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Exploring Ways to Support Teachers' Use of Instructional Practices: A Principal's Action Research Investigation

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by

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Dr. Graham Weir, Dissertation Chair	4/8/16 Date
Dr. Yvonne Gibbs, Committee Member	April 8, 2016 Date
Dr. John Long, Committee Member	4.8.16 Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of the school administrator in helping teachers to use instructional practices that led to improved student learning outcomes. The data indicated that teachers were comfortable learning from other teacher-leaders in the school. Teachers responded favorably to opportunities to participate in collegial observation and being provided specific feedback to stimulate growth. The study also confirmed that teachers looked to the school administrator to provide necessary resources and funding for professional development opportunities. Teachers need to be provided ongoing opportunities to learn and grow together through meaningful grade-level team meeting.

This study took place during the 2010- 2011 school year, and investigated individually and collectively four initiatives: reorganizing grade-level team meetings to facilitate better coordination, collaboration, and peer consultation; gearing professional development opportunities toward proven learning strategies; engaging the teachers in reflective practices for self-improvement; and engaging the teachers in keeping professional growth logs. Teachers were asked to respond to a questionnaire created by the principal, to complete feedback forms as a follow up to each professional development workshop, and to evaluate the effectiveness of grade-level teams using a scoring guide. An analysis of MAP and Tungsten data, teacher created goals/outcomes, and walk-through data was used to evaluate student growth, as well.

A narrow focus on analyzing and using data to make instructional decisions had an impact on standardized test result. The instructional leaders were responsible for

helping staff to understand and interpret data, create short- term and long-term goals, monitor the progress and celebrate success.

An underlying theme evolved during the study, encompassing the importance of the school leader to build positive relationships and lines of communication with the staff to guide them toward the improvement of instructional practices.

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Chapter One: The Journey

Background of the Study

Poor student achievement was a result of the beliefs, norms, attitudes, and behaviors of people within the organization as well as policies, practices, and procedures within the educational organization (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). Since the induction of consequences created by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, most state level Boards of Education developed standardized testing to assess student achievement (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2004). Schools across the nation were expected to meet specified progress or be held accountable, in some cases through a reward or punishment program. Schools receiving Title I funding faced several issues when Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was not made. These included options such that families could select a different school, the school could be subject to staff replacement, or the school could be restricted. Many schools were faced with the reality that all students in all subgroups were not making AYP. Because of this, in some cases programs were implemented without adequate time to measure the effectiveness and school staff felt the pressure that compromised positive relationships among colleagues and with the school administrators as a result of the perceived punitive nature of NCLB. School districts sought to find appropriate resources and tools that teachers could use to help assess students, as well as to assist with construction and implementation of effective teaching strategies to meet students' needs. This qualitative research study was designed to look at a novice principal working through the first and second year of her career. Areas of research included the following actions:

1. Identified ways the researcher could support staff in developing as learning experts.
2. Examined the impact and challenges associated with team meetings, and professional development.
3. Explored reflective practices.
4. Studied the response of teachers to support opportunities presented by the researcher.
5. Studied the ability of teachers to transfer learning strategies acquired when teaching students.

Background of the Researcher

Everyone has a calling in life, and that of the researcher was to work in the field of education. This action research examined the actions of the researcher as an instructional leader to help teachers improve the use of instructional practices to enhance student learning and achievement. The findings of the research may serve as a handbook for new principals, to help them avoid some of the pitfalls experienced by the researcher during the first two years as a school principal. Spirituality governs the researcher's belief that some things in life are destined to happen regardless of one's actions supporting the researcher's belief that education was her ministry.

Playing school with neighborhood children after school and on weekends was a favorite past time of the researcher; however, the matriculation through middle and high school dampened the once natural zest for learning. The disconnectedness toward learning was based on the paradigm shift from teachers teaching children to teachers focused on presenting content.

Elementary school provided the most pleasurable and meaningful educational experience for the researcher. There, phenomenal teachers provided guidance and learning experiences that met students where they were and helped each develop his or her skills. It was there, students were told and led to believe any goal could be achieved with diligence and hard work. Pearson, a child-centered teacher, believed and displayed whole-heartedly that education must come alive for children if they were to retain the important information. Small group reading sessions with Pearson would incorporated tactile and kinesthetic learning opportunities. During a lesson on letter sounds, she dabbed a cotton ball with peppermint oil and had the students gather around the table to take a whiff; then repeat the 'P' sound, 'pah,' 'pah,' P. When students did not put enough emphasis on the beginning P sound, she then placed a feather in their hand and again make the P sound. Success was evident if the feather fluttered away.

Another teacher who left a lasting impression was Crowder. She was a petite little lady who meant business. Again, she made learning come alive. When studying the pilgrims and Native Americans, students conducted research on each group and then recreated the first Thanksgiving feast, eating many of the traditional foods, including venison. Another educational pioneer was Cook, a fourth and fifth grade teacher. She was a strict disciplinarian who made learning come alive as well. When learning math facts, it was not uncommon for Cook to send five-to-six students to the board simultaneously to complete various problems; thereby assessing the students' understanding using what was referred to as a formative assessment. Back then it was just teaching. When Cook wanted to become engaged in writing, not only did she read great books to the class on a regular

basis, but she also created an opportunity for each student to write, bind, and publish a book.

The women described were all natural teachers with a special gift. Each were 'called' to the teaching profession and made lasting heart prints on the students they encountered. These remarkable ladies were instrumental in laying a solid educational foundation that supported the researcher while she traveled through the middle and high school years. Long before terms, such as disaggregating data, formative assessment, differentiated instruction, developing a learning culture, fostering relationships with students, and actively engaged, were commonly used in the educational community, Pearson, Crowder, and Cook innately carried out each process. These teachers kept track of the progress of their students without any mandate.

The researcher's mother, Mrs. Emma Jean Fitzgerald, made it very clear that getting a great education was never up for negotiation. She meticulously selected every teacher of the researcher from preschool through elementary school. During middle and high school, she met with the counselors annually to map out course selections, ensuring the proper balance of elective and rigorous courses. Fitzgerald set clear expectations regarding post high school options: attend a four year college, acquire a full-time job within three months of graduating, or join the military. Though these were the options that she communicated, ultimately college was her preference. This was evident based on the prescribed course work while attending high school, along with the fact that she enrolled the researcher in the Upward Bound College Preparatory program at Saint Louis University (SLU) in St. Louis, Missouri. Fitzgerald made sure the researcher was

constantly bombarded with role models and peers who were college-bound, confident that the researcher would become a college graduate.

College was another enlightening time. The researcher entered SLU as a business major, yet later changed to social work, and finally education. While the researcher and her family were spending thousands of dollars annually to figure out a career path, others already saw the destiny of the researcher. Summers were spent as a camp counselor, and every semester in college involved volunteering to tutor underprivileged children in local housing projects in the inner city. The time spent working with children provided the greatest reward. Pressure from increasing student-loan debt and from Fitzgerald, led the researcher to declare education as a major during the junior year of college. All along, mother contended the researcher would be a great teacher, and as many children think, the researcher felt her mother was biased and being pushy. After consulting an academic counselor, a plan was implemented to begin taking education classes. The first class was a practicum class designed to gain field experience. The first class solidified that working with students provided the greatest happiness. The researcher saw that opportunities existed to make the most difference in the lives of children and allow children to learn in meaningful ways to support achievement in the same manner provided by Pearson, Crowder, and Cook.

The impact of wonderful teachers on the formative educational years of the researcher helped to mold and develop an appreciation for the art of teaching, as well as value the responsibility associated with the job. The seeds planted by elementary teachers fostered the belief of the researcher, current at the time of this writing, that every student in public school was entitled to and deserved rigorous education peppered with

high expectations, when compared to the best private schools. Continued education provided the researcher an opportunity to obtain the role of school administrator and use the platform to revitalize education while adhering to local, state, and federal mandates. The charge of the researcher was to work with teachers to become comfortable using data, which led to changing instructional practices, and understand the validity of various data points to set goals and help students improve academically.

Statement of Problem

The pseudonyms Star Elementary and Mayberry School District are used when referring to the school and school district mentioned in this study. Star Elementary School made AYP in both reading and math in 2007. The researcher observed an inconsistent trend in student performance, beginning with the 2008 school year. The school had not successfully made AYP in reading and math since 2008, and scores were below the state average. It was evident that a consistent system for monitoring student data and achievement was not in place. The researcher determined the need to implement and utilize systems to monitor and support increased student achievement. As principal, the researcher attempted to increase her leadership skills regarding learning in the school, her awareness of self as a learning leader, and her effectiveness with teachers in regard to providing aide in consistently meeting AYP in both reading and math. Being the learning leader for a staff was only one of many roles of the principal. In addition to managing budget, maintaining discipline, conducting staff evaluations, attending administrative, parent, and committee meetings, and positively promoting the school, the researcher was expected to be knowledgeable about effective instruction and provide support for the

staff. The problem the school faced revolved on improving academic achievement in the areas of reading and math.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the researcher's role as principal, as the building learning leader. This endeavor to help teachers improve their learning-related practices was carried out in four initiatives during the 2010- 2011 school year, each investigated individually and collectively. These efforts included the following actions:

1. Reorganizing grade-level team meetings to facilitate better coordination, collaboration, and peer consultation.
2. Gearing professional development opportunities toward proven learning strategies.
3. Engaging the teachers in reflective practices for self-improvement.
4. Engaging the teachers in keeping professional growth logs.

Teachers completed a questionnaire created by the principal, completed feedback forms following each professional development workshop, and assessed their effectiveness and grade-level teams using a scoring guide. In addition, Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) data was used, along with Tungsten to access student growth.

Rationale

The goal for completing this study was to help teachers maximize student achievement and help the school receive higher performance marks in reading, math, and science, as measured by standardized testing. This undertaking required collaboration from the school administrator, teachers, students, and parents. Research indicated that

"School leadership and the way that individuals learn to lead are important for both school children and national governments as they try to engineer a step change in educational provisions" (Pegg, 2010, p. 4). Principals in high-performing schools were learning leaders who supported teachers in the improvement of their instructional strategies and practices, thereby leading to academic success for all students. DiMartino and Miles (2006) asserted, successful principals empowered their staff while focused on investigating and supporting new ideas to promote student learning. The combined efforts of teaches and school leaders can lead to sustained school improvement. Brown (2008) emphasized teachers and building leaders must think creatively and systemically. In addition, staff must be willing to remain student focused and implement solutions that address the outcomes of multiple data sources.

Research Questions

This research studied four key questions.

RQ 1: How can the primary investigator support her teaching staff in their own development as learning experts?

RQ2: What impact or challenges did each strategy offer?

a. Team meetings

b. Professional development

c. Reflective practices

RQ3: How did teachers respond to the support offered and the focus generated by the principal?

RQ4: Were teachers able to transfer the learning strategies that were the focus of the professional development to their teaching of students?

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this action research study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the building principal, as the building learning leader, to help teachers improve their learning-related practices. This study took place during the 2010- 2011 school year, and investigated individually and collectively four initiatives: reorganizing grade-level team meetings to facilitate better coordination, collaboration, and peer consultation; gearing professional development opportunities toward proven learning strategies; engaging the teachers in reflective practices for self-improvement; and engaging the teachers in keeping professional growth logs. Teachers were also asked to respond to a questionnaire created by the principal, to complete feedback forms as a follow up to each professional development workshop, and to evaluate the effectiveness of grade-level teams using a scoring guide. An analysis of MAP and Tungsten data, teacher created goals/outcomes, and walk-through data was used to evaluate student growth as well. The researcher reviewed school district demographic data to identify previous academic trends, regarding student achievement and learning. The study also included an examination of the history of the school district in which the researcher worked and described professional learning opportunities available to staff to support increased implementation of acquired pedagogical skills. The goal for completing this study was to help teachers maximize student learning and achievement, as evidenced by increased results on standardized achievement tests.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). According to the Missouri Department of Education (MODESE), the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) *Act* of 2001 mandated that all

school districts show how students were progressing toward making predetermined targets, by setting annual proficiency targets and monitoring attendance and participation rates (MODESE, 2011).

Collegial (Peer) Observations. The process of peer observation can be a useful way for new teachers to learn and practice essential teaching skills (Hansen, 2010, p. 54).

Daily Five. A management structure to engage students in reading and writing that was student-driven (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 12).

Data Teams were "designed for structured collaboration with a central learning goal." (McNulty & Besser, 2011, p. 3).

Depth of Knowledge (DOK) forms another important perspective of cognitive complexity and compelled states to rethink the meaning of test alignment to include both the content assessed in a test item and the depth to which we expect students to demonstrate understanding of that content (Hess, Jones, Carlock, & Walkup, 2009, p. 4).

Grade Level Assessment were augmented norm-referenced tests delivered annually each spring in communication arts and mathematics for grades three through eight, and science for grades five and eight (MODESE, 2013).

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). The MAP was originally designed as grade-span tests to measure Missouri's Show-Me Standards. These standards were adopted by the Missouri State Board of Education in 1996 (MODESE, 2009).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). With passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, Congress reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA). The principle federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. It was built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results, an emphasis on doing

what works based on scientific research, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility. (USDOE, 2004, p. 1).

Positive Behavior Intervention Support. Promote socially acceptable behavior by providing instruction and feedback for improving behaviors while reinforcing appropriate performance (Frazen & Kamps, 2008, p. 150).

SMART Goals. The acronym for SMART was represented by specific goals that were strategic, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time bound SMART (O'Neil, 2000, p. 46).

Special School District of St. Louis County. In December 1957, St. Louis County voters passed a referendum establishing a local public school district to support the educational needs of children with disabilities. The vote established Special School District of St. Louis County (SSD). SSD educated students with disabilities at sites throughout St. Louis County, including 265 public schools operated by the other 22 public school districts in St. Louis County. SSD also provided technical education to about 2,000 area high school students at the district's two technical high schools and at other satellite locations. (Special School District of St. Louis County [SSD], 2013)

Walk-through- Classroom walk-throughs emphasized the use of frequent, informal, short classroom visits by principals to look for specific aspects of good instruction, and they fostered a mentoring or coaching, rather than a superior-subordinate, relationship with teachers. Administrators also gathered ongoing school wide and district wide assessments of teaching, instead of isolated classroom examples (Dyrli, 2008, p. 66).

Limitations

There were several limitations that could have impacted the outcome of this action research study. The questionnaire was not proven to be statistically reliable. The response rate posed another limitation, due to 10 of 20 certified staff members giving consent responded to the questionnaire. Data gathering could be perceived as a limitation as well. Although, the questionnaire was completed anonymously and submitted to another party, staff may have had reservations about responding candidly about the performance of their evaluator. In addition, the response by staff members on the professional development surveys may have been higher, since the presenters were colleagues. A final limitation was the validity of the data, since the study was conducted during only one school year.

Conclusion

Chapter One presented an introduction to the study on a first and second year principal's efforts to improve academic achievement in an elementary setting. Research indicated that positive school reform lay in the hands of the school administrators and the decisions made to show the teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders that reform was a collaborative effort requiring on-going professional development. Leaders had to be abreast of ways to lead their staff towards a shared vision that revolved around improving instructional practices to meet the increasing demand of showing student growth and improvement by local, state, and federal authorities. Chapter Two continues with a review of related literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Principal's Leadership

Leaders who evoke change within their schools were proactive risk takers. They must assess the culture of the school in addition to the academic standings and must have high expectations of the staff, students, parents, and community. Their focus should be on instructional practices that yield positive student learning outcomes, using data to analyze the progress of all students, and on providing thought-provoking, relevant professional development to the staff (Mendez-Morse, n.d.).

> Effective principals are catalysts for change, protectors of the vision, and leaders of inquiry, engaging others in exploring questions versus telling everyone what to think. They are willing to let go of leadership functions associated with their roles and support shared leadership among all staff. (Kaser, Mundry, Stiles, & Loucks-Horsley, 2006, p. 3)

Principals had to be strategic leaders. Reeves (2009) described strategic leadership as "the simultaneous acts of executing, evaluating, and reformulating strategies, and focusing organizational energy and resources on the most effective strategies" (p. 103). Effective leaders willingly supported shared leadership among all staff to evoke positive change by releasing leadership functions associated with their roles (Kaser et al., 2006, p. 3).

According to Donaldson (2011), principals were the key to excellence in the school, since they were responsible for hiring, teacher assignment, and professional growth of the teaching staff. To this end, principals must be the most active in establishing the culture of the school by setting the tone for interpersonal relationships

amongst staff, students, and parents. The principal must take ownership of every obstacle or barrier that created a negative culture and continue to cultivate highly qualified staff within the organization, with focused conversation on instruction. Donaldson (2011) contended that districts and schools must focus on instruction and must be firm, open, and specific. There must be reciprocal accountability between the superintendent and principal, principal and teachers, teachers and students, and teachers and parents (p.32). Mitchell and Castel (2005) supported this conclusion by noting, "Instructional leadership regardless of where responsibility was located, thrived when the principal gave priority to teaching and learning" (p. 423).

Yavuz and Bas (2010) asserted:

> The instructional leader is the person who is involved constantly with teaching and learning. Furthermore, they are immersed in the teaching and learning processes and away thinking about how to design a better learning environment for students and how to organize the teaching process at school. Sisman (as cited by Yavuz & Bas) divides the role of an instructional leader into five parts; definer of the school mission, manager of curriculum and instruction, supervisor and evaluator of instruction and, monitor of student development and developer of the school climate. (p. 84)

Transparency and support of teachers was crucial in creating a healthy school climate built on trust. Tasdan and Yalcin (2010) concluded, "When teachers' perceived trust level increases teacher trust to school will also increase" (p. 88). Prager (1993) stated, "Faculty collegiality is hollow in a school unless connected to suitable curriculum goals

for students" (p. 1). How one leads a school and the degree to which the principal was willing to adjust his or her practices impacted the students, staff, and school district. School leaders must lead by example and cultivate relationships with staff, students, and parents in order to improve student learning and achievement. Transparency was critical to establishing trust that lent itself to staff being more willing to take a chance and follow the vision of the instructional leader, even if there was doubt about the effectiveness of the challenge in front of them. When teachers knew that the school leader was willing to support risk-taking without judgment, they were more likely to step outside of their comfort zone to try new strategies, or acquire new learning (Prager, 1993).

Seremet, Ward, Williamson, and Silkaly (2013) defined five areas critical for principals to lead a school. These included identifying school needs through data collection, using data for instructional changes, focusing on student achievement goals, promoting open communication and collaborating, and implementing the school improvement plan.

Collaborative problem solving and inquiry was essential to making substantive changes in the development of curriculum and delivery of instruction. Joyce (2004) stated that cadres of teachers and administrators should be formed to study together and to bring arrays of possibilities to share with their colleagues, thus shifting the providers of staff development from presenters to a collegial learning model promoting inquiring amongst teams.

In addition, Lieberman and Miller (2011) indicated, that teachers could learn from each other through learning communities created to maintain an environment that fostered collaboration, honest discussions, and a common commitment to the growth and

development of every team member, as well as the collective. Though educators customarily worked in silos, collaboration provided opportunities for teachers to share ideas and collectively embark on a journey of new learning. Lachat, Williams, and Smith (2006) indicated data teams allowed staff members to develop and model data anaylsis skills. Key functions of a data team included focusing essential questions, identifitying data to be dissagragated and intrepreted, setting improvement targets, providing staff with indiviual data, and responding to data request form staff members.

According to Lachat et al., (2006) data rich schools required staff members to become data literate. Therefore, teachers and instructional leaders should focus on "organizing data use around the most essential questions about student performance [as] an effective strategy for building staff members' ability to use data and maintaining a clear focus on student progress and program effectiveness" (Lachat et.al., 2006, p. 2). The key was to use the data to make adjustments to instructional practices. Jarrett was one of numerous principals who shared insight regarding data. She suggested the use of data was essential because "you find out exactly where students are, rather than making the assumption that if it's been taught, they know it" (Finkel, 2012, p. 52).

Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000) suggested that learning was complex in that it was deeply personal, yet inherently social. Furthermore it served as the connection to knowledge as an abstract and a connection to one another.

DiMartino and Miles (2006) made the implication that effective principals worked hard to empower their staff by finding ways to engage multiple parties in suggesting and supporting ideas. The leader of the school set the tone for success and the vision;

however, the entire staff must work collaboratively to bring both to fruition. Educating children must be personal, and analyzing data with the staff to identify strengths and areas of improvement helped to personalize teaching. According to DiMartino and Miles, "Empowering staff members first require understanding them" (p. 48). When staff organize data usage to address essential questions regarding student performance promotes the staff's ability to monitor student progress and effectively utilize programs that yield a positive and progressive outcome (Lachat et al., 2006). Promoting collaborative problem solving and open communication during individual and team meetings aided the principal "in pushing teachers to ask [questions] and in either providing answers or point them to colleagues who can help them" (Finkel, 2012, p. 54).

Trust was an essential part of data sharing and conversations. It was the responsibility of the principal to make sure that a safe zone existed when discussing data, to alleviate teachers becoming defensive or blaming the students for lack of performance. Finkel (2012) noted that prinicapls were requried to establish trust in order to present data without becoming defensive. Data should not be viewed as a means to penalize teachers for ineffective practices, instead it should be used to determine strengths and opportunities for growth. DuFour (2004) indicated that schools moving forward should engage all professional staff in the same critical questions, as mentioned by Finkel to help examine the impact of professional learning communities (DuFour). Teachers needed to understand they were not expected to solve the problem entirely on their own. Petrides (2006) concluded, "If teachers are not able to attach meaning to the data with analysis, they won't see the epiphany in their results" (p. 36). Teachers were comfortable with collecting data; the challenge came with using the data to impact instruction instead of

complaining with an expectation of collecting assessment data. Adminstrators must be cognizant of the fact that impactful school improvement included the entire school staff in the decision-making process. (Brown, 2008,). When a principal uncovered a great idea through reasearch, he or she needed to share the information with others on the staff to gauge the likelihood of the acceptability of implementation and potential pros and cons of the intiative prior to sharing with the entire staff. Soliciting feedback and reflecting on the opinions shared could be instrumental in determining to move forward with the rest of the staff, or to determine if additional research by a committee was needed. The use of systems thinking by administors and staff supported collaboration and creativity when addressing issues of teaching and learning (Brown, 2008, p. 5). Systems thinking required that one looked at the many parts that made up a whole and the impact that each part had on the system (Learning Pathway, 2012). Thinkers looked at the big picture, unintended consequences, mental models, and feedback when problem solving. The higher order thinking process of systems thinking was required of the average person (Dawidowicz, 2010). Cotter (1998) stated, "An organizaiton is more effective if it fucntions as a system" (p. 10). Systems thinking supported collaborative decision making, with laser-like focus to determine the best outcome for the orgaznizaion. Succesful leaders and educators focused on making impactful sytemtic changes. (Thornton, Peltier, & Perreault, 2004). The use of systems thinking in the educational arena to improve student achievement provided impactful results when embedded in the instructional process (Thornton et al., 2004, p. 227).

DuFour and Marzano (2009) proposed that principals needed to become "learning leaders who focus on evidence of learning" as opposed to instructional

leaders (p. 63). Principals needed to monitor the collaborative works of teams and require them to submit evidence of student success of learning outcomes. The responsibility of accountability became shared amongst all stakeholders, and effective instruction was measured using common assessements. When team members provided each other with ongoing evidence of progressing toward a shared goal, the collaborative team then became stronger and more powerful. (DuFour & Marzano, 2009). The learning leader must have a clear vision and be able to create a blueprint to share with the staff of how the school can achieve its desired goals (Johnson, 2008).

Professional Development

In a summary report of the Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Education Program, Knapp (1991) viewed professional development as a "conception of teachers as professional and as active agents of change, both in their own teaching and in the school programs of which they are a part" (p. 4). According to Knapp (1991) effective professional development embodied six characteristics: awareness of developments in the professional community, deeper learning of content, appropriate pedagogy, opportunities for experimentation and reflection, contact with peers and other professional staff, and participation planning. The six characteristics exposed teachers to development in a wider professional field, provided opportunities for teachers to learn new and deeper ways to provide instruction, while focusing on content and pedagogical development. In addition, teachers tried out new ideas and reflected on the effectiveness within their own classrooms, while interacting with other professionals to define the direction of their professional development experiences.

These experiences provided teachers with opportunities to grow in the profession over time and begin to make changes to instructional practices. It should help to answer the three essential questions posed earlier in Chapter Two: Where are the students performing now? Where should they be? And, what is the plan to get them to where they need to be? According to Knapp (1991) and Finkel (2012), the focus was on improving pedagogical skills of teachers to increase student learning.

The structure of professional development was as critical as the core characteristics. Quick, Holtzman, and Chaney (2009) described, "three structural features that foster the core features: collective participation, form and duration" (p. 48). This statement was supported by Leko and Brownwell (2009), who stated, "effective PD must be coherent, that is it must align with teachers' goals and needs" (p. 67). In addition, they believed teachers needed opportunities to practice new learning and theories after expert teachers modeled the concept. With collective participation, the entire staff may be involved in discussing concepts and problems or new initiatives, as suggested by Leko and Brownwell (2009). Other opportunities for professional development occurred during team time. Finally, development of teachers must occur over time (Quick et al., 2009). Change was a difficult process for everyone and habits were not easily broken. Educators became comfortable with strategies perfected over time, even when the strategy were not impactful on a specific group of students. To evoke change, the building leader must adopt a learn-together attitude. The instructional leader should point staff in the direction of effective professional development and be able to provide professional development to the staff in a way that was engaging and exciting.

According to Zambo and Zambo (2008), "Professional development has the

potential to change teachers' belief about their individual and collective efficacy" (2008, p. 159). Kindergartners began their school careers full of resiliency and excitement for learning. They believed they could accomplish anything. School leaders had to spark that type of resiliency and 'I can do anything' belief system, with teachers to help them move forward. "Increased learning and experiences impacts the personal competence of teachers" (Zambo & Zambo, p. 166).

School leaders were instrumental in ensuring the success or failure of the impact of professional development on their staff. Principals must protect professional development time and provide feedback. A principal's actions can help convince "teachers that success is within their control and the work is important" (Ferguson, 2006, p. 52). Job-embedded professional development created learning opportunities for staff without taking them away from their students. Wolff, McClelland, and Stewart (2010) shared that an attribute of high-quality professional development was the use of job-embedded leaning. Furthermore, they stated, "Principals become instrumental in the professional growth of teachers [by] providing direction in planning, supervising instruction, creating high expectations for performance, and ensuring that teachers had access to current research on instructional strategies and subject matter" (Wolff et al., p. 311). Powerful professional learning opportunities can help lead schools to improved learning outcomes for all.

Teacher Leaders

Using teacher leaders was another impactful and effective way of engaging teachers in professional learning opportunities. "One common definition of leadership is an individual's ability to work with others to accomplish some agree-upon result. What

isn't in this definition is as important as what is. It says absolutely nothing about position, title, or status" (Kaser et al., 2006, p. 3). Principals must realize the need to redefine the traditional connection of their power to that of the teacher leaders. This could be accomplished by changing beliefs, attitudes, and ways of thinking regarding each role, and the level of accountability and rewards (Miller, 2009). Principals determined to embrace change that would impact student learning positively realized that leadership had to be spread throughout the organization. Students learned a great deal when collaborating, and the same was true for teachers, which could create a powerful driving force for change. Team meetings and professional development were optimal times for teacher leaders to share powerful instructional strategies that brought about the greatest results (Miller, 2009). Principals must support teacher leaders and provide avenues in which they can share their wealth of knowledge, creating an interdependency among teaching staff as opposed to the traditional isolated role (Miller, 2009).

Semadeni (2010) suggested that teachers learned best from professional development that offered choice. His model suggested that, at the onset of the school year, teachers identify and select practices they felt would assist them in improving their instruction. Groups were then formed with a teacher as facilitator and the journey to becoming an expert in the area began. Teachers engaged in a group study regarding the specified practice. Several meetings were held for teachers to discuss the strategy and subsequently create a checklist of key components of the strategy. Semadeni (2010). Once the checklist was completed, peer observations began. These observations were not evaluative, but used as a lens to see how the strategy being used. Teachers then debriefed about their observations. After several weeks of group study, observation, and

implementation, the facilitator identified teachers who were then experts in using the strategy. These teachers became mentors for the rest of the school. Semadeni (2010) purported that "The increasing diversity of the student population in the United States is bringing increasingly complex teaching challenges; all teachers will need to master a large repertoire of instructional strategies to succeed with all students" (p. 69).

In the article, *Empowering Teachers Who Break the Mold*, Miller (2009) shared that leading leaders had to be willing to re-evaluate their roles as it pertained to distributing power between the principal and the teachers through the use of 'positive-deviant leadership. She explained that cultivating and utilizing teacher leaders within the school setting offered three advantages over traditional leadership approaches (Miller, 2009, p. 12). Accordingly, she implied that the school processes quickly, because the teacher leaders were responsible for researching powerful practices and understood how to share the new learning with peers. In addition, the teacher leader served as the on-site consultant who offered assistance when needed, while addressing inquiries or apprehensions. Finally, Miller (2009) specified, the positive deviate approach focused on what was needed at school while combining research-based practices recommended and successfully demonstrated by constituents.

Teaching Practices

Heward (2003) contended there were two variables that produced the most reliable correlations with student achievement, the amount of curriculum children were exposed to and the engagement level of students with the content information. Heward (2003) further believed that drill and practice, when properly conducted, helped students develop and improve fluency in their personal knowledge and skill sets they may possess.

For example, students with a solid foundation in basic facts could apply knowledge as they worked on more complex tasks and problem solving. When students mastered the basics, they had more endurance to process through larger, complex tasks requiring critical thinking skills. Heward contended, "Research has shown; however, that when properly conducted, drill and practice is a consistently effective teaching method" (Heward, 2003, p. 8)

Students were expected to think critically when solving challenging tasks. When school districts considered an adoption of a web-based assessment tool to prepare students to become more successful on state assessments, there had to be an understanding that the program was just a tool used to facilitate improved instruction. The data presented supported that web-based testing could free up a great deal of teacher time in terms of grading and desegregation data; however, it was up to the teachers to use the data to determine the best instructional path for the students. "NCLB is predicated on the belief that all students can learn, schools have the power to educate, progress must be measured, and schools will be held accountable" (Wolff et al., 2010, p. 304).

Educational stakeholders demanded greater accountability from schools to improve student performance and achievement. NCLB legislation required low-performing schools to improve students' academic performance each year (Chrisman, 2005). If educators wanted schools to not merely deliver instruction, but to ensure that all students learned in more powerful and effective ways, schools needed to know each student. (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Teachers must be astute to the individual strengths and weaknesses of all students and arm themselves with instructional strategies to meet the diverse learners included in every classroom. The focus needed to be on teaching

lessons that were self-differentiating, providing the appropriate level of scaffolding for students who struggled and challenging enough for those students who were proficient and advanced. Connor 2000 stated,

> Education is a serious business that requires every grain of "being" from individuals who want to invest in making a difference for students. It demands a serious commitment from people willing to go above and beyond the call of duty. (Connor, 2000, p. 11)

Armed with assessment data, teachers must be given opportunities to digest the information and work collaboratively to impart change on teaching practices to improve instruction and student learning. Leaders with a focus on purpose and passion diligently and consistently looked at the performance of everyone to carry out the student-centered mission and vision (Connor, 2000). Reeves (2006) contended that schools must become data-friendly. Data should be published based on class, teacher, and grade-level in order to celebrate teacher effectiveness, as opposed to its use as a humiliation tool as a result of where the data ranked. (Reeves, 2006). For every measure on display demonstrating student performance, there should be a correlating display for adult performance as well. Reeves (2006) also added, that a data-friendly school used data as a guide to identify areas for student improvement, as well as for how staff could improve leadership, teaching, and curriculum revisions to support student learning. Chrisman (2005) noted, the principal of a successful school routinely set aside time for teachers to collaborate, while providing them with structured support. This could be achieved by regularly attending grade-level team meetings, conducting walk-throughs, and by providing specific feedback consistently. Teachers should also be given opportunities to provide

feedback to the principal indicating areas requiring additional support. Chrisman (2005) further stated that principals from successful schools were "comfortable using data and making changes when the data demonstrated that student achievement had not risen" (p. 18). Principals must reflect and analyze their abilities to spearhead leadership that would result in high academic achievement for all students, while being sensitive to the needs of the staff. From an administrative point of view the data was rather cut and dried; however, teachers took the data personally and sometimes became defensive when the numbers were not favorable.

Professional Learning Communities

In theory, collaborations should be non-threating and result in increased learning outcomes for staff to improve upon professional learning. Lujan and Day (2010) asserted, "Twenty-first century teaching initiatives place emphasis on the formation of collaborative professional cultures" (p.10). Easton (2012) added that, at times, professional learning communities were mandated by various administrative levels, including building, district, or state. Mandating professional learning communities (PLCs) could result in staff push back and lack of ownership for the process. Easton (2012) additionally held the belief that the ideal learning community paradigm should emerge as a result of purpose or passion, with the desire to help students accomplish various learning targets. "Staff must work together to organize themselves to work toward a common goal" (Easton, 2012, p. 4). The principal was responsible for helping staff see the need to try other approaches to meeting a common goal. This could be done by helping staff triangulate, analyze, and study data from various sources, thereby facilitating their abilities to identify strengths and celebrate, while also identifying areas

in need of improvement and developing a plan of action. According to Hord (2011), "Staff members [should] prioritize student learning needs, and define one area to which they give immediate attention" (p. 40). Developing and maintaining strong PLCs took hard work. The premise behind the effectiveness of such teams was idealistic; however, the reality was looking at unfavorable data could be painful. Knight (2011) indicated that teachers may experience feelings of ineffectiveness when students were not performing proficiently after the material had been taught, thereby becoming defensive or hesitant to discuss strategies for improvement. Teachers may have felt as though their teaching practices were under indictment by the principal or that their competency was subpar when compared to peers. The focus could become about what the kids and their parents did not do, as opposed to reflecting on the effectiveness of the instructional strategy or delivery model. Teachers may have felt as though the school administrator was contributing to a competitive environment. The process of ongoing reflection and dialogue, along with practice, increased opportunities for teachers to learn from their colleagues and share ideas about that work, while maintaining focus on real-life situations (Knight, 2011). Teachers must understand the importance of learning from each other and relinquish excuses replacing them with the understanding that accepting the challenge that every child could make significant educational gains annually (Karns, 2002).

DuFour (2004) revealed three big ideas that encompassed successful PLCs. Structures should be in place to ensure learning for all students, to promote a collaborative culture, and a laser focus on attaining results. The shift in thinking

switched the thought process from teaching to learning. DuFour further suggested that schools focus on three essential questions:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when students experience difficulty in learning? (DuFour, 2004, p. 8).

Teachers working collectively transformed instructional practices from isolation to collaboration. Sharing various strategies led to overall improvement of all students. DuFour (2004) added that powerful collaboration in the form of PLCs was a systemic process for teachers to work in teams to analyze and improve instructional practices. Furthermore, teachers working in teams while engaging in an ongoing deliberate cycle of questions to promote deeper team learning and inquiry led to an increase in student achievement (DuFour, 2004).

The spirit of collaboration created openness with information within the school system. Teachers no longer hid behind closed doors, creating a culture of transparency. Principals had to create an environment that did not accept excuses for failing to collaborate and for poor student performance (DuFour, 2004). In addition, PLCs had to be results driven. DuFour (2004) also proposed there had to be specific measures of success for expected outcomes. For example, students were given a benchmark assessment to determine their current reading levels. Teachers then analyzed the data and determined whether students were performing above, on, or below level. After a specified period of time, students were assessed again with the expectation that they would improve. Data was used to create goals for improvement and to determine which

instructional practices would help students to meet the intended goal. Educators must rely on each other to share powerful practices that could be replicated in all classrooms. PLCs, "require[s] the school staff to focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement" (DuFour, 2004, p. 11).

Senge et al. (2000) provided additional support for collaboration and suggested that learning was both personal and social in that it connected learners, not just to knowledge in the abstract, but to one another. This implied that learning and subsequent discussion about what was learned naturally contradicted the practice of working in isolation, which was common in schools at the time.

PLCs required a shift "from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning" (DuFour, 2004, p. 8). This paradigm shift could be frightening for some teachers, because student achievement was measured by how much and how many students learned the concept versus whether or not the skill or content was taught. In a traditional setting, the teacher covered the content and gave a summative assessment at the end of the unit. If, for example, the data indicated a third of the students did not master the content, then instead of going back to re-teach the content, the teacher moved forward and continued to follow the pacing guide. The students never mastered the skill and continued to fall behind in their studies. Teachers were also confronted with the barrier of true collaboration. Teachers had different mental models of what collaboration looked like, and the willingness to engage in collaboration was varied. Some school staffs equated the term collaboration with congeniality and focus on building group camaraderie. Other staffs

joined forces to develop consensus on operation procedures, such as how they would respond to tardiness or supervise recess (DuFour, 2004, p. 9).

Another barrier to implementing effective PLCs was the factor of time. While teachers may be eager to share and learn from each other, often finding time within the daily school schedule was difficult. DuFour (2004) indicated teachers manufactured excuses to support the continued practice of working in isolation. Some of them included, "We just can't find the time"; "Not everyone on the staff has endorsed the idea"; and "We need more training in collaboration" (DuFour, 2004, p. 10). Principals were faced with the challenge of removing barriers that led to excuses and to shift the focus of the staff to finding ways to accomplish the goals set forth by the teams of educators.

Principal's **Role in Professional Learning Communities and Teacher Development**

Principals who were dedicated to creating PLCs in their schools must set aside time for teachers to meet. In addition principals must create a culture of collaboration by rendering support in every capacity needed. In doing so, leaders sent the message that they valued collaboration and were willing to help facilitate it. This was often easier said than done. Lieberman and Miller (2011) suggested learning communities provided teachers opportunities to discuss effective instructional practices and support one another. "When engaged in these practices, teachers internalized not only learning in communities, but gained many strategies that they could do in their own classrooms" (Lieberman & Miller, 2011, p. 19). The cornerstone of effective school improvement was hinged upon a shared vision by administrators, staff, students, parents, and the community. A collective commitment to eradicating mediocrity by all was essential to

moving forward with ensuring high levels of student achievement. In order to bring about successful change, all stakeholders must hold shared values, while maintaining a collective focus on improved student learning. In addition, educators must work in a collaborative effort to improve, while making decisions affecting their teaching and learning (Lieberman & Miller, 2011, p. 20).

Hord (2011) ascertained,

> "The principal was instrumental [in] launching the PLC meetings. Defining purpose for [the] gatherings was vital, and the principal's leadership in supporting and leading collaborative dialogue about students 'needs and how staff's learning can contribute to student learning is key to the effort" (p. 42).

Along with supporting the development of the structure of the PLC, principals had to encourage autonomy amongst the staff, "with teachers being responsible for making decisions and choosing their own paths for professional development" (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012, p. 20). Principals needed to assist with building a sense of community. "When engaged in these practices, teachers internalized not only learning in communities, but gained many strategies that they could do in their own classrooms" (Lieberman & Miller, 2011, p. 19). Edwards, Lyons, and Jost (1997) noted teachers agreed that data collection should be limited to what was useful, minimizing data overload. In essence, the use of data to make meaning of students' learning would help teachers to become aware of their teaching practices and grow professionally, thereby positively impacting student achievement outcomes. The role of the principal was to assist teachers in making meaning of the most useful data to support teaching and learning. Increased accountability caused schools to become more productive in using

measurable dimensions (Feng, Figlio, & Sass, 2010, p. 2). Attitudes and behaviors of school staff towards using data were impacted in response to the heightened accountability. Hord and Hirsh (2009) identified two key approaches in supporting learning communities. They implored principals to "emphasize to teachers that they know they can succeed together" and to "expect teachers to keep knowledge fresh" (Hord & Hirsh, 2009, p. 22). Teachers benefited from positive reinforcement, as well as students. Also, teachers must continue learning to keep their skills up to date, much like what was expected of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Principals could support this through frequent classroom visits. A summary of observations should be sent to the teacher within a timely fashion, so they could make immediate use of the feedback. "The more principals spend time in classrooms, the more credible they are as instructional leaders, and the more likely teachers are to be receptive to their instructional suggestions and ideas" (Anderson & Pigford, 1987, p. 70). This task could be accomplished by scheduling time to visit several classrooms on a daily basis.

Teachers' Use of Technology

Technological advances in education were available to assist teachers in accruing and analyzing data in a timely manner. Programs and algorithms were available to disaggregate data based on numerous variables. According to Petrides (2006), "The right technology helps teachers to see, longitudinally, how certain groups of children are progressing" (p. 36). On this subject, Bower (2005) expressed the idea that schools relied on technology to assess student performance and provide formative feedback as a result of increased accountability. Online assessments "allow educators to tailor feedback systems" (Bower, 2005, p. 143). Teachers had instant access to data detailing the

performance of their students and could provide descriptive feedback pertaining to strenghths and weakness. In addtion, having the information readily available allowed teachers to set goals with the class and individual students. In the article "Reclaiming Testing," Scherer (2005) questioned the posssiblitiy of teachers to reclaim assessemnt as a way to adjust instruciton and learning as a result of the univeral dominance of high-stakes testing. Dawidowicz's (2010) response was yes. He laid the claim that administrators must be skillful in helping the staff identify which data would be used to set goals and monitor the progress of students. Narrowing the focus to one or two sets of data would allow the teachers to collaborativeley work with colleages, students, and parents to set clear goals and provide on-going specifc, feedback about the performance outcomes. Scherer (2005) further stated a correlation existed between improved use of relevant assessment data by teachers, with improvement on the future work of students as a result of improved practices. (Scherer, 2005). Many schools were data rich. There were an overabundance of data collected. It was imperative for adminstrators and teachers to determine which data would be most relevant in analyizing to impact student learning outcomes, because assessments provided all stakeholders with necessary information to set goals and plan instruction. Benson (2003) noted two key benefits to instruction, the ability provide every child feedback. Bower (2005) also addressed the importance of providing learners with feedback and the increased prevlence in the educational community. He also determined that the use of online assessements assisted "teachers [in making] informed decisions about the best approaches to utilise with their students [to] more confidently engage in the task of helping students understand the implications of these different systems upon their learning" (Bower, 2005, p. 144).

Being overwhelmed by data may have led teachers to collect data simply out of compliance. Assessments were given and the data collected without deep analysis of patterns and trends among student performance. Teachers gathered information from various assessments to discuss in PLCs and team meetings. The most common assessments used were summative assessments. In the article, "Better than Bubble Tests (2011)," the author stated, "Formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust teaching and learning and to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes" (p. 22). Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) defined summative assessments as "tests administered after learning is supposed to have occurred" (p. 17). Summative assessments were useful to look at the end result; however, formative assessments provided the teachers and students with useful information during the learning process that could be used to augment instruction so that students were able to demonstrate mastery of the concept or skill. Sterrett, Fiddner, and Gilman (2010) stated,

> Educators were challenged to have time to reflect upon yearly, quarterly and end of unit assessment data to gauge the effectiveness of instruction and whether or not students were achieving. That being said, teachers needed to have methods to determine if students were mastering the learning. (p. 2)

They went on to discuss the importance of having "real time" student data to assist in reflecting upon their teaching and learning (Sterrett, Fiddner, & Gilman, 2010, p. 2). The research supported the use of formative assessments to help teachers with instructional decision making for all students.

Assessments

Callingham (2008) reminded educators, "large scale assessments can be used to inform curriculum development, provide information to systems and schools about strengths and weaknesses in their programs and monitor change across time" (p. 18). With accountability for the performance of all students being a main priority for all schools nationwide, systematic improvements needed to be made on how information was disseminated to teachers, students, and parents (Herman, Wardrip, Hall, & Chimino, 2012, p. 26). (Herman, Wardrip, Hall and Chimino even suggested using information from summative assessments in formative ways (p. 27). Summative assessments were typically given at the end of a given unit or period of time. Conversely formative assessments were administered during the learning process and the information was used to adjust instruction based on the needs of the students. Schools were using various benchmark and formative assessments to determine the effectiveness of instruction on student learning. Huff (2008) explained,

> Data from assessment helps schools measure student learning and measure progress toward achievement goals. School assessment data includes norm-referenced test results; criterion-referenced test results; data from concept tests, quizzes, and class assignments; anecdotal records and ongoing running records; and checklists and rubrics. School assessment data can be categorized as summative or formative. (p. 198)

According to Brookhart, Moss, and Long, B. (2008), the purpose of formative assessment was to share information. This communication should be both teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher. Teachers removed the stigma of judgmental assessments and replaced

the practice with setting specific learning targets, teaching explicit strategies, providing specific feedback, and posing provocative questions that caused students to think differently. Students were encouraged to develop more than one answer to solving a problem and discuss their learning with others in the class. Teachers at Star Elementary began this process by using three major assessments to monitor student growth regularly: formative assessments, norm-referenced tests, and summative assessments. "Formative assessment contributes to student ownership of learning more than any other classroom-based practice" (Brookhart et al., 2008, p. 54). "Norm-Referenced tests are designed to compare student achievement to that of other similar students" (Huff, 2008, p. 198). These assessments helped schools to view student learning on a broad scale. Summative assessments "take place after all instruction and student learning have ended" (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006, p. 24).

The chief executive officer of Edison, Stecz, said, "The company is trying to find ways to create 'new platforms' to improve student performance" (as cited by Gewertz, 2008, p. 7). The Tungsten product administered monthly computer assessments to students in the areas of reading and math. Teachers received instant feedback on student performance seconds after students completed the assessment. Teachers and administrators were able to use the results from the monthly assessments to help identify strengths and areas of concern regarding student learning. The monthly assessments were used during PLCs or grade-level meetings to identify skills that students performed well on and those in need of improvement. The skills on the tests were aligned to the Missouri Grade Level Expectations. (MODESE, 2011) Grade-level teams were provided numerous reports, such as individual student and grade-level reports identifying skills and

scores, performance by class room by subject, and percentage of students meeting proficiency by teacher, grade-level, and whole school to measure and compare the performance of students across the board. This information could be used during PLCs to determine which skills required additional focus based on the outcomes of the assessments and paying careful attention to skills that had been previously taught, as suggested by Brookhart et al. (2008). The teachers could review and discuss each question with the grade-level team and determine instructional strategies to use with their students to ensure mastery of skills. The data could also be used with students to discuss how answers were determined.

The information from the monthly reports could be helpful to level teams to establish goals for the next month. Teachers used this information to determine which skills had been mastered and which ones needed more improvement. The discussion should focus on setting goals for students and determining instructional practices to meet the goals. Since teaching was a highly personal activity, asking teachers to discuss their data publicly, and making them more accountable, had the potential to be threatening. (McNulty & Besser, 2011) Therefore, protocols and structures were helpful tools to use, as school leaders supported critical conversations regarding teaching and learning, as previously stated by Hord (2011). "Improvement planning begins with a consideration of desired learning results, usually identified in the content standards of the district or state" (McTighe & Thomas, 2003, p. 52). The data provided to teachers from computerized assessments helped them to reflect on instructional practices to best meet the needs of the students.

Web-based assessments provided teachers with instant objective feedback that could be used to determine instructional practices to be implemented to support students' improved learning. This quick acquisition of information "enable[s] educators to quickly change what and how they are instructing students who need help in certain curricular areas" (Dessoff, 2008, p. 44). Lin and Lai (2013) argued, "An efficient online formative assessment could help teachers promote teaching quality and student learning efficiency" (p. 264). The teachers engaged in meaningful discussions with teammates and the school administrator during PLC meetings, to determine how students were progressing toward individual goals that had been set. The school administrator gathered the data and constructed a data wall. The purpose of the data wall was multidimensional. Staff could track and celebrate success and continue to stay focused on the collective and individual goal for all students. "The data walls can be the focal point for faculty discussions on improving student achievement (Reeves, 2006, p. 196). Again, it was imperative that the PLC or grade-level team identified which data and the duration that the information would be tracked. "The challenge for instructional leaders in PLCs is learning first to select data that can improve teaching and learning, and then learning how to use that data effectively for informed decisions making" (Huff, 2008, p. 212). Principals could help teachers to understand the process of data analysis through modeling and by posing questions regarding student performance.

School Wide Behavior Intervention Support

Schools made great strides in increasing the degree of time on task, rigor, and student engagement, as a means to improve student achievement. Within lessons were an objective, level of rigor according to Bloom's Taxonomy, instructional delivery models,

instructional strategies, and assessment methods. In addition to academics, schools began to look at the effect of student behavior on learning outcomes. Schools were moving in the direction of teaching explicit instruction on acceptable behaviors. "In addition to the responsibility of effectively teaching academic subjects, such as math, reading, science, the arts, and writing, educators must increasingly deal with nonacademic factors that influence the instruction they provide" (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006, p. 701).

Schools were complex communities that played a major role in the social fabric of our culture. "Effective schools provide access to both good instruction and a social culture that supports engagement, community, and success. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) raised the level of expectation for all schools to address the needs of all children" (Flannery, Guest, & Horner, 2010, p. 38). Most difficult behavior could be addressed with School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). Flannery, Guest, and Horner (2010) defined SWPBS [as] a multi-tiered approach for building a school-wide social culture, that enabled students to succeed academically and to build skills for the rest of their lives. SWPBS sought to uncover the root of undesired behaviors; the question was why this behavior stopped the learning process. Once it was determined through a functional behavior assessment, the process began to replace unwanted behaviors with desirable behaviors, through explicit direct instruction. Doing this helped the educator and students contextualize the information, and focused on why the student displayed a behavior and not just the problem behavior. There were three levels to application of SWPBS:

Level One referred to school-wide support. "Support at this level includes reinforcing positive student behaviors and explicitly teaching pro-social behaviors that

conform to school rules and behavioral expectations" (Tan, Vaiouli, & Ochoa, 2011, p. 2).

Level Two addressed the "subset of student who do not positively respond to the support provided at the first level" (Tan et al., 2011, p. 2). At this level, more specific individualized interventions and support were put in place to change the behaviors of these students.

Level Three addressed individual students who were having the most difficult time. "At this level, an individualized behavior support plan is created which may include the delivery of specialized services" (Tan et al., 2011, p. 2). A specific measureable problem was identified, a functional assessment occurred, and a hypothesis was formed, as to what was the function of the problem behavior. From there, prescribed researched based replacement behaviors were taught to the individual.

The purpose of SWPBS was to reduce the use of punitive and exclusionary practices, such as office referral, detention, suspension, and increase student participation within the classroom. SWPBS was intended to help teachers manage most problem behavior on a classroom level, thereby increasing instructional time with the outcome associated with increased academic performance in the classroom and on district and state assessments. SWPBS and standards based education partnered to improve student-learning outcomes. Sugai and Horner (2008) suggested:

> The success of schools as effective learning environments rests in part on establishing a social context that promotes and supports successful academic engagement. Schools that do not establish a constructive social culture will have

> difficulty achieving the academic gains that define the purpose of educational systems in the United States. (p. 67)

If effective systems were in place to address behavior, then opportunities for more effective instruction would increase. Sugai and Horner (2008) further contended that a clear link existed between academics and behavior. "Good instruction is one of our best behavior management tools, and positive preventive behavior management are some of our best instructional support strategies" (Sugai & Horner, p. 68). Sprick (2009) indicated that behavior problems could be remedied by school leaders unifying staff to connect with and teach students who displayed challenging behaviors. The literature discussed indicated that the principal, as the leader of the school, must have an active role in all school improvement measures. The principal must be knowledgeable of the initiatives and help the staff to navigate the difficult road to change.

Summary

Chapter Two focused on a review of literature, examining at several areas dealing with school leadership, data analysis, and professional development for teachers. Principals were responsible for "ministering" to the needs of the schools they serve (Servgiovanni, 2001, p. 357). They ministered by furnishing help and being of service to students, teachers, and parents. They ministered by providing leadership in a way that encouraged others to be leaders in their own right (Servgiovanni). Adjusting leadership practices, supporting PLCs, helping teachers analyze and use data to adjust teaching practices, and removing behavioral barriers were ways for principals to be of service to their schools. Chapter Three provides the methodology used in the research study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Problem and Purpose Overview

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the researcher's role as principal and as the building's learning leader. This endeavor to help teachers improve their learning-related practices was carried out in four initiatives during the 2010- 2011 school year and investigated individually and collectively. These included reorganizing grade-level team meetings to facilitate better coordination, collaboration, and peer consultation; gearing professional development opportunities toward proven learning strategies; engaging the teachers in reflective practices for self-improvement; and engaging the teachers in keeping professional growth logs. Teachers completed a questionnaire created by the researcher, completed feedback forms following each professional development workshop, and assessed their effectiveness and grade-level teams using a scoring guide. In addition, MAP data was used to evaluate student growth.

Rationale

The goal for completing this study was to help teachers maximize student achievement and help the school receive higher performance marks in reading, math, and science, as measured by standardized testing. This undertaking required collaboration between the school administrator, teachers, students, and parents.

Research Questions

This research studied four key questions.

RQ 1: How can the primary investigator support her teaching staff in their own development as learning experts?

RQ2: What impact or challenges did each strategy offer?

a. Team meetings

b. Professional development

c. Reflective practices

RQ3: How did teachers respond to the support offered and the focus generated by the principal?

RQ4: Were teachers able to transfer the learning strategies that were the focus of the professional development to their teaching of students?

Background of the School District and School

The researcher was an educational practitioner for over 20 years working as teacher, assistant principal, and principal at the school district of study. For the purpose of this study, the school district is referred to as Mayberry and the school as Star Elementary School. The tables in this chapter provide demographic information about Star Elementary School, as compared to the Mayberry School District and the state of Missouri. The data for ethnicities, aside from Black and White, were suppressed due to potential small sample size.

Table 1

State of Missouri Demographic Data

MISSOURI	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total Enrollment	894,283	892,391	889,653	886,116
Asian Percent	*	*	*	*
Black Percent	17.8	17.8	17.1	16.7
Hispanic Percent	*	*	*	*
Indian Percent	*	*	*	*
White Percent	76.1	75.8	74.8	74.2

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)
*-Indicates the percent has been suppressed due to a potential small sample size

A comparison of demographic data for the state of Missouri to Mayberry School

District and Star Elementary School showed a contrast in enrollment data, based on ethnicity. White students made up the larger percentage of students enrolled in schools at the state level (76.1%). Conversely the Mayberry School District and Star Elementary had Black students as the larger percentage of students attending school, 68.1% and 62% respectively. Missouri maintained a stable enrollment in 2009 and 2010. There was a decrease in overall enrollment and a notable decrease in the number of Black students enrolled during the 2011 and 2012 school years.

Table 2

District Demographic Data

Mayberry	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total Enrollment	18,585	18,378	18,074	17,752
Asian Percent	*	*	*	*
Black Percent	68.1	69.5	70.6	71.3
Hispanic Percent	*	*	*	*
Indian Percent	*	*	*	*
White Percent	29.1	27.6	26.1	25.1

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)
*-Indicates the percent has been suppressed due to a potential small sample size

Total school enrollment for the Mayberry School District remained relatively stable in 2009 and 2010, but showed a notable decrease in 2011 and 2012. The district total in 2012 was roughly 800 less than 2009. The majority of the student population was Black, and the Black population increased incrementally from 2009 through 2012. The percentage of White students enrolled in the Mayberry School District decreased by four percent from 2009 through 2012.

Table 3

Building Demographic Data

Star	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total Enrollment	397	385	402	384
Asian Percent	*	*	*	*
Black Percent	62	61	62.7	63
Hispanic Percent	*	*	*	*
Indian Percent	*	*	*	*
White Percent	33.8	34.5	32.3	31.5

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)
*-Indicates the percent has been suppressed due to a potential small sample size

The overall enrollment at Star Elementary remained relatively constant over the four-year time period. The percentage of White students decreased after 2010, while the Black population remained relatively unchanged.

Table 4

Proportional Attendance Rate

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Missouri	86.4	86	86.7	87.8
Mayberry	80.2	82.1	82.2	84.4
Star Elementary	92	90.9	94.1	93.7

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)

The attendance rate of Star Elementary was greater than the rate for the state of Missouri and Mayberry School District for four consecutive years. The average proportional attendance rate for the school was just under 93%.

Table 5

Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Missouri	43.7	46.9	47.8	49.5
Mayberry	53	55.5	57.6	59.8
Star Elementary	37.3	41.2	46.2	44.2

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)

Over the course of four years the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch increased at the state, district, and school levels by a range of 6% to 7%. Almost half of all students in the state of Missouri qualified to receive free or reduced lunch. Almost 60% of students at the district level qualified, and a little over 40% of students at Star Elementary took part in the free and reduced lunch program. The rate of students who participated in the free and reduced lunch program increased from approximately one third of the student population to almost half. The trend was commensurate with the district and state increases. Standardized test accountability reporting for each agency was impacted by the increase. Students who received free and reduced lunch were factored into multiple subgroups. For example, a Black student who received free or reduced lunch was counted in the total of the school, Black students, and the free-and-reduced-lunch subgroups. The same applied if the student received services as a result of an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Table 6 provides the student-to-staff ratios for the state of Missouri, Mayberry School District, and Star Elementary for the years 2009 through 2012. The average student-to-classroom teacher ratios in the state of Missouri and Mayberry School District were very similar, with 2012 rates of 18% and 17%, respectively. Star Elementary remained lower than both the state and the school district since 2010 with an exception in 2011, with 2011 and 2012 rates at 15%. Mayberry School District and Star Elementary both had higher student-to-administrator ratios than the state, with 207 and 402, respectively. The contrast in numbers between the state and Mayberry was not as noticeable as when compared to Star Elementary, represented by differences of 12 and 217 from the state, respectively.

Table 6

Student Staff Ratios

Missouri	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Students to classroom teacher	17	17	18	18
Students to administrators	186	189	195	195
Mayberry	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Students to classroom teacher	17	17	14	17
Students to administrators	215	208	207	206
Star Elementary	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Students to classroom teacher	17	16	15	15
Students to administrators	397	385	402	384

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)

Mayberry School District was comprised of three early childhood centers, twenty elementary schools, six middle schools and three high schools. Each of the elementary schools had one principal, as opposed to multiple administrators represented on the middle and high school levels. Elementary school populations ranged from 330 to 500 students. This explained the larger ratio of student-to-administrator at Star Elementary, when compared to the district and state. The student-to-teacher ratio was on par with the school district. Each elementary school was assigned an instructional specialist, a certified teacher who received a stipend and provided additional support to the school administrator and teaching staff. Table 7 displays average teacher and administrator salaries for the state of Missouri for the years 2009 through 2012.

Table 7

Average Teacher and Administrator Salaries

District: Missouri					
Year	Average Teacher Salary (Regular Term)	Average Teacher Salary (Total*)	Average Administrator Salary	Average Years of Experience	Teachers with a Master Degree or Higher (%)
2012	$45,234	46,735	84,787	12.5	58.8
2011	45,309	46,287	83,581	12.6	57.7
2010	45,139	46,944	83,224	12.5	56
2009	44,234	46,070	82,224	12.2	53.5

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)

The average teacher salary in Missouri increased $1,000.00 over the course of four years. The average years of experience remained constant from 2009 through2012. Though little change was observed in salary and average years of experience, the percentage of teachers earning a Master Degree or higher increased by over five percent. The average salary of administrators doubled that of teachers. The amount increased by more than $2,500 during the same four year period.

Table 8 provides average teacher and administrator salaries for Mayberry School District. The average years of teacher experience in the Mayberry District remained lower than the state. The salaries of the teachers increased by more than $2,000 annually, in contrast to the $1,000 increase on the state level. Between 2009 and 2012, the percentage of teachers who held a Master Degree or higher increased by more than 15%; three times that of the state. Mayberry School District offered tuition reimbursement to certified staff pursuing advanced degrees.

Table 8

Average Teacher and Administrator Salaries

District: Mayberry					
Year	Average Teacher Salary (Regular Term)	Average Teacher Salary (Total*)	Average Administrator Salary	Average Years of Experience	Teachers with a Master Degree or Higher (%)
2012	$52,879	$53,674	$100,362	11.2	65.1
2011	$49,422	$49,940	$99,075	9.6	60.2
2010	$51,885	$51,885	$98,499	9.7	59.3
2009	$50,643	$50,643	$97,917	9.6	50.4

Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)

The district partnered with area universities to provide onsite learning opportunities for those in pursuit of a Master's or Doctorate degree. The rate of salary increases of teachers and administrators over four years did not change notably. Average teacher pay increased by $2,200 and administrators' by $2,400. Table 9 displays average teacher and administrator salaries for Star Elementary for the years 2009 through 2012.

Table 9

Average Teacher and Administrator Salaries

School: Star Elementary					
Year	Average Teacher Salary (Regular Term)	Average Teacher Salary (Total*)	Average Administrator Salary	Average Years of Experience	Teachers with a Master Degree or Higher (%)
2012	$56,396	$56,416	$90,597	15.4	67.5
2011	$51,519	$51,519	$89,700	13.1	56.7
2010	$54,628	$54,628	$87,516	15.1	52.8
2009	$53,340	$53,340	$111,250	15.0	43.6

Note: Note: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012)

The range of the average years of experience for the teachers at Star Elementary

(13.1 to 15.4) was higher than the state (12.2 to 12.6) and district (9.6 to 11.2). During three of the four years, the average was fifteen or more years or experience. The average teacher salary for teachers at Star Elementary exceeded the state and district annually. Teachers saw an average increase of $3,000 from 2009 through 2012; three times the state average increase. Two-thirds of the teaching staff at Star Elementary held an advanced degree. This number increased by 24% from 2009 through 2012. The administrator salary dropped by $24,000 from 2009 to 2010. The former administrator retired at the end of the 2008-2009 school year, which explains the drop in salary.

Foundation of Challenge

The Mayberry School District was a leader in educational reform during the period of study and provided numerous continuing educational and professional development opportunities to certified staff and administrators to promote improvement in student achievement. Training was provided to all certified staff in the following areas: data teams, cooperative learning, powerful instructional strategies that work, Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock's *Classroom Instruction That Works*, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning, Summarizing and Note Taking, Balanced Literacy, and the walk-through process, as well as others. This study sought to uncover if staff were able to apply and transfer their learning into instructional practices to support increased student achievement.

The researcher had to change personal behavior to achieve expected outcomes from staff members. Schmoker (1999) stated, "One of the most effective means to cultivate a goal-oriented culture is to regularly reinforce and recognize improvement efforts, both privately and publicly" (p.111). Staff needed to understand how the school

was to move forward and experience shared learning opportunities with the school administrator during the process of change; celebrating milestones through the process.

The administrator had to address the rapid decline of staff morale. Modeling and guided practice were used to encourage stakeholders to work together to develop a deeper understanding of the Data Team Process. Additional meetings with the staff were held to discuss the vision, mission, expected progress of the students, means of support for the staff, and personal idiosyncrasies.

Methodology Order

This study was used to determine the effectiveness of the researcher in helping staff grow and improve instructional practices to improve student achievement. Several steps were taken to prepare the staff for the changes. First, grade-level team meetings were reorganized to meet weekly and used to address building culture, which included removing barriers observed in addressing instructional practices with an emphasis on examining teacher ideologies and instructional methods. Second, staff professional development topics were generated, based on staff need and feedback. Professional development focused on using proven instructional strategies to engage students in high levels of instruction and learning. Third, teachers were engaged in reflective practices for self-improvement and provided feedback to the researcher by completing a questionnaire. Fourth, compelling conversations helped teachers identify strengths and areas to improve. The final step involved engaging the teachers in keeping professional growth logs to monitor personal learning.

Methodology/ Procedures

1. Based on a retrospective account of the researcher's first year as an elementary

school principal (2009-2010) and the successes and failures of the school population, a plan was created for the 2010-2011 school year to support teachers in improving instructional strategies and teaching practices.

2. A journal was kept by the researcher that chronicled the implementation of each part of the plan. The journal was used to note difficulties the researcher faced in moving the staff toward changing instructional practices. The journal was also used to note concerns the researcher needed to address with the mentor and assistant superintendent. Finally the journal recorded personal and professional challenges faced by the researcher and actions taken to address the challenges.

3. Various forms of feedback were collected from the staff on the principal's role in providing support to improve instruction and available professional development opportunities. These included a questionnaire, professional development feedback forms, feedback during individual conversations, as well as a data team scoring guide. The questionnaire ascertained the comfort level of the staff with using assessment data to improve student learning. The questionnaire also asked staff to explain how the researcher could support them in acquiring and implementing research-based strategies. Staff indicated how team meetings could be used to improve instruction and student learning. To access need, staff were asked to explain instructional practices used to improve student learning. The last component of the questionnaire was an open-ended section that encouraged teachers to share their opinions regarding what they desired to see more and/or less of, in regards to the use of grade-level team time.

Teachers completed feedback forms following each professional development workshop. Staff shared if the learning was directly related to the building action plan and

indicated the impact of the professional development on future planning and instructional practices. Teachers used the form to describe how the learning applied to individual and school-wide settings. Teachers provided the presenters with feedback regarding organization of the learning sessions and provided suggestions for future sessions.

Another form of feedback was attained during individual conversations. Teachers met quarterly with the researcher to discuss classroom and individual student data. The administrator used the time to set individual goals for improvement with each teacher. The goals were directly related to student improvement based on the analysis of standardized and anecdotal data.

Grade-level teams used a scoring guide to assess the effectiveness of the team in the following areas: Teams Collect and Chart Data, Analyze Strengths and Obstacles, Develop SMART Goal, Select Instructional Strategies, and Determine Results Indicators. The scoring guide was used as a pre- and post-assessment. The pre-assessment was a guide for each team to set goals for improvement.

4. MAP data from 2009 through 2011 was analyzed. Student achievement in the area of Communication Arts and math for third through fifth grade was reviewed to determine if improvements were made. Fifth grade student achievement in science was also reviewed. Tungsten data was monitored monthly to determine if students were making gains in Communication Arts and mathematics in second through fifth grade, with the belief that if students scored 80% or higher three or more times during the school year, they were likely to score proficient on the MAP test.

5. An analysis of all data was used to make recommendations for refining and improving the principal's role as building learning leader and effective ways to increase

continued professional self-improvement of the teachers.

Time Line

1. In September 2010, staff completed a four square-activity indicating items that the staff wanted to 'continue with, tweak, start, and stop.' The questions were presented in colloquial terms to lessen the formality, in an effort to illicit candid responses. The researcher wanted to ascertain which systems the staff determined were working well. The data were the basis that helped the researcher determine whether there was a need to improve skills as a leader.
2. During the 2010-2011 academic year back-to-school staff meeting, certified staff were given a copy of the study, received an explanation of the study, and were asked to give consent to participate.
3. Throughout the school year, all grade-level teams including SSD) staff met week to discuss student data and progress toward learning targets. SSD staff provided additional instructional support to students with various special needs. These meetings were held Tuesday of each week and noted on the building master schedule.
4. After first quarter benchmark testing was completed, the researcher met with classroom teachers to review student outcomes and to set goals for student growth.
5. The original intent was to meet quarterly with each teacher; however, one additional meeting was held at the end of the school year for a total of five.
6. Individual meetings were held with all staff during the first month of school to write professional growth plans. Staff identified an area they wanted to improve

upon or conduct action research within. The intent was to monitor these goals quarterly during individual conferences.

7. Throughout the school year, staff provided feedback about staff development activities via surveys. This information was collected and discussed during the monthly committee meetings of the professional development committee. This data was used to prepare for the following staff development meeting. Staff development meetings were held one hour after school, seven months out of the school year.
8. Grade-level teams met weekly. Each week, agenda items were discussed with a teacher responsible for taking notes. Grade-level teams analyzed student data and created improvement goals for the students.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The secondary data was derived from the following sources: MAP-GLA data, Tungsten (Edison) Data/Math and Reading Assessment, teacher created goals/outcomes, and walk-through data (used to determine the level of implementation of instructional practices). MAP-GLA data was a summative data source that detailed student achievement performance. Edison was a monthly assessment used to help teachers determine areas where more instruction was needed. Teacher goals and outcomes were used to help teachers gauge whether students had mastered a particular skill. The emphasis of the goals was in the areas of math and reading. Walk-through data were important for this study, because they revealed the DOK level of instruction used by classroom teachers, as a whole and individually. The data showed patterns and trends of instructional practices, student engagement, use of instructional strategies, and

differentiated instruction, etc. This process fostered more in-depth systematic regular review of data; shifting from holistic analysis of school, grade-level, or classroom data to monitoring individual student performance on formative and summative assessments. Use of this process allowed teachers to plan more effective lessons in core areas and was instrumental in determining how students were grouped for Response to Intervention (RtI).

Data Analysis

Data were collected from the elementary teacher questionnaire, professional development feedback forms, and individual conversations between teachers and the administrator, as well as from the grade-level team scoring guide. The data were sorted to identify trends and patterns. This information was used to determine the effectiveness of the plan put in place by the researcher.

Summary

Chapter Three included an explanation of the research methods used in this study. Additionally, detailed information was described regarding the elementary school and school district used in the study. The focus of the study was to determine the effectiveness of the instructional leader in helping the staff improve instructional practices to positively impact student achievement. Team meetings were reorganized to ensure that a consistent time was set aside weekly to address student data and instructional practices. Professional development for staff was based on teacher feedback and engaging the staff in learning about and implementing practical strategies to impact student learning outcomes. Teachers provided feedback to the researcher by completing a questionnaire. Teachers reflected on instructional practices during quarterly

conversations with the researcher. Finally, the researcher and teachers monitored personal and professional learning by maintaining a professional growth log. The research findings of the study are included in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Findings

Establishing Processes

The primary researcher was interested in determining ways to support teaching staff in their development as learning experts. Grade-level teams were reorganized to meet regularly to discuss student data and to promote collaboration on determining effective instructional strategies to support student learning, and used a scoring guide to assess the effectiveness of the team. Teachers participated in job-embedded professional development opportunities led by school staff and completed a feedback form after each session to assist the team with planning future learning opportunities. The researcher engaged teachers in reflective practices for self-improvement through individualized discussions and guided staff towards maintaining a professional growth log. The researcher also received feedback from teachers via participant completion of a questionnaire. In addition, MAP data was analyzed to evaluate student growth.

The first step in moving forward with collaborative data analysis and planning was to ensure that the data team process was implemented with fidelity. The Data Team process consisted of five steps. Teams Collect and Chart Data, Analyze Strengths and Obstacles, Develop SMART Goals, Select Instructional Strategies, and Determine Results Indicators. Data teams analyzed a variety of data including: Tungsten data in reading and math, and common formative assessment data for math, reading, and writing, as well as disaggregated MAP data.

Challenges arose with fidelity of implementation of the data team process. Initially, during data team meetings, teachers expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the data team process. The sentiment expressed by a kindergarten

teacher summarized the staff's impression of data usage. The teacher stated, "I know where my students are" and "Data teams will just add another layer of work." A second grade teacher commented, "Data teams don't have anything to do with what goes on in my classroom." The researcher had to help the staff understand that data was not an indictment against classroom instruction, but a useful tool for planning, setting goals, and monitoring outcomes. Consistent positive reinforcement and modeling was used to help teams pinpoint areas of strength and concern to facilitate more effective instruction.

Using data to plan instruction was a difficult paradigm shift from following the pacing guide or turning to the next page in the book. Analyzing data increased staff accountability for student learning and required teachers to provide evidence of learning. Increased accountability was a cultural shift. The staff met with the president of the teachers' union to discuss their concerns regarding data teams. The union leaders shared that the staff perceived that the researcher was "out to get them." It was shared that the staff believed the researcher was assigned to Star Elementary "to clean house" or remove staff. This perception was a barrier for some members of the staff and impacted the receptiveness to information shared about improving instruction and learning. There was discourse among the staff, and relationships with the administration were strained.

Prior to moving forward with additional changes, the researcher determined feedback, aside from the questionnaire was needed from the staff. The staff responded to four simple questions: "What do we need to keep?"; "What do we need to tweak?"; "What do we need to start?" and "What do we need to stop?" The questions were asked in colloquial terms to lessen the formality and to encourage the staff to respond candidly. In essence, the researcher wanted the staff to identify practices that were going well and

celebrate with the staff. It was also important to identify practices that needed adjusting to support a positive learning climate. The researcher also needed to ascertain if the staff had suggestions for practices that should be adjusted in some way, initiated, or discontinued.

What do we need to keep? The staff identified 12 items to keep which fell into the following three categories: school expectations and procedures, schedule, and the home and school connection.

***School expectations and procedures*.** A major component of Positive Behavior Support and Interventions (PBIS) focused on teaching school-wide expectations for all settings: classrooms, halls, cafeteria, school bus, playground, and rest rooms, as well as arrival and dismissal. The staff indicated that the systems in place to support changing student behavior were effectively implemented. Star Elementary implemented PBIS the first year of the researcher's tenure. A team comprised of general education, special education, special area teachers, the school counselor and administrator established the framework for implementation of PBIS. The initial task was to establish universal school-wide expectations and to regularly teach lessons to ensure the expectations were met. The team began by addressing classroom transitions, establishing cafeteria procedures and expectations, defining line basics, creating a universal student recognition system, and establishing hallway, classroom and building wide expectations. The team developed five school expectations: Respectful, Responsible, Positive, Safe, and Ready. The next step was to create a matrix and describe what the behaviors would look like while students were in the classrooms, halls, cafeteria, school bus, playground, and restrooms, as well as during arrival and dismissal. Each staff member received a matrix, and all students were

taught the expectations. Students who displayed the expectations earned Tiger Tags used to purchase items from the school treasure chest. Students were also recognized during quarterly assembles, which was new to Star Elementary.

The PBIS team indicated the noise level, messiness, and disobedience during lunch times was a concern. As such, cafeteria expectations were implemented for students and staff. Also, the number of staff supervising students was increased. Each supervisor was responsible for monitoring one class, as opposed to multiple classes. The researcher assisted with supervising lunch duties, to model staff behavior and reinforce appropriate student behavior. The noise level and misbehavior in the cafeteria diminished noticeably. Classrooms that met cafeteria expectations daily earned extra recess at the end of the month.

The researcher had several years of experience leading the PBIS team at a previous school and shared resources to make implementation less challenging.

Schedule. Adjustments to the school schedule were effective, as well. The schedule was adjusted to set aside time each week to build in a thirty-minute block of time four days each week for RtI and one day each week to teach to teach PBIS lessons to address desired behavior for the school community. During RtI, students received extra support in reading or math. Students were grouped based on academic need.

Arrival and dismissal processes were revamped to ensure students were actively supervised at all times by certified staff. Staff members were strategically placed throughout the building during arrival to ensure students moved through the halls quickly and quietly to get to their classes. Each classroom teacher was expected to stand at the classroom door in a manner that allowed them to monitor students in the classroom, as

well as the hallway. Staff members were assigned to monitor the top and bottom of stairwells to offset opportunities for student misbehavior. Changes to dismissal ensured staff members actively supervised students, as well. Students attending daycare and latchkey were dismissed first and escorted to their destination by a staff member. Students walking home were escorted by two staff members to ensure safe crossing of the street. Bus riders were dismissed as busses arrived and escorted to the bus by a classroom teacher and bus coach. The coach was the contact person between the school and bus driver. Car riders were escorted out after all other students were dismissed and placed in their cars by staff. The changes to arrival and dismissal noticeably reduced opportunities for disciplinary infractions.

The PBIS team met monthly to analyze data and determine lessons to be taught that addressed areas of concern, such as: dangerous behavior, physical aggression, bus misconduct, or insubordination. The team created lessons and disseminated them to the staff to teach each week.

Home and school communication. To increase home and school communication, teachers were required to send home weekly reports with students the last day of each week. The reports notified parents about what students were working on each week, provided helpful tips, and upcoming course of study, as well as addressed each student's academic strengths and areas needing improvement. Teachers indicated the parents responded favorably to receiving the weekly communication. Weekly reports return rate was monitored as part of the schools' accountability plan.

What do we need to tweak? The staff identified 29 items to adjust. Common themes were categorized into three areas: school and staff schedules, school climate, and teacher preparation and professional development.

***School and staff schedules*.** Teachers suggested reviewing and adjusting the schedule to allow more time to collaborate and plan for RtI. An analysis of the impact of block scheduling on planning programs for students with individual education plans was suggested. Staff members requested a strict adherence to the newly negotiated teacher workday established by the school district, as a result of feedback from the teachers' union. Finally, staff members wanted the data team meetings to be rescheduled from Monday to a different day.

***School Climate*.** Another theme addressed school climate. Respondents indicated the need to create a positive atmosphere in the building. Staff members stated the need for improved communication between staff members and the administrator, with clear expectations for teachers. Teachers felt more eye contact and smiles from the school administrator were needed to build up the staff and students. A final suggestion to improve school climate focused on providing students with more positive reinforcements.

Teacher preparedness and professional development. The third theme discussed opportunities for teachers to prepare for students prior to the school year beginning. Teachers felt strongly about having time to adequately prepare classrooms during contractual time. Staff expressed the need to work in individual classrooms before the beginning of the school year. Staff requested terminating the practice of attending seven professional development days before school started.

What do we need to start? Staff identified 13 recommendations to begin regarding school-wide practices. The recommendations fell in to four categories: student recognition, no additions, positive feedback for staff, and organizational procedures.

Student recognition. Student recognition was a component of PBIS. Students were taught expected behaviors and their efforts were acknowledged through various means. Students earned Paws for Applause certificates from school staff for going above and beyond what was expected. Students who accumulated a previously agreed-upon number established by the PBIS team were able to submit certificates each quarter to become a member of the Tiger Club. Students in the Tiger Club received a T-shirt to wear on spirit days and attended special celebrations quarterly. Students also earned Tiger Tags in all settings, including the school bus. Students submitted the tags each week as entries into a drawing for various prizes and opportunities to have lunch with the principal. Both Tiger Tags and Paws for Applause were implemented by the school PBIS team.

***No additions*.** Two respondents indicated no additions were needed at the time, referring to the feeling that enough was already being expected. Specifically the staff stated, “Please no!” and “Nothing new at the moment. I feel like I have enough to do.”

***Positive feedback for staff*.** Respondents shared ideas that indicated the administration needed to communicate positive feedback to staff. All three responses indicated the need for a more positive climate, increased staff recognition, and celebrations. Staff suggested the administrator leave positive feedback, such as notes, in the lounge and give Tiger Tags to teachers.

***Organizational procedures*.** Four responses addressed organization procedures

regarding the inclusion of all students in recycling efforts. This initiative was spearheaded by the Student Council and the staff sponsor. Staff asked that processes for student arrival during inclement weather be established. Staff also mentioned lesson plan protocols and RtI, but made no specific suggestions regarding each idea.

What do we need to stop? The final questions asked the staff to identify practices to discontinue. Twenty ideas were shared. Once again the impact of administration on the climate, official procedures, and schedules were common threads.

***Administrative impact on climate*.** Staff viewed the administrator as negative, impersonal, inflexible, and non-approachable. The staff felt the researcher focused on dress code and indicated displeasure when the dress code was not enforced. Staff members felt new ideas they proposed were dismissed by the school administration. In addition, teachers expressed the opinion that the administrator spoke down to the staff. The staff indicated that the discontinuation of these behaviors by the school administrator would support a more positive school climate.

***Official procedures*.** Staff members expressed concern about the amount of paperwork required. Staff members stated, "Somehow make fewer forms to fill out like goal setting sheet." Another commented, "Protocol is difficult to fit into planning time for just one subject. I can't image [sic] how to do more than one subject." One respondent conceded the push of increased paperwork was from the district and requested the school administrator refrain from "pushing down district stuff unless completely necessary." Staff members felt busy work took away time for planning for the kids and indicated that they want to be able to just teach!" During the study, the school district implemented a mandatory protocol for lesson plans. Teachers expressed the cumbersome nature of

completing the form. Staff members were also displeased with seven consecutive days of professional development prior to the start of the school year.

Schedule. During the time of the study the school district added 20 additional minutes to the school day, with the expectation of bell-to-bell instruction. The school also switched to an RtI model. RtI was scheduled the last 30 minutes of the day, four days weekly. Teachers posed questions and offered suggestions to meet the needs of the different levels of students. One respondent indicated the desire for an A through D schedule in which students attended special areas on a rotating schedule. According to her plan, students would have art, music, or PE on one of each of the four letter days. Students would visit the library during the communication arts block. Another suggested an A through E schedule to accommodate students with special needs. With an A through E schedule, students would have art, music, PE, and library. The students would attend PE twice a week and the other special areas once a week.

The teaching staff were asked to respond to four simple questions: “What do we need to keep?”; “What do we need to tweak?”; “What do we need to start?” and “What do we need to stop?” Common threads deduced from each of these questions were: staff support, celebrations and relationships, scheduling and procedures as well as district initiatives.

Staff support and celebrations and relationships. The information gleaned from the informal survey indicated teachers needed more frequent validation and encouragement during the shift in culture to use data to guide instruction. Teachers suggested that the researcher should, “laugh more and smile more.” Comments such as

these suggested the staff members needed reassurance that the researcher was not a threat and desired to build positive relationships.

Several impediments contributed to a delay in relationship development between the staff members and the administrator. The staff members participated in seven days of professional development at the onset of the school year, which limited the time that the staff members and administrator had to participate in team-building activities. Also, the staff members lamented the sudden retirement of the previous principal and the inability to pay homage with a proper retirement celebration.

Scheduling and procedures. The previous administrator and current school leader had divergent leadership styles. The predecessor worked with the staff for over nine years. Several staff members indicated feeling more autonomy under the previous leader. In comparison, the researcher encouraged autonomy, but also asked questions regarding the decision-making process used by the staff, as a means to develop an understanding of each teacher's instructional style. Some staff members took offense to the inquisitive nature of the new administrator. The staff openly shared that the researcher required increased accountability, which caused discomfort.

District initiatives. One teacher commented, "Stop pushing down district stuff." Staff shared that additional time to process, learn, and embed new practices into the daily routine was required. This survey confirmed that the staff felt immense pressure as a result of district requirements.

Data Teams

Data/grade-level team meetings were an important force of change in helping teachers better meet the needs of students. Data teams met weekly to discuss student

progress toward goals set by the team. The data team meetings incorporated a five step process: Teams Collect and Chart Data, Analyze Strengths and Obstacles, Develop SMART Goal, Select Instructional Strategies and Determine Results Indicators. Teams began the process in August of 2009. Effectively utilizing the process posed a challenge to most teams. Teams monitored processes using a data team scoring guide produced by the school district. The areas of greatest weakness were: analyzing strengths and weaknesses, developing the SMART goal, selecting instructional strategies, and determining result indicators. This process required data to be looked at objectively and conclusions drawn based on raw data. When data were not favorable, it was common practice to shift blame for a lack of success to external factors, such as lack of parental support, the curriculum not covering certain skills, transient students, and the information was taught but the students did not want to learn it. Teachers gave these responses when confronted with negative data. The initial focus of using the data team process centered on removing excuses. The increased pressure of accountability mandated that schools change behavior in terms of educating students and school personnel needed to be more responsive to increased accountability (Feng et al., 2010)

The staff members worked towards owning the raw data for what it was. The path toward ownership was slow and tenuous. Teachers participated in professional development during data team meetings and learned about the purpose of data and how to use it to disaggregate and identify instructional decisions that impacted desired outcomes. During the first semester of implementing the data team process, teams analyzed global grade-level data and created SMART goals for improvement. This allowed the teachers to work the process without feeling scrutinized as individuals. Along the way, teams

celebrated success, no matter how small. If a goal was not met, each team problem solved and determined the next steps.

This part of the process was challenging. Care had to be taken to help teachers reflect on instructional practices without feeling personally attacked, based on the delivery of instruction. In most cases, teams uncovered a gap between information presented versus assessed. For example, during a second-grade team meeting the team reviewed post-assessment results. The students did not perform any better on the post-test than the pre-test. The teachers felt deflated and were adamant that the skills had been taught. The researcher posed the question, "Were your instruction and assessment aligned?" This question caused anxiety among the team members. As such, the team was encouraged to examine instructional strategies and assignments used in comparison to how students were assessed. The teachers determined that the skill was presented in a manner totally different from the assessment. As a result, the team revised instructional strategies and assignments that aligned with the assessment. Subsequently, the post-test data surpassed the goal and the team expressed validation. The teachers conceded that aligned assessments and instruction were powerful tools that impacted student outcomes.

Developing the SMART goals. Initially, teachers were concerned about the process of developing SMART goals for the students. Teachers expressed concern about establishing proficiency targets and the likelihood of students meeting the target. Teams experienced difficulty in determining useful data to apply to creation of SMART goals, with the duration of time required to attain the goal and the number of goals selected. Staff members addressed the concerns by setting an eight-week target completion date

until they became more familiar with the process. Once comfortable with the new process, the average duration of a given goal was limited to between four and six weeks.

Selecting instructional Strategies. Selecting instructional strategies above the prescribed curriculum posed a challenge, as well. Teachers expressed fear about deviating from the script. The concern was based on the precedent set by the district that all curriculum had to be followed as written, which limited opportunities for differentiation based on individual student needs. The researcher worked with the staff and emphasized that textbooks were not curriculum. The expectation was set that instruction was to be based on the Missouri Grade Level Expectancies (GLEs). The researcher helped teams understand that various strategies were needed to address student needs in order to fill gaps of information not included in the adopted text. Conversations revolved around utilizing instructional strategies to provide remediation to students who performed below expectations and to challenge those who also scored proficient or advanced, with a focus on the GLEs.

Students who had not mastered material presented in one format were instructed using alternative research-based interventions. The school's conference room was converted into a data room with resources on hand for the teachers to use during planning. Hard copies and online research-based instructional materials were readily available for staff to use when planning instructional strategies. Reaching DOK levels 3 and 4 was a high priority. These levels of learning challenged students to apply and incorporate new ways of thinking to their own learning. Walk-through data indicated that teachers were most comfortable teaching levels 1 and 2. When challenged to expose students to higher DOK levels, teachers responded by presenting barriers to making it

happen. Barriers included the district curriculum did not provide those opportunities, lower level readers were not able to complete rigorous tasks, and team members felt one more thing was added to the teachers' plate.

To break down the barriers, professional development was provided during data-team meetings and teachers were instructed on how to increase rigor during class discussions and student activities. One example of this occurred during a second grade data-meeting. The teachers were wondering how to challenge the lower readers with the concept of cause and effect. Teachers were given instruction on how to scaffold lessons. Level-one instruction asked the students to define and identify cause and effect in written text. Level-two instruction required students to complete a graphic organizer and determine the cause and effect relationship within a written text. Students were asked to utilize information from the graphic organizer to draw conclusions or make inferences and provide justification for their responses as a level-three activity. Activities were completed individually, in pairs, small groups, or through guided practice with the teacher focusing on the ability level of the students.

To help students improve on the standardized test, efforts were made to increase the number of proficient and advanced students while decreasing the number of basic and below basic students. This required exposing all students to rigorous learning opportunities.

Determining results indicators. Results indicators identified whether the students met the specified goal. This was evidenced by students being able to articulate, demonstrate, and apply understanding of the expected learning outcome. It was important for teachers to express the objective of each lesson in student friendly

language. This objective was communicated throughout the lesson and used as a formative assessment of the learning. “Formative assessment is concerned with how judgments about the quality of student (performances, pieces, or works) can be used to improve and shape the student’s competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial and error learning” (Sadler, 1989, p. 120).

This information was used by teachers when conferring with students and making necessary instructional adjustments that helped students master the desired concepts. At the onset of using the data team process, teams scored their effectiveness based on the categories in Table 10.

Table 10.

Effectiveness Categories

- Collect &Chart Data and Results
- Analyze Strengths and Obstacles
- Establish Goals
- Select Action Steps
- Determine Results Indicators
- Membership Participation
- Group Norms
- Minutes
- Agendas
- Scheduling
- Data
- Follow-up
- Administration

Each category was rated advanced, proficient, or basic. This self-reflection provided the teachers and students with baseline data. Scores from each team were averaged to establish the school-wide total of 42%. This information was useful to determine what areas of the process needed to be addressed initially. Table 11 displays the proficiency average in percentage of pre-data for team reflection.

Eight areas had a score of zero: selecting actions steps, determining results indicators, membership participation, agendas, data, follow-up, and administration. The team decided to address agendas, determining results indicators, and follow-up as a preliminary focus. An agenda template was created to address these areas.

Table 11

Team Reflection Pre-Data

Data Team Steps	Proficiency Average by Percentage
Collect &Chart Data and Results	83
Analyze Strengths and Obstacles	100
Establish Goals	100
Select Action Steps	0
Determine Results Indicators	0
Membership Participation	0
Group Norms	83
Minutes	83
Agendas	0
Scheduling	100
Data	0
Follow-up	0
Administration	0

The template served a dual purpose; to keep meetings on track and as notes for subsequent meetings. Data teams were led primarily by the building principal and instructional specialist. Topics discussed were selected based on need, as measured by the data. Agendas were prepared and disseminated weekly. A team member completed the notes and submitted them to the team, keeping them apprised of next steps. Under the guidance of the principal and instructional specialist, the teams showed marked improvement.

Staying focused. To address the deficits noted on the pre-data, a template was created for the agenda and notes. Also, each team member determined what role to assume as a part of the data team, leader, note take, time keeper, or data manager. In addition, each team created norms to govern the weekly meetings. Data team leaders

were responsible for distributing the agenda to the team, instructional specialist, principal and secretary 24 hours prior to each meeting. Minutes from each meeting were due 24 hours after the meeting. Increased accountability equated to a reduction in a long lapse of time between establishing, implementing, and monitoring goals. The team leader was responsible for ensuring that all were prepared for the meeting with the needed materials, resulting in meetings focused on sharing, and modeling instructional strategies, as well as the effectiveness of the strategy.

During weekly team meetings strategies were discussed to address barriers to improved instruction and student learning. Teams listened more attentively and asked specific reflective questions to generate more ideas that had not been previously under consideration. Teams worked collaboratively to create pre- and post- tests and used the backwards design model for unit planning. As practices improved, grade-level teams noticed improvement in student learning outcomes. Table 12 shows the post-data regarding implementing of the data team steps.

The post-data showed that the team improved and the overall proficiency rate increased from 42% to 88%. An area that needed continued improvement and monitoring was creating the agenda and distributing it ahead of time so that all team members knew the focus of the next meeting. Areas that showed the most improvement were: Select Action Steps, Determine Results Indicators, Membership Participation, Data, Follow-up and Administration. The pre-data score for each was zero; however, the post-data score was 83%. Using agendas increased from zero to 50%. Professional development was provided to the staff during data team meetings to facilitate identification and implementation of research-based strategies.

Table 12

Teacher Reflection Post-Data

Data Team Steps	Proficiency Average by Percentage Pre-Data	Proficiency Average by Percentage Post-Data
Collect &Chart Data and Results	83	100
Analyze Strengths and Obstacles	100	100
Establish Goals	100	100
Select Action Steps	0	83
Determine Results Indicators	0	83
Membership Participation	0	100
Group Norms	83	83
Minutes	83	83
Agendas	0	50
Scheduling	100	100
Data	0	83
Follow-up	0	83
Administration	0	100

Teacher Led Professional Development

At the onset of the 2010-2011 school year, the researcher met with a group of teachers who attended conferences or participated in other professional development activities, aside from what the district required during the 2009-2010 school year. During this meeting, the idea of teacher led professional development was discussed. The original plan was for professional development to be differentiated based on teacher need or interest. For example, the teachers worked in cadres, with one serving as the facilitator and master teacher. The group read research about a given topic then implemented a plan of action. The teachers were responsible for creating a scoring rubric to assess the implementation of the strategy studies. This process also required that teachers visited the

master teacher's classroom to observe the practice and observe each other. This strategy was supported by Yavuz and Bas (2010), who articulated the importance of school leaders paying attention to the professional development needs of teachers with the end result impacting the development of students.

During the study, the teachers were receptive of the information delivered by their peers during teacher-led professional development. The first few professional development sessions focused on the introduction and implementation of the Daily Five. The *Daily 5,* by Boushey & Moser (2006) was a twist on the balanced literacy model. Most of the primary teachers used some form of the balanced literacy, and incorporated the use of a traditional basal reader. The Daily Five re-energized the primary teachers and more importantly sparked the interest of the teachers of intermediate grades. The premise behind the Daily Five was quite simple. For the period of reading instruction, students were assigned five choices each day: read to self, read to someone, work on writing, word work, and listen to reading. Students transitioned through 15-to-20 minute rotations of direct instruction and/or learning conferences with the teacher. The Daily Five involved a certain familiarity and established routines to support students' connection to literacy. Of 18 classroom teachers in the building, 10 reported using the Daily Five process on a daily basis during reading instruction. The teachers using it the most taught kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. After the initial professional development, teachers were provided copies of the book to use as a resource, and provided with rotation labels to be used in their classrooms. Another key component of the professional development was that all teachers were offered release time to observe the practice by one of the presenters. The release time was coordinated through the instructional specialist. There were a total

of three sessions on the Daily Five to support the teachers through the process. Each session was followed-up by the staff completing a feedback form.

Another group of teachers attended a conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, on differentiated instruction. These teachers also presented during the school's professional development meetings. Similar to the Daily Five presentations, teachers were given strategies and templates that were easily modified for any grade level or subject, in an attempt to make professional development meaningful and useful in improving student learning and teacher effectiveness. The professional development opportunity was geared toward helping staff acquire practical instructional strategies to support various learning styles of each student. The end result of professional development was for staff to acquire more practical instructional strategies to help support the various learning styles of all students. This effort supported research conducted by Johnson (2006), who wrote, "The demands of teaching more challenging content to diverse learners suggested a need for teacher education that enable them to become more sophisticated in their understanding of the effects of content and learner variability on teaching and learning" (p. 513).

Reflecting on success of teacher led professional development encouraged the staff to look forward. A collaborative decision was made to focus on differentiating the Daily Five to address the diverse learning needs of students with self-differentiating, engaging activities. The teachers took something familiar and stepped it up to meet the needs of all learners. Planning and preparation for professional development was teacher led and capitalized on the expertise of classroom teachers and the reading specialist. By layering the learning, teachers developed a deeper understanding of the practice with the

intended outcome being deeper implementation with fidelity. Providing teachers opportunities to lead sparked creativity along with a willingness to challenge themselves and achieve more.

The positive-deviant approach re-energized the staff to embrace balanced literacy using the Daily Five. The staff embraced the concept because it was not being presented as a top-down initiative from the administration, although it was fully supported and funded. Teachers continued the discussion about the implementation outside of the workshop in the halls and teacher's lounge.

As teachers became more familiar with learning from, and collaborating with, each other, master teachers within an area of specialty surfaced. The professional development experience served as a catalyst to promote discussion and collaborative planning of language arts. This improved the prior practice of teachers working in isolation.

Professional Development

The investigator wanted to understand the impact of professional development on increasing student achievement. After each professional development session the teachers completed a survey. The survey consisted of 15 questions to which participants responded yes, no, or not clear. The feedback was used by the professional development committee to plan future activities for the staff. The survey questions were as follows:

Today's professional development experience . . .

1. Directly linked to building action plan.
2. Was directly linked to improve student learning so that all children may me the Show-Me Standards at the proficient level.

3. Was presented in an organized, user-friendly manner.
4. Provided ample time for discussion and reflection during session.
5. Provided information that will engage me in planning, skills and implementation of concepts learned in my classroom.
6. Provided me with an artifact that will be included in my Professional Growth Plan/Log.
7. Demonstrated the input and planning of more than one group within the school (administration, teacher leaders, and teachers).
8. Provided me with opportunity to give the district feedback on the effectiveness of participation in this PD activity.
9. Describe any new information/concepts learned today
10. List ways this information applies to your education setting school or classroom
11. I will use information learned today in my classroom

12a. If you answered no, please explain why not.

12b. If you answered yes, please explain how you will use this information in your classroom.

13. List the specific artifact(s) from this experience you will include in your professional growth plan/log
14. Suggestions for future topics and/or presenters
15. I would like more information about the following concepts discussed today

Table 13 contains the responses to the first eight questions of the survey, provided after professional development on September 15, 2010. There were 25 respondents,

reflective from certified staff: classroom teachers, special education teachers, library, instructional specialist, and counselor.

Table 13

Professional Development Feedback Daily Five

Today's professional development experience...	Yes	No	Not Clear
1. was directly linked to the building action plan.	24		
2. was directly linked to improve student learning so that all children may meet the Show-Me Standards at the proficient level.	25		
3. was presented in an organized, user-friendly manner.	25		
4. provided ample time for discussion and reflection during session.	24		1
5. provided information that will engage me in planning, skills and implementation of concepts learned in my classroom.	23		2
6. provided me with an artifact that will be included in my Professional Growth Plan/Log.	21	2	2
7. demonstrated the input and planning of more than one group within the school (administration, teacher leaders, and teachers).	25		
8. provided me with opportunity to give the district feedback on the effectiveness of participation in this PD activity	24		1

Source: Mayberry School District Professional Development Feedback Form 2010

The feedback from the first professional development day on the Daily Five received favorable responses from the staff. Three areas earned the highest mark: linkage to improved student learning regarding the Show-Me Standards and organized and user friendly, as well as demonstrated input and planning from multiple individuals. The staff

ranked provision of an artifact toward professional growth plan/log the lowest, with 21 of 25 respondents replying yes.

The next set of survey questions requested open-ended responses. These were organized and reported as follows:

9. Describe any new information/concepts learned today:

- Daily Five, Anchor charts, Read to Self, Buddy Reading
- List what teachers do for teachers
- Students learning how to choose good books for them
- How to do literacy stations
- Free Writing Journals, anchor Papers, Etc…
- Daily 5 concept
- Daily 5
- The Daily 5, Anchor Charts

When asked to describe new learning, five individuals mentioned Daily Five and anchor charts as new information attained. Other topics included building reading literacy stations, free writing, and using journals. Eight of nine respondents to question 9 indicated that the information learned would be used in their classrooms.

10. List ways this information applies to your educational setting school or classroom

- As a counselor I may be able to utilize anchor charts in problem solving
- guided reading management
- Classroom library available(books available)/ working on writing in tests include how P.E. helps you to stay healthy(ex)

- The students must work on reading and writing. This is a great way to get students engaged in their own learning.
- Improve literacy
- In need to do more with centers/stations
- I use speech centers and utilize a classroom library
- Great center ideas
- I use speech centers and utilize a classroom library
- I need to do more w centers/stations
- Communication Arts Block
- Change my literacy block

The consensus of how the information would be used focused on literacy work stations, improving guided reading, and providing opportunities for students to read to self when exempted from physical education class.

Question 11 received an answer of no from one person and an answer of yes from eight people. Those who answered no were asked to explain in question 12a and those who answered yes were asked to explain in question 12b.

11. I will use information learned today in my classroom.

12a. If you answered no, please explain why.

- I work with only small groups on specific lang. and speech goals-this is not related to my area of focus.

12b. If you answered yes (to question 11), please explain how you will use this information in your classroom.

- Set up stations

- I will streamline my literacy station work
- Implemented with guided reading on a daily basis.
- Change my literacy block
- I will have some of those stations in my class
- new ideas for guided reading
- Have books available for students that are out of gym for the day (due to injury/religion). Have them work on reading to self.

In general, the staff indicated that adjustments to the class structure would be made, including within physical education classes. Teachers focused on creating work stations to support partner and individual learning. Staff also focused on implementing guided reading on a regular basis during the literacy block. The PE departments created alternative assignments for students who could not participate, due to injury or religious beliefs.

13. List the specific artifact(s) from this experience you will include in your professional growth plan/log:

- Slides from PowerPoint
- Cards for stations
- All of it….
- I will include the power-point packet.
- Some of the Daily Five parts when applicable.

Staff who responded to question 13 indicated they used the PowerPoint slides and cards for workstations as artifacts to include in the professional growth plan or log.

14. Suggestions for future topics and/or presenters:

Teachers noted a need for topics and presentations in SSD policies and non-core classes, such as art and music.

15. I would like more information about the following concepts discussed today.

Teachers indicated that they would like more information on the Daily Five. The professional development committee reconvened to process the survey information and determined that it would be beneficial to the staff to provide a follow up session the following month. The purpose of the second session was to answer any questions teachers had pertaining to the use of the Daily 5 and implementation within classrooms.

Table 14 summarizes the answers to prompts concerning follow up of the Daily Five PDC, on October 27, 2010. Most prompts were answered yes. Only two participants indicated ‘not clear’ as an answer, one on prompt number 5 and one on prompt number 6.

Twenty two respondents completed the survey. Twenty respondents indicated the learning was directly linked to the building action plan, was linked to improve student learning, and was printed in an organized user-friendly manner. Twenty one respondents shared the training provided ample time for discussion and reflection, demonstrated the planning of more than one group within the school, and provided an opportunity to give the district feedback on the effectiveness of participating in the professional development (PD) activity. One respondent each shared that additional time was needed for discussion, more information to engage in planning, skills and implementation of concepts learned, and the planning demonstrated the input of more than one group, as well as the new learning provided an opportunity to give feedback on the effectiveness of participant in the PD activity.

Table 14

October 27, 2010 PDC Evaluation Results: Daily Five Follow Up

Today's professional development experience...	Yes	No	Not Clear
1. was directly linked to the building action plan.	22		
2. was directly linked to improve student learning so that all children may meet the Show-Me Standards at the proficient level.	22		
3. was presented in an organized, user-friendly manner.	22		
4. provided ample time for discussion and reflection during session.	21	1	
5. provided information that will engage me in planning, skills and implementation of concepts learned in my classroom.	20	1	1
6. provided me with an artifact that will be included in my Professional Growth Plan/Log.	16	5	1
7. demonstrated the input and planning of more than one group within the school (administration, teacher leaders, and teachers).	21	1	
8. provided me with opportunity to give the district feedback on the effectiveness of participation in this PD activity	21	1	

Source: Mayberry School District Professional Development Feedback Form 2010

One respondent also indicated she was unclear regarding additional time was needed for discussion, more information to engage in planning, skills and implementation of concepts learned, and the planning demonstrated the input of more than one group. Five responded negatively to the PD providing an artifact for the professional growth

plan or log. The responses were from individuals who taught special area courses, such as art, music, physical education, and library skills.

9. Describe any new information/concepts learned today:

- ideas for Daily Five, journal ideas, making understanding anchor charts
- Wow! Learned a lot! I have a clearer picture of how this works. It seems more "doable" now. [sic]
- Using binders for word work & work on writing
- How to do my management board.
- I learned How to better organize my writing & word work
- Ways to change weekly schedule to work around Tungsten & library
- Does not apply

The staff revealed working on writing and word work as new learning, along with clearer understanding of organizing learning and using anchor charts. Six out of seven respondents indicated that the information learned would be used in their classrooms to implement Daily Five or aide in scheduling and organization.

10. List ways this information applies to your educational setting school or classroom:

- Improve communication arts time by becoming more focused on student's needs. Student get more practice on necessary skills
- I like the writing folders and how they are used. I also need to begin the class library.
- It will help me get it set up for success.

- I teach using Daily Five practices, it is beneficial to lean how teach more effectively and hold students more accountable [sic]
- Implementation of Daily Five
- Does not apply

When asked to list ways the information applied to their educational setting, a common theme was adhering to the needs of students, providing additional practice for students, and holding students accountable during reading rotations.

For question number 11, one person answered no and six people answered yes. One person indicated the question did not apply to his or her situation. Questions 12a asked for an explanation of the answer of no, while question 12b asked for an explanation of the answer of yes.

11. I will use information learned today in my classroom.

12a. If you answered no, please explain why.

- I teach Art

The response to question 12a explained that the art teacher did not find the session helpful, as it was not related to the subject matter taught.

12b. If you answered yes (to question 11), please explain how you will use this information in your classroom:

- It will help me to cater the time to the students [sic] need.
- I would like to begin with the "read to self" corner. I have been sending their grade-level books home, but will keep them here for familiar reading.
- Try to implement different ideas in the daily Five

- I will be able to use this information to get my schedule figured out and gave me some new ideas.
- I will use the strategy of organizing word work and writing in a classroom binder.
- Try to implement some change into my Daily Five

The responses indicated that teachers planned to adjust instructional practices, classroom schedules and organization of materials used by students. Teachers expressed the desire to implement new ideas and changes.

13. List the specific artifact(s) from this experience you will include in your professional growth plan/log:

- add logs to use during Daily Five
- My professional growth plan is RTI.
- I have the icons for the centers. I need to make labels for the library.
- New logs to use for Daily Five
- Travel log accountability sheet anchor chart [sic]

Three teachers indicated that they would add reading logs or travel logs to artifacts to include in the professional growth plan or log.

14. Suggestions for future topics and/or presenters:

- I loved and appreciated the time to work on the Daily Five information. I loved the chance to visit rooms
- I really liked having the time to go in Deana's room & spend time looking at her things & letting her explain in more details. It makes more sense now. It is a little different than I had imagined.

- More sharing across grade level * writing process across grade levels
- More sharing with colleagues. I heard some great ideas today that I never would have known about. * Across grade-level sharing- i.e. How they teach the writing process
- Grade level planning
- Behavior Management

Staff members suggested that more time was needed to share across the grade levels and with colleagues. Also, grade-level planning and behavior management should be considered as future topics. The staff shared the desire to collaborate more, which was a significant change from traditional planning that occurred previously.

15. I would like more information about the following concepts discussed today.

- I would like more time to discuss questions that arise as program progresses (time in room as grade level); never during day.
- More Daily Five info
- I'd like a copy of Heather W's Daily Five schedule

Teachers shared an interest in having more time to discuss questions that arose as the program progressed and to obtain a copy of a related classroom schedule.

The second professional development day was teacher-led as well. Based on the information from the previous survey, the teachers provided more information regarding the implementation of the new reading initiative. The teachers indicated an interest in participating in more opportunities to learn from each other and share ideas. Teachers expressed interest in vertical and horizontal team time reinforcing the goal of the researcher to move teachers towards working collaboratively to support student learning.

A third professional development day was devoted to Bully Prevention. When analyzing school-wide discipline data, the team observed a surge in negative student interactions, in particular on the playground during recess. As such, the team planned a workshop on bully prevention. Staff members were provided with information to identify signs of bullying, strategies to use to address the victim of bullying, as well as the student who was bullying, and techniques to prevent bullying.

Table 15

November 17, 2010 PDC Evaluation Results for Bullying Prevention Workshop

Today's professional development experience...	Yes	No	Not Clear
1. was directly linked to the building action plan.	25	0	0
2. was directly linked to improve student learning so that all children may meet the Show-Me Standards at the proficient level.	24	1	0
3. was presented in an organized, user-friendly manner.	25	0	0
4. provided ample time for discussion and reflection during session.	22	3	0
5. provided information that will engage me in planning, skills and implementation of concepts learned in my classroom.	21	4	0
6. provided me with an artifact that will be included in my Professional Growth Plan/Log.	21	3	1
7. demonstrated the input and planning of more than one group within the school (administration, teacher leaders, and teachers).	22	1	2
8. provided me with opportunity to give the district feedback on the effectiveness of participation in this PD activity	22	2	1

Source: Mayberry School District Professional Development Feedback Form 2010

Table 15 displays the participants' answers to prompts concerning PD on bullying, held on November 17, 2010. Most answers to the prompts were yes, while prompt numbers 6, 7, and 8 indicated some respondents were not clear.

Twenty five staff members indicated that the learning was directly linked to the building action plan and was presented in an organized, user-friendly manner. Twenty four responded that the learning was directly linked to improve student learning. Three respondents indicated a need for additional time to discuss and reflect on the learning as well as the lack of information to be including in the professional growth plan. Four staff members indicated the information would not engage them in planning skills and implementation of concepts learned within the classroom. It was unclear from the survey information why four respondents were unable to apply the skills learned to planning and preparation. No explanation was provided.

9. Describe any new information/concepts learned today

- Check in-check-out. Playground most common arena. Bullies are often bullied themselves.
- As a supervisor, I must move, scan & interact
- How to stop bullying- direct-indirect bully-why kids Bully & why some don't
- Listen to students, move around- stand observe- interact
- To change the culture of a school, the behavior of the adults must change first
- Be on the lookout for bullying at Recess. Teachers should spread out and interact with the kids.
- Check in-check out- involving bystanders to report bullying [sic]
- Review steps for Adults

- Establish a Continuum of Behavior Interventions/Characteristics of Victims & Bullies/Reactions to Bullying How to implement Check in/ Check out w/Tier2 Students
- Check in check out.

A common theme regarding change in adult behavior while supervising students emerged. Staff indicated the need to carefully observe students and move more during recess in order to actively supervise students while at recess and in classroom settings. During this PD session, presenters explained how a system called check-in and check-out would provide additional support to students who did not respond to universal expectations. Teachers and students set goals for improvement of undesired behaviors. The behavior of the child was tracked daily and recorded on a point sheet. The information was used to determine if interventions were successful in reducing problematic behaviors. In addition, this PD opportunity provided staff with more information on how to identify bullies and students who were bullied, along with interventions to utilize with those involved in bullying. Staff mentioned the necessity for changes in adult behavior in order to combat bullying.

10. List ways this information applies to your education setting school or classroom

- Not sure-don't know yet if I'll involved in CICO.
- I am a playground supervisor, so this applies to me.
- Help me w/ID Bullying and how to manage it
- Helps w/classroom managing
- The presentation will help to create a safer school with a sense of community
- Teacher's recess duty, work on tier 3 student goal- check in-check out.

- Social skills/pragmatic language
- Gave strategies for dealing with bullies and interventions for students
- Every day to practice- time-out signals talk to student about reporting
- Pinpointing bullying behaviors & using appropriate strategies for resolution
- A good bullying refresher and I am one of the people helping to pilot check in check out.

Seven staff recorded being observant of bullying behavior in various settings as new learning. Staff indicated the information was applicable to their educational setting because they directly supervised recess or the learning would increase safety at school. Staff commented on using strategies to assist in the reduction of bullying behavior in the educational setting school-wide.

11. I will use information learned today in my classroom

Eleven of eleven staff indicated the information learned would be used in the classroom setting.

12b. If you answered yes, please explain how you will use this information in your classroom.

- If any bullies are in my groups I will deal with it the same as the classroom teacher does.
- I will teach skills for by-standers and give scenarios to role play.
- Use it to ID Bullying and manage I/handle it when it present itself. Part of social skills training.
- I will observe student more talk w/students Re: Behavior

- I will know patterns of bullying behaviors. I will be better able to help students who have been bullied.
- Remember to watch for bullying at Recess. Check in-Check out w/ a tier 3 students- work on their goal.
- Role-playing reacting got bullies-during pragmatic lessons
- Will remember ways to deal with bullies and ways to prevent
- Have students use signal like time-out-STOP- Role play to report problem to teachers
- Implementation for . . . check in- Check out w/3rd Grade Student
- I will participate 2nd semester in the CICO program.

Two respondents mentioned their work with check-in and check-out made the learning applicable as well. Once again, identifying bullies and managing those negative behaviors was a common theme. Teachers felt they learned strategies to assist students who are bullied and manage bullying behavior. Check-in and check-out was also mentioned as information to be used in the classroom.

13. List the specific artifact(s) from this experience you will include in your professional growth plan/log

- Personal Experiences/Bullying Strategies PBIS CI&CO Experience growth observation
- Power point presentation
- Notes

The staff responded that bullying strategies, the PowerPoint presentation, and personal notes would be included as part of their professional growth plan or log.

14. Suggestions for future topics and/or presenters

- Collaboration- vertical
- Take pictures implementing good practices
- Differentiated Instruction/RTI Interventions
- Use part of time for staff info.

Staff recommended collaboration time and providing the staff with visual aids as suggestions for further topics. Again the staff requested time to collaborate. Staff also requested to see examples of the practice in place.

15. I would like more information about the following concepts discussed today:

- I like the idea of check-in & check-out on problem student
- I will talk to school leaders later about check in check out.

Respondents reported wanting more information about how check-in and check-out could support the success of students with challenging behavior. Staff members indicated follow up conversations with the implementer of check-in and check-out would take place.

Though the topic changed, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive and teachers took nuggets of information away from the learning experience and applied it immediately in their classroom

Teachers were receptive to teacher led professional development regardless of the topic. Professional development being directly linked to the building action plan and student learning as well as being presented in an organized manner received the highest ratings on all three feedback forms. The staff consistently indicated that the PD demonstrated the input and planning of more than one group within the school and

provided an opportunity to provide feedback. Improvement was needed in providing the staff with an artifact applicable to their professional growth plan or log. One future consideration was to differentiate professional development so that the special area teachers felt the information being provided was useful. Collaboration amongst teachers surfaced as another common theme. Teachers requested additional opportunities to work with and learn together on future topics.

Collegial Observations

Based on the review of literature and data from the data team and professional development surveys, staff members indicated that learning from one another was an effective practice used to strengthen understanding and implementation of strategies to support teacher and student learning outcomes. During the study, a teacher requested to participate in professional development including collegial observations and job swapping. The suggestion was based on the premise that special area teachers were afforded limited opportunities to meet and collaborate during district and building level professional development days. The physical education teacher piloted this process with a colleague at a neighboring school. The two sought to develop ways to improve students' participation in organized sports while incorporating English Language Arts. This strategy was based on research that collegial observations provide time for teachers participate in "observing colleagues . . . and discusses observations afterward." (Hall & Simeral, 2008, p. 165)

The teachers observed, conferred, and strategically planned lessons. Each shared a lesson design that was co-taught with the P.E. teacher at the home

school. On two occasions, the teachers swapped classrooms for the day and worked with the other's teaching partner for the day to observe and participate in the activities that had previously been shared. Afterwards, the teachers met to discuss what was observed and how to implement the new strategy at the home school. One of the teachers stated

> The idea of collegial professional development is great for me because I have been in a situation for thirty one years where I have not had the advantage of seeing new ideas; I have just picked stuff up from sports camps, coaching, workshops and a little bit from our Mayberry professional development days.

He went on to explain the impact of the experience and stated. "This opportunity is different because you actually see the lessons taught to children instead of a five minute summation of the lesson." The respondent also felt that he and the other teacher benefitted from teaching in a different setting with a colleague who taught the same subject area.

Another third grade teacher participated in a different sort of collegial professional development. She partnered with another master teacher of the same subject area and participated in three separate collegial observations and planning sessions. Each teacher was provided release time to visit the other's classroom to observe various lessons and to provide feedback. The teachers also discussed lesson ideas and planned some lessons together. The teachers provided specific feedback regarding lesson design, implementation, and classroom management. The third grade teacher initially felt overwhelmed by the collegial process because of the number of procedures, ideas, and

suggestions shared. She stated, “Our discussions included: Promethean Board flipcharts, management techniques, student engagement during Cooperative Learning Activities, and lesson ideas.” She indicated, “The feedback I received from my colleague was invaluable, as she is in ‘the trenches,’ a.k.a. 3rd Grade Classroom, each day, as well, and knows first-hand what I am facing.” This teacher felt that feedback from workshops and the administrator was valuable, but felt collegial PD was more relevant since she worked with someone “who knows, from experience, what’s it’s like to be in your situation and knows how much is expected of you, regardless of the challenges you might face in your classroom.” The teacher also felt validated when she shared her ideas and advice regarding various strategies and curriculum.

The responses confirmed that teachers learning from each other was very powerful and altered teaching practices to benefit the students. This can be patterned after the research of Anderson and Pigford (1987) who stated, “When teachers support teachers, students benefit” (p. 738). As teachers became more aware and reflect on their instructional practices they are better suited to meet the needs of the students served daily.

Collegial observations afforded teachers the opportunity to learn and receive feedback from colleagues in a non-evaluative manner. Teachers shared ideas regarding lesson design, implementation, and classroom management. Comments from the staff indicated the process was professionally beneficial.

Communication and Feedback

The researcher wanted to develop an understanding of how teachers responded to support offered and the focus generated by the principal. School leaders needed effective

communication skills to aide staff with internalizing the message of success in order to move the organization forward. This concept was supported by Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian (2012), “The best schools we know of focus relentlessly on communication. They have systems in place to ensure that people have access to information that they are always encouraged to ask if they are not sure” (p. 137). The data showed that the school leader needed to meet teachers where they were to provide guidance in a non-threatening manner providing encouragement to help them move forward with improving student learning outcomes.

Communicating effectively with teachers and providing useful and essential feedback had an impact on the professional learning and instructional practices of teachers. Hall and Simeral (2008) asserted that teachers need support, interventions and extensions of professional learning.

The researcher met with each teacher quarterly to discuss professional growth goals and to discuss the progress of each student in her classroom. During these conversations, teachers were able to highlight accomplishments of their students and to share in a non-threatening, non-evaluative manner ways to support teaching and learning. Prior to each conversation, teachers were asked to assemble their student data and respond to preselected questions. Though questions varied quarterly, the primary focus of the questions focused on assessing student data, plans for instruction based on the data, continued monitoring of student achievement, implementation of professional growth plan.

Compelling Conversations and Responses

Questions were shared ahead of time with staff to remove the perception that the meeting was designed to critique or criticize the instructional practices of the teachers. The process of compelling conversations facilitated critical conversations and supported goal setting and reflective thinking amongst the staff. The individualized conversations provided the researcher an opportunity to hold conversations with teachers regarding classroom data and support staff in using data to focus on using instructional strategies to support student learning. The conversations provided the researcher opportunities to monitor individual teacher data in comparison to the grade level and determine how to support individual teachers in meeting the criteria of their professional growth plans.

CQ 1: What are your thoughts pertaining to your professional learning goal for the year?

Various responses were given regarding professional learning goals. The answers included using formative and summative assessments, asking higher level questions, differentiating instruction, and goal setting with students. A kindergarten teacher commented, “Students take more ownership of learning when setting goals.” She went on to stipulate that goal setting yielded increased improvement of scores when students knew the expectations at the beginning of the learning experience. A first grade teacher candidly shared that she wanted to become masterful at using formative assessments as opposed to using jargon.

CQ2: Discuss and provide examples of formative assessments used with your students. How is the data gathered from the assessments used by the students and you to impact learning outcomes?

Most of the respondents discussed using exit slips, checklists, and thumbs up or down as a representation of understanding or agreement with an answer. Primary teachers used running records to monitor students' progress in reading while intermediate teachers relied on weekly reading assessments to glean information about the progress of their students. Both primary and intermediate teachers expressed how benchmark data from district assessment was used to determine specific skills taught and remediated. A fifth grade teacher shared that she was confused about what constituted a formative assessment versus a summative assessment.

CQ 3: Based on your students' data, discuss goals that you have set with individual students and the entire class.

According to the respondents, individual goals were based on standardized reading assessments given to students throughout the school year. Many respondents also focused on the need to increase the self-esteem of students and build their confidence in order to meet the prescribed goal. Classroom goals addressed student behavior, increased reading stamina, and improving reading levels by two or more years. Some teachers were uncomfortable setting goals with students who performed below expectations. A second grade teacher noted, "I didn't know we could tell students they are reading on a level three when they should be reading on a level eighteen. "A fifth grade teacher also revealed that she required help in working with her students who exceeded grade-level expectations.

CQ4: Share a success story or point of reflection from this school year.

The educators shared multiple responses. Five teachers were pleased with the increased reading levels of individual students which took place in a short period of time.

Others were proud of establishing relationships between the student and teacher that resulted in the student feeling more confident about learning. A fifth grade teacher mentioned the increase in reading stamina of her class. She stated, “The kids did not want to stop when we got up to 25 to 30 minutes of reading. I have never had kids say that when reading before.” Three teachers mentioned collaboration between team members. A second grade teacher shared, “We work well together to rewrite and create new formative assessments and using the data to support our teaching.” A few teachers celebrated the positive change in student behavior.

CQ5: What additional support do you need from the school administrator?

The overwhelming majority of the staff indicated the need for feedback regarding strategies, support, and ideas to improve performance. A kindergarten teacher requested, “Encouragement or motivation with a kind word or smile.” A fifth grade teacher specifically asked for support to help students with varying reading levels achieve at high levels. Three teachers asked for additional resources to assist with consistent use of formative assessments to drive instruction. Four staff members indicated no additional support was needed from the administrator, while two educators asked for more hours in the day.

Questionnaire Items and Response

The staff completed a questionnaire to assist in planning for the following school year. A teacher agreed to collect the questionnaire and compile the data to ensure anonymity. The questions were designed based on administrative observations, previous compelling conversations, as well as information gathered from an informal survey in which the staff were asked four questions: “What do we need to keep?”, “What do we

need to tweak?", "What do we need to start?" and "What do we need to stop?" Ten respondents completed the questionnaire.

Q1: What is your experience with and how comfortable are you using common formative assessments to improve student learning?

The results of this question indicated that teachers felt comfortable administering common formative assessments, but had varying definitions of this type of assessment. The expectation of the school district was that all teachers administer unit tests for reading, math, science, and social studies. In addition, students completed a common writing prompt quarterly. The scores were tabulated and entered into the district database. The assessments mentioned by the teachers were actually common summative assessments and benchmark tests. Tungsten reading and math were given monthly and were based on both information previously learned and skills that had not been covered.

> The purpose of the assessment items, tasks, or activities must be that they are windows into the students' cognitive processes. Assessments that allow students to show their thinking, and allow teachers to best elicit evidence about these cognitive processes, is where the emphasis should be. (Pinchok & Brandt, 2009, p. 2)

This data indicated that more support was needed in helping teachers understand the purpose of formative instruction. Formative assessments guided instruction; summative assessments evaluated the effectiveness of instruction on student learning.

Q2: How can the administrator help you acquire and apply research based instruction to improve student learning?

A common trend noted was teachers wanted to be provided with new resources, but also needed time to process and implement new learning. Some respondents indicated a sense of being overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork required and conceded that personal effort was impacted by the demands of the job.

Q3: In what ways would you like team meeting time to be used to provide additional professional development on improving instruction and teaching practices?

Collaboration and modeling best practices was a theme gleaned from the responses above. Teachers realized working in isolation was not as productive as working collaboratively. Teachers also expressed the need for additional plan time and training that would not interfere with personal plan time.

Q4: Explain instructional practices that you use to improve student learning.

Most of the respondents indicated that cooperative learning was used to improve student learning; however, a review of walk-through data from August 2010 through March 2011 revealed that teachers used cooperative learning an average of 17% of the time (Table 16).

Table 16

Walk-Through Data August 2010- March 2011

Instructional Model	Aug./ Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Differentiation	21%	22%	45%	30%	20%	30%	18%
Cooperative Learning		28%	10%	15%	20%	10%	18%
Extensive Student Engagement	75%	67%	75%	55%	67%	70%	73%

Source: Teachscape 2010-2011 school year

The highest percentage of time that cooperative learning was observed was 28% during the study. Teachers were observed differentiating instruction an average of 30% of the time. The average level of student engagement with these strategies was 69% and did not exceed 75% during any month.

Though differentiated instruction and cooperative learning strategies were on the lower end of the spectrum, student engagement rebounded from the decline December and steadily increased from January through March. This data was based on walk-throughs conducted by the principal and the instructional specialist from August 2010 through March 2011. Through the data team process and professional development, teachers became more aware of the need for students to be actively engaged in the learning process. Active engagement led to deeper understanding and application of the concepts being taught and learned.

Q5: For the 2010-2011 school year in team meetings, I would like to do more of…

Staff once again indicated a need to work together for collaborative planning and data analysis. They desired to focus on realistic, attainable goals while remaining focused.

Q6: For the 2010-2011 school year in team meetings, I would like to do less of…

Staff frustration with meeting was evident by the responses provided. Many listed wasting time and meeting for the sake of meeting as a concern. Another area of concern was preparedness for meetings. An item that was striking was the comment, “discussing data when it stays the same from week to week”. The researcher was charged with helping staff uncover barriers that limited the productivity of their team meetings. Teams

revisited meeting norms and established roles for each team member. Teams discussed ways to make meetings more efficient and agreed to follow the established agenda for each meeting as well as set the agenda for the following meeting beforehand. Staff pledged to arrive on time and stay on task. Teams agreed it was crucial to come to each meeting with data prepared and proposed instructional strategies and artifacts to demonstrate the use.

Q7: How does/ has professional development changed your teaching practices?

Staff responded favorably to the professional development received during the school year. Based on walk-through data, there was a disconnection between what teachers learned versus what they implemented in their classrooms on a daily basis. Differentiation in learning occurred 45% or less during the course of the study and the use of cooperative learning, 28% or less.

Transforming Learning into Practice

The primary investigator sought to discern if teachers were able to transfer the learning strategies that were the focus of professional development to their instruction of students. A review of MAP data indicated the trends of the percentage of students who scored proficient steadily increased in math and science in fourth and fifth grade since the 2009-10 school year. Student achievement increased as a result of the use of data to determine the instructional needs of students. Prior to the MAP test, each student and their parents were informed of the percentage of growth each child needed to achieve on the MAP assessment. Teachers set goals with the students and parents and sent home activities that supported the learning that occurred during the school day. Table 17 shows MAP performance trends from 2009 through 2012.

Table 17

School-wide Missouri Achievement Program (MAP) Results

Year	Math	Communication Arts	Science
2009	26.9	43.8	19.7
2010	31.0	43.5	26.8
2011	41.3	43.4	43.3
2012	49.2	40.8	40.6

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2013

Following the completion of the study, the school-wide MAP data showed improvement in math and science. Math increased by 10.3% and Science by 16.5%. Communication Arts remained relatively the same. School-wide math scores increased again in 2012 while Communication Arts and Science decreased slightly; however, the cumulative score of all three assessments was higher in 2012 than in 2011.

Summary

Chapter Four provided the results of the researcher's attempt to determine ways to support teaching staff improve instructional practices. Reorganization of grade-level team meetings increased opportunities for teachers to collaborate and discuss effective instructional strategies to support student learning. Job-embedded professional development ignited teacher's desire to seek additional learning from one another. Quarterly, teachers met with the researcher and discussed the progress of students, celebrated successes and shared the support needed from the administrator. The conversations engaged teachers in reflective practices for self-improvement that supported their professional growth plans. Feedback from the questionnaire revealed areas that required additional support.

Teacher led professional development empowered teachers to collaboratively plan and implement instructional strategies to improve student learning outcomes. Improved use of data also led to increased school-wide MAP test scores. Finally, collegial observations and support were other avenues implemented to foster improved pedagogical skills.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflection

Introduction

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the role of the principal as the building learning leader, in an effort to help teachers improve their learning-related practices. This was carried out during the 2010- 2011 school year. Data was gleaned from a staff questionnaire, feedback forms evaluating professional development workshops, and a scoring guide to assess the effectiveness of grade-level team meetings, along with MAP data to Tungsten student growth data.

This action research study was conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of the researcher in helping staff cultivate and improve instructional practices focused to improve student achievement. Multiple actions were taken to ready the staff to embark on the journey of analyzing instructional practices in correlation to student outcomes. Initially grade-level team meetings were restructured to meet weekly. In addition, the meetings were instrumental in addressing barriers associated with providing student-centered, data-rich instruction. Teachers were challenged to examine personal philosophies and ideologies related to rigorous instructional practices. Professional development was teacher-led and created based on the needs of the educators. Feedback shared with the team. The professional development team concentrated on using proven instructional strategies to engage students in high levels of instruction and learning. A third component to the study engaged teachers in reflective practices for self-improvement and provided feedback to the researcher via a questionnaire. Fourth, compelling conversations helped teachers identify strengths and areas in which to advance their expertise. The final step involved engaging the teachers in keeping

professional growth logs to monitor personal learning.

Research Questions

This research studied four key questions.

RQ 1: How can the primary investigator support her teaching staff in their own development as learning experts?

RQ2: What impact or challenges did each strategy offer?

a. Team meetings

b. Professional development

c. Reflective practices

RQ3: How did teachers respond to the support offered and the focus generated by the principal?

RQ4: Were teachers able to transfer the learning strategies that were the focus of the professional development to their teaching of students?

There were several limitations that may have impacted the outcome of this action research study. The action research was conducted during one school year, and the questionnaire was not checked for statistical reliability. The response rate posed another limitation. Ten of the twenty certified teachers who gave consent responded to the questionnaire. Although, the questionnaire was completed anonymously and submitted by a third party, staff had reservations about responding candidly about the performance of their evaluator. A final limitation was the response by staff members on the professional development surveys may have been higher, since the presenters were colleagues.

Research Questions and Analysis

RQ 1: How can the primary investigator support her teaching staff in their own development as learning experts?

Data Teams

This study examined the use of data teams to help teachers collect, interpret, and utilize data to adjust instructional practices. According to the post-data tabulations, teams increased overall proficiency following the implementation of data teams from 42% to 88%. The most notable areas of growth were related to changes in professional practices of certified staff. In the area of instructional strategies, the teams' performances increased from 0% to 83%. According to the scoring guide, teachers focused on changeable actions of the adults in the school, in terms of developing techniques to foster improved student learning. In addition, teachers now brought artifacts or resources to meetings that supported the implementation of the agreed upon strategy.

Staff displayed the same level of improvement in determining results indicators. Indicators were based on teacher and student behaviors and were representative of the impact of change in student performance, based on the established strategy. Assisting the staff to focus on adult behaviors, as related to changing learning outcomes was a monumental paradigm switch. This required teachers to reflect upon instructional practices and how adult practices impacted student outcomes. Several teams struggled with this component early in the research timeline. The researcher often prompted staff to explicitly explain in detail how instructional delivery methods could be altered to achieve the desired results. Furthermore, each week, a few minutes were set aside to discuss the impact of the strategy and make course corrections if no change in

achievement was noted. This removed the adage, 'I taught it, and they just didn't learn it.' The results of this study supported the research completed by Hall and Simeral (2008), who wrote,

> When you meet resistance, stop and reflect about the reasons behind the behavior. By attempting to address the real reason behind the unwelcoming response, you can likely pull the person out of a negative state into a more positive one, ultimately guiding him or her further down the path of self-reelection. (p. 52)

When met with resistance, the researcher helped the teachers compare the strategies used to teach content to the assessment used to measure mastery of the skill, thus removing the perceived barrier of blame towards the teachers or students. Reflection on the data team process, in particular strategies used, during grade-level meetings and PLCs encouraged teachers to set goals for improvement, instead of remaining stagnant.

Teacher Led Professional Development

Teachers learned from each other during Data Team meetings and spearheaded professional learning on District Professional Development Days. Meeting with the staff to ascertain what new learning needed to take place was effective in rolling out Teacher-Led Professional Development. Staff felt a part of the decision-making process and were active learners at each PD session. Staff indicated a desire to learn practical instructional strategies to support various learning styles and increase student achievement. As teachers reflected at the end of each session, they were energized to look forward and seek out additional learning opportunities, outside of what was required. Staff embraced the information presented during learning sessions, because it came from their peers, whom they trusted. Linking PD to the school action plan validated the importance of

information presented. As teachers learned from one another, they expressed the desire for more opportunities to learn with and from one another. Data from professional development feedback forms indicated that the use of teacher leaders to customize professional development activities to meet the needs of the staff enabled the teachers to become responsible for their own learning.

Collegial observations

Providing teachers opportunities to learn with and teach one another was an impactful teacher-driven initiative. The two teachers who participated in collegial observations agreed that learning from peers in a non-threatening manner allowed them to build positive relationships with peers who had a common desire for improving student learning. The teachers valued the time spent collaborating and discussing learning opportunities.

Compelling Conversations

Quarterly meetings to review student data provided insight about the individualized support each teacher needed. The conversations also created an opportunity for the researcher to ascertain what custom level of support each teacher needed while building positive relationships. Initially, the staff was hesitant to meet individually with the researcher, due to fear of the conversation focusing mostly on what the teacher did wrong. According to Rieg and Marcoline (2008), positive relationships between teachers and administrators were not natural. Relationships have to be fostered through on-going communication and built upon trust and mutual respect. The researcher had to focus on building relationships that fostered trust during initial conversations to

remove negative perceptions of the meetings used as an opportunity for the administrator to berate teachers for lackluster performance.

Questionnaire

The response to the questionnaire revealed that teachers needed to see the validity of weekly meetings. Teachers were given the responsibility to create the agenda to ensure the meetings were meaningful. Grade-level teams were provided a yearly calendar template with pertinent testing dates, and teams were expected to design weekly meetings around those dates. Some meetings focused on interpreting data and writing SMART goals, while others focused on collaboratively scoring assessments to calibrate achievement expectations amongst the grade level. Staff also indicated the importance of the administrator providing resources and strategies to help improve learning. As such, the conference room where weekly meetings were held was also converted to a resource library and data room. Data was displayed around the room to allow monitoring of the progress of students. In addition, the researcher regularly forwarded workshop opportunities and journal articles to the staff via email. A portion of each team meeting was set aside for administrative comments. The administrator used this time to focus on achievements of students, teachers, and grade-level teams.

RQ2: What impact or challenges did each strategy offer? (Team meetings, Professional development, Reflective Practices)

Data Teams

Implementing data teams with fidelity posed a significant challenge. Teachers felt the weekly meetings infringed upon their personal planning time and was another thing added to an already expansive to-do list. McNulty and Besser (2011) stressed,

"Principals should foster and promote vivid and rich image of staff members talking frequently about teaching and learning, sharing effective practices, and planning the materials and resources to support student learning and instruction" (p. 116). The researcher and teachers worked diligently to become comfortable discussing teaching and learning without reproach. Teachers were consistently encouraged to reflect on instructional practices and the alignment to the expected standard to be taught.

During the examination of instructional practices, staff realized that SMART goal strategies were only being implemented during intervention time to supplant instruction, as opposed to supplement. Discussions during team meetings helped teachers brainstorm strategies to execute SMART goal strategies during core instruction, as well as intervention time. As teams collaborated and analyzed data, teachers showed more ownership of data and lessened the perception that data was used to pass judgment on their performance. Closer data disaggregation uncovered that teachers relied heavily on fiction during direct instruction of communication arts, which correlated to student performance on the MAP test. Teams concluded that a paradigm switch to using more nonfiction in communication arts was warranted, in order to achieve desired results on standardized assessments. Data teams were effective in moving teachers forward in reflecting on instructional practices and outcomes, resulting in an improvement from 0% on the data team scoring guide to 100% in the area of member participation. Members were deemed proficient when they actively sought to understand instructional practices, reflect upon strategies and instructional delivery models, as well as sharing ideas, successes, and challenges. Overall, teams increased from 0% to 83% in regard to action steps (instructional strategies). A significant amount of work was needed pertaining to

staff proposing activities to be used with the students to identify research-based instructional strategies, to meet the needs of diverse learners. This step was one of the most problematic for the staff to improve upon, because it focused on the impact of changes to adult behaviors, which in turn impacted student learning outcomes. Staff listed expected changes for students with confidence, but experienced difficulty in determining the necessary adult behaviors that needed changing.

Compelling Conversations

Feedback from staff during individual conversations indicated that some of the staff did not feel valued. The individual conversations about data, along with the analysis of grade level and school data during PLCs, lessened the threat teachers felt when discussing student performance. However, individual conversations made some staff uncomfortable, as the focus was no longer on the grade level, but instead on their individual classes. There were times when classes within a grade level had data with varying degrees of proficiency and large gaps. Data from a fifth grade team indicated that one teacher had 80% of students perform proficient on a reading assessment, while the other two teachers had scores of 60% and 45%, respectively. Though all teachers responded to the same open-ended questions, additional probing questions were asked of the teachers with the lower scores to help identify the crux of the implication of the discrepancy. Hall and Simeral (2008) stated, “Asking open ended-questions, reflective questions instead of providing read answers will cultivate critical thinking and nurture independence” (p. 89). Needless to say, the conversation with each teacher was different, as the feedback given had to go beyond transmitting information and be used to evoke a

change. If the researcher could redo the first few years as principal, she would implement compelling conversations immediately.

Teacher Led Professional Development

Teacher-led professional development led to the staff making a collaborative decision to find alternative ways of delivering reading instruction. "Change has a much better chance of going forward when principals team up with teacher who help to translate a negotiated new practices with the faculty" (Schmoker, 1999, p. 116). The data from each of the professional development days was extremely favorable. Teachers felt comfortable learning from one another and requested additional opportunities to meet and share ideas. The presenters also became in-house experts that staff could use as a resource to help improve student performance. The researcher quickly capitalized on this method to disseminate new learning amongst the staff. The researcher would meet with influential staff members and discuss new initiatives and collaborate on the timing and manner in which the implementation should take place.

RQ3: How did teachers respond to the support offered and the focus generated by the principal?

Completing this research was a challenging undertaking. At the onset of the research, the investigator sought to reveal the vulnerabilities of staff so that she could provide support to improve their skill set. Instead, the researcher learned some valuable lessons about leadership, communication, and perceptions. The researched adhered to the adage that job performance did not relate to whether an employee liked or disliked the supervisor. Completing this research challenged this belief and caused the researcher to question and reflect on her personal level of effectiveness as a classroom teacher. The

lesson learned through this process uncovered the importance of sharing new learning with staff in a manner that the information would be received with reverence and implemented within the classroom to impact learning. Muhammad and Hollie (2012) contended that, language is an expression of thought which can control thinking within an organization. Reeves (2002), highlighted several characteristics of highly effective leaders. These included, self-awareness, empathy, social awareness, and social skills. Through the process of this research, the primary investigator realized the need to hone in on the skills Reeves identified, to move the staff forward. Though they respected the intellect of the researcher, staff were hesistant about following the lead of the adminstrator, based on the negative perceptions that they had regarding the intent of the researcher.

Data Teams

Analyzing instructional practices during data teams initially posed a challenge. At one data team meeting with a primary team, teachers were frustrated, because on the Tungsten reading assessment the students scored poorly on the summarization strands. The teachers were adamant about the fact that they taught the skills, but students were not showing mastery, as measured by the monthly assessment. The first step involved examination of how the skill were taught. The teachers shared that they taught powerful transition words, students had completed activities in which they had to organize events, and that the students were sequencing during writer's workshop. Next, the team reviewed how sequencing was previously assessed, earlier in the year, via the Tungsten computerized assessment. While reviewing the skill and strand descriptions, the team recognized that the instruction in the classroom did not correlate to the manner in which

students were assessed. From there, the teachers were able to plan lessons to re-teach the skill to match the same thought processes accessed. Over time, teachers became more comfortable with the facilitation of conversations, like this, by the researcher.

Collegial observations

Teachers observed and supported each other during collegial observations. The teachers appreciated the opportunities to provide one another with specific feedback.

Compelling Conversations

Though the staff was happy with the previous administrator's leadership style, the school still lacked a healthy school culture. Teachers functioned autonomously without accountability. Being required to justify student learning outcomes with data and encouraged to make adjustments to instructional practices were actions not initially received favorably. Data, when negative, created a defensiveness and individuals responded by making excuses or blaming outside factors related to students, such as poor homework completion, not studying, or having a poor attitude. Work had to be done on changing the school culture to center on the belief that all students were capable of achieving as long as the right support was in place. Building a healthy school culture was imminent. Schmoker (1999) noted that success hinged on garnering and implementing radical ideas, along with making a sustained commitment to improvement.

This research helped the principle investigator to uncover that initial lack of effective communication with all stakeholders created a notable barrier in the quest to impact change on the school culture. DiMartino and Miles (2006) noted that leaders empowered staff members by first understanding them. Obtaining support from the staff, they contended, "required principals to have the ability to understand others' viewpoint[s]

and the self-confidence to allow other ideas to be seen as valuable" (p. 48). Effective leaders demonstrated an ability to value the professional contributions of staff, along with an ability to relate to people and round out the trifecta by fostering collaborative relationships.

RQ4: Were teachers able to transfer the learning strategies that were the focus of the professional development to their teaching of students?

Teacher Led Professional Development

The data indicated that teachers learned best from their peers or when there was no apparent threat. Mizell (2007) emphasized that professional development, from conception, should focus on changes in educators' and students' behaviors, needed to promote high performance. She further stated that teacher improvement was hinged upon "their minds and hearts . . . engaged in learning experiences they value" (p. 20). To this end, teachers should be given opportunities during staff meetings to present on best practices identified to foster student learning and growth. More work needs to be done on transferring what is learned into practice. Half of the respondents indicated that cooperative learning was used to improve student learning. However, walk-through data indicated the highest percentage of time cooperative learning was observed; from October through March the percentage was 28%.

Compelling Conversations

Compelling conversations with teachers was a tool used to discuss data individually. Initially, the researcher prepared the data for staff on a spreadsheet and sent it out, along with reflective questions prior to our meeting. She found that the teachers were defensive about their data; however, with each additional meeting they became

more comfortable with the results. Eventually, teachers were required to come to the meetings with their classroom data prepared. This shift in responsibility helped the teachers take ownership of the data.

Teachers also used the time to set professional growth goals and goals for the students. During one conversation with a teacher, the discussion concerned reading and math MAP data. The researcher purposely began with math, because 67% of her students performed at a proficient or advanced level. The data was favorable, and she contended that it was reliable. Next, the reading data was examined, which was the inverse of math. She began to make statements such as, "Well, MAP is only one data point, and should not be the sole judge of a student's performance." Discrepancies of validity were then discussed. Ultimately, she said, "I love math and can teach it all day!" From the conversation, the researcher led her to understand that she did not show the same zeal for communication arts as she did math, thereby resulting in the large disparity in her students' performance on standardized tests. Resources and support that she needed to become equally effective teaching communication arts as she was in teaching math were then discussed. Each quarter when looking at student outcomes on the Scholastic Reading Inventory, her students showed continuous progress.

MAP Data

MAP data showed an overall increase of 1.2% in communication arts for the entire school; however, third and fourth grade reading scores declined. Third grade math scores increased by 13.5% between 2010 and 2011. Fourth grade math increased by 10.1%, and fifth grade math increased by 9.2%. The teachers indicated the need for more

feedback and time to consistently reflect and adjust teaching practices to match what they said occurred in the classroom.

Questionnaire

A change in practices needed to occur in order to uphold the common belief that all children can learn. The first step was to remove the blame game. Teachers were no longer allowed to blame students, parents, or former teachers for a child's lack of progress. Instead, our focus was on identifying students' current performance and plotting a path for improvement. Based on staff feedback, data teams were established to focus on the needs of teachers, as well as students. Teachers were encouraged to share instructional practices that yielded positive outcomes. The focus on collaboration was intensified, based on feedback. Teachers became responsible for setting the agenda and purpose of each meeting and the researcher reviewed the agenda before the meeting to determine how to support the staff. The staff emphasis switched from identifying problems to solving problems. Muhammad and Hollie (2012), explained that problems will always exist, but what was more essential was how problems were addressed. Remaining calm while collaboratively analyzing data is the necessary catalyst to cause teachers to change instructional practices to increase student learning outcomes.

Recommendations to the Study

It is recommended that administrators new to the position or school take the time to connect with staff and build positive relationships. This foundation will help support change and build a healthy school culture. Evaluating the capability of stakeholder' and their abilities to execute change is important; however, one cannot develop a true understanding if the subordinate does not trust the leader or has fears regarding the intent

of the leader. According to Hall and Simreral (2008), "Phrased positively, if you, as an administrator, begin to understand your teacher on a higher level and cultivate a relationship with each as an individual, you can make intentional progress toward building every teacher's professional capacity" (p. 115). Compelling conversations, coupled with feedback from the questionnaire and walk-through data, indicated that the researcher expected that all could carry out the charge of disaggregating and using data to determine and implement the most effective instructional strategies to positively impact student learning. Though some staff were comfortable in disaggregating data, most were not. Moreover, many were comfortable assessing and assigning grades, but few reflected on the outcome of the assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction to make necessary remediation or enrichment. Compelling conversations and questionnaire responses indicated that more training was needed to help staff consistently identify, administer, use, and discuss formative assessments data with colleagues and students to gauge the learning of the children. There was noticeable confusion about the difference between formative and summative assessments.

New administrators should take time to foster strong communication skills with students, staff, and parents and get to know them on a personal level. It makes a difference when an administrator can identify each student and the parents by name, as well as when she is able to share areas of strength and goals in place to help the child excel. Staff members appreciate when the administrator connects personally with them and can ask about family or a special project they worked on. Another component of strong communication relies on laying the framework or foundation for change. The researcher began the first year of leadership with assumptions regarding the notion that

the school was accustomed to implementing all district initiatives with fidelity, which caused apprehension among a large number of staff. This realization that they were not used to following procedures led to a feverish pace to get the staff accumulated to implementing required changes. This enhanced pressure on faculty to comply with district guidelines regarding using data and the data team process, and led to resistance to change. New principals should assess current frameworks in place and discuss with staff the level of implementation and the impact on teaching and learning prior to imposing change. Sharing resources that explained why working collaboratively as a team was beneficial and the effectiveness of using data and research-based practices were eventually instrumental in catapulting necessary changes. Failure to effectively communicate created a huge informational gap between the staff and researcher and fostered resentment and frustration from all parties. The researcher resented that the previous principal had not helped the faculty move forward in their professionalism and the faculty resented the change ordered by the new principal.

Compelling conversations should be continued and expanded to include students and parents. Teachers should use the compelling conversation model to foster goal setting with students and parents by closely monitoring and discussing the student's progress. Increased parent communication is paramount to student success. Information on specific strategies to support reading and math need to be disseminated on a regular basis via email blasts, bi weekly notes home, and quarterly newsletters. Transparently, sharing data increases accountability for all and the natural desire for improvement.

It is recommended that administrators frequently visit classrooms and provide specific feedback, focusing on an observed strength to be replicated. Providing on-going

non-evaluative, specific feedback on instruction may increase teachers' abilities to transfer skills obtained through grade-level meetings, personal research, staff meetings, and professional development into daily instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study suggests that the school administrator has a significant impact on the instructional practices commonly used by teachers to support student learning outcomes. Relationships have an impact on how information is received. Three possible areas of future study are suggested. First, it is recommended that research be conducted to focus on the impact of the relationship between staff and the school administrator on promoting academic achievement and improving instructional practices. Second, future research should also examine the impact that creating partnerships with area universities could have on providing professional development to teachers as they work to improve daily classroom practices in an effort to benefit student learning outcomes. Third, research based on the gender, ethnicity, age, and years of service of the novice principal should be conducted to determine if results will remain constant or differ.

Conclusion

It is imperative that school administrators are masterful at helping staff to refine instructional practices to meet the learning outcomes of students of individual students, cohorts, and the entire school. According to McTighe and Thomas (2003), "Schools and districts today are working on two distinct kinds of improvement initiatives" (p. 52). The two initiatives center on effective instruction to meet state standards and getting results to spearhead school improvement plans. Shifting instructional practices is a challenge that can be met with adversity and resistance. As such, it is necessary for the school leader to

walk the staff through the change process in a manner that allows the teacher to see the value of the change and take ownership for implementing, monitoring, and refining how students are taught.

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Appendix A

Dear Educator:

I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University. I have chosen to Exploring Ways of Supporting Teachers' Use of Instructional Practices: A Principal's Action Research Investigation.

I am asking you to participate in this study by completing a questionnaire to help me determine the needs of teachers at Star Elementary School.
All information you provide can be anonymous and will be confidential. The questionnaires will be turned into a neutral party and given to me in a sealed envelope.

An anticipated risk may be teachers feeling uncomfortable about the principal's reaction to feedback, as such all information will be submitted to a neutral party and placing you name on the questionnaire is completely optional. There is no compensation or other direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate and may discontinue your participation in the process at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research protocol you may contact either me at the phone numbers or email address below. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant rights may be directed to the International Review Board, Lindenwood University Education Division, 209 S. Kingshighway St. Charles, MO 63301 or at 636-949-4987.

Please sign and return this copy of the letter by (date to be determined pending IRB approval). Questionnaires will be distributed electronically. By signing this letter, you give me permission to report your responses anonymously in the final manuscript to be submitted as part of my dissertation.
Thank you,
Sheilah Fitzgerald
Primary Investigator
If you have any questions, you may contact me as follows:
Sheilah Fitzgerald
sftzgrld@Mayberryschools.org
314.953.4351

I have read the procedure described above and voluntarily agree to complete a questionnaire.

_____

Signature of participant Date
I would like to receive a copy of the final questionnaire manuscript submitted to the instructor. YES / NO
Anonymously

Appendix B

May 2010

Staff,

We have made an enormous amount of progress this year in utilizing the data team process to set goals for our students and determine appropriate instructional practices needed to improve student learning. The work we completed during the 2009-2010 was very impressive. The feedback that you have previously provided about the climate and culture of our school in addition to the feedback you provided about team meetings has been beneficial in helping me to plan with and support you in additional learning.

As I enter my second year as principal, I will be again soliciting your feedback to continue to help me help you acquire and apply skills that will improve student learning. From
August 4, 2010 through December 17, 2010 I will be conducting a study to Explore Ways of Supporting Teachers' Use of Instructional Practices: A Principal's Action Research Investigation. Your help is needed in completing a confidential questionnaire to help guide my study. The questionnaire will be disseminated electronically and you are asked to submit it to Karen Zarf, school secretary. Placing a name on the document is optional.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 314.953.4351 or sftzgrld@Mayberryschools.org.

In the Service of Children,

Sheilah Fitzgerald
Primary Investigator

Appendix C

May, 2010

Dr. Mary Piper
Interim Superintendent of Schools
Mayberry School District

Dr. Piper,

I am a student in the doctoral program at Lindenwood University. For my dissertation, I have chosen to study Explore Ways of Supporting Teachers' Use of Instructional Practices: A Principal's Action Research Investigation. The literature states that principals in high performing schools are learning leaders who support teachers in the improvement of their instructional strategies.

With your permission, I would like to gather and use data from Star Elementary School Staff and Analysis of secondary data including: MAP data, Tungsten Data/Math & Reading Assessment, Teacher Created Goals/outcomes.

The participants in this study are guaranteed complete confidentially. The information gathered will be used for research purposes only. All findings will be shared with the staff and my supervisor.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sheilah Fitzgerald
Principal
Star Elementary School
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

Staff Questionnaire

Please take a moment to respond. You don't have to give your name. Your candid feedback is requested. You may type or write your answers. This information will help us determine the direction we need to go.

Q1: What is your experience with and how comfortable are you using common formative assessments to improve student learning?

- We have been using formative assessments for some time now. I am very comfortable using them and review the times missed to see if there is a common mistake that most the kids are making. If so, then I know that this is an area that needs more work. It is also used for individuals, as these are the areas review by the teacher assistant as needed.
- I have been trained in writing them. I use them to guide my instructions and to see if students have mastered a particular skill.
- very comfortable
- I am a first year teacher but I think common formative assessment is the answer to improving student learning. It will help my grade level and the students to strive for the same goals. When we see the results, we can come up with a plan together.
- I think the writing prompts are a valuable resource to look at to see what the grade level as a whole is doing as far as writing is concerned. The math assessments have been interesting to see how the students can grow. I'm comfortable using them but I feel like that is all we are doing-assessing, assessing, assessing.
- Tungsten, Aims- I am somewhat comfortable using these assessments
- Fine ☺
- I am comfortable with using common assessments. We have been using them for years.
- I use them daily

Q2: How can the administrator help you acquire and apply research based instruction to improve student learning?

- I read a handout with some of the activities listed that were research based. Some of them were the common alphabet bingo, etc. It would be interesting to see if there was a list by grade level of activities/games that are considered "research based".
- Pay for professional workshops Have appropriate literature available for checkout
- He/she could tell me the most effective way to use homework. I know homework is a part of Marzano's Instructional Strategies and, his strategies are research based, but I am not sure if it is improving student learning. Homework is

supposed to be used as additional practice but it seems like my kids are not transferring skills/knowledge.
- Allow more time to implement what we've learned.
- Give me Friday's off so I can do all the paperwork we have to do. [sic] Then I can really think about research based instruction. I feel like we have so much to do I'm only giving half of my attention to anything. Sad. P.S I'm guessing Friday's off is not even on the table…?
- By making sure that training is available
- Just come up w/other ideas of where to go w/the kids after testing
- N/A
- Keep providing resources

Q3: In what ways would you like team meeting to be used to provide additional professional development on improving instruction and student learning?

- I would like to see us use the data meeting around pre and post-test time to work together as a grade level to get the info into the computer forms. This takes more time that you realize and we spend a lot of planning time on this stuff. I am seeing the benefits of the data, but also think is a total waste of our time to have to put the names on the forms. We have a way of arranging our data that is more visual for us, and to have to put it all on paper for data to show the "powers that be" is aggrevating!![sic]
- I'd like to see more modeling of best practices
- Give availability to go to workshops outside school
- I wouldn't like any additional professional development during planning time because I need that time to plan.
- We already have enough. Give us time to process current info.
- We have more than enough professional development. Unless it will start taking the place of after school PD which I'm guessing isn't going to happen. I'm glad we're doing a lot of the data stuff during team meetings. I would like to keep that up.
- time for training on Tungsten & Aims web [sic]
- Just using the time to write goals, grade pre/post-test, & coming up w/suggested activities there.
- N/A
- Presentations such as The Daily Five

Q4: Explain instructional practices that you use to improve student learning.

- Co-op learning, peer helpers, hands-on whenever possible, a lot of review and questioning to see if they understand and remember
- 1. Identify similarities and differences 2. Summarizing and note taking 3.Reinforcing effort and providing recognition 4. Homework and practice 5.

Nonlinguistic representations 6.Cooperative learning 7. Setting objectives and providing feedback 8. Generating and testing hypotheses 9. Cues, questions, and advance organizers (2 respondents)

- compare/contrast- reinforcing effort-summarizing & note taking-cooperative learning
- Kagan, hands on, cooperative learning (Kagan), Guided practice
- Cooperative learning, direct instruction, reading centers, whole group instruction, small group instruction
- frequent modeling, use of visual cues/prompts, frequent repetition/drill, breaking into smaller parts/chunks, partner & small group work, co-teaching
- Cooperative learning, small group instruct. modeling a lot! [sic]
- Balanced literacy, Cooperative learning, Investigations/hands on learning
- Using the GLEs to align my lessons. Reflect on lesson to plan the next.

Q5: For the 2010-2011 school year in team meetings, I would like to do more of:

- grade level time to work together, if needed
- analyzing data and writing smart goals
- the data team process during data teams
- I would like to talk about setting realistic goals.
- time to process
- Common planning time. I feel like we're racing through planning because we have so much to do during our 'plan time'. I don't' feel like we spend enough time working on creative lesson plans because there isn't time after figuring out what days we're testing what so that we can have data to hand in constantly.
- Discussing possible interventions for struggling students
- RTI lesson plans
- Dear God! Nothing hope!
- Staying focused to the task to complete all things on the agenda in a timely manner, Use the time to create common assessments for our smart goals, Use the time to determine where students fall high, medium, low instead of plan time

Q6: For the 2010-2011 school year in team meetings, I would like to do less of:

- meeting just for the sake of meeting-think sometimes we could skip a week and use the time more wisely working on activities that directly effect the day to day classroom [sic]
- Grade level meeting
- I feel we are always getting off task
- N/A
- Work assigned
- We can't have fewer meetings, right? I'm not trying to be negative but I truly, honestly feel like creativity in planning for our students has gone out the window.

It's really frustrating to feel like I'm going through motions and barely keeping my head above water.
- discussing data when it stays the same from week to week
- Work! Ha!
- Wasting time by not being prepared-having slide shows ready, showing up on time

Q7: How does/ has professional development changed your teaching practices?

- It give me new ideas of things to try. [sic] It also keeps us fresh and excited about teaching.
- I try to incorporate my learning in my classroom setting.
- given me new ideas/strategies
- Professional development, along with my classes, helps me think about what is best for students. When other teachers present, I get ideas about what works for them and what might work for me.
- Allows opportunity to see individual progress
- Sometimes it gives me new ideas to try. If I was a special area teacher I'd really be frustrated with PD. It seems to rarely have anything to do with them. Just a thought…
- It has made me feel more responsible for knowing more about general education assessments & being able to administer/progress monitor. [sic]
- My workshops have been helpful ☺
- I have taken some good ideas I have learned from professional development that I feel are appropriate for my classroom, but not all professional development has been useful time.
- Has given me new resources for old ~~problems~~ concerns.

Appendix E

Data Team Meeting Agenda/Notes

Date:

Data Team Norms: Begin/ End on Time, Come Prepared, Listen to Each Other, Equal Participation, Respect Everyone's Views

Team Members Present:

Check and connect

At this meeting we will discuss: (highlight all that are applicable)
Common Assessments, Tungsten, DIBELS , Intervention Block, SMART goals (Use the 5 step process), Other

SMART goals:

- Collect and Chart Data
- Analyze Strengths and Obstacles
- Develop SMART goal
- Select Instructional Strategies
- Determine Results Indicators

Items Discussed/Strategies	Outcome(s)	Follow up Actions	Person Responsible	Date Due

Reflections:
IS notes:
Announcements:
Next Data Team Meeting:

Data Team Scoring Guide
Mayberry School District

Steps	Advanced	Proficient	Basic
Collect and Chart Data and Results	ata is assembled and organized ultiple data sources re- and post-test results indicate the umber of students who are proficient eam members agree on what proficient erformance looks like esults are disaggregated and individual udent data is analyzed	ata is assembled re-test/post-test data is used esults usually include the umber of students who are oficient chool, Grade Level, Team, epartment, or Classroom sults are analyzed	ata is not assembled common pre-test/post-test is not sed roficiency level is not defined roup results are analyzed
Analyze Strengths and Obstacles	Targeted needs have an impact on multiple subject areas (leverage, endurance, skill needed for the next grade level) Team members collaboratively analyze student work Needs are prioritized across content areas	Identification of strengths and weaknesses are within a teacher's control Needs are prioritized within a content area	Identification of strengths and weaknesses is inconsistent Blame for performance is attributed to factors out of school and/or teacher control Needs are identified but not prioritized
Goals	Goals reflect consideration of students who are "almost proficient" SMART goals established for each targeted student in need of support	Group goals are: • **S**pecific • **M**easurable • **A**chievable • **R**elevant • **T**imely	Established goals are academic or behavioral but may not be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, or timely
Instructional Strategies	Strategies are research-based and impact multiple content areas (MSIP IV Observation Form or Marzano's Nine) Strategies prioritized for impact on student achievement Differentiating to meet individual needs is evident Teacher always models strategies Teacher reflects through journaling peer observation	Strategies reflect actions of adults in the school or district that can change the thinking of students Strategy instruction is observed Teacher usually models strategies	Strategies are identified but are not identified as significantly impacting student achievement Teacher introduces strategies but does not model instructional strategies with consistency

Steps	Advanced	Proficient	Basic
Determine Results Indicators	○ Indicators monitor the impact of the strategy ○ Indicators describe the change in student performance to be expected if the strategy has the desired impact ○ Course correction is evident if student achievement does not improve	○ Indicators describe teacher and student behaviors that will be seen if the selected strategies are implemented ○ Indicators describe the change in student performance if the expected strategy has the desired impact	○ Result indicators are identified; changes in student and teacher behavior are not identified or monitored
Collect and Chart Data and Results	○ Data is assembled and organized ○ Multiple data sources ○ Pre- and post-test results indicate the number of students who are proficient ○ Team members agree on what proficient performance looks like ○ Results are disaggregated and individual student data is analyzed	○ Data is assembled ○ Pre-test/post-test data is used ○ Results usually include the number of students who are proficient ○ School, Grade Level, Team, Department, or Classroom results are analyzed	○ Data is not assembled ○ A common pre-test/post-test is not used ○ Proficiency level is not defined ○ Group results are analyzed
Member Participation	○ Team members apply practices to classrooms and serve as models for other team members or teachers ○ Action research is evident as team members use and modify strategies and delivery models ○ Team members actively solicit ideas from each other ○ The purpose of Data Team Meetings is clear ○ Team members bring appropriate documentation to	○ Team members actively seek to understand instructional practices described in Data Team Meetings ○ Team members openly reflect upon strategies and instructional delivery models ○ Team members share ideas, successes, and challenges ○ Team members adhere to Data Team Meeting times and purpose ○ Team members bring evidence and other required	○ Team members have an inconsistent understanding or inconsistently apply instructional practices described in Data Team Meetings ○ Team members discuss strategies and instructional delivery models ○ Team members share some ideas, successes, and challenges ○ Data Team Meetings are scheduled and agendas are written; adherence to times, agenda, and Data

	the Data Team Meetings ○ Fidelity to implementation is consistent	resources to the Data Team Meeting to insure fidelity to implementation	Team purpose is beginning ○ Team members bring random evidence of student performance Data Team meetings
Norms	○ Norms are collaboratively developed ○ Norms are internalized ○ Norms are modified as necessary ○ The Data Team serves as a model for professional behavior for other teams in the school and/or district	○ The Data Team operates by clearly defined and collaboratively developed norms of professional behavior ○ Norms are referenced prior to each Data Team Meeting	○ Norms of behavior are externally imposed ○ Norms are understood but not necessarily agreed upon

Steps	Advanced	Proficient	Basic
Minutes	○ Minutes are detailed ○ Minutes include a list of the team members present, contributions of each member, and communication methods for those not present ○ Minutes describe the agreed-upon strategies and results indicators as well as modifications that happen between Data Team Meetings if the strategies do not meet student needs ○ Results indicators reflect desired changes in both student and teacher behaviors ○ Minutes are available within one week of the Data Team Meeting	○ Minutes are an accurate representation of the meeting process ○ Minutes include a list of the members present and the contributions of each Data Team Member ○ Minutes describe the agreed-upon instructional strategies and results indicators Data Team Members will utilize ○ Results indicators reflect desired changes in student and/or teacher behaviors ○ Minutes are available to Data Team Members within two weeks	○ Minutes of Data Team Meetings are available; minutes relay items discussed and understood by the Data Team members present ○ Members include a list of members present ○ Minutes describe some instructional strategies and results indicators that Data Team Members will use ○ Result indicators reflect desired changes in student behaviors ○ Minutes are available to Data Team Members within three weeks
Agendas	○ Agendas include the Five Steps of the Data Team Process with an outline of the time available for each step of the process ○ Agendas indicated targeted instructional area and accompanying Mayberry School District Power Standard ○ Agendas indicate the 1) date of the next Data Team Meeting; 2) the date of the next assessment, and, 3) a list of documentation needed for the next Data Team Meeting	○ Agendas outline the Five Steps of the Data Team Process ○ Agendas indicate targeted instructional area ○ Agendas include the date of the next Data Team Meeting and the date of the next assessment ○ Agendas are focused mostly on the collaborative analysis of student work	○ Agendas list the topics to be discussed in the Data Team Meeting ○ Agenda topics may or may not be completed during the Data Team meeting ○ Agendas indicate a window of time in which a Data Team Meeting may take place ○ Agendas are focused on the collaborative analysis of student work but the Data Team Meeting does not adhere to the agenda

	○ Agendas are focused entirely on the collaborative analysis of student work ○ Agendas include reflections of current team status against the goals		
Scheduling	○ Interim meetings are scheduled to collaborate on strategy implementation and to make required adjustments to instruction ○ Data Team Meetings are held weekly and are scheduled for at least 45 minutes of uninterrupted time	○ Data Team Meetings are held at least twice a month and are scheduled for at least 45 minutes of uninterrupted time	○ Data Team Meetings are held at least monthly and are scheduled for at least 45 minutes of uninterrupted time

Steps	Advanced	Proficient	Basic
Data	○ Results are available within one (1) week of the assessment ○ Results are disaggregated by school, Grade Level, Team, and Department, significant subgroups, **AND** individual student ○ Data supports timely, specific, relevant feedback to teachers and students to improve performance; supports independent student goal setting ○ All involved stakeholders have access to the data	○ Results are available within two (2) weeks of the assessment ○ Results are disaggregated by school, Grade Level, Team, or Department, **AND** significant subgroups ○ All team members have results, including support personnel ○ Data supports timely, specific, relevant feedback to teachers to improve performance	○ Results are available within three (3) weeks of the assessment ○ Results are disaggregated by school **AND** Grade Level, Team, or Department ○ Results are not consistently available to all ○ Data does not supports timely, specific, relevant feedback to teachers to improve performance
Follow Up	○ Support is available to Data Teams ○ When needed, coaching is provided ○ Data Team Leaders meet with the Building Data/PDC Committee, which includes the Building Leadership Team, to discuss building-wide accountability (vertical teams)	○ Clear time lines and responsibilities are outlined in Data Team Meetings; resources and support are also identified ○ Data Team Leaders meet with the Building Data/PDC Committee to discuss building-wide accountability (vertical teams)	○ Data Team Meetings are beginning ○ Data Team Leaders meet with the Building Data/PDC Committee to discuss building strengths and weaknesses
	○ Leadership Team is present during Data Team Meetings ○ Leadership Team has clearly identified action steps to support Data Teams ○ Leadership Team serves as a model for administrative support of the Data Team process ○ Action Research is the basis of faculty learning that links student achievement results to adult variables	○ Leadership Team is knowledgeable about the Data Team Process; attends at least every other Data Team Meeting ○ Leadership Team provides time for collaboration on a scheduled, consistent basis ○ Leadership Team models an inquiry-based attitude, which is evidenced in some action research-based learning of the faculty that begins to	○ Leadership Team attends at Grade Level, Team, or Department Data Team Meetings at least monthly ○ Leadership Team provides time for collaboration ○ Leadership Team is aware of Data Team goals and identified, prioritized areas of need ○ Leadership Team is aware of some of the instructional practices selected by the Building Data Team ○ Leadership Team sometimes provides support (time and/or materials) identified by Data Teams

Administration	○ Administrator anticipates and coaches Data Team Leaders about Data Team goals and identified, prioritized areas of need ○ Leadership Team researches the instructional practices selected by the Data Teams ○ Leadership Team is aware of and provides regular opportunities for team members to publicly share instructional practices during faculty or other meetings ○ Leadership Team provides structures that allow coaching, teacher modeling, observations, or WalkThroughs to allow teachers to learn from teachers ○ Leadership Team always celebrates the successes of Building **AND** Grade Level, Team, or Department Data Teams with external and internal stakeholders	link student achievement results to adult variables ○ Leadership Team is aware of Data Team goals and identified, prioritized areas of need ○ Leadership Team is aware of the instructional practices selected by the Data Team ○ Leadership Team is able to articulate the resources and/or materials identified by the Data Team that support selected practices ○ Leadership Team promptly provides support identified by Data Teams ○ Leadership Team frequently celebrates the successes of Building **AND** Grade Level, Team, or Department Data Teams	○ Leadership Team occasionally celebrates the successes of Building **AND** Grade Level, Team, or Department Data Teams

Vitae

Sheilah Fitzgerald is an educator with 21 years of experience advocating for rigorous, high quality public education for all students. She is the principal of an elementary school in St. Louis County located in St. Louis, Missouri. Prior to becoming a principal, Ms. Fitzgerald was an Assistant Principal and teacher for over 14 years. Ms. Fitzgerald earned two degrees from Saint Louis University, in St. Louis, Missouri; a Bachelor of Arts in Education (’94) and Masters of Arts in Educational Leadership (’06). She is anticipated to graduate with a Doctor of Education from the School of Education at Lindenwood University in the fall of 2015.

Ms. Fitzgerald is a member of the Charmaine Chapman Society of the United Way, as well as the Normandy Kiwanis Club. She was recognized by North County Incorporated as one of 30 Leaders in Thirties in 2011 and received the Ambassador’s Award from the Special School District of St. Louis County in 2015 for her work with students with special needs. In addition, the elementary school where Ms. Fitzgerald is principal has been recognized for the past six years by the State of Missouri for the effective implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and support. In 2014 and 2015 the school earned a gold rating; the highest attainable level.