary principals and their choice to create a "principals-only" model based upon their needs.

The Exclusivity of the PPLC

Professional Learning Communities have been recognized as a viable tool to improve the capacity of educators. At the state and local levels, decision makers advocate the work of turning districts into PLCs. Researchers including DuFour et al. (2010), Darling-Hammond (2010), Elmore (2006), Fullan (2008), Senge (2006), and Leithwood et al., (2004) all support Professional Learning Communities. Through my research, I found that the configuration of the PLC is not important, rather it is the existence of PLCs throughout every facet of the district that will make the difference. Principals are generally the managers, the facilitators, and the data analysts of PLCs. Less frequently, are they the students and peer participants. The next few sections examine how "principals-only" was a need for the principal learner, without sacrificing the goals of PLCs.

You're Safe in Vegas

When building a guiding coalition, Kotter (1996) emphasizes the importance of credible trusted members with good reputations, and Evans (1996) focuses on relationship building. All of the principals agreed to a "principals-only" model with the feeling that a single constitution would create a safe environment. Several principals used

the well-known “Vegas” reference during their interview and “Vegas” was often touted during meetings. This motto alludes to the fact that there could be an unsafe environment – an alternate, all too common environment, where it would be acceptable to repeat what was said or witnessed during closed meetings. Although most of the information from my point of view was positive and rarely were other administrators or teachers discussed in a negative manner, it was comforting to know that a trusting foundation amongst the group was established. The following excerpts illustrate the principal’s feelings towards the “principal-only” model:

Principals have been in isolation and used worked on directives from the superintendent for you and your building. It is important to get different perspectives. (Edward, Post-PPLC Interview)

The small group makes it more intimate and safer. You are more apt to say things with other principals. We have Stacy but she has a great reputation. It’s Vegas. We are in exactly the same role. VPs do not really have to deal with it, although there are certain VPs whose work ethic and drive mirrors ours. I don’t know that all VPs share the same thrust as we do. (Tina, Post-PPLC Interview)

I think that principals have a unique role as the instructional leader of the building but also the manager of the building. We wear many hats throughout any given day. This gives us a chance to talk about all of those special issues. (Pat, Post-PPLC Interview)

Principal-only gave a consistent voice. We have the same needs. With the same group we can deal with subjects the same. We are the constant voice. Staff looks to the principal, not the VP or supervisor. (Tim, Post-PPLC Interview)

In order to help determine the needs of the principals, another interview question was,

“What support do you need to be successful as an instructional principal?”

It would be nice to have an effective assistant principal – for any building principal. There are too many things to be done. Maybe it could be help from a guidance counselor or nurse. There is not enough technology support. As far as supervisory support, as in Curriculum and Instruction, we don’t benefit like the high school. It has always been an issue. Discussions speak of rotations but it never manifests. (Edward, Post-PPLC Interview)

VP. Somebody. Another person. Perhaps a teacher leader without a classroom of students. Someone to take something off your plate. (Tina, Post-PPLC Interview)

More time in the day! Clear expectations of where the district is headed. (Pat, Post-PPLC Interview)

Collegiality, support from Central Office. Our network is the most important piece. We understand the hot issues and order of importance. We are in the trenches. Central Office is responsible for living the big picture, our role is to keep the big picture in mind. We have different roles. The same level is the most important network – the elementary ed principals. (Tim, Post-PPLC Interview)

As noted, all of the principals conveyed a strong need for competent, focused, administrative staff. It is interesting that other administrators were intentionally omitted from this PLC. This decision created a setting where the principals could talk about anyone or any group that is different from them without guarding their words and true feelings. In the analysis below, I provide general speculations of what this choice may imply.

Principals, Not Supervisors

In many districts, including Journey Township, there is an unspoken tension between principals and supervisors. Supervisors struggle for their place in the hierarchy of administrators and principals challenge supervisors' authority over their building. Supervisors are known and expected to defend curricular choices from a utopian like mindset, while principals are forced to grapple with everything from managing the environment to monitoring the curriculum, staff, students, parents, and community. Principals must live with the staff and the fall out of any decisions while supervisors are often located in a central location or have an out of the way office in one of the buildings. Supervisors are specialists and principals are generalists. The ratio of work often feels like the difference between a high school teacher and an elementary teacher. Both jobs

are critical, but one has the responsibility of focusing in one area and one must do it all. Tim specifically talked about network support from central office staff during his interview. Yet, again, centralized staff was not a part of this PLC. The decision to exclude supervisors could imply that principals may feel insecure with content knowledge and a restricted PLC constitution would decrease feelings of vulnerability or incompetence. “Change challenges a person’s sense of competence.” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 27). Admittedly, supervisors might and should have the content knowledge to drive the learning, yet their presence in a PLC could risk dividing the group and thereby comprising the anticipated progress. Every PLC must decide on a configuration that will support its purpose (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Principals, Not Vice-principals

Another excluded group of administrators from the principals-only model were the vice-principals. In Journey Township, vice-principals are shared among the elementary schools. It is understood that they have difficult schedules and must lobby for the very existence of their position in the elementary schools. While collegial, the decision to exclude vice-principals from the PLC is worth examining. Both Edward and Tina requested an efficient vice-principal or a teacher leader, “without a classroom, to take something off their plate” during their interviews. Yet, this opportunity for professional development was not offered to them. A practical explanation that was given uses logistics as the response. “Who would be in charge of the school if both administrators leave for meetings?” However, the district makes provisions for all administrators to be centralized during the superintendent’s monthly meetings. Therefore, this excuse has a limited defense.

The decision to exclude vice-principals is an examination of power, roles, and responsibilities. One suggestion is that principals feel a level of superiority to vice-principals. It suggests that principals view their role as more of the instructional leader and view vice-principals as more of the disciplinarians and managers of daily, mundane requirements. It is a difficult decision to judge, because there are differences in the responsibilities and there are rites of passage in many places to becoming a principal. Be that as it may, one responsibility that is shared is staff evaluations. Both principals and vice-principals formally evaluate teachers in Journey Township. Therefore, it could be argued that vice-principals need the same content and process knowledge as principals. It is counterproductive and even sabotage when administrators in the same building do not have the same expectations. Teachers will desire to be evaluated by one person over the other or will look for discrepancies amongst themselves when they share their private reports. Again, the decision is difficult as one of the main goals was for principal to have a safe environment to learn. They do not want to be exposed for inadequacies and in parallel thinking, vice-principals would also need to be safe in order for their learning to be maximized.

Principals, Not the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction

A final administrative exclusion was the omission of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. Pat conveyed the need for clear expectations to be communicated of the district's direction and I believe we need an implementation timeline for district initiatives. The assistant superintendent would be the appropriate person to make these decisions. However, if the assistant superintendent were a member of the PLC, it would have changed the setting and included the principals' supervisor.

This would create an environment where principals' knowledge and learning would possibly be exposed for evaluation – which is the same scenario that would have been presented if vice-principals were learning side by side with principals. According to Duke “Principals need autonomy and support” (as cited in Fullan, 2007, p. 159).

The assistant superintendent did attend the second half of the first meeting. I noticed a few principals slightly shift their eyes in my direction. I did not know the assistant superintendent was coming, but knowing how much he genuinely loves learning environments, I was not surprised. After the meeting, Stacy asked me if he would be attending the meetings. I responded that I did not know. At the time, I did not broach the subject with the assistant, but he never attended another meeting. After the formal portion of this project concluded, I asked him about this occurrence. He said that no one spoke to him, but he felt that the principals were not able to open up with him there. He admitted that he was looking for a way to get the principals on board with UbD, but thought the principals “clammed-up” when he was there. He therefore left it up to Stacy who was “non-threatening” to cut through cultural barriers. He also talked about the demands of his schedule that really did not allow him to participate. Although the assistant superintendent is an ally and even friend to a few of the principals, he too, was excluded from this PLC. Although a friend and colleague, the hierarchy is clear. No one wants to appear incompetent in front of her supervisor.

Incremental Progress

The decision to create a learning community of colleagues is not surprising. Again, “Change challenges a person’s sense of competence” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 27). Principals, like many others, will guard themselves against scrutiny and create a

safe haven when given the option to choose the environment. Whether supervisors, vice-principals, or assistant superintendents, a change in the participants could create an imbalance in power and risk the learning possibilities. In addition to principals being overloaded with work and responsibility, there is also an expectation that principals possess enough knowledge about curricula and programs to lead their staff. Principals pride themselves on having achieved a level of success and guard their leadership role; leaders like to lead (Evans, 1996). These implications are not judgments against the principals. One possibility may be to maintain a PPLC and create learning in cycles. This would support program coherence (Fullan, 2007). Depending upon the need, other administrators could rotate into meetings as needed. This would have to be managed well so that half of the meeting is not spent bringing the other person up to speed. Also, creating an environment where the principals do not talk about future activities in which that group will not be involved could be complicated. The overall goal is to have one unified team, so planning for cycles and creating and maintaining norms would be critical. Elmore (2000) agrees,

The job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skill and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result. (Elmore, 2000, as cited in Fullan, 2007, p. 165)

Again, the demands of the principalship are relentless and opportunities for camaraderie are limited. It is human nature to want to be around people who are going through similar experiences. No matter how professional a staff, principals are unique, need support, and often feel isolated.

Isolation Contradicts PLCs

Another implication for the principal only model relates to feelings of professional isolation. Researchers have reported on the isolation and autonomy of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Snow-Gerono, 2001; Supovitz, 2006) but as four out of the five elementary principals in Journey Township reported during their interview, they too feel isolated. Each of the four has experienced success on paper with degrees and advanced degrees – including two with doctorates. Each is confident with her leadership and can present with knowledge and poise. Each works in a building with at least one hundred staff members and all aspired to be principals, but each still feels isolated. Like teachers, principals receive support early in their assignment, but definite plans for continued support into their tenured years are non-specific (NAESP, 2008) and do not exist at all in many districts. One of the known advantages of PLCs is the reduction of isolation through collaborative practices. The establishment of a Principal Professional Learning Community/PPLC served as an immediate benefit to the principal participants in Journey Township. Part of this comfort was predicated on prior relationships. In other districts, it may take time for trust to build if the principals do not already have relationships, or worse, have adversarial relationships. In Journey Township, the principals had relationships. Some extended beyond work, as two were in the same doctoral program, and the others were congenial and collegial. No matter the depth of the relationships, they existed and are necessary if principals are going to commit to the vulnerability that exists when you are in a learning environment. Professional learning communities should humble every professional and remind us what it is like for our students. Can we, as

professionals, be truthful enough to be the preacher and the congregation, the doctor and the patient? If we are going to be leaders, we must be willing to model.

Admitted by most, the job of an elementary principal can be all encompassing and thereby very isolating. The intentional, homogeneous grouping of elementary principals served to reduce isolation, combine expertise, and establish consistent expectations. In a collegial and safe environment, reflection, learning, and growth were possible. The isolation that the principals normally felt was minimized by the supportive attitude that we are all responsible for organizational learning. This type of lateral capacity building can be used as a mechanism to discourage isolation (Fullan, 2007). Knowledge cannot and should not be kept in isolation. Respecting how quickly changes are occurring in education and in our society, professionals will be forced to rely upon the expertise of one another more than ever. Principals are believed to be the most critical factor in influencing the daily operations of a school, including instructional reform (Supovitz, 2006 as cited in Fullan, 2007). While there are often discussions of how to encourage teachers to collaborate (common planning times, interdisciplinary studies, team teaching assignments) discussions and opportunities for principals to develop structured, collegial interactions, remain limited in many school systems. Part of the limitations is solely due to the structure alone. If teachers choose to open their doors and fight autonomy, there are colleagues just a few feet away; that option does not exist for principals. Principals only come together for scheduled meetings. If you are an elementary principal without a vice-principal, it can be a couple of weeks before you interact with another administrator in person. Yet, principals are required to make decisions that impact hundreds or even thousands of students. Educational change initiatives cannot overlook the demanding role

of the principal and “the deployment of mechanical techniques cannot become a substitute for understanding why we’re doing, what we’re doing” (Blankstein, 2010, p. 54).

Learning is Social, Meaningful, and Fun

The work of Jean Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) are often referenced during debates of how learning is constructed. Both Piaget and Vygotsky posit that learning is a social activity that is enhanced or limited by a person’s prior experiences or schemata. Vygotsky (1978) believed that knowledge is constructed within a person and enhanced by social interactions. This construction of knowledge is referred to as constructivism or constructivist philosophies. In early childhood, Science, and Arts and Humanities, constructivist philosophies and active learning are pretty easily accepted in most schools. In the middle and upper grades, many have pushed for years to turn the learning over to the learner for their deeper understanding. We now also need to consider constructivist philosophies when working with adult learners. Lambert (2003) places constructivism at the core of leadership capacity and working with adult learners. Kauchak and Eggen (1998) connect constructivism with learning in these terms,

Constructivism is a view of learning in which learners use their own experiences to construct understandings that make sense to them... Learning activities based on constructivism put learners in the context of what they already know, and apply their understanding to authentic situations. (p. 184)

Recognizing professionals as adult learners and the acceptance of PLCs and the work of DuFour et al. (2010), *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, is to accept the tenets of constructivism.

Recommendations: Changing the Paradigm

The research on professional learning communities is beginning to emphasize that PLCs should not be promoted in isolation. For example, schools must begin to move away from solely accepting grade level PLCs or department PLCs and move toward environments where everything and everyone is a PLC. PLCs need to become the culture, “the way we do things around here.” In most of the research, the leadership that is advocated for is Distributed or Shared Leadership. This recognizes that principals need help and recommends that teachers share the ownership, responsibility, and workload. While this is helpful, needed, and practical, my recommendation for Journey Township and all districts is to recognize the urgency that exists around professional development for principals. The 21st century vision of school leadership demands ongoing professional learning that is collaborative, sustained, and job-embedded. In this context, professional development is not something “extra” that leaders do, but rather a means of continually reflecting on and enhancing their own professional practice (NAESP, 2003). The training must be specific to the individual needs of the participants and the districts.

Making Time and Allocating Resources

The New Jersey Professional Learning for School Leaders Process offers a five-step framework for districts to assess, build upon, and align their professional learning for school leaders.

Step One: Affirm systemic commitment of board of education and district leaders to establish a culture that supports high-quality, standards-based professional development for school leaders (e.g., readiness for professional collaboration, level of trust, and openness to feedback).

Step Two: Conduct an assessment of district readiness (i.e., resources, structures, policies, contractual agreements) to implement and support high-quality, standards-based professional development for school leaders.

Step Three: Establish district policies, resources, structures, contractual agreements, and quality assurances needed to successfully implement, monitor, evaluate, and sustain high-quality, standards-based professional development for school leaders. For a listing of resources to use with each standard, visit the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) Web site at: <http://www.nsd.org/standards/resources.cfm>

Step Four: Develop a district plan designed to evaluate, both formatively and summatively, the implementation and the results of the *New Jersey Professional Learning for School Leaders* process with administrators within the district.

Step Five: Revise district and school professional development plans as needed to ensure effective alignment and implementation of the *New Jersey Professional Learning for School Leaders* process.

The steps that are outlined in this framework are consistent with common goals and objectives of many districts. More directly, each of these steps includes actionable items that can be tied to the ISLLC standards. Standard One emphasizes the expectation of administrators to focus on the vision and Standard Two requires that school administrators are anchored in teaching and learning (NJDOE, 2004).

Structures Matter

The PPLC as configured in Journey Township seems to be rare. Often, principals are gathered at monthly Administrator's Meetings but many times those meetings are management-oriented or mandatory to fulfill a state funding requirement. For instance, when schools receive grants, often times there are stipulations and required trainings.

New Jersey schools who are recipients of Race to the Top (USDOE, 2010) funding are designated as School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools. One of the many requirements are trainings and professional development. So while it is comprehensible why federal mandates have been developed, the teachers and administrators that are being trained may view it as a punishment, instead of positive consequence. While the Journey Township PPLC participated in this on-going, reflective learning, participation was voluntary and self-motivating. The composition of the group addresses isolation and provides opportunities for collaboration and consistency. The PLC built its relational capacity within a particular sphere of influence (Kanold, 2011). Principals met monthly, had an opportunity to dialogue about managerial concerns, expanded their instructional capacity, and had the freedom to initiate building level change at their own pace. Realizing the context, these findings may or may not have a similar impact in other districts. Viewing principals as a consistent variable in schools, these same factors have the potential to benefit other principals who are interested in monitoring and improving their instructional leadership. Less often do principals voluntarily come together to learn content and leadership pedagogical practices. Districts use issues with building coverage as a limitation and the expectation that principals have the knowledge to successfully complete all of the job requirements. Principals need safe structures to advance their knowledge. Homogeneous PLCs are one strategy that have the potential to make an impact as long as there are other PLCs sharing the same district vision, functioning on an on-going basis, and cross-checking actions incrementally.

If I Had to Do It Again

In Journey Township, the philosophy of Understanding by Design had been a proclaimed, espoused belief for at least three years. Professional development is offered in cycles with the intended goal of having all staff trained by the 2012-2013 school year. Additionally, adoption of the Journey Township Mathematics curriculum in September 2011 paralleled the Wiggins and McTighe (2005), Understanding by Design template and subsequent curricula revisions are expected to follow this same format. These actions notwithstanding, the administration had not determined if, when, or how UbD would be fully mandated and expected as a consistent teaching and learning practice throughout the district. To that end, the purpose of this study was to examine how knowledgeable elementary principals in Journey Township are in the concepts and philosophies of UbD, with the expectation that principals would incorporate leadership strategies to advance their staff toward practices consistent with UbD.

Decision-making and accountability are connected. New Jersey, like many states, is increasing accountability through revisions to the professional evaluation system. Teachers and eventually principals' evaluations are going to be connected to student growth. Accountability is embedded in every aspect of education. As related to PLCs, there must be teacher and administrator accountability to ensure that everyone has the necessary support to improve student achievement. One tangible method of accountability can be tied to staff evaluations. New adoptions and frameworks for the teacher evaluation system began as a requirement for failing schools that receive Schools in Need of Improvement Grant (SIG) funds and as a pilot for 10 other districts throughout New Jersey during the 2011-2012 school year. The evaluation system for principals is

subject to change as well. A strategic examination of the administrator's evaluation tool, as it relates to principals' learning, is one of my recommendations for school districts and school leaders. Beyond student growth scores, principals should be evaluated on how they support teacher practices.

One of the chief motives for this project was to help principals become more entrenched in the curriculum. Due to the breadth of UbD, we made the decision to study it in the broadest terms. We learned the vocabulary, observed teachers in action, and reflected within our PPLC. With our global role, we did not drill down to one particular subject or one particular strategy. This flexibility may have left us disjointed. For future groups, I would recommend that time is dedicated to the specific and the generalities of the curriculum. Teachers will be held to specifics and as evaluators we must be able to offer specifics towards commendations and/or recommended areas of improvement. While it is unrealistic to think that a principal will be an expert in all areas, it is becoming increasingly important to be able to analyze a lesson and offer useful feedback. I would recommend that PLCs keep a tight grade span, such as we did, Kindergarten – Grade 5. This allows for a span of knowledge but maintains the practical nature of the principal's role. During planned intervals, there should be articulation with the middle and high school administrative staff, but for regular meetings the greatest advantage is for principals in similar configurations to meet.

Being Open to Possibilities

One unexpected change was the decision to advance our leadership through coaching. Coaching as a leadership tool is a technique that I would recommend to principals and supervisors who have the responsibility to evaluate teachers. However,

coaching requires training on both sides. Coaching is considered to be a very different technique than evaluating. Supervisors must learn how to prepare for the conference, the types of questions to answer, and how to lead teachers to a level of self-actualization.

Recommendations are for continued learning in Journey Township as well as for others who are interested in creating a PPLC. I think the unique role of the principal warrants an exclusive learning community. Principals are placed in the position of being generalists. Principals are expected to live in the world of leadership and management. While principals have roots in the classroom, their experiences and expertise are varied. It can be difficult to stretch outside of their comfort zone.

Future Research Opportunities

Recommendations to the field include a review of the coursework of principal preparation programs for instructional leadership coursework. A study at the university level designed to examine how closely the course descriptions match the ISLCC standards would be beneficial to higher learning and to those seeking degrees. Within the graduate studies, there should be a connection to how each course will prepare students for instructional leadership. Utilizing the philosophies of UbD, courses should be designed using a backwards framework, *“If instructional leadership is our goal, then in this course we must...”* A curriculum tool could even be designed to help professors cross check their syllabi and assignments for these learning objectives. Once principals are working in the field, a program audit should be conducted to determine whether principals feel prepared in the areas of instructional content, instructional pedagogy, leadership content, and leadership pedagogy. Often surveys are completed at the end of a course or at the time of graduation. However, students at that time are not equipped to

evaluate a program. You must be working in the field, in order to know what you know and to realize gaps and needs. Embedded during the courses, a culture needs to exist where students are indoctrinated with the understanding that they are responsible at a later date to help build the program. Universities and/or researchers could then go back and compare surveys to the course descriptions and analyze the findings.

Current principals could support this overall goal by completing surveys that determine their leadership role on a regular basis. Information from their involvement in active learning such as PLCs, to information about their daily responsibilities should be included. Since it is difficult to get people to complete surveys, universities and professional organizations, such as New Jersey Principal and Supervisor Association (NJPSA) need to have partnerships with local school districts to accomplish this task. This would increase the odds of data collection. Since many aspiring principals are trained in universities usually close to their homes or in a neighboring state that is within commuting distance (unlike undergraduate programs), and principals pay for their own learning (unlike undergraduate students), that is another incentive for universities to be more comprehensive and publicized in a positive light. Effective programs would receive good publicity.

Another study could be conducted to examine the effectiveness of on-line leadership programs for principals versus traditional principal preparation programs. Some of a principal's job is specific to her district and/or state. When learning occurs through an on-line community, it would be interesting to see if those principals feel more or less prepared once they are working as principals. Since the ISLLC standards are utilized in many states, it is worth a study to determine if the job of a principal is so tied

to local context that local learning is deemed to better prepare principals according to their own perceptions.

Within the field of education, there must be a willingness for universities to change to meet the demands and needs of principals. Universities espouse theories of research, but is it a theory in use? This is a study within itself. Do universities change to meet the needs of their clients? How are universities preparing principals to meet 21st century leadership needs?

As a result of my study, ultimately I would recommend that districts recognize that the responsibility of the principal is increasing and the need to support her must be a focus of the district. Although legislation does not yet exist to connect principals' evaluations to student test scores, depending upon the political climate, that is likely to change in the near future. This will raise the stress of principals to even higher levels. Principals will need to be capable of instructional leadership and will need peer support to combat feelings of helplessness. Once again the responsibility of the principal is multiplied. Teachers will be held accountable for the growth of their students. Principals may be held accountable for the work of all teachers and its transfer to the growth of all students. This has the potential to worry even the most prepared leaders.

Conclusion: A Check for Understanding – Post-Game Coverage

The purpose of my dissertation was to document how principals' involvement in a Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC) changes instructional leadership choices. I wanted to specifically observe how a PPLC in Journey Township (a pseudonym) could advance the district's initiative for teachers to utilize instructional techniques consistent with the philosophies of Understanding by Design (Wiggins &

McTighe, 2005). This project first required that I consider the structure, culture, and politics of the district. Early in my formal learning process we learned about examining an organization through multiple lenses. While structure and symbols are embedded in my mind from the work of Bolman and Deal (2003), I have also learned from Heifetz and Linsky (2002), and Friedman, Lipshitz, and Overmeer (2001), how important it is to realize multiple points of view. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) assert that, “People push back when you disturb the personal and institutional equilibrium they know” (p. 2). Friedman et al. (2001) state, “We define organizational learning as a process of inquiry through which members of an organization develop shared values and knowledge based on past experiences of themselves and of others” (p. 757). The Principal Professional Learning Community allowed me to learn more about my colleagues, the system, and how they work together in context and impact choices and change.

The PPLC was launched from my perceived need to challenge the status quo. While administrators have become increasingly comfortable with holding teachers accountable, in most instances the challenge has not elevated to administrator accountability. The PPLC was an opportunity to structure conditions for organizational learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Friedman et al., 2001; Senge, 2006). Though teachers would not be a part of the PPLC, the principals’ participation indicates a form of shared responsibility and egalitarianism (Friedman et al., 2001). A PPLC with an instructional focus on UbD admits that there is reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2006) and a need for organizational learning (Friedman et al., 2001). Fortunately, the principals in Journey Township were willing to put their “Leadership on the Line” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) and show their vulnerability.

When I introduced the idea of the Principal PLC, I took a risk to examine the existing habits of Journey Township and many PLCs. In my experience, most PLCs advance the role of the principal as a supporter to the staff and advocate for distributed leadership, but do not challenge the principals as new learners themselves. However, the premise of my dissertation and the PPLC was built upon challenging the principals' competence (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). I wanted to examine whether principals felt confident with the philosophies of UbD and wanted to see how expectations were communicated to their staff. This made the PPLC both a technical and an adaptive challenge (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

In Journey Township, we espouse to the principles of UbD, yet we have not held teachers accountable. This begs the question of whether the principals have internalized some of the problems with teachers' instruction and possess the knowledge to recognize areas of needed improvement. As the PPLC went through the cycles of action research and making a connection to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), it has become clear to me that the PPLC is more of an adaptive challenge. The technical challenge of the PPLC could be easily accomplished through a series of trainings from a knowledgeable professional and organizational structure. However, the adaptive challenge, which would require uncovering why the problem exists, requires ownership and increased accountability. This is much more difficult and the true challenge of this PPLC.

My role in the PPLC could not be easily defined. Although I was a full participant, I was also a fairly new principal who needed a supportive group to help me complete a project that I was using as my dissertation. Fortunately, within the district there is a staff developer. Not wanting my dissertation and leadership style to be the

focus, I decided to let the staff developer lead the project. I did not want to become the issue (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). I was aware that my actions could be viewed as accusatory to the existing culture and the entire culture was open for examination.

As a participant observer and researcher, there were times that I needed a “balcony view” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). This was very difficult and navigating the two perspectives required a constant attentiveness to my actions and the task. I think working with a group of principals only, presented unique challenges. Every member was both a peer and a leader at all times. As the project evolved, it was critical to “listen to the song beneath the words” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 55). The underlying melody is that principals want to do a good job, but the responsibilities and the demands do not allow for mastery. Professional learning is urgent as we must find more efficient methods to impact teachers and thereby learners.

The unique context of Journey Township requires the work of the PPLC to be transformational. The emphasis on the principals, with their full participation is an act of transformation (Burns, 2003). The superintendent and assistant superintendent, while advocates for UbD, believe that professionals must come to their own conclusions to foster change. In order to build commitment and buy-in, upper administration believes in loose-tight leadership practices.

The type of leadership that is required to sustain a Principal Professional Learning Community beyond an action research project and to truly advance Journey Township from good to great (Collins, 2001) requires both single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974). An analysis of behavioral strategies (single-loop learning) and their underlying values, objectives, and standards for performance (double-loop learning)

must occur. Organizational learning mechanisms should be in place to systematically collect, analyze, store, disseminate, and use information that is relevant to the performance of the organization and its members (Friedman et al., 2001).

The increased accountability of the principal is on the rise at state and national levels. In addition to students and teachers being held accountable for student achievement, decisions of how principals will be held accountable are also transpiring. While teacher effectiveness is most closely tied to student achievement, principal effectiveness has also been realized as being essential to the success of our schools. Opportunities for principals to be trained in order to increase their instructional aptitude and leadership competence must become a focus of the principal. A focused community, such as the Principal Professional Learning Community in this dissertation, can become a more widely used vehicle for the continual education of principals.

In the United States and in New Jersey, we are at a highly political and controversial point in education. No Child Left Behind, now A Blueprint for Reform, calls for qualified teachers in every classroom and qualified administrators in every building. The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards have been revised and the Common Core Standards have been adopted. Of equal importance, the ISLLC standards have been revised and adopted as New Jersey's Professional Standards. The content of teaching has shifted and in many cases the pedagogy of how to best ensure results is also shifting. Twenty-first century learning can be rhetoric or action. If principals are going to hold teachers to a higher standard, they must know what to expect.

Final Thoughts

The urgency that I feel (Kotter, 1996) exists because I believe that education is the great equalizer. Having accepted a job in education, I believe that it is my moral obligation to support the learning of all children. I have always respected that every year of a person's life is only given to them once. If I made the choice to be an educator, then I made the choice to change another person's life trajectory. Early in my career, I did not think that I would be interested in being a principal. I loved being in the classroom and having "Ah-ha" and "So you can read!" moments. I did not think that principals were able to reach out and directly impact students. Yet, the very first principal that I worked for encouraged me to go back to school and get a degree in administration, "You already know you can teach," he used to say to me. I now believe that what he was not saying was, "Can you lead?" So, through the years I am learning to combine the two and understand that they are not mutually exclusive. Teaching and leading may look very different at times, but often there are instances when you cannot define one without the other. I know this to be true because if I was to define myself, I could not choose one "verb" over the other. Both teaching and leading are action words; and to include adverb, I am still having "Ah-ha" moments!

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Appendix A

Superintendent Consent Form

Office of the Superintendent
JOURNEY TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS
xxxx Avenue
Journey Township, New Jersey xxxx
Telephone xxx xxx-xxxx Fax xxx-xxx-xxxx

April 28, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

I acknowledge and approve the educational research being conducted by Mrs. Dana E. Walker, Principal in *Journey Township* Public Schools in *Journey*, New Jersey as part of her requirements to complete her doctoral program at Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to create a Principal Professional Learning Community to support the district's expectations to improve instructional leadership and more specific to this study -leadership guidance consistent with the philosophies advanced by constructs such as Understanding by Design. It is my expectation that this collaboration will reduce professional isolation and serve as a model to other professional learning communities within our district. I understand at some point in this study teachers may be interviewed and/or observed as principals attempt to gauge their own instructional growth. The goal is to increase student learning by improving instructional practices.

Data collected in this qualitative study will be collected from principals, teachers, and other members of the administrative team via interviews, focus group meetings, observations, and journal entries. All work will be coded to ensure confidentiality. The length of the study is expected to last from the Spring of 2011 through the Spring of 2012.

I understand that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that the participants are in no way identified and names are not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study and that the principals, teachers, and other administrators participating in the study are free to withdraw their participation at any time without penalty.

If I have any questions or problems concerning this study, I may contact Mrs. Dana Walker at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Additionally, her faculty advisor's contact information is listed below:

Faculty advisor Dr. Gini Doolittle
Department: Educational Leadership Location: Education Hall
E-Mail: doolittle@rowan.edu; Telephone: (856) 256-4500 x 3637

Superintendent of Schools

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

I agree to participate in the study entitled “The Culture of Instructional Leadership Amongst Principals: A Principal Professional Learning Community’s Exploration of Understanding by Design” which is being conducted by Mrs. Dana E. Walker, Rowan University Doctoral Candidate.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of a Principal Professional Learning Community that is focused on the reflective process of change through the reduction of professional isolation and the focus on instructional practices such as the philosophies of Understanding by Design. The data collected in this study will be used for the purpose of dissertation publication at Rowan University.

I understand that participation in this study is for a 10 month period. I understand that observations will occur during Professional Learning Community meetings and/or in the natural work setting. I understand I will also be interviewed individually or as part of a group. I will share my Professional Learning Community reflective journal with the researcher. I understand that I will have the opportunity to clarify findings and/or change reported findings to more appropriately match my intent.

I understand that the observations and interviews will be audio taped and videotaped.

_____ (Participant signature and date)

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all data gathered will be confidential. My data will be assigned a code, and the code list will be maintained in a secure location. 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.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I will not receive any form of compensation.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact *Mrs. Dana Walker* at xxx xxx-xxxx.

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Associate Provost for Research at:

Rowan University Institutional Review Board
for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701
Tel: 856-256-5150

Or the Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair for this research:

Dr. Gini Doolittle
Rowan University, Education Hall
E-Mail: Doolittle@rowan.edu
Telephone: 856 256-4500 x 3637

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Journey Township, Principal Professional Learning Community

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Personal-like, (yet professionally relevant)

How long have you been a principal?

How long have you worked in Journey Township?

Do you belong to any professional groups that you meet with regularly?

Prior to this idea, had you thought of a Principal only learning group?

Why did you agree to participate in the PPLC?

Why did you agree on the “principal only” model?

Did you have any apprehensions about the creation of a Principal PLC?

What expectations did you have about the PPLC?

Have your expectations been met?

What do you want to accomplish through your involvement in this PLC?

What have you learned during this PLC?

What do you wish you had done differently in the past as a leader?

What are you learning during this process?

Has your personal vision changed for yourself as a leader?

What do you believe about how best to develop adults’ knowledge capacity and relational capacity?

Do you feel isolated in the principalship?

Has your relationship with the principals changed? If yes, how?

What have you learned about yourself?

Professional

What do you believe to be the biggest challenges you face as a principal?

What do you want to do better/differently regarding how you lead your school?

How are you transferring knowledge to your practices?

Have you ever been a member of a PLC?

What professional development have you had in the past year?

Did you change any practices based on anything discussed or learned in the PPLC?

Do you feel that you are making progress as an instructional leader? Do you have any evidence?

What “era” needs to be over for your leadership?

What questions do you still have regarding – PLCs, UbD, district goals?

Instructional Leadership

Talk about some choices that you have made this year –specifically as an instructional leader? Are they related to the PPLC?

How do you think you will be able to connect the work of our PLC to changes in teacher’s instruction?

Do you think you will be able to connect the work of our PLC to changes in student achievement?

Has your leadership changed?

What support do you need to be successful as an instructional principal?

What is your main instructional focus?

Building specific

What interactions have you specifically had with the teacher(s) in your building that is a part of the “District Teacher UbD/DI PLC as it relates to implementing UbD philosophies in the district?

What important choices have you made as a manager?

How many of your staff have been UbD trained?

What discussions have you had with your staff about UbD?

Are your teachers aware of your participation in the PPLC?

Have you taken any intentional actions to move/advance your staff toward UbD practices?

Are there any PLCs in your school?

District-type questions

What experiences have you had with the district staff developer beyond our PPLC?

What plans do you have to support the district initiative to move towards UbD?

In what collaborative practices have you engaged with other principals?

How much do you know about the leadership styles of the other elementary principals?

What is the district's expectation of UbD implementation?

Professional Learning Community

Do you think there is anything that we could do to improve our PPLC?

What do you think should be our next steps as a PLC?

Did your view of a principal's role in PLCs change since the implementation of the PPLC? If yes, how?

What are your thoughts on the PLC being comprised of principals only?

What do you believe is missing from our PLC?

How will we measure our individual & collective results from this PLC commitment?

Understanding by Design

What training/experiences have you had with UbD?

What is your belief about UbD?

Have you read any of the Wiggins and McTighe texts?

Why did you agree on the single focus of UbD for this PPLC?

Appendix D

Pre & Post Assessment Survey

As we begin our Principal PLC with a focus on UbD, we are looking for some information on your comfort level with the basic foundations of UbD. Ask yourselves, “Would I be able to help a teacher with this particular idea or part of UbD?” During the PLC there will be opportunities to have formal training and/or informal training on UbD. Please indicate your needs (F, I, N) next to each term:

F = Formal training and practice needed

I= Informal training needed (group discussion, one-one one with Stacy, etc)

N = No training needed; completely comfortable with term and can help a teacher with this

Stage 1 UbD: Identifying Desired Results

___ Big Idea

___ Essential Questions

___ KUDs

___ Enduring Understandings

Stage 2 UbD: Assessment Evidence

___ Pre-assessments

___ Formative Assessments (Assessments for Learning)

___ Summative Assessments

___ Authentic Assessments v. Traditional Assessments v. Performance Assessments (GRASP)

___ 6 Facets of Understanding

Stage 3 UbD: Learning Plan

___ Differentiated Instruction (Low and High Prep Strategies)

___ Data analysis – using assessments to monitor and adjust

___ 6 Facets of Understanding

Appendix E

Coaching Questions

COACHING QUESTIONS

Are Your Questions POWERFUL?

Criteria of Powerful Coaching Question	1	2	3
Question assumes positive intent and focuses on positive connections			
Question is open-ended and invites multiple answers			
Question acts as thought starters to energize the mind and consider new perspectives			
Question focuses on solutions, not problems			
Question empowers coachee to go to a deeper level and uncover patterns of thinking			
Question creates greater clarity, possibility, or new learning			
Question evokes discovery, insight, commitment, or action on behalf of the teacher			
Question can reveal and reflect understanding of teacher's perspective			

1 = does not meet criteria

2= somewhat meets criteria

3= meets and exceed criteria

(Adapted from Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010)

Appendix F

Reflection

Follow-up, reflective, “journal-like” questions to the development of coaching questions:

Principal's Name:

Date:

When did you develop your coaching questions, during the observation or sometime later?

How was the experience of developing the questions (easier than you thought, more difficult than you thought, etc.)?

How did you develop the questions (from memory, using your notes, using a set of guiding questions, being reflective of our past PPLC meeting)?

What style of note taking did you employ?

Did you enter this lesson in a different mindset than you usually do during an observation? Explain.

Was this observation announced? Are your observations usually announced?

How was the experience of developing the questions (easier than you thought, more difficult than you thought, etc.)

Did you enter this lesson in a different mindset than you usually do during an observation?

Was this observation announced? Are your observations usually announced?

Did you do anything to prepare in advance for this observation? Do you normally “prepare” in advance for observations?

Was it easier to observe as a coach in a non-evaluative capacity or is it easier for you in your normal principal/evaluator mode?

How was the teacher's tenor towards you - typical of your relationship with that person or different?

Did you find it difficult to fit this observation into your schedule?

Are you confident with the quality of your "coaching" questions?

Are you glad that we agreed on this action step?

Though specifically not requested, did you debrief with this teacher at all? If yes, explain.

Please provide any additional information about this experience that you think might be helpful for my Action Research or as a reflective practice for yourself.

Appendix G
UbD Lookfors

The Unit and Course Design	Looks Like	Sounds Like
The Teacher	Looks Like	Sounds Like
The Student	Looks Like	Sounds Like

Appendix H

Leadership Coaching UbD Notes

As you observe the coaching session, pay particular to the following points. Take notes as you watch:

	Interesting Points	How this Affects Teacher
Mindset/Attitude Toward Teacher		
Body Language		
Types of Questions		
Types of Statement/Responses		

Appendix I

UbD/DI Model Lesson Visitation Reflection

Host Teacher:

Lesson:

Date:

Visiting Teacher:

As you visit this classroom, please keep in mind that you are not evaluating the teacher. You're looking to develop a better understanding of how students learn using Udd/DI strategies. Read the questions below before you observe. You'll have a better idea of what to look for in the lesson. Respond to the questions (You may respond to the questions during the lesson or after the lesson if that is more convenient for you).

Our school goal and focus for this project is to develop a collegial atmosphere here at our school, whereby teachers can freely share effective teaching practices with each other, visit one another's classroom, receive feedback, and have deeper discussions about UbD/DI practices. I look forward to your input and getting your feedback with regard to our school goal.

Thanks.....*Mr. Edward*

1) How were the students actively engaged in the lesson? Cite examples/evidence.

2) As a representation of the Unit's KUD (Know, Understand, Do):

A. What was the learning goal of today's lesson? Did the teacher make reference to the learning goal during the lesson?

B. Do the students know why they were learning this information and how they will use it in their own lives (transfer)?

B. How was the lesson “Differentiated” to meet students’ needs? e.g. by interests, learning styles or readiness? Also for example: tied graphic organizers, learning centers, students making choices, drawing, singing, group work, teams, using visuals, etc.

C. What physical evidence of UbD strategies did you notice in the classroom? e.g., essential questions posted? Big Idea posted? Lesson Goal posted? Cite evidence.

D. What assessment/s was/were used? Cite examples. e.g., rubric, checklist, exit pass, project, writing sample, journal entry, presentation, etc.

E. Using this observation as a point of reflection, what UbD/DI strategies will you/do you use in your own classroom?

Appendix J

Schooling by Design: Mission, Action, and Achievement

Figure 10.3

Continuum of Observable Indicators

Understanding by Design Elements: Assessing Your School		
<i>Use the continuum to analyze the classroom practices in your school according to the following UbD reform elements.</i>		
1. Learning activities clearly address established content standards.	----- ----	1. Learning activities do not typically address established content standards.
2. The textbook is one resource among many used in teaching the standards.	----- ----	2. Textbooks serve as the primary teaching resource. (The textbook functions as the syllabus.)
3. Instruction and assessment are focused on exploring big ideas and essential questions.	----- ----	3. Instruction consists primarily of content coverage, doing activities, and/or preparation for high-stakes standardized tests.
4. Student understanding of the big ideas in content standards is assessed through complex performance tasks using the six facets.	----- ----	4. Assessment consists primarily of quizzes and tests of factual knowledge and discrete skills.
5. Teacher evaluation of student products/performances are based upon known criteria, performance standards, and models.	----- ----	5. The students do not know (cannot explain) how their work will be evaluated. They are typically not shown models of exemplary work.
6. The students regularly self-assess their work based on the established criteria.	----- ----	6. Students do not regularly self-assess their work according to established criteria.
7. Teachers regularly pose open-ended questions with no obvious right answer. The questions are designed to direct and deepen inquiry and understanding.	----- ----	7. Most teacher questions are convergent, leading questions, pointing toward the knowledge students are expected to learn.

<p>8. Students are given regular opportunities to rethink and revise their work based on feedback from ongoing (formative) assessments.</p>	<p>----- ----</p>	<p>8. Formative assessments are not routinely used. Students are rarely given opportunities to rethink and revise their work based on specific feedback.</p>
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(Copied from Schooling by Design, Wiggins and McTighe, 2007, P. 236)

Appendix K

Levels of Use of UbD: Typical Behaviors

<i>Levels of Use</i>	<i>Behavioral Indicators of Level</i>
7. Renewal	The experienced UbD user is inventing and/or seeking more effective ways to use and modify UbD and their design work to improve local curriculum writing.
6. Integration	The UbD user is making deliberate efforts to coordinate with others in using the approach to increase design skill and instructional impact.
5. Refinement	The UbD user has not only used the Template but has internalized the ideas behind it, and is now refining their designs to enhance learning for understanding. The user revises and adapts both process and products, no longer treating the approach as a rigid recipe, but as a way of thinking.
4. Routine	The use of UbD is stabilized; user has an established and comfortable pattern of use. The UbD approach is affecting their other design work and their thinking about how to accomplish better learning. Use of the Template and other people's units is more flexible and familiar, but they still may talk and act as if the Template is a rigid set of rules.
3. Mechanical	The user is at the start of using UbD on their own, beyond the workshop(s); actions are brief, piecemeal and short-term; the approach is mechanical. The user treats the Template and approach as requiring a step-by-step set of rules instead of as tools for improving all planning and teaching. The user may be using UbD and/or others' units either because it is required or because they feel an obligation to do so; they do not yet talk or act as if they have personally seen the power of the approach.
2. Preparation	The user has plans to begin using the UbD template and tools. They have read the handouts, they willingly listen to discussion about use, and/or they dabble in creating their own unit elements, e.g. Essential Questions, performance tasks, or rubrics.
1. Orientation	The user is becoming informed, and is exploring the value of UbD. They look over UbD materials and engage in training with polite attention.
0. Non-Use	The user is taking no action to investigate UbD. They show no apparent interest in UbD or in learning more about it.

Adapted for UbD from *Taking Charge of Change* by Shirley M. Hord, William L. Rutherford, Leslie Huling-Austin, and Gene E. Hall, 1987.