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Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

by

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds

August 2009

Dr. Eric Glover, Chair

Dr. Cecil Blankenship

Dr. Virginia Foley

Dr. Louise Mackay

Key Words: Team Building, Morale, Administrator, Teacher, Teamwork, No Child Left Behind Act

ABSTRACT

Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building

by

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds

The purpose of this study is to build a conceptual framework to explain the influence of team building among elementary school teachers to improve teacher morale. This framework is intended as the foundation for a team building model to provide principals and teachers with a guide for implementing sound team-building activities into inservice training and throughout the school year. What are the best practices for implementing team building and how can these practices encourage teachers to have a more positive outlook on their profession? The variables include school environment, school climate, different principals, principal changes, years of teaching experience, teaching and planning time, school populations, and types of student programs at the school.

This qualitative case study was conducted using interviews of administrators and teachers from 7 public elementary schools located in Southern Appalachia to discover how team-building activities influenced their perceptions of teacher morale. School observations captured the climate of the schools and each school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Staff Development Plan were examined.

The researcher coded transcripts into themes, patterns, and the following conceptual

constructs: (a) communication, (b) change, (c) building community, (d) acknowledgement, (e) work morale, (f) time, (g) team building, and (h) teamwork.

Findings confirmed that administrators and a majority of the teachers showed evidence of high morale. The administrators reported that team-building activities at their school promoted open communication and a positive working environment. Ninety percent of the teachers discussed that team building brought the faculty together and improved communication and the overall climate of the school. Ten percent of the teachers interviewed came from 2 schools that had vertical team meetings during their planning time. They complained that vertical team meetings were a waste of time. For the most part team-building activities incorporated in the schools influenced keeping teacher morale high. Many teachers welcomed opportunities to work with their coworkers on school decision-making teams as well as in off-campus socializing.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband, Mark Edmonds. Thank you for giving me time “away” to research, study, and write. You have given me support, help, encouragement, patience, and love. I cannot thank you enough for what you have helped me accomplish over the past 4 years. I am so thankful that you are my husband. I will always love you!!

I would also like to dedicate this study to my two sons, Mason and Chandler. Thank you for being so patient with me when I was working on my research. You have been with me every step of the way by going to class with me, helping me keep our home clean, and encouraging me to complete my goal. I love you!!

Finally, I would like to dedicate this study to my parents, Dr. Eddie Shoffner and Betsy Shoffner. You have instilled in your three girls a motivation for going to school and achieving our goals. Thank you both for always encouraging me and letting me discover what is best for me. I am proud to have you as my parents. I love you both!!

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I would like to thank God for having a strong influence in my life. He has walked with me every step of the way and gave me many blessings throughout this process that I am very thankful for.

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Eric Glover, for his dedication to the students in the ELPA program. He became my chairperson in the final stages of my dissertation and was always positive and helpful.

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OPENING VIGNETTE

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” -- Andrew Carnegie

Many teachers find the growing demands of being an educator in modern schools difficult and stressful. “When work stress results in teacher burnout, it can have serious consequences for the health and contentment of teachers, students, professionals, and families they interact with on a daily basis” (Wood, 2002, p. 2).

Each year, expectations and teacher workloads increase. Teachers may experience low morale because their daily work life often includes long periods of isolation from their peers. Teachers spend most of their day interacting with their students. Factors such as the layout of a school campus, teachers working alone in their classrooms, and scheduling constraints make finding time to talk and work with other teachers almost impossible. This could cause teachers to feel disconnected (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990).

During 18 years of teaching elementary school in two different school districts, I saw many teachers “burn out” and leave the teaching profession because they did not have administrative support or teacher collaboration but did have complaining parents, stress, and better job opportunities in other fields of employment. These teachers said they were not appreciated for the work they did and the long hours they put in. They said they were not a part of the decision making process of the school.

Preventing low teacher morale is easier than trying to reverse it once it occurs. Using team-building activities can be a positive way to change the climate of a school and build a support system for teachers. Lumsden (1998) found that, “when a healthy school environment exists and teacher morale is high, teachers feel good about each other and at the same time, feel a sense of accomplishment from their jobs” (p. 2).

Making schools successful takes more than one individual teacher working towards goals for his or her students in the classroom. It takes a team of faculty, staff, and administrators working together to accomplish the many tasks of the school. School teams might work on site-based decision making, school improvement plans and curricular reform, implementing new programs, or restructuring existing ones (Peterson, 1995). Teaching is more demanding than ever. Through team-building activities, administrators create ways to help teachers come together as a group and work together toward a common goal. Team building establishes good practices and support that assures teacher cohesion, effectiveness, and continuity. Such practices include sharing goals, clearly defining roles, establishing trust, self-disclosure, good communication, rewards, recognition, and training (*Team Building*, 2007).

Growing up with caring teachers in elementary and middle school made going to school an exciting and positive experience. I thought teachers had the best jobs in the world. From a young age, I wanted to grow up and become a teacher. I wanted to be able to give my students the same positive learning experience I once had. I could do all the things I loved doing if I were a teacher including working and playing with children, doing math, reading, making crafts, and singing. As a teacher, I could make a difference in the lives of my students. I wanted to create a positive, safe, learning environment and

instill a love of learning. I know many teachers fondly remember why they wanted to be teachers and how they wanted to help every child who passed through their classroom. When these teachers started teaching, they knew they could help every child in one way or another.

My 3rd year of teaching was very exciting for me. My morale was high and I truly loved my job. I was teaching in a rural county school in Southern Appalachia that had a supportive principal and a faculty that worked together. It was my 2nd year of teaching first grade. I studied and taught the current curriculum and was more confident in my teaching practices and the people in the community were beginning to know me. I felt that every child could learn if he or she were put in the right situation. Unfortunately, the county in which I was teaching was poor and had few career opportunities for the parents of our students.

My first experience with team building occurred a few weeks before the new school year. We always had a few days of inservice during the summer and that year was no different. The principal brought the faculty and staff together in order to get to know one another and complete part of our inservice days. We completed a 2-day team building workshop with a majority of the exercises focused on relationship building. Team-building exercises included intimate interviews and discussions about important aspects of each person's life. We also completed activities that built trust and encouraged teamwork. At the time, I didn't think about what was being accomplished at this inservice. I saw inservice as something that had to be done each year and the sooner we had completed it, the sooner we could check it off our yearly list of requirements.

We received our class lists a few weeks before school started. One of the

kindergarten teachers checked my class roll and saw the name of a little boy whom I will call Chris. She had Chris in her class the previous year and made several comments about his bad behavior. She also talked about his family and their poverty. She made a point of telling me that I could be lucky because Chris and his family might have moved over the summer, especially if his family could not pay the rent on their single-wide trailer. After the comments she made, I began to dread the upcoming school year. Could I handle this child in a first grade class of 28?

The 1st day of school, teachers went to the lunchroom to collect their new students. Students, dressed in their new school clothes and with their parents beside them, waited anxiously to find out which teacher they had for the upcoming year. As I called my students' names, they lined up behind me with their parents. The last child on the list was Chris. He ran to get in line with the others. He did not have new clothes or any school materials. His shoes were ragged and his hair, uncombed. Although it was obvious to everyone that Chris was different, it seemed that Chris did not really care. He was just glad to be back in school.

The first few weeks were tough with Chris. He would not sit still and was always getting into the other children's belongings. He would argue with and hit the other children. Academically, he was an average student, basically doing just enough to get by. After about 2 weeks of school, I noticed Chris playing well with some of the other children in class. That same day, he completed all of his work. I decided to call his mother to let her know how proud I was of him. When she found out I was Chris's teacher, she asked me what he had done wrong and said she would definitely spank him when he got home. When I told her how proud I was of him, his mother began to cry.

She told me later that was the first time a teacher said Chris was a good kid and was doing okay in school.

The next year, Chris and his family moved to another county. It was two years before I saw him again. He changed schools three times before he came back to my school. When they moved back to the county, Chris's mom called the school and asked that her daughter, whom I will refer to as Melissa, be placed in my classroom. She told the secretary that I was a very nice teacher and she wanted her daughter in my class. I felt good about the success I had with Chris and, later, with his sister Melissa.

The year I spent with Chris was one of my most challenging. I could not have imagined that year without the support I received from both the faculty and my administrator. Through team-building activities, I strengthened my relationship with my grade level team. I could trust them and share my concerns about my class throughout the year. At that elementary school, we quickly learned that it takes support, cooperation, and teamwork to accomplish many tasks. The administrator was supportive and faculty knew that whenever a problem arose, we could depend on him to help. Throughout the year, the administrator used team-building activities for support, site-based decision making, and the implementation of new reform. Even though the school district was one of the poorer in the state, the faculty was taught through the guidance of our administrator how to work and plan together as a team and to depend on one another. We had clear, shared goals and the ability to work well together.

Effective team-building activities can greatly impact and increase faculty productivity, morale, job satisfaction, and retention rates. Team building is a process. When team members share common goals, know their roles and responsibilities, have

open methods of communication, and are motivated to perform them, success happens (Schneider & Schneider, 1999).

The school district administrators in this study promoted teamwork and communication using a variety of team-building activities. This study examines the team-building activities and teacher support that contributes to higher teacher morale.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” -- Margaret Mead

Team building and improving teacher morale has been a topic of research for many years and continues to be important in schools across the country. Research revealed that high teacher morale improved learning, achievement, and overall teacher health (McCarthy, 2002). However, teacher morale could decline over time. According to McCarthy, it could happen so subtly that teachers might not be fully aware of the decline. Reasons for this decline could include: (a) isolation from their peers, (b) low salary, (c) parent teacher conflict, or (d) classes with many discipline issues or low-achieving students.

Teacher morale and student achievement go hand in hand. Ellenberg (1972) found that, “where teacher morale was high, elementary schools showed an increase of student achievement” (p. 3). Maintaining high teacher morale nurtures an environment focused on learning. It also made teaching a rewarding profession (Miller, 1981). Over time, teachers might become frustrated or tired and experience job burnout. Events could tear away their enthusiasm for teaching, which could affect their productivity and quality of teaching.

One way to improve teacher morale is through team building among the school faculty and staff. Making schools and teachers successful takes more than an individual

effort. Working together within a grade level or with the entire faculty has made it easier to accomplish tasks. Team building has had many benefits in a school setting. These benefits include: (a) promoting personal and leadership development opportunities; (b) working in a positive environment; (c) promoting teacher collaboration; (d) building stronger relationships among faculty, parents, and community members; (e) faculty becoming better at solving problems; (f) accomplishing a higher level of commitment among the faculty and staff; (g) promoting involvement; (h) increasing teacher motivation; (i) enhancing the quality of teaching; and (j) improving communication (Langlois, 1992).

Team building has improved communication and decreased isolation among faculty and staff. An active process that creates a common purpose among faculty and staff members, team building focuses on achieving a specific task or set of outcomes. During this process, faculty and staff identify clear goals. These goals help them practice effective teamwork, share decision making, and improve communication and relationships that, over time, can change the school culture (Grazier, 1999).

Team building has been a process of enabling faculty to reach its goals. The stages involved in team building are: (a) to clarify collective goals; (b) to identify inhibitors that prevented them from reaching their goals and remove them; (c) to put in place enablers that assisted them; and (d) to measure and monitor progress to ensure the goals are achieved (Alexander, Johnson, & Winslow, 2001).

To be effective, a school climate must promote learning and positive relationships among school personnel, parents, and the community. This type of environment has instilled confidence, pride, and security for those involved in the school (Blank &

Kershaw, 2001). Therefore, an effective leader must provide opportunities for relationship building, communication, and collaboration among the staff.

The performance of any school depends on a strong set of goals. According to Burke (1998):

When a work group has at least one goal that is common to all members and when the accomplishment of that goal requires cooperative interdependent behavior on the part of all group members, team building may be an appropriate intervention. (p. 3)

Team building has been often used in school communities to establish good practices and ensure team cohesion, effectiveness, and continuity (Peretomode, 2006). It has been used to improve communication and working relationships through planned and managed change involving a group of people. In many schools, where team building is not in place, teachers work in isolation, administrators try to accomplish their work alone, new ideas ultimately fall on the shoulders of an individual, and there is a general lack of communication among the faculty and staff. The faculty has little or no support and teacher morale declines.

Benton and Bulach (1995) posited that incorporating team-building activities improved school climate in an elementary school. They conducted a study that identified areas in a school that needed the most improvement and introduced team-building techniques. The entire faculty was involved in these activities. From these activities, community and curricular teams were established. The results showed gains in teacher collaboration and job satisfaction as well as in other areas deemed important.

Goodlad (1984) identified characteristics in traditionally structured schools that

were considered unfavorable for effective teaching, teacher empowerment, and development of professional status for teaching. This type of work environment did not encourage professional interaction with the exception of monthly faculty meetings. Interaction among the teachers frequently consisted of quick conversations during lunch, encounters in the hall, and planning periods.

Goodlad (1984) found that classroom structure, limited time for planning activities, and top-down decision making contributed to conditions that make it difficult for teachers to work collaboratively with other teachers and staff. As a result, educators looked for ways to create a nontraditional approach to inservice teacher education and teacher collaboration.

Research on teamwork in elementary schools is conflicting. Frase and Sorenson (1992) conducted a study with elementary teachers on teacher motivation and job satisfaction. They found that teachers were not concerned about the lack of teacher collaboration; in fact, many teachers preferred to work alone. Only teachers who were considered *high growth* teachers enjoyed being in the decision-making process and working with other faculty members. Frase and Sorenson concluded that teachers were not trained in the decision-making process outside the classroom. These findings indicated the need for further study in the area of team building.

Intent of Study

Each year, expectations and teacher workloads increase. Teachers may experience low morale because their daily work life often includes long periods of isolation from their peers. Factors such as the layout of a school campus, teachers

working alone in their classrooms, and scheduling constraints make finding time to talk, plan, and work with other teachers almost impossible. Team-building activities are planned in the workplace to improve communication, develop the team, cooperation, and cope with change. The intent of this study, therefore, was to explore the use of team building activities and the influence of those activities on the perception of teacher morale in the elementary school. The researcher examined the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding school climate, faculty teamwork, and team-building activities.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this qualitative study was: In what way do team-building activities influence teacher morale in elementary school teachers? The secondary research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What team-building activities were implemented at the school?
2. At what point in the academic year were team-building activities conducted with teachers?
3. What were the expected outcomes from team building?
4. Did the expected outcomes occur at each school?
5. What were teacher perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?
6. What were administrator perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?

Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to extend current research on team building in elementary schools to improve teacher morale by focusing on the perceptions of administrators and teachers on the best practices of team building. By gathering and analyzing the views of administrators and teachers, this study provides some perceived strengths and weaknesses of proven team-building techniques that can contribute to positive teacher morale and teacher job satisfaction both inside and outside the school district.

Team building is important not only for the immediate experience of the activities undertaken by the team but also for the group skills, communication, and bonding that result. The team building activities are the means to that end (Dee, 2007). Team building activities provide realistic experiences that empower individuals to contribute to common goals. The main goals of team building in the school system are to: (a) improve motivation, (b) define objectives and goals, (c) identify a team's strengths and weaknesses, and (d) find barriers that prevent creativity. All school districts, schools, or other workplace may benefit from this study.

Scope of Study

A case study design was used to gather qualitative data from administrators and teachers. Data collection sources included personal interviews with administrators and focus group interviews with teachers at seven elementary schools located in Southern Appalachia. Additional data collection tools included document review and observation.

Statement of Researcher Perspective

In my teaching career, I have taught in two school districts and at four different schools. During that time, I worked with five principals, one woman and four men. Each had his or her own leadership style. Some said that teamwork was important to the success of the school. Two principals used team-building activities to enable the faculty to open up and work together. Another used vertical team meetings once a month to encourage teachers in different grades to work together. One of the principals had a poor leadership style. The teachers said the principal took sides, gave them little support, and encouraged competition. They said they were isolated from other teachers. The present school was a new school when I arrived. The faculty was made up of recent graduates, teachers from other elementary schools who requested to be transferred, teachers who were at a small school that closed, and a principal from the most populated school in the district. The principal used team-building activities when school was out for the summer by sending the newly formed faculty and staff to an overnight camp. During our stay, we completed many team-building activities to help us get to know each other better, to build trust, to become motivated about our new school, and to help us work better as a team. Later that summer, faculty went to an off-site location, completed some smaller team-building activities, and created our vision and mission statement as a school team. We worked together to create clear goals and to build friendships. The experience made me a better team player and teacher. I felt I had ownership in the school and was very positive about the upcoming year.

Team building is necessary to build a positive climate in a school. Using team-building activities improves communication among faculty and builds teamwork skills.

Teamwork can have a long lasting positive influence on the school and in individual classrooms. During team building activities, teachers have time to reinforce current friendships and develop a new respect for others. When teachers have a support group, they are willing to try new things and take greater risks. Faculties learn how to create and work toward common goals.

Completing team-building activities is a positive experience for teachers. Through team-building activities, the faculty came together to create a vision and mission statement for the school. We also picked school colors and a mascot. These team-building activities afforded ownership in the school. I have learned through team-building inservices to depend on and work with other teachers.

I have been employed for 11 years as an elementary teacher with the school district in which this case study was conducted. By interviewing principals and teachers and reporting about strategies that motivated them to work as teams, improve morale, and create a better school climates, their stories can be told. I aided those interviewed in understanding the phenomenon of teacher morale; however, I made every effort not to influence the research study.

Definitions of Terms

1. Administrator - The administrator of a school or a business.
2. Teacher - A person employed by the school system to guide and direct the learning experiences of students in an official educational setting. This person successfully completed a professional curriculum from an accredited teaching institution and held a teaching certificate (Encarta, 2007).

3. Morale - (a) The mental and emotional conditions with regard to a task or goal to be accomplished. (b) A sense of common purpose with respect to a group (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2007*).
4. Team Building – A effort to improve communication and working relationships by managed change involving a group of people. Team building is “improving performance by developing team working skills by using any appropriate method” (*Team-wise, 2008, p.1*).
5. No Child Left Behind Act - Public Law 107-110 reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of United States primary and secondary schools. It was built on four pillars: accountability for results; an emphasis on doing what worked best based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility (NCLB, 2006).
6. Teamwork – Defined as “two or more people working together toward a common goal” (Snell & Janney, 2005, p. 6).
7. Culture - “[C]onsists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 3).
8. Climate - “[R]ecurring patterns of behavior, attitudes and feelings that characterize life in an organization” (Lindahi, 2006, p.2).

Overview of the Study

This study contains five chapters and begins with an opening vignette. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, intent of the study, research questions, significance and scope of the study, perspective of the researcher, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 presents a

review of the associated literature. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to examine the perceptions of administrators and teachers on how team building activities improve teacher morale and the overall climate of the school. Chapter 4 contains data collected and data analysis. Chapter 5 provides recommendations for future research, the conclusion, and a summary of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the responsibilities of elementary administrators and teachers greatly increased. Changes in education are occurring every year with new laws and new curricula. Elementary educators are constantly learning and adapting to these changes. Teachers see trends in education come and go including theme-based learning, phonics-based learning, curriculum mapping, thinking maps, authentic assessments, more testing and less testing, and differentiated learning, among others. However, one law has had a major impact on education in every state; the No Child Left Behind Act implemented major provisions for each state to follow. These provisions include:

1. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Adequate Yearly Progress requires each state to create an accountability system of assessments, graduation rates, and other indicators.
2. Teacher Quality. All teachers have to be *highly qualified*, as defined in the law.
3. Student Testing. All students are measured annually in reading and math in grades three through eight.
4. Parental Involvement. States are required to issue a detailed report card on the status of schools and districts. Parents have the right to know if their child is being taught by a *highly qualified* teacher.
5. Scientifically-based research. School systems are required to use *scientific-based*

research strategies in classrooms and for professional development of staff.

6. Public school choice. If a school is identified as needing improvement, the school administrators are required to provide students with the opportunity to take advantage of public school choice (NCLB, 2006).

Teaching can be a rewarding profession and most teachers embrace learning with their students. They enjoy seeing their students succeed in everyday tasks. They choose the profession not for the salary but because they want to work with children and be part of their learning experience. Over the past years, however, the role of teacher has expanded and changed as elementary teachers are asked to accomplish more.

Expectations placed on teachers have expanded exponentially (Lumsden, 1998). Under the No Child Left Behind Act, teachers are expected to teach specific content for specific tests. Schools and teachers are graded on how well their students perform, which adds additional pressure to the teachers.

Because elementary teachers cannot leave their classrooms unattended, daily isolation from their coworkers results. They may be on committees that meet after school and during their planning time and they must schedule additional time to grade papers, attend workshops, clean their rooms, and prepare lessons, much of which is done on their own time. Many come to school during the summer months to prepare for the upcoming year. Each year, a teacher's commitment of time and responsibility increases, and, unfortunately, many administrators are unaware of how much time and effort it takes to be an effective teacher. Consequently, morale, a feeling, a state of mind, mental attitude, and emotional attitude (Mendel, 1987), could be easily affected by the everyday stress that teachers encounter.

Job satisfaction in a school setting is influenced by a variety of factors such as a teacher's relationship with the principal, the quality of the physical environment in which they work, and the degree of fulfillment in their work. Researchers have noted that teachers tend to be more motivated by intrinsic reward such as respect, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment than by extrinsic rewards, such as job security, salaries, and fringe benefits (Tracy, 2000). Teachers want to be part of a team, participate in decision making, use their skills in ways that are valued, have freedom and independence, be challenged, express their creativity, and have opportunities to learn and grow in their chosen profession (Black, 2001). Poppleton (1992) concludes that teaching is a profession either spoiled or enhanced by working conditions.

School success is very important in today's world. It takes more than individual effort to make a school perform well. It takes teamwork from all the stakeholders involved in the school. It takes community effort for a school to grow and flourish. Many schools use teams to accomplish many tasks. Teams may work together on site-based council, technology committees, school improvement plans (SIP), curricular reform, implementing new programs, or restructuring. For teams to be successful, everyone involved must have clear, shared goals, a sense of commitment, the ability to work together, mutual accountability, access to needed resources, and other elements of effective teams (Peterson, 1995). Team building develops working relationships and improves the performance of the team. In addition, team building improves motivation, communication, support, and trust within the team (Heathfield, 2007).

Chapter 2 consists of a review of the related literature in the areas of team building, leadership, and teacher morale. The chapter is divided into several relevant

sections: (a) definition of teacher morale, (b) high and low teacher morale, (c) definition of principal leadership, (d) definition of team building, (e) history of team building, (f) importance of team building, (g) methods of team building, (h) ways to make team building successful, (i) examples of team building, (j) emerging best practices for team building, (k) team building relating to job performance, (l) problems with team building, (m) schools using team building, (n) qualitative research, and (o) summary.

Definition of Teacher Morale

Morale has been defined as the mental and emotional conditions with regard to a task or goal to be accomplished (Merriam-Webster, 2007). Much of the literature has defined morale as a feeling or state of mind that involved a mental and emotional attitude (Mendel, 1987). Bentley and Rempel (1980) defined morale in a broader sense as encompassing both the organizational goals of productivity and the whole of the environment of the individual.

Morale is the extent to which an individual's needs are satisfied, and the extent to which the individual perceives satisfaction as stemming from total job satisfaction. High morale is evident when there is interest in and enthusiasm for the job. It is important in morale that the person believes and feels, rather than the conditions that may exist as perceived by others (Bhella, 2001, p. 369).

Morale affects the level of well-being based on such factors as purpose and confidence in what the person or group accomplishes. Morale has been defined as the feeling people have about their job based on how they perceive

their position in the organization (Washington & Watson, 1976). McKnight, Ahmad, and Schroeder (2001) defined morale in the context of the workplace as “the degree to which an employee feels good about his or her work and work environment” (p. 467).

If teacher morale is driven by the existence of unsatisfied needs, understanding which needs are more important to teachers becomes essential. Maslow (1954) established a model in which five basic needs of humans emerged in a hierarchy of importance that addressed physiological requirements, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. In Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs model, when a need is satisfied, it no longer motivates and the next higher need takes its place. The following needs, arranged from lowest to highest, are consistent with the basic needs of people and a determining factor when looking at the morale of an individual person.

1. Physiological needs are those required to sustain life. These include air, water, nourishment and sleep.
2. Safety needs include living in a safe area, medical insurance, job security and financial reserves.
3. Social needs are needs related to interaction with other people. They include a need for friends, for belonging, and the need to give and receive love.
4. Esteem needs might be classified as internal or external. Esteem needs include self-respect, achievement, attention, recognition, and reputation.
5. Self-actualization needs are at the top of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Self-actualized people have needs for truth, justice, wisdom, and meaning (Maslow & Lowery, 1998).

Once the lower level physiological and safety needs are met, the higher needs, such as job satisfaction and improved morale become more important.

Parks (1983) wrote that people need certain things from life in order to maintain higher levels of morale. Those needs are grounded in motivational theories in psychology. Motivation is an important ingredient in job performance and satisfaction and could be both extrinsic and intrinsic. According to Huitt (2001) primary motivational needs are: (a) behavioral, obtaining desired, pleasant rewards or escaping undesired, unpleasant consequences; (b) social, being part of a group or a valued member; (c) biological, maintaining balance in one's own life; (d) cognitive, developing meaning, or understanding and eliminating threat or risk; (e) affective, feeling good about oneself and maintaining levels of optimism and enthusiasm; (f) connotative, realizing personal dreams and taking control of one's life; and (g) spiritual, understanding the purpose of one's life, and connecting the self to the ultimate unknown.

High and Low Teacher Morale

Molloy (2006) said that morale was "attitude towards work" (p. 2). Morale pertains to the mental and emotional feelings people have about the task they are expected to undertake. Work can be one of the most enjoyable parts of a person's day or one of the most unpleasant; thus, work morale could be defined as high or low. Molloy proposed that staff members on a team with high morale: (a) considered themselves winners and resent the presence of losers in their workplace; (b) found fault with any member who brought discredit to the team; (c) were among the best at what they did and were aware of that excellence; (d) expressed respect for their leaders; (e) told about the

accomplishments of their peers; (f) required little supervision; (g) cooperated with one another; (h) did their jobs without supervisory oversight; (i) displayed a relaxed friendship; (j) make suggestions for improvement; and (k) voluntarily came in early and stayed late.

Maehr, Midgley, and Urdan (1993) stated, “People are more personally invested in their work with an organization when, (a) they have a voice in what happens to them; (b) their work has meaningful and significance in contributing to a higher purpose or goal” (p. 2). Consequently, it is important that school administrators treat teachers in ways that empower them. Teachers should be involved in decision making about policies and practices in the school and have their expertise acknowledged. By doing so, administrators could help sustain teacher morale.

Teachers spend the better part of their day with their pupils. When they are on break or the day has ended, the first topic of discussion is often their day as a teacher. Teaching can be one of the most fulfilling, rewarding, and satisfying jobs people could have. Each day, they can see the progress of their students. When a positive healthy school culture exists and teacher morale is high, “teachers feel good about each other and at the same time, feel a sense of accomplishment from their jobs” (Hoy & Miskel, as cited in Lumsden, 1998). Yet, when teachers are not supported by their peers, their students’ parents, and administrators, their job can create stress, making them feel tired and unappreciated. In America, teachers are being stretched to the limit. Expectations placed on them appeared to be growing each year.

Several circumstances could affect a teacher’s morale. Low teacher morale can be caused by several factors including feeling dissatisfied in the job, isolation from peers,

feeling unappreciated, overwhelmed with the workload, or being underpaid. When teacher morale was low, student achievement goes down (Connors, 2000).

Stress is another factor that affects teacher morale. Lumsden (1998) stated, “it can result in emotional and physical fatigue and a reduction in work motivation, involvement, and satisfaction” (p. 1). Feeling stress in a job can damage a person’s productivity and enthusiasm.

A healthy school environment and high teacher morale tend to be related. One very important factor that improves teacher morale is a school administrator who listened to teachers. Through communication, teachers identify the positives and negatives in the school environment (Protheroe, 2006). Having administrative support and leadership are important to teachers. Principals could create a positive school culture, which could lead to a healthy school environment. Other factors, that aide teacher morale are good student behavior, a positive school atmosphere, and independence (Lumsden, 1998). In addition, parental support and teacher perception of students and student learning can affect teacher morale. “The morale of the building needs constant attention”(Hayden, 2007, p.1).

Miller (1981) noted that teacher morale could have a positive effect on students and the way they related to school. Teacher morale can affect student learning and make school a bad or good experience. By supporting teachers’ decisions, involving them in decision making, and acknowledging their expertise, administrators can aid teacher morale. Effective administrators serve as guardians of instructional time, assist in student discipline matters, and allow teachers to develop and enforce discipline codes (Blasé & Kirby, 1992).

Dimensions of Principal Leadership

The word leadership could refer to: (a) the process of leading, (b) those entities that perform one or more acts of leading, and (c) the ability to affect human behavior to accomplish a mission designated by the leader (Gitomer, 2005)

Northouse (2004) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Other definitions of leadership include: former-President Harry S. Truman, who said a leader “is a person who can persuade people to do what they don’t want to do, or do what they’re too lazy to do and like it” (*Think Exist*, 1998); and the U. S. Air Force’s definition, “Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people in such a way that will win their obedience, confidence, and respect and loyal cooperation in achieving common objectives” (*Ten Leadership Definitions*, 2008).

According to Bass (1990), leadership is a process by which one person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs their organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leaders have certain attributes that guide them as leaders, including beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge, and skills. A good leader can create followers or coworkers who want to achieve higher goals. Key ingredients in having a healthy school climate and high teacher morale include having a school leader who can: (a) facilitate a shared vision, (b) sustain a school culture conducive to student and staff learning, (c) manage the organization for a safe, efficient, and effective environment, (d) collaborate with families and community members, and (e) act with integrity, fairness, and ethics (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996).

Administrators might have different leadership styles but a clear vision for their school

and the passion and skills to work with students, faculty, and parents to realize this vision.

Burns (1978) compared transformational and transactional leadership styles, basing his theories on Kohlberg's (1971) stages of moral development and Weber's (1920) theory of leadership and authority. Burns defined transformational leadership as the process that "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 36). He defined transactional leadership as the process that "occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of exchanging valued things" (p. 38).

According to Northouse (2004), transformational leadership "refers to the process whereby an individual engages with another and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower and tried to restore the idea of leaders possessing special gifts and abilities" (p. 126). The transformational leader energizes, aligns, and excites followers by providing a compelling vision of the future (Burns, 1978). Bass (1985) extended Burns' leadership approaches and defined transformational leadership in terms of how the leader affected the followers who are intended to trust, admire, and respect the transformational leader. He offered three ways in which leaders transformed followers: increasing their awareness of task importance and value, getting followers focused on team or organizational goals rather than on their own interest, and activating their higher-order needs.

Transactional leaders employed conventional rewards and punishment to gain compliance from their followers (Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders motivate followers

by appealing to their self-interest. They focus on the accomplishment of tasks and good worker relationships in exchange for desirable rewards.

Four components of transactional leadership include:

1. **Contingent Reward:** The leader provides rewards if subordinates performed adequately or tried hard enough.
2. **Passive Management by Exception:** To influence behavior, the leader uses correction or punishment as a response to unacceptable performance or deviation from the accepted behaviors.
3. **Active Management by Exemption:** To influence behavior, the leader actively monitors the work and uses corrective methods to ensure the work was completed to meet accepted standards.
4. ***Laissez-faire* Leadership:** The leader is indifferent and has a “hands-off” approach toward the workers and their performance. The leader ignores the needs of others, does not respond to problems or did not monitor performance.

Transactional leadership works when both leaders and followers understood and agreed on what task was important (Northouse, 2006).

Another dimension was developed to analyze the application of transformational leadership in schools. The Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) model conceptualized leadership along the following 6 dimensions to: (a) build vision and goals, (b) provide intellectual stimulation, (c) offer individualized support, (d) demonstrate high performance expectations, (e) symbolize professional practices and values, and (f) develop structures to foster participation in decisions.

Transactional leadership is often viewed as being complementary to

transformational leadership. Some people consider transformational leadership a first stage in carrying out day-to-day routines (Owens, 2004). Hopkins, Sanders, and Geroy (2003) proposed an extension to transactional and transformational leadership they labeled *transcendental leadership*. Transcendental leaders visualize new modes of thought and have a deeper sense of feeling. Their model suggests structural levels of leadership accomplishment: transactional, transformational, and transcendental.

The leadership practices of school administrators should aid them in turning schools into effective organizations. Administrators facilitated leadership by developing and counting on others in their faculty and staff to strengthen the school's culture, modify organizational structures, and build a collaborative process. This accomplishment requires teamwork (Glickman, 2003). Glickman noted, "In successful schools, principals aren't threatened by wisdom of others; instead, they cherish it by distributing leadership" (p. 56).

Glover (2007) discovered, through the power of dialogue, an effective school leader will take time to generate more open communication, engage teachers in conversation, respect teachers' views as legitimate, and listen to the ideas and suggestions from the faculty. When this is done teachers will be empowered and take more active roles in the decision making process.

It is important for school administrators to set goals and find ways to create and sustain schools that could compete with private, charter, and magnet schools, empower others to make significant decisions, provide instructional guidance, and develop and implement strategic and school improvement plans (Hoffman, 2005).

Due to modern educational reform, school administrators assume several roles as

school leaders. Many of these are related to accountability. The school leader needs to create and sustain a competitive school, empower faculty and staff to make significant decisions, provide instructional leadership, and develop and execute strategic plans. Many successful school administrators are proactive in promoting school quality, equity, and social justice (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Definition of Team Building

In order to understand the definition of team building, it was important first to understand the meaning of team. “A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are; committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (Musselwhite, 2007, p. 1).

A team can be defined as a group of people coming together to achieve a purpose or common goal. In the workplace, teams change and grow. One way to have successful teams is to incorporate team building into the workplace. Team building is a general term that covers what one wants to accomplish and the ways in which it is being accomplished. Team building enables the group to reach a goal. Through team-building activities, people establish and develop a greater sense of collaboration and trust among team members (Snell & Janney, 1999).

Kennett (2007) defined a team as a group of people who have a task that demanded a high level of interdependency. In other words, they have a goal that can be accomplished only as a team. They need to have boundaries to create cohesion and sustainability among members.

Team building usually refers to a series of activities that improves the performance of a team by strengthening the relationships among team members. Team building might involve many different exercises and activities. Although the different activities could lead to different results, in the end, team building is effective in building relationships and helping performance (Hunter, 2007).

Team building creates trust and cooperation among team members. When engaging in team building activities, team members complete interactive activities and discussions in order to encourage teamwork. Team building works in school settings, work environments, sports, and other recreational activities.

Team-building techniques can be put into place to improve an organization. Successful team building creates effective, focused work teams, skills, and inherent creativity of diverse people (Grazier, 1999). Teams are a formal way to actualize collaboration, which is at the heart of successful decision making. Team building is a way to formalize the power of collaboration among staff by blending the talents

Team building is a process of awareness building. It helps staff understand that the sum is greater than the parts and that their decisions would be better if they worked together as a team. Team building brings a group of people to a place where there was appreciation of each member's thoughts and ideas (Grazier, 1999).

Billington (1994) noted that the terms *team*, *teamwork*, *team building*, and *managing the team* stood for a wide area of managerial practices that went well beyond the actual use of team building. The essentials that constitute team building and creating an effective team include commitment to a shared dedication for achieving specific performance goals, competence of the team members, and a common goal. Team

members needed a common vision of the purpose of the work they share. “Team building is a culture, team building is a value, a mission, a deep down belief in the participants’ soul to like and love their job as well as their co-workers” (Cardus, 2007, p. 2).

History of Team Building

Wesner (1995) examined the way in which team building became a discreet educational intervention in organizations. She traced the history of team building to 1900, dividing her study into three chronological periods.

The first period, 1900 to 1950, was a period of discovery of the value of teams in the workplace. During this time, people sought ways to improve productivity. The period was highlighted in the 1920s with the Hawthorne Studies. The Hawthorne Studies involved a series of research activities designed to assess what would happen to a group of workers under various conditions. These studies concluded that the most significant factor in productivity was the building of a sense of group identity and a feeling of social support and cohesion that came with increased worker interaction.

The second period, 1950 to 1969, focused on the social interactions of managers, supervisors, and workers. The assumption that better relationships in the workplace would create more satisfied workers and lead to greater productivity gained prominence during this period.

The third period, 1970 to 2008, resulted in team building becoming a stand-alone educational process focused on solving problems of productivity and quality.

Importance of Team building

“Strong, effective working teams can greatly impact and increase staff productivity, employee morale, and overall staff retention rates” (Zweig White Consulting, 2005, p. 1). There is a need for team building in most workplaces, including schools. School faculty must have tools in order to set goals and objectives. In the workplace, everything is fast-paced and ever changing. It is expected that people in the workplace could work together effectively and get along with one another while simultaneously moving toward achieving a common goal. Due to these expectations, it becomes necessary to have methods in place to assist in team building.

“The most important feature of a successful team is high morale” (Protheroe, 2006, p. 1). When implementing team-building activities in the workplace, it is necessary to establish objectives and provide training in how to work together. One important part of building a successful team is the ability to keep morale high among the members of the team. Morale is tied to factors such as support, resources, communication, and the personalities involved.

When implementing team-building activities in an organization, a leader should select a team-building activity that would be good for the team. Some of the best team-building activities are the worst team-building experiences when there is no clear objective. Leaders should begin with a clear objective in mind. The goal should be attainable for the team, relevant, applicable to the team’s abilities, and reinforced long after completion of the activity. Leaders who implement team building with their employees should be prepared for their activities and certain that everyone would have a positive learning experience. They should read the exercises, obtain all necessary

materials, set up the room, and anticipate potential problems (Miller, 2004).

Methods of Team Building

Higher morale exists when one has a sense of ownership, is part of a team, or considers the job as meaningful. A sense of belonging or feeling part of a team is like feeling part of something larger (Heathfield, 2007). Team-building activities and exercises are designed to develop synergy and trust. The facilitator, leader, and team members gain the opportunity to know each other in an informal way (Johnson, 2003). Teams should understand the social process of leading a meeting, conflict resolution, generating creativity, self-management, and leadership (Sims, 1995).

Team-building techniques can be put into place to improve an organization. Successful team building creates effective, focused work teams. To help design a team-oriented environment, Heathfield (2007) created the Twelve C's for team building to foster continuous improvement including total quality, lean manufacturing, and self-directed work teams. Successful team building that creates effective, focused work teams requires attention to each of the Twelve C's. The Twelve C's are:

1. **Clear Expectations:** Leaders clearly communicate their expectations for the team's performance and expected outcome. Team members understand why the team is created.
2. **Context:** Team members need to understand why they are participating on teams and that forming the team will help the organization attain its communicated goals. The team understands where its work fit in the total context of the organization's goals, principles, visions, and values.

3. Commitment: Team members need to want to be part of the team and to feel the mission is important. The team members are excited about working together on the goals of the team.
4. Competence: The team has the appropriate people participating with the knowledge, skill, and capability to address the issues for which the team is formed.
5. Charter: The team assumes responsibility and designs its own mission, vision, and strategies to accomplish the mission.
6. Control: The team has freedom and is empowered to feel the ownership necessary to accomplish its task.
7. Collaboration: The team understands team and group processes and the stages of group development. Team members work together effectively. Team members understand the roles and responsibilities of team members and team leaders.
8. Communication: Team members are clear about their tasks. The team knows the complete context for their existence and communicates clearly and honestly with each other.
9. Creative Innovation: The organization is interested in change and values creative thinking, unique solutions, and new ideas. The team rewards people who take reasonable risks to make improvements. Administrators provide training, education, access to books and films, and field trips necessary to stimulate new thinking.
10. Consequences: Team members need to be responsible and accountable for the team achievements. Reasonable risk is respected and encouraged in the

organization. Team members spend time resolving problems and can see their impact on increased organizational success.

11. Coordination: Teams are coordinated by a central leadership team that assists the groups in obtaining what they needed for success. Priorities and resource allocation are planned across departments.

12. Cultural Change: The organization recognizes that the team-based, collaborative, empowering, enabling, organizational culture of the future is different from the traditional, hierarchical organization. (Heathfield, 2007)

Team-building methods in corporations generally refers to the selection and motivation of teams for fulfillment of organizational goals. Corporate team-building techniques aid people in adapting to new requirements. Team-building skills are critical for a person's effectiveness as a manager or as an effective member of a corporate team. Kidd (2007) provided basic methods for team building. The first was to have diversity of skills and personalities. When all members of the team contributed their full strengths, they compensated for each other's weaknesses. When implementing team building, it is critical to have good communication and harmony among the team members.

Best Practices for Team Building Success

Steps for a team-building activity to be successful include selecting an activity that is good for the team, preparing for the team-building activity, explaining the activity to the team, checking for understanding before beginning, facilitating the activity, debriefing the activity, and reinforcing the learning on the job (Miller, 2004).

Before beginning a team-building activity, the leader must develop a clear

objective for the activity. The activity should be possible for the team to complete, appropriate, related to where the participants are as a team, something that can be reinforced long after the activity is completed (Miller, 2004). Trust is an important part of team building. If a team has not worked together or does not know one another, trust team-building activities might need to be implemented.

It is important to prepare for a team-building activity. The person implementing the activity needs to read through the entire activity and be clear about what is going to happen. All materials for the activity should be gathered and the room set up. Job assignments and roles should be assigned and potential problems should be thought out. The leader of the activity should consider what could go wrong and prevent those problems from occurring and plan the corrective actions to take.

Once the activity begins, it is important to explain the activity to the team. By taking a few minutes, the leader could set the mood for the activity. Rules should be clarified in order for participants to know what they can or cannot do. Team members would be more willing to participate if they understand the rules and conditions of the game. During the activity, the leader should encourage and support the teams, mix among the groups to be able to clarify steps or redirect a team, give time checks, and debrief the participants.

Following the team-building activity, reinforcing the learning on the job is paramount. Reminding participants of the activity and keeping the lessons alive could extend the impact. If the activity is successful, it could be repeated sometime in the future. At a subsequent meeting, the participants should discuss the impact of the activity on their job performance (Miller, 2004).

Examples of Team Building

Team-building activities are designed to help groups develop effective communication and problem solving skills. Activities should be selected based on the team's needs and objectives. Team-building activities are planned to improve communication, connecting to the team, and team cooperation and to cope with change (Pell, 1999) Examples of team building activities are:

1. "Me, Myself and I" is a storytelling activity that forces participants to communicate about anything except them. The purpose is to become aware of how often the participants' communication centers on themselves. The participants select a partner with each allowed to speak for three nonstop minutes with no pauses. Although the participant might speak about any topic or several topics, he or she should never use the word "I." The listening partner is not permitted to speak. After the 3 minutes, partners reverse roles and repeat the activity. At the end the person in charge should ask questions, such as: Which role was easier, the speaker or the listener? Why? How did it feel to speak without feedback from a listener? How difficult was it to continue talking?
(Miller, 2004)
2. White Water Rafting, staff cookouts, or holiday parties are activities away from the business or school where team members can learn more about each other. These activities often revealed a great deal about the whole person, not just his or her work disposition. During these activities, they might tell another about their family, their childhood, jobs they liked or hated, among others. Team members should relax and begin trusting the other members of their team.

3. “Toxic Waste” is a team-building activity for small groups. Team members are equipped with a bungee cord and a rope. A small group must work to transport a bucket of “Toxic Waste” and tip it into the neutralization bucket. This activity could be used highlight almost any aspect of teamwork (Pell, 1999).
4. “Shared Values” is a sharing team-building activity in which participants agree on the most important shared values in the group. Team members individually write the three most important values to the staff and divide into groups of four or six to share those values with the team. The team then selects the most important values on the list for the organization as a whole. Teams create posters with words, symbols, or pictures that reflect the three values. At the end of the activity, each team presents their poster to the group. Discussion encourages team members to take a closer look at the values they selected (Miller, 2004)
5. In “Zoom” the group generates a cohesive story from a set of sequential pictures. The facilitator randomly orders the pictures and hands them out. Each person receives a picture but cannot show it to the others. This team-building activity builds patience and communication. It allows the members to understand from another’s point of view in order to recreate the story’s sequence (Neill, 2006)
6. “Tower Building” promotes team interaction while exploring collaboration and competition among groups. The participants are divided into a minimum of two groups of five to eight participants. Each group selects one person to be the judge. The groups are required to build a tower with materials provided. There are no rules for the building process other than each tower has to be free standing. After the allotted time passes, the judge examines the towers, chooses a winner,

and shares the results. Afterwards, the facilitator asks questions, such as: What happened? How did the group work? Was everyone's ideas heard? What was observed about teamwork? (California State Polytechnic University, 2005)

7. "Catch" increases cooperation and promotes working together as a team.

Participants are encouraged to improve the time it took to pass the ball around a group. Participants form a large circle with everyone standing. The person with the ball throws it to someone else in the circle, that person throws to another, and the activity continues until each person in the circle catches the ball. The last person throws the ball to the participant who had it first, establishing a pattern. The pattern is repeated with the facilitator timing the group. If anyone drops the ball, the sequence has to be restarted. The group creates a strategy to improve its time and plays the game again. When the game is over, the facilitator begins a discussion by asking questions, such as: How did it feel the first time I kept time? What was the key to success? or What implications did this have for the job? (Miller, 2004)

An important part of team-building activities is participant reflections and discussion about the activity, how they approached the situation, and possible points of learning.

Emerging Best Practices for Team building

Brodie (2007) noted that getting results in team building depended on teams being productive and positive. There are essential ingredients of highly productive and positive teams such as; setting clear goals for the team, having a common mission, creating

accountability for the team, having secure resources, making effective decisions, being proactive by anticipating, and thinking outside the boundaries, having effective leadership, being optimistic, building trust, respecting each other, having effective communication, welcoming conflict, creating a sense of belonging, and valuing and embracing diversity.

Whether in education, sports, or business, the right components are needed to build a successful team. Lee (2007) developed seven key components in building a successful team, as follows:

1. Find the right team members. They need to be able to accomplish their goal.
2. Give each person in the team a valued role. Everyone is important and needs to have a valued role to feel ownership. This helps create a sense of self-esteem in the individual.
3. Create a unique identity for the team. Let the team decide on a nickname. It will give them confidence. Success is all about confidence.
4. Commit to excellence. The people on a successful team must have the drive to succeed. They should perform and execute tasks with pride.
5. Give them a vision. A vision motivates employees.
6. Play or work with passion. Everyone on the team should love what he or she is doing. They are proud of their expertise.
7. Get out of the way. Leaders may just have to “give them the ball” and get out of their way. Let the team do its own thing.

The business climate is becoming more complex and businesses needed to adapt to change with agility.

Fraizer (2007) noted that it was important to look at improvisation as a leadership skill for those working with teams. He discussed the six essentials of an effective team: (a) willing support, (b) virtuosity, (c) optimism, (d) mutual respect, (e) good will, and (f) making it feel good.

Love (2007) alleged that “selecting the right people [is] one of the crucial first steps in team building” (p. 1). It is important for a leader to judge people based on what they accomplished in the past. A leader should pick people who worked well on the team. To have the most successful, high performance teams in the workplace, each person on the team needs to have shared values and shared objectives. Teams should spend time talking about ways to achieve their goals and objectives.

When implementing team building into a business organization, five conditions are necessary to make top teams effective. These conditions include clarity of direction, appropriate structure and rules of working, the right mix of people, CEO support and sponsorship, and individual and team development (Kennett, 2007).

Team building Relating to Job Performance

In an organization, large or small, success often depends on forming a cohesive staff with people who can get along and work toward the same goal. Successful corporate team building can be measured in two ways: by keeping conflicts down and performance up (Caliper, 2008).

A study by (Wolfe et al., 1989) observed teams of MBAs participating in a complex, interactive business decision-making simulation. The subjects participated in team-building training aimed at increasing trust, cooperation, and cohesion among team

members. The participants who received previous team-building training were more open with each other and were better communicators than members of the team who had not received the training. The study suggested that team-building training could provide short-term benefits.

Macy and Izumi (1993) found that all organizational interventions in the area of team building had the largest effect on financial performance. Guzzo and Dickson (1996) reported that “indicator[s] of financial performance show the greatest improvements when multiple changes are simultaneously made in aspects of organizational structure and human management practices” (p. 324).

Vinoker-Kaplan (1995) discovered in her research on interdisciplinary medical treatment that greater group interdependence and group collaboration contributed separately to increase the overall performance of the team members. She stated that employees needed to learn productive group strategies and receive organizational support and consultation that facilitated the development and implementation of the teams’ product.

Team building and a healthy work environment are related. Team building improves collaborative communication and performance for all kinds of teams. Organizations use team building to clarify new goals and step up to a higher level of communication, performance, and productivity (Shah & Shah, 2008).

Problems with Team Building

“Attempts to make teachers the agents of change usually follow one of two paths: an individual goes off alone to a workshop, or an entire faculty attends an in service

training session” (Maeroff, 1993, p. 513). When an individual teacher returns from a workshop, fellow teachers might show little interest in what he or she learned. It could be difficult for teachers to share what they learned. Faculty meetings often occur after a full day of teaching and inservice days are planned in the summer. Before a faculty walks in the door, they may be already dreading coming to the inservice. They view it as an invasion of their time and often think there are other ways to use their time more effectively.

Every situation with team building is different. Despite the best efforts of administrators to implement team building with their staff, many organizations still have difficulty producing the desired results from team building. Schools invest time and dollars in the workshops that are supposedly put into place to help team members bond and function as a group but results could be short-term at best.

There are several reasons that an organization might have problems with team building. Some of them include:

1. Some or all members did not want to be a part of a team. They are used to working independently and did not see the value of operating as a whole.
2. Team building is not linked to results. Instead, the team experiences artificial feel good exercises. The team might learn about each other’s strengths and weaknesses, yet they fail to connect their efforts to desired outcomes.
3. After the one time event, there are no follow up workshops. To have a successful team building process, the workshops should be well planned. Team building should result in actionable ideas to help the team and the

organization achieve their goals. Continued learning and reinforcement are necessities (Lantz, 2007).

Lantz covered possible issues that could negatively affect team building, including:

1. Fuzzy Focus. Teams do not really know how to function. The team loses focus and the results of their goals were never clear. They judge each other, make assumptions, speculate, finger point, etc. Team members become distracted or respond to whatever issue landed in their hands. There is no strategic team focus or energy to move forward.
2. Lack of leadership. Leadership is vital in helping a team succeed. If there is no leadership, members might resort to their own methods. Members might try to prove themselves or push the boundaries, taking on too much risk. Leaders need to understand their role in team building.
3. Stuck on sameness. The team might be in a time warp. They could be stuck in practices that were established years before. New team members might get easily frustrated by the lack of openness of experienced team members. Established team members might defend the way things have always been done.

Cardus (2007) offered four possible reasons that corporate team-building activities failed to achieve results. They are:

1. Lack of understanding why they are there. When participants are not made aware of the reason for the team-building program, there could be people involved who do not want to be there or even be upset because

they were made to be there. It is important that the participants are made aware of the goals for the day. The leaders of team-building activities should speak to the teams to inform them that they are taking part in a team-building program.

2. Improper sequencing of activities. The team should not begin with an insurmountable physical, mental, or emotional challenge; instead, the sequence should begin with the current comfort level of the group. The facilitator or leader of the group would decide on the sequence of the team-building activities.
3. Poor or inadequate debrief. A skilled leader would debrief the team-building activities to the leaders of a company. Effective facilitators gain the trust and attention of all team members through a variety of processing techniques.
4. Lacking commitment of management and executive team. Everyone should be involved in the team-building process. This includes the leaders and staff of the organization.

Teams without access to necessary resources, that have a leader who discourages them from spending time in team activities, or members who did not feel valued become frustrated and give up. Teams that do not receive positive feedback for what they accomplish might give less effort in the future (Grimme, 2007).

Schools Using Team Building

Maeroff (1993) suggests that “education might be improved by the formation of a

nucleus of committed people in each school, people prepared to take risks inside and outside their own classrooms” (p. 513). This team would “assume ownership of new ideas and learn strategies for implementing them and for winning adherents among their colleagues in the school community” (p. 513).

Parkview Elementary, located in Chico, California, noted that positive leadership and team building among the staff promotes the academic success of their students. The principal and faculty use team building to improve the climate and culture of the school (Capen, 2007).

Willard Elementary School, an International Baccalaureate (IB) Elementary school in California, has three main components, one of which is staff development and collaboration. They set aside time for team building within the grade levels, new teacher support through mentoring programs, vertical teaming, professional growth opportunities, and essential agreement that provided consistent practices. Working together helps the faculty follow their mission statement and achieve the goals of the school (Onoye, 2007).

The faculty at Joyce Elementary School in Michigan credits their principal, Mrs. Brown, for supporting team building and learning at the school. Brown offered a subcommittee role in the school improvement plan to every faculty member on staff; thus, each felt ownership in the school, which was better for the students, staff, and community (Langlois, 1992).

C.P. Squires Elementary School in Las Vegas offers team-building activities during inservices to help build a collaborative environment. Teachers are given opportunities to learn from one another. The principal, Carol Lark, allows teachers to take time out throughout the year for team-building activities. She postulates that team

building relieves stress, allows for creativity, gives teachers a passion for their job, allows teachers to work together and increased faculty morale and test scores. At one time, C.P. Squires Elementary had a difficult time finding highly qualified teachers. By 2007, however, there was a waiting list of highly qualified teachers wanting to join the faculty (Furger, 2007).

Many schools throughout America use teams to accomplish many tasks. The site-based decision making teams are made up of principals, assistant principals, PTA presidents, teacher representatives, staff, and parents. They meet regularly to make decisions on curricular reform, new program implementation, or restructuring. For teamwork to be successful in a school, individual team members need clear, shared goals, a sense of commitment, the ability to work together, mutual accountability, and access to needed resources.

Teamwork in schools should focus on meeting the academic and social needs of all students in the school. Just as the school vision and mission should focus on student learning, team building and team developing should be directed toward improving student success. Maeroff (1993) stated that education might be improved when schools work together as a team of committed staff. The staff needs to be prepared to take risks, inside and outside their classrooms. Setting aside time for team building would bring improvements to teaching and learning

Business Success in Team Building

Team building had tremendous significance in the corporate world. “A united team of business people and employees can work wonders for the various factors within a

business and can impact the profits and assets held” (Scott, 2008, p.1).

During a past summer sales campaign, Keller-Brown Insurance Services gave bonuses if goals for new business sales were met. Employees became stressed and customers became frustrated. Consequently, the company cancelled the campaign on new business sales; instead, they implemented team-building activities and acknowledged employees’ service to one another, to company partners, and to clients. According to Olenchek (2003), supervisors at Keller-Brown affirmed, “Anything you can do to uplift employees is important” (p.2). Soon after the team-building activities occurred, business sales increased and employees were working together.

JFC Staffing Association featured focus groups in order for employees from different offices and divisions to get together and share stories. The employees received positive feedback from interacting and sharing their success stories with others in the company (Carchid, 2002).

Qualitative Research

This study used qualitative inquiry as the best methodological approach to assess improving teacher morale through team building activities. Creswell (2003) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explored a social human problem. Qualitative research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyze words, report detailed views of informants, and conduct the study in a natural setting.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.3) defined qualitative research as:

multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its

subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their on natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them.

Interviewing administrators and teachers in their school environment and recording their perspectives on team-building activities in place in their schools offered understanding of how team building improved teacher morale and the overall climate of the school.

Case Study

A case study approach explains the phenomenon of using team-building activities to improve teacher morale. A case study is “the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular person or small group, frequently including the accounts of the subjects themselves” (Colorado State University, 2008, p.1). A case study takes a close look at a person or small group of people. A purposeful sampling of administrators and teachers from seven schools in one school district were interviewed. The emphasis of this case study was placed on exploration and description of team-building activities that improved teacher morale at each school.

A case study is “a deep exploration of a particular context, such as a classroom or group of individuals that involves the collection of extensive qualitative data” (State Educational Technologies, 2007, p.2). The data collection was triangulated using interviews, observation, and document analysis.

Case studies are used to organize information about a case and analyze the contents by seeking patterns and themes in the data and by further analysis through cross comparison with other cases. When developing a case study, it is important that:

1. All data about the case are gathered. Data could be collected through documentation, interviews, and observation.
2. Data are organized into an approach to highlight the focus of the study.
3. A case study narrative is developed. The narrative is a readable story that integrated and summarized key information around the focus of the case study.
4. The narrative might be validated by review from program participants.
5. Case studies could be cross compared to isolate any themes or patterns (McNamara, 1997).

Summary

The research and literature reviewed showed a distinct connection between implementing team building into organizations and improving faculty and staff morale. When proper team-building techniques are implemented in an organization, team members have a clear vision and understanding of the goals they want to accomplish. Each team member brings special talents, history, skills, and a unique set of experiences to the group. Team building shifts the focus of the group to its members rather than to organizational tasks. This allows team members to feel important, have ownership in the task, and collaborate with their peers. People who feel empowered tend to have higher morale. In a school setting, team building could improve the overall climate of a school.

Chapter 2 reviewed the extant literature on team building in both schools and industry. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3
METHODS AND PROCEDURES
INTRODUCTION

Dickman (2005) defined qualitative research as a way to help researchers understand how people felt and why they felt as they did. Qualitative research is appropriate for this case study because it explores the perceptions of those interviewed about team-building activities that improved teamwork and teacher morale in an elementary school setting.

The intent of this qualitative research case study is to explore the use of team-building activities and the influences of those strategies on the perception of teacher morale in elementary schools. According to Hirsch (2005), teachers indicated they value a school setting where they are not isolated, working together with leadership that allows time to build relationships and support their efforts. The researcher examined the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding school climate, faculty teamwork, and team-building activities. The study also examined the best practices in team building used with elementary teachers to improve teacher morale in a school district in Southern Appalachia. The central research questions addressed in this study are:

1. In what ways do team-building activities influence the elementary teachers' perception of teacher morale?
2. What team-building activities are implemented at this school?
3. At what point in the academic year are team-building activities conducted with teachers?

4. What are the expected outcomes from team building?
5. Did the expected outcomes occur in each school?
6. What are teacher perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?
7. What are administrator perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?

This study identified the perceived strengths and weaknesses of established team-building methods at seven elementary schools in one school district. This could provide insight for other school systems interested in implementing team building into their staff development program to improve teacher morale.

Chapter 3 contains specific details of the research design of the study, the selection of the purposeful sample, recruiting protocol, interview guide, interview logistics, ethical protocol, the data collection techniques, and data analysis.

Data Collection

Interviews

The primary source for this study was detailed, personal, open-ended interviews with seven administrators at the seven elementary school and seven 1-hour focus group interviews with four or five teachers from each of the seven schools. The interviews were conducted with open expectations and no hidden agenda. In addition to the questions asked, techniques were employed to generate additional conversation and clarify further details or questions. Probing for further explanations or addition information is a research technique that increases the clarity of the data collected (Creswell, 2002).

Purposeful Sampling

The participants in this study included principals and teachers from seven elementary schools in one school district. The purposeful sample of teachers included: teachers from primary and intermediate grades, a special education teacher, a literacy coach, related arts teachers, traditional and multi-age teachers, and teachers from year round and traditional calendar schools. The researcher eliminated the school where she taught. In other words, the sample was purposefully heterogeneous to ensure adequate representation of the teacher population. All principals and teachers were classified as highly qualified under the *No Child Left Behind Act* in the area in which they were currently teaching. Two of the teachers were Nationally Board Certified and 52% were certified by the state as Career Ladder I or Career Ladder II teachers. After receiving permission from the Director of Schools (See Appendix A) and the Principals (See Appendix B) to conduct research on best team-building practices at each of the seven elementary schools, 40 stakeholders were identified as participants in the research study. The stakeholders included: six school principals, one assistant principal and four or five teachers from each school. Teachers at each school were chosen by the principal to be interviewed. The focus groups consisted of teachers from school one, three 1st grade teachers and two 2nd grade teachers; from school two, four 4th grade teachers and one 5th grade teacher; from school three, five kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and multiage teachers; from school four, three 5th grade teachers, one related arts teacher and one special education teacher; from school five, three 2nd grade teachers and one literacy coach; from school six, one 1st grade teacher and four kindergarten teachers; and from school seven, four related arts teachers.

Forty participants including administrators and teachers were identified for the interviews. If administrators chose to withdraw from the study, other administrators at the schools were asked to participate in the individual interviews. If teacher participants withdrew from the focus group interviews, other teachers in the school were contacted to participate. In the focus group interviews, four or five teachers participated in each session. Table 1 presents a summary of information about the administrative participants in the study.

Table 1

Demographics of Individual Administrative Interviews

School	Name	Gender	# Years as an Administrator	# Years as an Administrator at Current School
Forest #1	Becky	F	2	2
Fairway #2	Carol	F	12	8
Wood #3	Anne	F	9	2
Lake #4	Joe	M	31	11
Ocean #5	Richard	M	7	3
Mountain #6	Mark	M	2	2
Town #7	Steve	M	4	3

Table 2 presents a summary of information about the teacher participants in the study.

Table 2

Demographics of Teacher Focus Groups

School	Name	Gender	# Years of Teaching Experience	Current Grade Assignment	National Board Certified	Career Ladder 1 or 2
#1	Susan	F	18	1 st	No	Yes
#1	Diane	F	32	1 st	No	Yes
#1	Judy	F	30	1 st	No	Yes
#1	Gail	F	5	2 nd	No	No
#1	Amy	F	8	2 nd	No	No
#2	John	M	18	4 th	No	Yes
#2	Cole	M	10	4 th	No	No
#2	Karen	F	6	4 th	No	No
#2	Mary	F	5	4 th	No	No
#2	Kim	F	22	5 th	No	Yes
#3	David	M	1	Multiage	No	No
#3	Robyn	F	19	Multiage	Yes	Yes
#3	Miles	F	5	Multiage	No	No
#3	Tracy	F	20	Multiage	No	Yes
#3	Keith	M	28	Multiage	No	Yes
#4	Candy	F	18	Special Ed.	No	Yes

Table 2 (continued)

#4	Sean	M	24	P.E.	No	Yes
#4	Bill	M	30	5 th	No	Yes
#4	Tony	M	26	5 th	No	Yes
#4	Nikki	F	10	5 th	No	No
#5	Sue	F	20	Literacy Coach	Yes	Yes
#5	Missy	F	18	2 nd	No	Yes
#5	Pearl	F	12	2 nd	No	No
#5	Claudette	F	9	2 nd	No	No
#6	Sharon	F	24	1 st	No	Yes
#6	Betsy	F	19	Kindergarten	No	Yes
#6	Jill	F	22	Kindergarten	No	Yes
#6	Wendy	F	6	Kindergarten	No	No
#6	Rebecca	F	2	Kindergarten	No	No
#7	Coach	M	20	P.E.	No	No
#7	Liz	F	4	Art	No	No
#7	Ann	F	29	Guidance	No	No
#7	Maria	F	10	Library	No	No

Recruiting Protocol

Participants were contacted through the school district email (See Appendix C). Each administrator and teacher in the district had a school email address. Once the selection of participants was completed, verification letters were sent to inform each

person that he or she was chosen for the focus group or individual interview. The letter included the time and place of the interview (See Appendix D). The participants were given the researcher's email address in case of cancellations.

History of School System

After the individual and focus group interviews were completed, it was discovered that six of the seven elementary schools used in the study underwent a principal change a few years previous to the study. Ocean and Wood schools had three changes in the last 6 years. Mountain School and Lake School had two new assistant principals in 3 years. Based on the restructuring of leadership in all but one elementary school and three different directors of schools during those changes, a breakdown of the number of years each principal was in the current school is provided in Table 1 above. This information was relevant to the research because different administrators have different leadership practices and beliefs.

Interview Guide

In both individual and focus group interviews, the session opened with an introduction and thanks to the participants for being willing to talk about the team-building activities used at their school. The researcher requested they use their own words to analyze the actions on team-building activities and their perceptions of the aftermath. The researcher also informed the participants that the information from the interviews would be in a manuscript submitted for publication.

The researcher assured the participants that this study would remain anonymous. Although quotes from the interviews were used in this final research report, no real names were associated with those quotes. The researcher informed the

participants that the interview session should take approximately 1 hour and would be tape recorded. Team building was defined for the participants.

Following that, the researcher asked the interviewees to read and sign the informed consent form for focus group interview participants (See Appendix E) and for individual interview participants (See Appendix F). Each participant received a copy of the informed consent. The researcher asked the participants for permission to record the session. After this was completed, the tape recorder was turned on.

Once the tape recorder was turned on, the initial interview questions were asked. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher summarized the comments made during the interview. The researcher asked if the summary was correct and reminded the participants that their words might be used as a direct quote in the published document. At that time, participants were allowed to withdraw their data from the study without penalty. The tape recorder was turned off and the researcher asked if there were any additional comments that needed to be off the record. At the end of the session, the researcher thanked everyone for his or her participation in the study in both the focus group and interview session (See Appendix G) and the individual interview session (See Appendix H).

Interview Logistics

Interviews were conducted at each of the seven schools. The interviews of the administrators were conducted in their offices. The focus group interviews were conducted in a classroom of each school with the doors closed. The researcher arrived early to assure sufficient seating and to have everything in place for the interviews. All interviews were conducted after school hours during August and September 2008.

Ethical Protocol

The steps in completing this research were as follows. The researcher secured authorization from the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to complete the study. Once approval was granted, the researcher sought permission from the school system in southern Appalachia and each school principal (See Appendix I). Teachers and administrators who participated in the study were made aware that their names would not be revealed. The identity of the schools and district in which the interviews were conducted remained anonymous to protect privacy. Throughout the study, pseudonyms were used to conceal identities.

The focus group interviews were conducted at each of the elementary schools of the participants in the study. These focus group interviews were after hours in a private location at the school. After being selected to participate in the interviews, each interviewee was asked to sign an informed consent document. Participants were told that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that everything said during the interview would be kept confidential. Permission was secured to record the interviews and to use quoted material in the final report, if needed. The interviewees had access to the findings of the study for the purpose of member checking. The interviewees were informed that a professional transcriptionist would transcribe the data and, once transcribed, the tapes and hard copies would be kept locked in a secured location until the report was published. After publication, the audiotapes and transcribed notes would be locked in a secure location for 10 years in the researcher's home.

Document Review

Sample and Selection Protocol

The researcher reviewed identical documents at each school that contained

information pertaining to team building. The researcher discussed document selection with each principal who assisted in the selection. The documents reviewed were school improvement plans (SIP), planning documents for workshops about team building, school flyers, letters from the principals to parents and faculty, and each school's website.

Document Review Guide

The researcher selected the same documents at each of the seven schools. The document review questions were developed after talking to district administrators who recommended the documents to be examined. The researcher looked closely for team building activities that were planned or occurring in each of the schools and recorded the title of the document, the date of the document, the date on which the researcher reviewed the document and the location of the document (See Appendix L).

Ethical Protocol

The researcher used only documents considered part of the public domain. Therefore, there were no ethical considerations for this document review. However, no personal names used in the documents were revealed. The identity of the schools and district from which the documents were reviewed remained anonymous to protect privacy. No names of the faculty in the school system were used in the study. Throughout the study, pseudonyms were used to conceal identities.

Observations

Sample and Selection Protocol

The principal at each school decided which teachers should be observed and when observations should take place. Potential participants in the observations were contacted

through the school district's email addresses (See Appendix L). Participants volunteered to allow the researcher to observe team planning and committee meetings. Additional data were obtained through observations made during school tours and by attending a faculty meeting at each school.

Observation Guide

The researcher developed a guide used during the observations. The observation guide included who was being observed, when the observation occurred, where the observation occurred, and why the observation was taking place. The same four questions were used during the observations at each school (See Appendix M).

Observation Logistics

Observations were conducted at each of the seven schools. The volunteers allowed the researcher to observe team planning, inservice, team building activities, and committee meetings. The researcher completed all school observations at the beginning of the school year so that each school would have equal opportunity to complete team-building activities.

Ethical Protocol

No names of teachers and administrators participating in the observations were revealed. Observations occurred during teacher planning times, faculty meetings, committee meetings, inservice, and workshops relating to team-building activities. Observations occurred in the classrooms only when students were not in the rooms. Other persons at the school during the time of the observations were included in the study. The identity of the schools and district where the observation occurred remained anonymous to protect privacy. No names of the participants or faculty of the school

system were used in the study. Throughout the study, pseudonyms were used to conceal identities.

Data Analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), “Qualitative data analysis is working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145).

Interviews

A qualitative, descriptive case study method was used to analyze the perceived best team building activities to improve teacher morale. Interview questions were developed for the face-to-face interviews with seven administrators from the district’s elementary schools. Similar interview questions were used in the focus group interviews with the teachers at each school. Data analysis began after completing the first of seven focus interviews and seven face-to-face interviews. Field notes taken from the interviews were analyzed and reflections were recorded in the researcher’s personal journal. The researcher compiled the data after each of the seven individual interviews and seven focus group interviews. After the interviews were completed and the tapes transcribed, data analysis began using the constant comparison analysis method of Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Spiggle (1994) states,

the constant comparison method explores differences and similarities across incidents within the data currently collected and provides guidelines for collecting additional data. Analysis explicitly compares

each incident in the data with other incidents appearing to belong to the same category, exploring their similarities and differences. (p. 493)

The researcher open coded each transcript, writing memo statements about the open codes from the transcripts in a journal. Coding is defined as the analytical process through which “data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.3). Coding “involves taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often based in the actual language of the participant” (Creswell, 2003, p. 192).

In the coding stage of analysis, each interview transcript was read paragraph by paragraph and, eventually, word by word each time a new idea or concept emerged. The data were clustered by similar topics and each topic was coded.

The next step involved the researcher selectively coding to filter the resulting theory. Theory emerged as themes and patterns developed. The researcher reviewed the conceptual framework for density throughout the coding process by examining the properties and dimensions of the themes. In the last step of data analysis, the researcher reexamined any areas considered special codes. The researcher reported any irrelevant cases to improve validity and descriptive power.

Document Review

The researcher used the codes, themes, and patterns from the interview data to guide the analysis of the document review at each school to answer questions in the document review guide. Documents were the same at each school and included the school improvement plan, faculty meeting notes, committee meeting notes, inservice notes, and school websites. The researcher maintained a personal journal for each school

to record findings. The notes were analyzed and reflections of findings were recorded and compared. The researcher examined the notes word by word. Each time a new idea or concept emerged, the data were clustered to help form patterns, divided into smaller categories, and put into themes.

Observations

The researcher used codes, themes, and patterns from the interview data to guide the analysis of the school observations. Observation questions aided in recording faculty behavior, team building activities, and the way faculty worked together as a team.

Throughout the study, notes and observations were collected and analyzed descriptively to gain a greater understanding of what team-building activities were implemented and how they affected teacher morale. The findings answered the guiding questions and gave the school system insight into the effective inclusion of team building in their staff development to improve teacher morale.

In summary, the following steps were used to analyze the qualitative data:

1. After the first of the six principals and one assistant principal face-to-face interviews and seven focus interviews, transcribed data were openly coded on the hard copy transcript;
2. sentences were segmented and put into categories;
3. data were clustered into themes;
4. patterns emerged from the themes;
5. data were compared from one transcript to the next;
6. the codes, themes, and patterns from the interview data guided the analysis of the document review;

7. the codes, themes, and patterns from the interview data guided the analysis of the school observations;
8. member checking was used to assure accuracy of meaning, and
9. an external auditor, who was IRB certified and versed in qualitative research, was used to analyze and review this study.

Quality and Verification

The researcher triangulated data during the collection process by conducting personal and focus group interviews, making observations and reviewing documents at each of the seven schools in the study. Triangulation is an important strategy to provide evidence of internal and external validity (Merriam, 1998). Personal interviews with the administrators and focus group interviews with the teachers occurred at each school. Observations were completed during faculty meetings, inservice training, teacher planning, and site-based council meetings over a 6-week period. A document review was also conducted at each school. The researcher examined each school improvement plan (SIP), faculty minutes, principal letters to the parents and staff, school flyers, and website.

To check for accuracy of findings, the researcher used member checking by taking the descriptive themes from the interviews and observations back to a select group of participants to ensure accuracy. A peer review was conducted, using graduates of the doctoral program who had knowledge of qualitative research practices. An external auditor, who was IRB certified and versed in qualitative research, was used to analyze and review this study. Using these methods improved the internal and external strength

of the study.

Merriam noted that internal and external validity are critical to judge results and asserts that internal validity assesses how well the researcher captured the subjects' constructions of reality. "Validity must be assessed in terms of interpreting the researcher's experience, rather than in terms of reality itself (which can never be grasped)" (Merriam, 1988, p. 167).

External validity rested with the readers' assessment of the believability of the results and their value to the reader. Such an assessment depended on the researcher's ability to provide a description of the case that was sufficient to furnish the reader the ability to assess the value of the conclusions (Merriam, 1988).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

*“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.” -- Henry Ford*

With summer ending, administrators and teachers were anxious to begin preparing for the upcoming school year. With only 1 week before the students arrived, teachers were working many hours cleaning their rooms, placing every desk and chair in just the right place, putting away new materials, setting up literacy centers, climbing up and down ladders, and hanging welcome signs and posters everywhere. Many of these teachers had been at school for several weeks getting ready for the upcoming school year. Principals were also rushing about, checking the classroom lists, making sure all schedules were completed, and seeing that every teacher had what he or she needed to start school. Faculty meetings, various committee meetings, and grade level meeting were happening on a daily basis.

This was the time of year I began conducting my interviews. I was anxious about finally reaching my first destination and completing the first individual administrative interview, with a recently appointed principal. He had been a successful teacher and assistant principal in other elementary schools in the district. He greeted me with a smile and firm handshake, introduced me to his office staff, and promptly escorted me into his office. According to his views, his faculty and staff worked well together. He scheduled planning times for teachers to insure that each grade could have grade level meetings, conducted regular faculty meetings, and sent out weekly email notices to inform faculty and staff of the activities in the school. He also had regular off-campus outings in order

for the faculty to know each other on a more personal basis. Even though this was only his 2nd year as principal of the school, he was confident that the climate of the school was positive, teachers were excited about coming back, and morale was high. I planned to return later in the week to complete a focus group interview with four of the schools teachers.

After interviewing seven administrators and 34 teachers ranging in experience from a year to 32 years, it was time to investigate what, if any, team-building activities helped improved collaboration and teacher morale. Each individual interview, focus group interview, document review, and observation has added to the gathering of research by revealing specific answers to questions concerning the team building activities, both formally and informally, which occurred in each school. Each participant, regardless if they were an administrator or teacher, played an important part in this study. Each participant held a distinct view that jointly provided data supporting themes to guide this qualitative research study.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the use of team-building activities and the influence of those activities on the perception of teacher morale in the elementary school. The researcher examined the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding school climate, faculty teamwork, and team-building activities. The study identified some best practices for implementing team building and ways in which these practices encouraged teachers to have a more positive outlook on their profession.

Data were collected through detailed, personal, open-ended, one-on-one interviews with six principals, one assistant principal, and seven 1-hour focus group

interviews with four or five teachers in each group from each of the seven schools.

Thirty-four elementary school teachers were interviewed. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting elementary school administrators in kindergarten through 5th grade school for the individual interviews. Teachers in the focus group interviews included teachers from primary and intermediate grades, related arts teachers, traditional and multiage teachers, and teachers from year round and traditional calendar schools. The sample was purposefully heterogeneous to insure adequate representation of the teacher population. The research examined the perspectives of administrators and teachers related to the following research questions:

1. What team-building activities are implemented at the school?
2. At what point in the academic year are team-building activities conducted with teachers?
3. What are the expected outcomes from team-building?
4. Did the expected outcomes occur at each school?
5. What are teacher perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?
6. What are administrator perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?

Data included a document review and observations at each of the seven schools.

Sample and selection protocol was employed through reviewing identical documents that pertained to team building at each school. Each principal recommended the selected documents. The documents reviewed for the study included: school improvement plans, planning documents for workshops, school flyers, letters from the principals to parents and faculty, and each school's website. The research examined the perspectives of

administrators and teachers related to the following research questions:

1. According to this document, what planning occurred at the school to develop team-building activities?
2. What team-building activities are being implemented at the school?
3. At what point in the academic year are team-building activities conducted with the teachers?
4. Did the expected outcomes occur at each school?

Sample and selection protocol was carried out by arranging observations in each school recommended by individual principals who selected teachers to be observed and when observations should take place. Observations took place during team planning, faculty meetings, and committee meetings. Additional data were obtained through observations made during school tours. An observation guide recorded who or what was observed, when the observation occurred, where the observation occurred, and why the observation was taking place. The researcher kept a journal in order to answer the following research questions from the observation guide:

1. What team-building activities did I observe at the school?
2. How would I characterize the teacher's behavior during collaboration opportunities?
3. What team-building activities did I observe during faculty meetings?
4. In what ways were teachers working together as a team?
5. Specifically, what behaviors did I observe that were important in understanding teacher attitudes about team building?

Results

Eight constructs related to team building and its perceived influence on teacher morale came from the research. These eight constructs were: (a) communication, (b) change, (c) building community, (d) acknowledgement, (e) work morale, (f) time, (g) team building, and (h) teamwork.

Communication

Communication was an important part in all the schools included in the study. Administrators provided rich, descriptive stories of the importance of communication with parents, faculty, and students at their schools.

Carol shared details about how communication worked at her school:

Communication is very important at Fairway school. I put out a monthly newsletter to my parents and another one out to my faculty. In the mornings I open car doors and talk to the parents. This way parents know that I am approachable. I return every phone call. Communication is part of our tradition. We have a website. Everyone knows when to expect my newsletter with a calendar. In the classrooms students have daily folders they bring to and from school.

Richard discussed communication outside the school with the parents and inside the school with the faculty. He explained:

As a principal it is very important to have an open door policy. If a parent or staff member has a question or concern, I feel it is important that I am available to help them. We use emails. We have grade level meetings weekly that I try to sit in on as much as possible. We started this year with having two meetings a year with the classified staff. I did not feel we were letting the classified staff voice their concerns and give input. We have a monthly faculty and site-based council meetings. We have food at most of our meetings. I want the faculty to know that we are open and I am willing to talk to them about anything that concerns them.

For our parents we have a yearly open house. I communicate with the parents through newsletters, letters about their children, phone calls, and parent conferences.

Forest noted he had very good communication at his school. He also discussed communication with both his parents and the faculty. He explained:

To build communication with my faculty, I send them a weekly newsletter letting them know what is happening in the week. I have monthly faculty meetings to let them know what is going on. I let them have a chance to talk about or discuss anything they need to.

For the parents I send home a monthly calendar of events happening at the school. The PTA sends home a monthly newsletter to the parents. Teachers send home weekly newsletters and homework for the students in their class. Both I and the teachers use phone calls, email and parent conference to communicate with the parents.

All seven administrators had proven, successful ways to communicate with their parents, faculty, and staff.

When interviewing the teachers in the focus group three reoccurring themes developed under construct of communication. These were listening to faculty, keeping the faculty informed, and communication with parents and students. Most of the teachers reported that communication at their schools was professional and open. However, two focus groups had different opinions about the communication. One group indicated that communication was *slow or medium level functioning*. Nikki noted, *The principal is not good at communicating with his staff*.

Bill elaborated,

We have tried to talk to our principal about issues that concern our team. We believe many times our opinions are not valued. One example that I want to talk about is our school seems to have a hard time splitting up children with discipline problems. Each year they all seem to go into the same class. Different grade level teams have tried to talk to the principal about the problem but nothing has ever been done.

Sean stated:

We have parent teacher requests at our school. Our staff circulated a petition with the teachers', who had tenure, signature on it to stop teacher requests. We felt it would be easier to divide up the discipline problems and even out the classes if parents did not get to choose teachers. Our grade level team took the petition to our principal and asked the principal if he would consider our request. He told us no immediately. He told us as long as he was principal, there would always be parent teacher request. This made me upset and disappointed.

Bill agreed. *It is hard to work in an environment where you do not have open communication with your administrator. When something like this happens, it lowers morale.*

At another school, Robyn said, *Communication at our school is very hard.* She explained:

Each time we get a new principal, everything seems to change and the teachers have to start all over. Our school was built without any concern on how the teachers would communicate with each other. We have two separate areas. We have one pre-kindergarten wing through second grade wing and a three to five grade wing. I can go a whole week without seeing teachers in the other wing.

David added something positive. *Communication from our principal to teachers is good. It is done weekly through weekly newsletters sent through email. We also have monthly faculty meetings.* He continued, *I have only been teaching 1 year and I really don't know enough about [the principal].*

Five of the focus groups were pleased with the communication and thought that being able to discuss planning, problems, events, students, or whatever was needed with peers and the principal improved teacher morale.

Communication at Town school is open and free. Administration and faculty email each other constantly as needed about all matters, explained Maria.

Liz added, *We get opportunities to discuss anything we need to during our site-based council meetings, grade level meetings, and teams for behavior problems. We*

have several committees in which we can talk about things and know the people listening value our opinion.

Candy was a special education teacher who traveled between her home base, Lake School, and two other schools in the district. She noted that communication was good at all of the schools she visited. She said, *My job as a special education teacher puts me at one school half a day and another school, the other half. Due to this, some things do not get to me.* She continued:

Something I value at Lake School is the copy of notes from faculty meeting that is distributed. Since Lake is my home school, I attend all of their meetings. The notes provide a good summary that briefly tells of important announcements, events and decisions made. The other two schools, I feel, do not involve me when it comes to communication.

I am very happy with the communication at our school, said Mary. She explained:

Our principal sends out a “Monday Memo” each week. It is full of the latest happenings and upcoming events. Our principal also allows time for teacher communication at our faculty meetings. Our principal allows us to share our comments and concerns. We all know that she listens to us, cares about what is important. The design of our building also allows for good communication. As a whole, I think our school has excellent avenues of communication.

Cole added, *If we have a problem with a student we can go and discuss it with our principal. She always listens to our concerns and helps the teachers come up with solutions to our problems.*

Karen said she was happy with the communication at her school. She said the principal listened to her teachers. She stated:

I think we [teachers] should be able to be very open with our principals about things. It makes me feel good when a principal will ask you a question and listens to what you have to say. When that happens, it really makes me feel what I am saying is important to her. She values my opinion.

Each elementary school in this study had a decision-making board known as a site-based council. The principal, the PTA president, one staff member, representatives from each of the different grade levels, and sometimes people from the community sat on the council. Each school's site-based council operated differently. Cole was a member of his site-based council and enjoyed being a part of the decision making at his school.

He reflected:

I learn a lot by being on the site-based council. We work together as a team to try and do what is best for our school. There is someone from each grade level on the council. After the meeting we go back to our grade level meeting and let everyone know what happened. Sometimes we ask questions to our team to find out how they feel about a certain topic. Once we find the answers, we report back to the council to make a decision. Our principal sends out emails of the minutes, the agenda and discusses the happenings of the site-based meeting in the general meetings. It is a great way to communicate what is happening at our school.

Some of the documents reviewed in the study were the web pages of the district and the schools. They revealed that communication throughout the district was very strong. The district's main website included the mission statement for the system: "The mission of the district is to enable all students to achieve excellence in learning, social responsibility, and self-worth." The motto for the school system was "Expect the Best!" The home page was positive and offered a variety of ways to obtain information about the district and each school. The district website connected to each school's individual web page with calendars, PTA information, the school mission statement, news and letters from the principal, and teacher information. Teachers had a contact email address and approximately 85% of the teachers had created an individual web page. The teachers' web pages included: upcoming events, homework, activities that reinforced

learning, pictures, spelling lists, videos, quizzes that could be taken online, teacher information, and links to other websites that would help students and parents.

In Lake School's School Improvement Plan (SIP) teachers and staff completed a survey that showed the school had a positive climate for the staff. However, they indicated the need for more effective communication but no details were offered.

Each school had a faculty handbook, a student handbook, and a school flyer for new students. The faculty handbooks were similar at every school. Fairways handbook bore the motto: "Where Everybody is Somebody Special."

It was noted during observations that teachers worked as a team to plan for the following week's lessons and activities. The most effective teams had a leader who had been in the same grade for a few years. They led the meeting and provided teachers' editions and state curricula for the meeting. The longer the team had worked together, the better the roles of the team members were defined. Communication in all the grade level planning meetings was good. In two separate grade level planning meetings, only one teacher was absent. Another teacher mentioned that the one who was missing liked to plan on her own and rarely joined the group.

Change

Under the construct of change, the predominant theme was a change in leadership. Leadership change became a major part of this study during the focus group interviews. Twenty of the teachers said their morale altered due to a recent change in administration at their school. However, five interviewees noted that morale improved with the new leadership. The new principals had open door policies with their faculty and parents, they planned outings for the faculty, and six of the principals had some form

of regular celebrations for the staff.

After the individual and focus group interviews were completed, it was discovered that six of the seven elementary schools used in the study had changed principals in the previous few years. Wood School and Ocean School had three principal changes in the last 6 years. Forest had two principal changes. Mountain School and Lake School had two new assistant principals in 3 years. With restructuring of leadership in all but one of elementary schools and three different directors of schools during those changes, findings from both the teacher and administrative interviews showed that positive changes took place because of leadership changes. Teachers noted that because of the recent administrative changes, team building activities changed. *Teacher morale has been all over the place with all the principal changes we have had*, commented a teacher from Wood School.

At Ocean School Missy asserted the biggest change affecting teacher morale in her school was *the principal. We had three different principals in 3 years. This was hard for all of the faculty and students.* She continued:

Our first of the three principals was our buddy. He always was complimenting us on how well we did our job. He wasn't much for getting us together as a faculty. Due to his lack of organization, he was replaced by the second principal. The second principal was tough. She told us what to do and what not to do. She set the rules and the faculty was always avoiding her. She lasted 1 year. Our current principal is doing much better with both the faculty and students. He is positive and encourages us to work together through having team planning times, working on school projects during faculty meetings and having outings during our time off. This has improved the teacher morale at our school.

During her 32 year career, Diane served with seven principals. She talked about the anxiety the teachers at her school experienced in not knowing if the new principal

would stay and what kind of leader the person would be. She explained:

You get used to a principal when he or she has been working with you at a school for a few years. Communication with that person seems to be better and, as a teacher, you know what to expect. A new principal means new rules, different teacher evaluations and a different type of leadership in general. Most of the time a change in leadership will affect faculty morale.

Twenty-four teachers noted that leadership change was positive for teacher morale and were happy to have a new administrator.

Two other themes emerged under the construct of change. These were population change and grade level change.

In the 11 years preceding this study, the district went through changes in reapportioning where children attended school. One change occurred when Straight Creek School was closed on the south side of town and Lake School was opened on the north side of town. A majority of new homes were being built on the north side of town. When Lake School opened, it was already at capacity. Five years later, the lines for the district were redrawn to prevent overcrowding at Lake School. Students were moved to Town School and Fairway Elementary School.

Mountain School's population changed significantly due to redistricting. Mark said,

We have always been a Title I school but due to the redistricting, our poverty level keeps going up. My teachers struggle with more issues that families are dealing with now. And I think that this can sometimes affect teacher morale. It is easy to get down and think that there is nothing I can do to help this family or this student. By working as a team and discussing the problems in faculty meetings, I believe we have found a lot of ways to help our families. Teachers have become more adept in finding services for these families. We have started an after school tutoring program. We see about 100 kids up to four times a week. I think that has had a positive affect on the teachers and students.

Population change also affected three other schools in the district. Coach

remarked, *It is hard to have children come and go in a classroom. You work hard to have success with one student and then they up and move before you can say goodbye. You may never see them again.*

Ann added, *Then, out of nowhere, a student comes into your class with multiple problems and disrupts the whole class. That really affects a teacher's morale. Maria echoed it is when you need to work together and support each other.*

Grade level change was also an issue at three of the schools. Wood School had a drastic grade level change a month before school began. The director moved 16 teachers into new rooms with 10 of those teachers assigned to different grades, which meant they were meeting weekly with new grade level teams. Miles said, *The shock of moving and switching grades at the same time without a lot of notice was very upsetting. I felt I had lost my support and my morale was very low.*

The faculty at Wood discussed how difficult the moves were. Due to a well established faculty, other teachers pitched in, helped with the move, and supported the affected teachers.

Tracy added, *Once we got together as a faculty and voiced our opinions things started to get better.*

Keith explained:

At first teachers were angry and felt betrayed. Morale was very low. Our principal presented us with a team building activity where each grade designed their own grade level t-shirt. Each grade had a motto and a team mascot.

When school began the principal made sure each grade level had common planning times. We also now have vertical team meetings monthly where we meet in smaller team to discuss school issues, curriculum, and anything else that is important to us.

Two other schools had similar grade level switches on a lesser scale. At Lake School four 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers were switched 2 weeks before school started. Fairway Elementary also had changes in 4th and 5th grades.

Building Community

Administrators need to work hard to have a positive climate in their schools. Teachers asserted that when they were part of the decision making process of the school, it made them belong to the school community. They enjoyed collaborating with their fellow staff members to make decisions that were important to them and all stakeholders involved. Tracy said, *If a principal can make his teachers feel valued and is genuine, it will increase the overall morale of the school and build a sense of family.*

Decision-making team-building activities were used in all the schools in order for faculty to work together as one team, as well as in small teams, to develop their annual School Improvement Plan. This was the most important document reviewed because it showed the results of what team building could accomplish. By working together at faculty meetings, during planning periods, and at other times in the day, each faculty created a common mission statement and shared a vision for the school. These beliefs, mission statements, and visions were also posted on most of the schools' websites, in school flyers, and in student and teacher handbooks. Observations at each school included a tour of the campus. Many teachers had their school's mission statement and shared vision posted somewhere in the room as well as in the office and the gym. Administrators said their mission statement and shared vision were created by teachers and staff working together in teams. Each mission statement and shared vision was different, yet each worked toward building a positive learning community. Below are two

examples of the faculty accomplishments:

Town School's Mission Statement: By providing our students with the academic, social, and cultural skills necessary to become productive citizens, Town will prepare students to be proficient in math, science, language arts, reading, social studies and written/oral communication with the ability to problem solve and work with others.

Town School's Shared Vision: Town will facilitate a learning community in which education is a mutual responsibility of school, home and community. Town will effectively meet community expectations through interaction with parents and stakeholders. This atmosphere of mutual respect and concern for achievement will nurture, motivate and empower our students to become responsible and productive members of an every changing, complex society.

Wood School's Mission Statement: The mission of Wood School is to provide ongoing educational experiences where the teachers, students, families, and community members work collaboratively to enable all students to achieve academic excellence, determined by local, state, and federal guidelines, while promoting social life skills to produce lifelong learners.

Wood School's Shared Vision: Wood envisions productive students who are educated, cultured, and experienced in reasoning critically, while contributing as productive members of our school and community. This will be accomplished by providing cooperative and meaningful learning opportunities, among diverse community, where each child is challenged to reach their maximum competency as lifelong learners.

Each school also had flyers in the office for families moving into the area. Lake School's flyer had a section on the community to assure families that community and parents were an important part of Lake's success.

Becky, the principal at Forest School, posted that it was important for teachers and staff to feel a part of the school community. She elaborated

It made them [the teachers] feel more valued when they get the opportunity to share and be a part of the decision making process. They work better as a team for the betterment of the students and school. The teachers feel a sense of ownership. I believe this builds a positive learning community that has teachers wanting to come to school and do a good job.

One strategy I use for getting the teachers to collaborate more is to have faculty

meetings, whenever possible, in the classrooms to help teachers know what is happening around the school. When they [teachers] are working in their classrooms most of the day they do not get to see what is happening in other parts of the building. The teachers who host the faculty meetings are asked to share something that is working in their classrooms. It is a five to ten minute presentation that gives the teacher a chance to showcase what is working well for them. Most teachers in my school enjoy talking about their students and what works for them. By doing this I believe it increases collaboration and morale.

Tony recognized that building community was not always easy. *Community is built when teachers feel safe to voice their opinions and know they can rely on their principal and the other teachers in the school for support.*

Bill added:

I have worked with many different principals over the years. Some of them [principals] encouraged teachers to talk, share, and work together while others never did. The most important thing I found to building a positive school environment was to have a good school leader. It is important have a principal who made themselves available to the teachers, a principal who would make daily rounds through the classrooms, a principal who had an open door policy, and a principal who gave teachers time for discussion and planning.

Acknowledgement

The next construct was acknowledgement. Acknowledgement included the following themes: accomplishments, appreciation, and support. Most of the administrators expressed the need to acknowledge the accomplishments of their faculty both in the classroom and in the community. They noted that recognizing the faculty for their accomplishments boosted morale.

Becky celebrated the end of her 1st year with a pizza party for her staff on the last day half day of school after the students left. She created a PowerPoint© to show improvements on the palm pilot, Think Link, and T-Caps assessments. She said *I am a better number cruncher and technology person than a people person. This was a way I*

could use my strengths to show the teachers I was proud of them. As she moved through the PowerPoint© presentation, each grade level was applauded for its accomplishments.

In the focus group interview Susan commented it was exciting to see what your students scores were at the beginning and how much they had improved throughout the year. This is one of the best rewards a teacher can have.

Diane added, When our principal started, she did not talk to us much. She stayed in the office and did not promote success. The first year she was here, we did not see a lot of leadership. The last day of school was a wonderful surprise for all of us.

Amy agreed This is her first school and [she] had a hard time talking to her staff at first. She is doing much better now. I think she now realizes how important we are to the school and students.

To boost teacher morale, Carol presented wacky teacher awards on the last day of school. She described the day.

Every year some grade gets a Barbie award. You get a Barbie by having a really good year and by having all your paperwork in on time. I guess you could call them the principal pleaser. This past year was the eighth annual Barbie Awards. I then think of different things that are funny. One teacher can get parents to put children on meds when they need to be. She is the queen so I gave her a crown and put sugar pills on it. The art teacher had been on a cart instead of having a classroom and she had been my trooper for the year so I went and spray painted a boot and put it on a piece of wood and she got the golden boot award for being a great trooper. Teachers who are flexible, I give the slinky award too. If teachers have a really hard class with children coming and leaving, they get the Maalox award.

[. . .] recognizing teachers for what they accomplish each year is important. It's the culture I want to create. I wanted to do something fun for the teachers. They need positive feedback and recognition just like the students.

Teachers in the focus group interview from Fairway school expressed their enthusiasm about teacher awards day. *It is always a surprise to see what our principal*

has come up with to give us for our successes both in and out of the classroom said Karen.

Kim added, *[The principal] expects a lot out of her teachers but is fair and good to us. She is the best at building morale. She makes a point of recognizing us for our accomplishments not only on teacher award day but throughout the year.*”

Cole discussed what he experienced with another principal. He explained:

I have had a principal that was not as direct and positive as Carol. That principal never bragged on us and left us alone unless there was a complaint from a parent or another teacher. When that happened he was very negative and yelled. As a teacher, I felt I was being backed into a corner and all I could do was try and defend myself. Teachers worked in fear under his leadership, never knowing when something bad was going to happen.

With Carol you know she is going to defend you to parents and other. She comes to us and gets the whole story. It makes a difference in the workplace when you know you have support from you boss.

Most of the teachers expressed satisfaction and happiness when the administrators recognized their hard work. Cindy said the teachers at her school recently got an email forwarded by her principal from the director of schools praising the teachers for having their website running and current. The director of schools noted, *The websites were very informative and he appreciated the time and hard work when setting up and keeping the websites current.* Cindy continued, *It's nice to have someone recognize your extra effort to improve student learning.*

Teachers wanted to know that their administrators supported them as educators. Giving teachers respect, support, and acknowledgement helped them be more open and feel comfortable at work. *When you feel you're making a difference in the life of your students and you principal notices and give you positive feedback, all those extra hours*

you work seem worthwhile. said Mary.

Work Morale

The differences between talking with administrators and then talking to the teachers about work morale at the school were evident. Administrators said that their personal morale as high and thought their faculty reflected the same high work morale. The schools with team-building activities in place had teachers who were eager to discuss their personal work morale and thought their school was a great place to work. However, the two schools that did not do as much with team building and had fewer opportunities to work with their peers and were negative about work morale.

Joe, who had been a principal for many years, considered his work morale high and expressed that his teachers were happy and content with their jobs. He explained:

I work really hard and I know my staff works really hard. I trust them to do their best as a person and as a teacher. I try to be as positive as I can with the faculty. If I see a teacher having difficulty, I try to help them by working with them myself or giving them a mentor.

I always stand behind my teachers. When a parent has a complaint, I go to the teacher and listen to their side of the story. Together, the teacher and I discuss the problem. Many times, I will sit in on a parent teacher conference if the teacher feels she needs help. I feel it is very important to stand behind my faculty.

Steve, a principal at Town school, noted the climate of the school was positive and morale was high. He elaborated:

I have an open door policy at my school. Teachers know they can come and talk about anything. If they have a concern or problem at school they can come to me. If there is something bothering them on a personal level they can come and talk to me about that to.

I feel it is important as a school leader to support the teachers, give them time to plan and work together. Most of us are here because we love working with children.

Maria and her principal agree. She said *morale at Town school is sweet and special. We work tirelessly, but laugh often. I would put our school morale up against any other school in the district or state and we would be better.*

Ann agreed, *Our principal, Steve, never gets negative. He is always bragging about our accomplishments.*

Maria added, *He helps us loosen up and realize that we work to improve the lives of sweet children. I love my job as most people do at this school.*

Coach noted, *Our school has excellent work morale because our principal stands behind us and is very positive. We all know we can trust him and be honest with him.*

Liz agreed, *The principal sets the climate of the school.*

In the focus groups, six of seven groups noted that their personal morale was a reflection of the entire school. Five schools used team-building activities on a weekly basis. Two focus groups had fewer team-building activities in place, less communication with their principal, less time to work and plan as a team, and indicated that their ideas were not valued. Some teachers who expressed low morale during interviews still had positive experiences from team building. Two of the focus groups cited a combination of team-building activities and principal leadership as playing a major role in teacher morale.

Twenty-one teacher interviewees said team building helped morale if the team members were interested in participating in and completing the activities. The informal outings away from the school had a positive effect on teacher morale. Teachers mentioned incorporating team-building activities off school grounds aided the faculty in becoming closer and in viewing others on a more personal basis.

Data gathered from the individual administrative interviews showed many of the principals noted that team building was a *key ingredient* in improving teacher morale. Six of the principals were dedicated to team building and actually led the team building processes in their schools. All administrators agreed that implementing different team building activities throughout the year gradually increased teacher morale and produced teachers who were happier in their teaching.

Time

Teachers and administrators discussed not having enough time to do everything they needed or wanted to do. Lack of time caused teachers to experience stress.

Carol stated, *If I know a teacher needs materials or time to get something done, I try to give her what she needs. The culture here is to support the classroom teachers.*

The School Improvement Plans documented the ways in which the schools allocated time, money, and other resources. These documents showed team building and collaboration occurring at each school.

Town school teachers meet weekly as a grade level during common planning time. Team meeting notes are submitted to the principal each week. Each team has a designated team leader who serves on the Site-Based Committee. This committee meets monthly to make decisions regarding all aspects of the school. The team leader reports back to the team. Teachers participate in staff development activities each year. Literacy coaches are available to help assist teachers as needed for classroom support, instruction, tutoring and testing.

Fairway school's SIP shows that three days are set aside in the summer to provide staff development and learning team planning.

Wood school's SIP shows time is set aside for monthly TLC meetings (Teaching and Learning Communities). These TLC meetings are half day conducted during school hours. During these meetings, teachers work together to come up with ways to improve students writing and math skills.

Mountain school's SIP shows when the faculty discussed the issue of time they

found some grade level teacher groups meet weekly to collaboratively discuss how best to prioritize the curriculum to meet the needs of their students, teachers share successful strategies and materials that have proven to be the most effective in the classroom, Faculty meetings are held twice monthly, and the principal prioritizes time for classroom visits.

Many participants discussed that vertical team meetings sometimes took time away from planning blocks. Teachers valued their time and became stressed when they did not have time to prepare for class. *One problem I have that affects my morale is not enough time to get everything done. If I can't get it done then I am stressed.* said Wendy, a kindergarten teacher. She explained:

When the children are in the room I have to be working with them constantly. When they leave and go to lunch or related arts class I need that time to set up for the afternoon activities or plan with the teachers for the upcoming themes. If the principal plans something during my planning time there needs to be a good reason.

Most teachers expressed the importance of having time to work together, especially in grade teams to plan, socialize, and do paperwork. They indicated that their time was valuable and principals needed to remember what it was like to be a classroom teacher.

Many teachers discussed the value of their time was but did not object to team building activities as long as they were well planned. Fairway's teacher focus group reported, *if team building activities are planned after school or during a faculty meeting, they wanted to be informed in order to prepare to stay longer if needed.*

Bill, a 5th grade teacher said,

No one likes to have to stay after school. We all have lives outside of our classroom. We want to have team building activities occur during inservice or times we are required to be on the job not on our own time. I believe all team building activities not planned during that time must be optional. At our school they are.

Each focus group expressed a desire to keep personal time their own.

Tracy mentioned that teaching elementary school was not like any other job. She added;

Teaching school is not like a normal nine to five job. A teacher takes home her lesson plans, students work, grade book and projects to work on at home. Parents email and call teachers about concerns and questions all the time at night. Teachers are on call several hours after the day has ended.

This school system had 20 administrative and inservice days built into the teachers' contracts. Teachers were quicker to agree to participate in team-building activities if the activities were planned during those marked days.

Team Building

There were four recurring themes in the construct of team building: connecting activities designed to help faculty get to know each other and build trust; creative activities used to help in the decision making process; activities to promote teamwork for teaching faculty how to appreciate and support each other; and team building to create traditions to help faculty with coping and change. Team building was important to the administrators interviewed and they were eager to share the different team-building activities incorporated into the school year and during inservice days.

Because the principals and teachers who were interviewed represented seven different schools, team-building activities varied from school to school depending on the needs of the faculty. Principals facilitated some of the team-building activities at their schools; in many cases, teacher leaders were in charge of planning and implementing the activities. In some of the planned team-building activities, outside consultants were used as leaders.

The administrators that implemented such team-building activities throughout the

year explained that team building made an impact on developing good communication for all stakeholders, effective decisions making teams, productive encouragement for the staff, and a positive climate and culture in the school overall.

Three administrators explained that teamwork was an essential part of student learning and communication. They commented that having common planning times for grade level teachers encouraged them to work together as a team and gave them additional support, mentoring opportunities, and instructional strengthening as well as preventing isolation.

Joe, who was the principal in school since it opened 11 years earlier, introduced his new faculty with a team building weekend before that annual team building began. He assisted in planning the physical location, put together staff from other schools, and hired new teachers for the remaining positions. *I put the faculty together for the first two times with inservices designed especially with team building in mind.* He detailed how each inservice worked:

The faculty's first inservice was an overnight outing to a team building camp in the mountains of Southern Appalachia. For 2 days the faculty worked together in whole and small group settings. During the day, we completed a ropes course and completed team building activities that helped the faculty get to know each other, encouraged trust, and promoted cooperation.

We ate all of our meals together and, at night, we talked, played table games, and slept in cabins with 16 beds to a cabin. Faculty and staff got to know each other on a personal level. I wanted my faculty to connect with each other. This team-building experience set the climate for the school's first year. The faculty was excited, had high morale and worked well as a team. I believe all the stakeholders involved benefited.

The second team-building activity Joe described was decision-making team building that involved staff members in making school-wide decisions. The group

formed the school's beliefs, mission statement, and vision. Joe discussed how this happened.

The second team building inservice was at a nearby park in a conference facility and lasted 1 day. Together, I presented each of the faculty a flock of geese pin and told them the story of the geese and how they work together as a team. Together, we exchanged ideas concerning the mission, beliefs and vision of our brand new school. We developed and produced our mission statement, school vision and grade level teams got to talk about what their goals were for their grade level. The team building inservices were a big success. The teachers gave positive feedback.

Four other administrators and four focus groups enumerated ways decision making activities occurred at their schools. *When you are part of the decision making process, you feel good about what you are doing*, shared Liz.

Carol indicated that team building was paramount at her school.

It is part of the climate. A positive school climate affects everyone associated with the school: teachers, students, staff, parents and the community. I always thought real leaders used team building to improve the climate of their organization. I will intentionally do things to bring my staff together. On Fridays, I will bring in Pal's tea and do things with food. Our school is set up different than the other schools in the district. Buildings are separated and teachers seem to be more isolated when they are outside in their classrooms. The rooms were built in 1950 and this is a high poverty school. Physically, our teachers have the worst job, more than anyone else. Because of this, I got the faculty a cappuccino machine. They have to go somewhere to work together.

At each faculty meeting my faculty and I try to build a lesson. They have an essential question. We take turns going to the different classrooms to have a faculty meeting. We have food and meet once a month. Food and drinks bring us together.

Three other administrators discussed that team building built a positive climate for their school using similar examples.

Celebrations at faculty meetings were important to Mark. At the beginning of each meeting, he would ask faculty to share accomplishments or personal happenings.

The social committee would prepare food and gifts and present certificates or awards for many accomplishments such as graduations, teacher of the year, pregnancy, marriages, and faculty members with outstanding character. Celebrations in other schools were mentioned 11 times.

Richard, who was previously an assistant principal in the school district, said, *I wanted to do a more with team building than was done at my previous school. I believe that a principal needs to have activities off of school grounds.* He explained one his staff traditions.

Before school starts, our faculty goes to a local park. We rent a pavilion and I buy all the meat and buns and the faculty brings a covered dish. We plug in the stereo system and play Jimmy Buffet and sometimes we do celebrations. It is important to do celebrations for the teachers. It boosts morale and lets them know they are important. They need reinforcement.

Six of the seven administrators planned yearly outings with their faculty and staff. They did everything from going to Barter Theatre, on shopping trips, and white water rafting to playing games specifically designed to build trust and communication, or going on cruises and planning picnics. Anne revealed, *A yearly outing encourages us to spend time together and talk more. This brings us closer.*

Team-building activities were found in Fairway's School Improvement Plan. The team-building activities included a fall family picnic, Valentine Day's banquet, parent meetings, grade level teaching teams, teacher and staff cookouts, and outings to various places. These team-building activities with the teachers occurred throughout the year, before and after school, before school began in the summer, and during Christmas break.

One school built in a 5 to 10 minute period at the beginning of faculty meetings to allow for recognitions or small team-building activities. Teachers said they looked

forward to that part of the meeting and mentioned it boosted morale. Some of the interviewees noted that having team-building activities throughout the year provided opportunities for the faculty to build trust, learn to work together at a team, build confidence, improve teacher morale, and learn the decision-making process of the school where they were teaching.

One activity mentioned by 2 of the school focus groups was the faculty and staff wearing their favorite t-shirts to school on days when there was going to be a faculty meeting. The t-shirt was to disclose something about the person. First, the faculty would participate in small groups to guess what the t-shirts revealed. They would take turns sharing the meaning of their shirts. Afterwards, they would regroup and talk about what they learned.

Team building was very important to all the administrators interviewed and they noted using different types of team-building strategies throughout the year to produce desired outcomes. Connecting activities were used to help faculty get to know one another and to build trust. Creative activities aided the decision-making process. Teamwork activities taught faculty ways in which to appreciate and support one another. Administrators used team-building activities to create traditions through celebrating successes and helping teachers with the always changing school culture.

Twenty-one teachers in the focus group interviews posited that team building helped morale if the team members were interested in participating and completing the activities.

Mountain School's SIP plan showed that the staff completed a Staff Climate Survey to examine results from team-building activities. Some interesting results were:

98% were positive about working conditions, 95% of the teachers said that their opinion was important in the decision-making of the school, and 90% said that team-building activities brought them closer and improved the climate of the school.

Wood School showed evidence of team building in its SIP. Its faculty had weekly team meetings, monthly faculty meetings, team teaching, committee meetings, and family engagement events. These occurred at the beginning of school, in the summer before school started, and after school.

Evidence of planning to develop team-building activities was found in Forest School's SIP and Staff Develop Committee minutes. Forest School set aside money from the staff development fund to train mentors for new teachers. The teachers noted that having a mentor kept the new teachers from feeling isolated or lost and offered them someone to go to for advice, encouragement, and help. Team-building activities were planned throughout the year and at the beginning of the school year. The last day of school was set aside for recognition and lunch. Becky said, *This is a great way to recognize teacher's success and end the school year on a good note.*

On the district level, team-building activities were incorporated into the 1st day after summer vacation. After the formal opening ceremonies, the director of schools welcomed everyone and asked the audience members to introduce themselves and shake hands with the people around them. He spoke positively, encouraging everyone to do his or her best during the coming year. A PowerPoint© on "Unsung Heroes" in the school system recognized their achievements over the past year. This segment included every position including principals, secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, teachers, crossing guards, lunch ladies, and others.

The principals introduced their new faculty. Some of the schools showed support for their principals and pride for their schools during this time. Fairway School showed support with school colored pom-poms and signs including a faculty-created cheer. Ocean School's faculty had t-shirts made for opening day. Mountain School's faculty blew whistles and horns when it was their principal's turn.

After the introductions were completed, a motivational speaker presented "You Don't Know Me 'til You Know Me?" As people left that day, they conversed positively about the event, the speaker, and the upcoming year.

Teamwork

Carol remarked that teamwork was an essential part of student learning and communication.

To help each grade come together as a team, I meet with each grade level once every nine weeks; the grade levels have common planning. Since they are together and know I think it is important to meet, they have been doing better working as a team. They have support of their teachers and me.

I give inservice credit for teaming and planning and sharing together. They have essential questions. It helps teachers who need instructional strengthening and helps build teacher morale.

Each grade is a team. They plan together one day a week. Each grade can choose Tuesday or Thursday to plan. This way I can meet with them. I try to let their lunch and planning time run together to give the teachers one and a half hours planning a day. This way they can go off campus to plan together.

Steve said,

Teamwork is very important in the school setting. Giving teachers the chance to plan and work together is very important. Climate is very important. If teachers have high morale and they are happy in their work environment, the children will learn. If they are not happy where they are working, they are not going to be an effective teacher.

When discussing team-building activities at her school, Sharon spoke of an

educational activity that occurred at one of the faculty meeting.

The staff learned the difference between groups of people and a team of people working together. I learned that a team must have a purpose, a goal for what they are trying to accomplish. When you are working in a team, you work together on a common goal, whether it is team planning for your grade, meeting with the site-base council or developing the school improvement plan.

Several of the teachers interviewed asserted that team building enhanced teamwork. *Collaboration is working as a team toward a common goal*, said Karen.

Most teachers had positive comments about collaboration when working in team. They said they had high morale when their group was working toward a common goal. Ten teachers in the study remarked that team-building activities enhanced collaboration. Fourteen teachers agreed that team building improved teacher morale through building trust, friendship, and respect for one another.

Evidence of teamwork was found in the School Improvement Plan for many of the schools in the study. All staff members served on one of five school improvement plan committees. During this time, team members worked together to create a successful school improvement plan. Each member contributed knowledge and input. Teams met with their principals to collaborate on the final draft.

Town School's SIP showed that faculty and staff collaborated in grade level teams as well as across grade levels.

Fairway School's SIP showed that the staff had opportunities to collaborate during whole faculty meeting times and with curriculum group, site-based leadership, grade level teams and system vertical support teams. The planning committee communicated to the school's stakeholders through newsletters, emails, and minutes.

Many focus group interviewees explained that decision-making teams were used throughout the school in the form of committees, vertical teams, and grade level teams.

Liz explained:

These committees and teams are formed in order for the entire faculty to work together in large and small teams to make decisions for the school.

One focus group discussed how working together in grade level teams made them have a sense of belonging. *When everyone takes responsibility for what we are trying to accomplish, meetings run much smoother and we get more done*, said Sharon.

Betsy added:

Our grade level team is committed to sharing our ideas, planning together, and supporting each other. We meet on a weekly basis to go over and discuss lesson plans, what is going on in the school, gather resources, and plan for the next week. It is a wonderful thing when you have a team that you can share with and depend on.

Observations occurred during faculty meetings, school tours, grade level meetings, vertical team meetings, site-based meetings, committee meetings, and teacher workshops. The best example of teamwork happened in the grade level meetings during the teachers planning time. In five of the schools, teachers who were in the same grade had the same planning time. Weekly each grade level would meet to plan for their next week's lessons, field trips, and literacy centers or to share information from another committee. The most productive grade level meetings were the ones that had a teacher who led the meetings or when the principal attended the meetings and gave support. Teachers seemed to enjoy this time together and got a lot accomplished. I observed teachers actively involved in the decision making process. Everyone in each meeting shared their ideas and materials.

Sean commented that he *enjoyed the grade level team meetings. We get a chance to plan together and share what is on our mind. It also keeps us from feeling isolated.*

In every focus group interview the teachers mentioned someone on their faculty who chose not to participate in grade level planning meetings and did not take an active role in the schools decision making. Those teachers came to work did what was required of them in monthly meetings and went home. In addition, those particular teachers attended the required meetings, contributed little, and did not appear at the optional meetings such as Fall Festival, Math Night, monthly PTA meetings, and summer activities. Gail, a second grade teachers remarked, *that was the reason one of the second grade teachers had not agreed to do the focus interview.*

Observations occurred at two of the site-based meetings. The meetings were good examples of ways in which the administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and community members came together as a team to make school-wide decisions. During these meetings teachers explained how they were more willing to work harder to improve student learning and please their administrator when they were acknowledged for their efforts. Many of the focus group interviewees said they felt a *higher sense of worth* when they were treated with respect by their school leaders. Sometimes, a daily greeting or a smile showed approval.

In site-based meetings one of the teachers served as the committee chair, one as the vice chair, and one as the secretary. The school bookkeeper was the treasurer. Representatives from each grade level, a staff member, the PTA president, a parent, a community member, and the principal also served on the committee.

The site-based chair had an agenda printed for everyone in attendance and each actively participated in the discussion and the decisions that were made. In one of the meetings the committee members made decisions using their right thumb. If they were in

agreement with the decision they would give a “thumbs up.” If members were not completely in agreement and were willing to live with the decision they would point their right thumb to the left. If they disagreed with the decision they would offer “thumbs down.”

Almost all participants agreed that to be more successful it was a good idea to work as a team in a school setting. One teacher commented, *The whole is greater than it parts if it is put together right*. It takes time to build effective teams. Principals need to focus on building trust and support within teams. In turn, this will build a pleasant school climate and culture.

Summary

Throughout the interview findings, the document review findings, and the observation findings, the same themes emerged and some of the same patterns developed to help explain the outcomes of having team-building activities in place in elementary schools. The findings showed similarities and differences with both the administrators and teachers at the different schools regarding teambuilding and how it affected teacher morale at their school. Chapter 5 addresses the findings further and presents conclusions drawn from the researcher’s findings.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Working together works.” -- Dr. Rob Gilbert

Introduction

Researchers and theorists have identified best practices for implementing team building and ways in which these practices encouraged teachers to have a more positive outlook on their profession. The conceptual framework for the study included the following constructs: (a) communication, (b) change, (c) building community, (d) acknowledgement, (e) work morale, (f) time, (g) team building, and (h) teamwork. Many patterns and themes related to each of these constructs addressed listening to faculty, informing faculty, collaboration, leadership change, grade level change, accomplishments, appreciation, support, connecting activities, creativity activities, improving teamwork activities, and building traditions.

Data for this inquiry were collected from seven open ended, individual in-depth interviews with administrators and seven focus group interviews with teachers. Both the individual and focus group interviews offered descriptions of team-building methods used previously and at the time of the study to improve teacher morale and the overall climate of the school.

In addition, similar documents from each school were reviewed. These documents were the district website, school websites, committee and faculty meeting minutes, School Improvement Plan (SIP), school flyers, and student and teacher handbooks. Observations were made at each school during tours, after school, in grade

level team planning meetings, during faculty meetings, and in the district inservice meeting.

During the research it was discovered that the six of the seven elementary schools underwent a change of leadership a few years before the study. This information was relevant to the research because different administrators have different leadership practices and beliefs.

Research Questions

Research Question # 1

What team-building activities were implemented at the school?

When implementing team-building activities into an organization, a leader should select a team-building activity that would be good for the team. Leaders should begin with a clear objective in mind. The goal should be attainable for the team, relevant, and applicable to the team's abilities and reinforced long after the activity was completed (Miller, 2004).

Because the principals and teachers represented seven different schools, team-building activities varied from school to school depending on the principal's perception of the needs of the faculty. Principals facilitated some of the team-building activities at their schools but in many cases teacher leaders were in charge of planning and implementing the activities. In some of the planned team-building activities, outside consultants were used as leaders.

Concerning the first research question, four different types of team-building activities were implemented to fit the needs of the faculty. They were:

1. connecting team-building activities to help faculty get to know more about each other and to connect on a more personal basis;
2. creativity team-building activities or problem-solving team-building activities to help the faculty learn to work together to produce solutions to problems that occurred at their school;
3. team-building activities to improve teamwork and support for each other;
4. other team-building activities to build traditions at the school and provide ownership for the faculty and staff.

The findings strongly suggested there should be different types of team-building activities depending on the needs of the faculty. Two administrators interviewed said they would always choose team-building activities with a clear objective in mind. When deciding what type of team-building activity to choose, many of the principals and teachers agreed activities that improved effectiveness. It was important to select an activity that would give faculty the desired results.

Communication

Schools used team building to clarify new goals and to achieve a higher level of communication, performance, and productivity (Shah & Shah, 2008).

Effective and steady communication increased teacher morale when it was good and open. The data showed that connecting team building activities were used at all seven schools to encourage faculty to know each other, build trust, and communicate better. Many of the schools in the study used one or more of the following connecting team building activities during the summer break and at faculty meetings during the school year.

1. One school faculty had an overnight outing at a team-building camp in the mountains of Southern Appalachia: During their stay, the staff engaged in team-building activities to become familiar with and learn about each other. They engaged in getting-to-know you activities and worked together on a Ropes Course. This activity took place in the summer.
2. Two schools had the faculty play “A penny for your thoughts” at the beginning of the year: This was a team-building game. Each person learned everyone else’s name and one interesting fact promoting people to talk to each other. Participants were asked to share something about themselves and something about the year on a penny that was passed around.
3. Favorite T-Shirt Day: For a faculty meeting, one school’s faculty members wore individual t-shirts designed to disclose something about each person. The initial activity was in small groups to guess what each t-shirt disclosed about the person. When the larger group reconvened, they discussed what they learned. This activity usually took place the first few weeks of school.

Building Community

Creativity team-building activities, or problem-solving team-building activities, helped the administrators and faculty in build a strong school community and improve the schools’ decision-making process. Many of the participants focused on working and making decisions as a team. It was important for school administrators to set goals and find ways to empower others to make significant decisions, provide instructional guidance, and develop and implement strategic and school improvement plans (Hoffman, 2005).

For teams to be successful, everyone involved in the team must have clear, shared goals, a sense of commitment, the ability to work together, mutual accountability, access to needed resources, and other elements of effective teams (Peterson, 1995). In the study, the following activities went on throughout the year at six of the seven of the schools:

1. A day in the park: One administrator had his faculty meet at the beginning of the year to work as a team making important decisions to build a foundation for their new school. He took the faculty off campus to a nearby park. During their time together, the new faculty examined important values for the school. Throughout the day, they learned certain decisions were best made by declaration and other decisions such as purpose were made in small groups. Because this was a gathering for new faculty and a new school, information about the area, the students, and community were supplied. Eventually, at the end of the day, the faculty developed a mission statement and built a shared vision for their new school.
2. All 7 schools built in common planning time for grade level teams to meet for grade level planning and decision making.
3. Three schools conducted monthly vertical team meetings for school-wide decision making and improved communication.
4. The faculty in all seven schools worked together to brainstorm, make decisions, and create the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Following this process, faculty composed five smaller committees to work on different components of the SIP plan.
5. Each school had monthly or bi-monthly faculty meetings.

Many of the participants agreed that these team-building activities helped them stay connected to their grade level peers and to know the rest of the faculty on a more personal level. One focus group discussed how the importance of knowing each other because it started the school year on a fun note, relaxed the social anxieties of the new teachers, and helped to create mutual respect and understanding among the faculty. Two focus groups mentioned building bonds with other faculty by having planned meetings on a regular basis. Many said they did not feel as isolated from other adults when frequent productive meetings occurred.

Six principals noted they must work hard to have a positive climate at their school. Teachers asserted that when they felt a part of the decision making process of the school, they felt a sense of belonging to the school community. One of the principals offered that building community does not happen in a short time frame; rather it could take several months or years. She said it was important that principals encourage teachers to share their successes and be part of the decision making process. Blasé and Kirby (1992) found that administrators who enabled teachers to work together in a positive, safe, and supportive environment had a community of teachers who were willing to work in team and take leadership roles in the school.

Teamwork

The next construct that raised morale was effective teamwork. Many teachers expressed the desire to work in teams. Data showed that administrators remarked teamwork was an essential part of student learning and communication. Most administrators mentioned team-building activities to promote teamwork taught the faculty members to appreciate and support each other.

Maeroff (1993) posited that education might be improved when schools worked together as teams of committed staff. The staff needed to be prepared to take risks, both inside and outside their classrooms. Carol mentioned she felt, *setting aside time for team building improved both teaching and learning.*

One of the interviewees stated, *when faculty is engaged in these activities, the participants discovered they must work together as a team and would not be as successful when working alone.*

Principals at 5 of the schools conducted activities to encourage teamwork during the summer and in after school inservice training. Those activities included:

1. Working together to play “catch” or “hot potato.”
2. Planning a white water rafting trip.
3. Training teachers as mentors for new teachers.

Team building is a process of awareness building. It helps staff understand that the sum is greater than the parts. It helped people understand that their decisions would be better if they worked together as a team (Grazier, 1999).

Acknowledgement

Higher morale exists when one has a sense of ownership, is part of a team, or considers the job as meaningful. A sense of belonging or feeling part of a team was like feeling part of something larger (Heathfield, 2007).

The data gathered from the interviews suggested it was important that administrators recognized their faculty’s accomplishment, appreciated what they did for the school, and showed support. The team-building activities discovered in the study were more informal and used to motivate faculty, celebrate their accomplishments, and

raise overall morale. Each the schools had celebrations built into the school year. Three of the schools formed social committees in charge of celebrations.

In both the teacher focus group interviews and the individual administrative interviews, the data revealed that the following team-building activities occurred at different schools in the study throughout the year.

1. Celebrations at faculty meetings such as when one received a degree, got married, or became pregnant and other events to recognize success, such as a teacher of the year award or a faculty member with character. The social committee or principal had food and gifts and handed out certificates or awards.
2. Having an outing at a local lake, eating together, traveling to see a play, or planning picnics.
3. Faculty cookouts.
4. “Guess and Switch,” a team building game, where participants switch teams often.
5. Valentine Day’s banquet with faculty recognitions.
6. Last day of school pizza parties for the faculty featuring highlights of student progress for the year.
7. Family fall picnics.
8. Motivational speakers to work with faculty.
9. Presentations of the “Unsung Heroes” at the school, recognizing their accomplishment in becoming an “Unsung Hero.”

All focus group interviews acknowledged that effective team-building activities significantly increased faculty productivity, morale, job satisfaction, and retention rates.

Joe noted *Team building is a process*. Schneider and Schneider, (1999) concluded when team members knew common goals, their roles and responsibilities, and methods of communication and were motivated to perform them, success would happen.

Research Question # 2

At what point in the academic year are team-building activities conducted with teachers?

Time

When implementing team-building activities in the workplace, it is necessary to have time to complete activities, establish objectives, have a common goal, and provide training in how to work together. One important part of building a successful team is the ability to keep morale high among the members. Morale was tied to factors such as support, resources, communication, and the personalities involved (Protheroe, 2006).

Administrators interviewed remarked that team building was very important at their schools. It set the climate of the school. Team building was a continuous process through which the faculty and staff were involved in making decisions of school-wide importance. In all schools team-building activities occurred throughout the calendar year. Team-building activities were planned in the summer, the week before school started, the 1st day teachers came back to work from summer vacation, during the school day, after school at faculty meetings, during spring break, and on Saturdays.

Evidence from the study revealed that most teachers valued their time but did not object to team-building activities as long as they were well planned. If team-building activities were planned after school or during a faculty meeting, the teachers wanted

advanced notice in order to prepare to stay longer if needed.

Some teachers bragged about principals who respected their planning and after school time. When time was taken away from planning blocks or after school, teachers became stressed and morale declined.

Schools with vertical planning in place had teachers who were upset about changing their planning time. Administrators use vertical team planning in order for different grade level teachers to meet in small groups with the principal to be informed of school happenings, discuss problems occurring at the school, and create solutions to those problems. Many teachers discussed that the vertical team meetings were useless and took away from planning with their own grade level teams. Eighty percent of the teachers who had vertical team planning times at their school did not like switching their planning time and said they could have these discussions during the regular faculty meetings.

Interviewees from all the schools mentioned the importance of instructional and planning time during the school day. They said in order to have successful team-building activities in place, those activities should be planned and put into place to benefit everyone.

Many of the interviewees acknowledged they did not want to *waste* their time during summer, going on trips or in training with their school's faculty. Some of the teachers complimented administrators who valued their summer time and recognized that when school was out of session many of the workshops and planned events should be optional. When teachers were permitted to choose the events they wanted to attend, they were happier and morale increased.

Five schools in the study used team-building activities on a weekly basis. Two of

the teacher focus groups mentioned they had fewer team-building activities in place and less time to work and plan with their grade level team. These two focus groups said they felt isolated at times and that many of their ideas were not valued.

This school system had 20 administrative and inservice days built into the teachers' contracts. Teachers were more agreeable about participation in team-building activities if the activities were planned during those marked days.

Leadership Change

Administrators facilitated leadership by counting on their faculty and staff to strengthen the school's culture, modify organizational structures, and build a collaborative process. This accomplishment required teamwork (Glickman, 2003).

Many administrators discussed that the timing of team-building plans reflected what was happening at the school. The new administrators acknowledged that many traditions and team-building activities were already in place when they became principal. The interviewed faculty at each school was well established and there were few new teachers in the schools; yet, in six of the focus group interviews changes in administration and different management styles were noted. Six of the schools in the study acquired a new principal or assistant principal in the 7 years previous to the study.

Due to these changes in leadership, teachers stressed the importance of having familiarizing activities incorporated throughout the year. The new principals worked with the teachers to keep established, successful team-building activities in place. Most teachers welcomed activities away from school with their new leader. They said doing fun activities outside of work helped them know their coworkers on a more personal level.

Grade Level Change

“The morale of the building needs constant attention” (Hayden, 2007, p. 1). Grade level change affected when team-building activities occurred at three of the schools. Wood School had undergone a drastic grade level change a month before school began. The director moved 16 teachers into new rooms with 10 of those teachers assigned to different grades, which meant they were meeting weekly with new grade level teams.

Two other schools had similar grade level switches on a lesser scale. At Lake School four of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers were switched two weeks before school started. Fairway Elementary also had changes in 4th and 5th grades.

Teachers from these three schools only had time to relocate their rooms and look over new curricula. Team-building activities were the last thing on their minds.

Research Question # 3

What are the expected outcomes from team building?

Interview responses in this study showed evidence that the expected outcomes from team building in the elementary schools occurred. The various expected outcomes are categorized under select constructs of the theoretical framework.

Communication

Team building improved communication and decreased isolation among faculty and staff (Grazier, 1999). The administrators who implemented team building activities throughout the year explained team building made an impact on developing good communication strategies for all stakeholders, effective decision making teams,

productive encouraged staff, and overall positive climate and culture of the school.

Three administrators explained that teamwork was an essential part of student learning and communication. They said that having common planning times for grade level teachers encouraged them to work together as a team and gave them additional support, mentoring opportunities, and instructional strengthening as well as preventing isolation. Carol stated, *If I know a teacher needs materials or time to get something done, I try to give her what she needs. The culture here is to support the classroom teachers.*

Each elementary school in this study had a decision-making board known as the site-based council. The teachers in the focus groups asserted that when they were part of the decision-making process of the school, it improved communication and the overall climate of the school.

Many participants noted team-building activities improved teacher morale by teachers getting to know each other better. Teachers enjoyed having scheduled time to talk and work together.

Acknowledgement

The next outcome from team-building activities that raised teacher morale was teacher acknowledgement. Principals who included open discussions during faculty meetings, commented on teachers' achievements, and had regular celebrations helped raise morale among their faculty. The school leader should create and sustain a competitive school, empower faculty and staff to make significant decisions, provide instructional leadership, and develop and execute strategic plans (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Almost all of the administrators expressed the need to acknowledge their faculty's

accomplishments both in the classroom and community because recognizing their faculty accomplishments boosted morale. Many of the teachers said they were willing to work harder to improve student learning and please their administrators when they were acknowledged for their efforts. Many of the focus group interviewees said they felt a *higher sense of worth* when they were treated with respect by their school leaders. Sometimes a daily greeting or a smile showed approval.

Collaboration

Through team-building activities, people established and developed a greater sense of collaboration and trust among team members (Snell & Janney, 1999).

Focus group interviewees explained that decision-making teams were used throughout the school in the form of site-based committees, staff development committee, technology committee, school improvement teams, vertical teams, and grade level teams. These committees and teams were formed by the principal in order for the entire faculty to work together in small teams to make decisions for their school.

All seven of the focus group interviews had positive comments about team building that helped them in working with their peers. Many reflected on the connecting team-building activities which helped in learning about each other on a more personal basis.

Three administrators mentioned that trust developed between the faculty and themselves during team building times. One assistant principal said, *We learned that we could depend on each other during fun times and hard times.*

The document review evidenced the faculty worked together as a team to create their school improvement plan, a common mission statement, and a shared vision for

their school.

Support

By supporting teachers' decisions, involving them in decision making, and acknowledging their expertise, administrators could aid teacher morale. Effective administrators served as guardians of instructional time, assisted in student discipline matters, and allowed teachers to develop and enforce discipline codes (Blasé & Kirby, 1992). Many teachers noted that support from other teachers and the principal grew from having team-building activities incorporated in their schools. Support varied in the different schools. One teacher mentioned that having the principal's support was very important to her.

Three focus groups talked about ways in which the needs for support varied. One group said teachers needed emotional support during a hard day or a personal crisis. A focus group at Fairway school expressed the importance of professional support from their principal. One teacher said, *We didn't recognize how much support meant to us until we had awards day, cookouts, and faculty meeting celebrations. It makes me feel good when my principal pays me a compliment.*

Many of those interviewed said they preferred an administrator who enthusiastically assisted wherever needed. They enjoyed having a principal come into a classroom and participate in instruction. Teachers wanted to know that they had a principal who would help them with the student discipline problems. Teachers also mentioned they felt greater support from an administrator who had an *open door* policy. Teachers wanted to be able to share their concerns and comments with their principal when needed.

Work Morale

This finding strongly suggested that positive leadership improved morale. Many teachers commented that they were much more willing to participate in team-building activities if they had a principal who was positive, supportive, effective, considerate, and honest. Schools where the principal came into the classrooms, participated in grade level meetings, and was visible throughout the day had more support from teachers.

Teachers reflected that school leaders set the climate for the school. The findings showed that administrators who had good communication, offered multiple opportunities for the faculty to work together, were positive, and respected the faculty had higher teacher morale. “The most important feature of a successful team is high morale” (Protheroe, 2006, p.1).”

All administrators noted their personal morale was a reflection of the schools morale. They stated their faculty worked together with few conflicts. They were confident that under their leadership they had a school with contented teachers, parents, and students.

Research Question # 4

Did the expected outcomes occur at each school?

Many of the expected outcomes occurred at each of the schools. Interviews, document review, and observations were completed in seven elementary schools in the district. Each administrator stated that his or her personal work morale was reflected in the faculty morale. Every school had team-building activities in place with a majority of the faculty and staff participating. Staff members who did not participate in team-building activities in the school were the staff paid on an hourly wage instead of a yearly

salary. These participants included teacher assistants, cafeteria staff, educare staff, preschool teachers and assistants, and custodians. All the salaried faculty and staff participated in team-building activities. These participants included teachers, administrators, preschool director, and secretaries.

Job satisfaction in a school setting could be influenced by a variety of factors such as teachers' relationships with the principal, the degree of fulfillment in their work, and the quality of the physical environment. Past research revealed that teachers tended to be more motivated by intrinsic rewards such as respect, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment than by extrinsic rewards such as job security, salaries, and fringe benefits (Tracy, 2000).

Teamwork

Five of the administrators discussed that decision-making team-building activities were used in the schools for faculty to work together as an entire team and in small teams to develop their annual School Improvement Plan. By working together, each school's faculty created a common mission statement and shared vision for their school. These beliefs, mission statements, and visions were posted on most of the school's websites, in school flyers, and in student and teacher handbooks. One of the observations at each school included a tour. Many teachers had their school's mission statement and shared vision posted somewhere in their classroom as well as in the office and the gym. Administrators said their mission statement and shared vision were created by teachers and staff working together in teams. Each mission statement and shared vision differed, yet each worked towards building a positive, learning community.

Making schools successful takes more than an individual teacher working towards

goals for his or her students in the classroom. It takes a team of faculty, staff, and administrators working together to accomplish the many tasks of the school. School teams might work on site-based decision making, school improvement plans, and curricular reform, implementing new programs, or restructuring existing ones (Peterson, 1995).

Many of the teachers interviewed expressed desire to have times set aside to plan and work as a team. During the school observation, seven teams planned and worked together to make grade level decisions. Teachers who had specific times they could work together as a team applauded the value of this time.

In every focus group interview, the teachers mentioned someone on their faculty who chose not to participate in grade level planning meetings and did not take an active role in the school's decision making. Those teachers had made it clear to others in the focus group interview that they would rather be alone during planning and not participate in faculty meetings. Two of the teachers ate lunch alone in their rooms. Those teachers came to work, did what was required of them in monthly meetings, and went home. They attended the required meetings and activities, said very little, and opted out of the other meetings and activities.

The teachers who were in two of the focus groups complained about the teachers who liked to work alone. One group said they had complained to their principal about a teacher who would not participate in the weekly planning meetings. They had asked that she be placed in another grade at the end of the year.

Research on teamwork in elementary schools was conflicting. Frase and Sorenson (1992) found that teachers were not concerned about the lack of teacher

collaboration, in fact, many teachers preferred to work alone. Only *high growth* teachers enjoyed working together and being a part of the decision making process.

Work Morale

To boost teacher morale, administrators said they showed support in various ways and offered well deserved recognition. Some of these included wacky teacher awards, slide programs illustrating teacher and student success, and sending emails and letters. Teachers noted they needed positive feedback and recognition.

In the focus groups, six of seven groups noted that their personal morale was a reflection of the entire school's. Six schools used team-building activities on a weekly basis. Two focus groups had fewer team-building activities in place, less communication with their principal, and less time to work and plan as a team and mentioned their ideas were not valued. Some teachers who expressed low morale during interviews still had positive experiences from team building. Two of the focus groups cited a combination of team-building activities and principal leadership as playing a major role in teacher morale. Glover (1997) stated, "Principals need to learn how to value teachers' ideas and expertise as much as the ideas and knowledge of experts and district supervisors" (p. 61).

In a document review of the schools' School Improvement Plans, one school created a staff climate survey concerning results accomplished in team-building activities. Results revealed that 98% of teachers were satisfied about their working conditions, 95% of teachers said their opinion was important in the decision-making of the school, and 95% said that team-building activities brought the faculty closer and improved the climate of the school.

Research Question # 5

What were teacher perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?

Work Morale

Teams without access to necessary resources, that have a leader who discourages them from spending time in team activities, or members who do not feel valued will become frustrated and give up. Teams not receiving positive feedback for their accomplishments might give less effort in the future (Grimme, 2007).

A majority of teachers interviewed reacted positively to team-building activities. In focus group interviews, teachers noted that team-building activities improved teacher morale only when the school had an effective leader. Thirty of the teachers interviewed expressed that team-building activities improved teacher morale. Through team-building activities, the faculty got to know each other, built closer relationships, and placed higher value on the opinions of other team members. Many teachers acknowledged team-building activities create a support system. Fourteen teachers believed that team-building activities allowed their faculty to get to know teachers of other subjects and grade levels and learn to depend on one another.

None of the administrators or teachers viewed team-building activities negatively. Teachers mentioned someone on their faculty who chose not to participate in any of the optional team-building activities and did not take an active role in the schools decision making. One teacher from Wood School said, *“These teachers do not seem to have low morale they just prefer to work alone.”*

It was important in three of the focus group interviews that the person who

organized the team-building activity had a clear objective in mind. One teacher said, *the planned activity should be something that is relevant and applicable to where our faculty is right now*. Those 3 focus groups talked about how well planned team-building activities had boosted their morale and brought the faculty closer. One specific example was the white water rafting trip. This focus group discussed the way in which each team worked together to get down the river. They laughed, screamed, and talked as they rode down the river.

Collaboration

Maehr, Midgley, and Urdan (1993) stated, “People are more personally invested in their work with an organization when they have a voice in what happens to them, their work has meaning, and significance, contributing to a higher purpose of goal” (p.2).

Most teachers had positive comments about collaboration when working as a team. They had high morale when their group was working toward a common goal. Ten teachers in the study remarked that team-building activities enhanced collaboration. Fourteen teachers agreed that team building improved teacher morale through building trust, friendships, and respect for one another. One group of teachers discussed that vertical team meetings sometimes took away time from planning blocks. They preferred working with teachers on their grade level. Teachers said they valued their time and were under stress when they did not have time to plan for class.

Twenty-one teacher interviewees said team building helped if the team members were interested in participating in and completing the activities. The informal outings had a positive effect on teacher morale for those teachers who chose to participate. A majority of the summer outings were optional, thus, not all faculty participated. The

teachers said incorporating team-building activities off school grounds aided the faculty in becoming closer and in viewing others on a more personal basis.

Research Question # 6

What were administrator perceptions about improving teacher morale via team building?

Work Morale

All the administrators mentioned the importance of team building in their school. Leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northhouse, p. 3).

Data gathered from the individual administrator interviews showed that for many of the principals team building was a *key ingredient* in improving teacher morale. All of the principals said they were dedicated to team building and actually led most of the team-building processes in their schools. They agreed that implementing different team-building activities throughout the year gradually increased teacher morale and produced teachers who were happier in their teaching. Three administrators pointed out that team-building activities designed to recognize success and allow team members to learn about each other were important. These ongoing activities provided opportunities for the faculty to learn about personality types, to learn with whom they would be making decisions, and to promote positive reinforcement.

Acknowledgment

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) found that the school leader needed to create and sustain a competitive school, empower faculty and staff to make significant decisions,

provide instructional leadership, and develop and execute strategic plans.

Many of the administrators discussed the importance of having celebrations and creating traditions. One administrator had an awards day celebrating the success of every teacher in the school. Another administrator created a slideshow and served lunch to his faculty to show how much progress the students made over the past year. Three administrators discussed making time to allow open discussions to occur during faculty meetings, commented on teachers' achievements, and had regular celebrations helped to raise morale among their faculty.

Most administrators expressed the need to acknowledge their faculty's accomplishments both in the classroom and in the community. They noted that recognizing their faculty for their accomplishments boosted teacher morale. Others discussed effective ways they implemented team building in schools by having both formal and informal team building in place throughout the year. One administrator mentioned that regular celebrations and informal gatherings were important to her faculty. Some of the principals noted that when teachers were praised for their hard work and had time to socialize they seemed more willing to work on decision-making teams and committees.

Faculty members on teams with high morale considered themselves winners, were among the best at what they did and aware of that excellence, expressed respect for their leaders, told about the accomplishments of their peers, required little supervision, cooperated with one another, did their jobs without supervisory oversight, displayed a relaxed friendship, made suggestions for improvement, and voluntarily came in early and stayed late (Molloy, 2006).

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

Team building enables a group to reach a goal. Team building is often used in school communities to establish good practices and ensure team cohesion, effectiveness, and continuity (Peretomode, 2006).

The reason for doing this case study was to explore the use of team-building activities and the influence of those activities on the perception of teacher morale in the elementary school.

1. As noted previously, even though there were some administrative changes at some of the schools, each site had established team-building activities in place. The concept of team building and teacher morale could be examined in schools that have little experience with team building. How would the introduction of team-building affect teacher morale in such a school?
2. This study showed that implementing team-building activities in elementary schools could successfully improve communication and teamwork. Working together as a team for a common purpose improves morale and builds community. Team-building activities in schools involve defining roles of the team members. Different types of team-building activities connect team members and encourage faculty to get to know each other better, build trust, build creativity of its team members, and aid in the decision-making process. Similar studies can be done in other settings to confirm the results of this study.
3. Principals at each of the schools chose the grade level and teachers in the

focus group interviews. Teachers who did not like team planning or chose not to participate in optional team-building activities were not interviewed.

Additional studies could examine why some teachers choose not to engage in team-building activities.

4. Throughout the study teachers constantly referred to their administrators and their leadership styles. Many interviewees said for team building to be successful the school needed a positive supportive principal who encouraged a variety of team-building activities. Additional studies could focus on the leadership practices that make effective team leader principals.
5. The findings of this study suggested that many teachers valued opportunities to work in teams with other teachers and experience higher morale as a result. Additional studies can focus on the impact that teacher team work has on the quality of teacher work and the impact on student morale and on student learning.

Summary

The administrators and the majority of the teachers in this study showed evidence of high morale. Of those interviewed, all said they loved their job and enjoyed working in the school system in which they were employed. The administrators reported that team-building activities at their school promoted open communication and a positive working environment. Ninety percent of the teacher interviewed discussed that team building brought the faculty together and improved communication and the overall climate of the school. Ten percent of the teachers interviewed came from two schools that had vertical

team meetings during their planning time. They complained that vertical team meetings were a waste of time.

The interviews were conducted at the beginning of the school year and the interviewees were part of the day's district wide opening, which was replete with celebrations, recognitions, and motivational speeches. Everyone interviewed enjoyed working with children and was excited to go back to work. For the most part team-building activities incorporated in the schools influenced keeping teacher morale high. Many teachers welcomed opportunities to work with their coworkers on school decision-making teams as well as in off campus socializing.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to Director of Schools

Director of Schools [Name]
XXXX Street
Any City, TN 37xxx

July 31, 2008

Dear Dr. [Name]:

I am a student at East Tennessee State University working on my doctoral dissertation. In my research study, I will be interviewing principals and teachers from different elementary schools regarding team-building activities and their perceived influence on teacher morale. I will also be conducting observations during different faculty meetings and completing a document review at each school. I am asking your permission to complete observations, complete a document review, conduct individual face-to-face interviews with the principals at each school and focus group interviews with teachers in a neutral area at each school. Please feel free to contact me by phone at XXX-XXX-XXX or through e-mail at nautumne@hotmail.com to let me know your response.

Sincerely,

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX B

Letter to Principal

Principal [Name]
XXXX Street
Any City, TN 37xxx

July 31, 2008

Dear Mr. [Name]:

I am a student at East Tennessee State University working on my doctoral dissertation. In my research study, I will be interviewing principals and vice-principals from different elementary schools in face-to-face interviews. I will also be conducting focus group interviews with teachers regarding team-building activities and the perceived influence on teacher morale. I am asking permission to come to your school and conduct a face-to-face interview with you as well as facilitate a focus group interview with teachers in a neutral site at your school, such as the teacher workroom or conference room. This will allow the participants to feel free to converse openly. Please feel free to contact me by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email at nautumne@hotmail.com to let me know your response.

Sincerely,

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX C

Letter to Participants

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
XXX Any Road
Any City, TN 37xxx

Date:

Dear Principal or Teacher:

I am a student at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City working toward a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I am currently writing my dissertation on *Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building*, and I would like to know if you would be interested in being part of the study.

The intent of this study is to explore the use of team-building activities and the influence of those strategies on the perception of teacher morale in elementary schools. If you agree to be a willing participant, I will ask questions pertaining to your view of team-building activities that can improve or cause decline in teacher morale and how, in your opinion, team building influences teacher collaboration, student learning, and the overall climate of your school. Persons participating in this study can expect to spend about one hour being interviewed and recorded by an audio-recording device. The interviews will be conducted in a focus group setting with four or five teachers from your school. Participants may withdraw their data at the end of their participation if they decide they do not want to participate.

Participants' identity and personal information will be kept confidential and will be destroyed as soon as the study is completed. By participating, you will be granting permission to quote you; however, your name or other identifying information will not be used in any form when quoting. The results will be published in a dissertation and possibly in a qualitative journal or higher educational journal.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you are interested in learning more, please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also email me at nautumne@hotmail.com or edmondsj@jcschools.org.

Sincerely yours,

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
Graduate Student
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX D

Verification Letter to Participants

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
XXX Any Road
Any City, TN 37xxx

Date:

Dear Principal or Teacher:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in my study on *Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building*. You have been selected to be part of a focus group interview that will meet at your school in the _____ room on May __, 2008 at 3:45 p.m.

The intent of this study is to explore the use of team-building activities and the influence of those strategies on the perceptions of teacher morale in elementary schools. Since you have agreed to be a willing participant, I will ask you questions pertaining to your view of team building activities that can improve or cause decline in teacher morale and how, in your opinion, team building influences teacher collaboration, student learning and the overall climate of your school. Persons participating in this study can expect to spend about one hour being interviewed and recorded by an audio-recording device. The interviews will be conducted in a focus group setting with four or five teachers from your school. Participants may withdraw their data at the end of their participation if they decide they do not want to participate.

Participants' identity and personal information will be kept confidential and will be destroyed as soon as the study is completed. By participating, you will be granting permission to quote you; however, your name will not be used in any form when quoting. The results will be published in a dissertation and possibly in a qualitative journal or higher educational journal.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions or can not meet on this date, please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also email me at nautumne@hotmail.com or edmondsj@jcschools.org.

Sincerely yours,

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
Graduate Student
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form for the Focus Group Interview Participants

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affairs Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nanci Autumnne Edmonds

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building*

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in a study. It is important that you read this material and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to develop a conceptual framework explaining the influences of team building among elementary school teachers to improve teacher morale. This framework could become the foundation for a team building model that provides principals and teachers with a guide for implementing sound team-building activities into in-service training and throughout the school year. The study will help identify the best practices for implementing team building and ways in which these practices encourage teachers to have a more positive outlook on their profession.

DURATION: The participants will be asked to share their information in a focus group interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Should the participant wish to continue the interview, the request will be accommodated at a mutually convenient time. Any additional information needed for clarification and accuracy will be taken over the telephone. The duration of the data collection and analysis phases of this study will be from April 2008 to April 2009.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There will be minimal to no risk to individuals participating in this study. The participants may decline to answer any question at any time for any reason. They may also terminate or leave the interview at any point in the process if they choose and may withdraw from further participation in the study of their own choice. They may withdraw their data once transcribed and read. Interviews will be conducted at each school after school hours.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS and/or COMPENSATION: The information from this study will be shared with schools and other parties interested in promoting high morale for teachers. Some satisfaction may be taken from the interview knowing the participants are allowed to express their opinion and concerns regarding team building activities and teacher morale.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nanci Autumnne Edmonds

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building*

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions or research-related problems at any time, you may contact N. Autumnne Edmonds at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX-XXX-XXXX or Dr. Kathryn Franklin at XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Each participant's right to privacy will be maintained. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. The work may be used in a final research report but no identity will be given to quoted material, protecting confidentially. The research information will only be available for inspection by personnel of the East Tennessee State University Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis in collaboration with the researcher and East Tennessee State University Campus Institutional Review Board.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT: East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury that may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims, call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423-439-6053.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: The purpose, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me and are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I signed freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. My records will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent for the Individual Interview Participants

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affairs Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nanci Autumnne Edmonds

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building*

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in a study. It is important that you read this material and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to develop a conceptual framework explaining the influences of team building among elementary school teachers to improve teacher morale. This framework could become the foundation for a team building model that provides principals and teachers with a guide for implementing sound team-building activities into in-service training and throughout the school year. The study will help identify the best practices for implementing team building and ways in which these practices encourage teachers to have a more positive outlook on their profession.

DURATION: The participants will be asked to share their information in an individual face-to-face interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Should the participant wish to continue the interview, the request will be accommodated at their request at a mutually convenient time. Any additional information needed for clarification and accuracy will be taken over the telephone. The duration of the data collection and analyses phases of this study will be from April 2008 to April 2009.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There will be minimal to no risk to individuals participating in this study. The participants may decline to answer any question at any time for any reason. They may also terminate or leave the interview at any point in the process if they choose and may withdraw from further participation in the study of their own choice. They may withdraw their data once transcribed and read. Interviews will be conducted at each school after school hours.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS and/or COMPENSATION: The information from this study will be shared with schools and other parties interested in promoting higher morale for teachers. Some satisfaction may be taken from the interview knowing the participants are allowed to express their opinion and concerns regarding team building activities and teacher morale.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nanci Autumnne Edmonds

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building*

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions or research-related problems at any time, you may contact N. Autumnne Edmonds at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX-XXX-XXXX or Dr. Kathryn Franklin at 423-439-7621. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Each participant's right to privacy will be maintained. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. The work may be used in a final research report but no identity will be given to quoted material, protecting confidentially. The research information will only be available for inspection by personnel of the East Tennessee State University Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis in collaboration with the researcher and East Tennessee State University Campus Institutional Review Board.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT: East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury that may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims, call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423-439-6053.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: The purpose, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me and are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. My record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE

APPENDIX G

Interview Guide for Teachers in Focus Group Interviews

I. Introduction

1. In focus group interviews, the researcher will begin with an introduction and thank the participants for being willing to talk about the team-building activities used at their school.
2. The researcher will request they use their own words to analyze the actions taken on that day and their perceptions of the aftermath. The researcher will also inform the participants that the information from the interviews will be in a manuscript submitted for publication.
3. The researcher will assure the participants that this study will remain anonymous. Although quotes from the interviews may be used in the final research report, no names will be associated with these quotes.
4. The researcher will inform the participants that the interview session should take approximately one hour and will be tape-recorded.
5. The researcher will define team building for the interviewees. The definition is a planned effort to improve communication and working relationships by planned and managed change involving a group. Team build is “improving performance by developing team working skills by using any appropriate method” (Team-wise, 2008, p.1)
6. The researcher will ask for any questions before the tape recorder is started.
7. Next, the researcher will ask the interviewees to read and sign the informed consent form. Each participant will receive a copy of the informed consent.
8. The researcher will ask the participants for permission to record the session. After this is completed, the tape recorder will be turned on.
9. Once the tape recorder is turned on, the initial interview questions will be asked.

The researcher examined administrators' and teachers' perspectives related to the following research questions:

II. Main Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, describe the communication at your school.
2. Do you feel your personal work morale is an example of the school's morale as a whole?
3. What changes have occurred in the past few years that affected morale at your school?
4. Do you feel implementing team-building activities into inservice, faculty workshops and meetings can influence teacher morale? Please describe.
5. In your opinion, in what ways to the team-building activities improve teacher morale at your school?
6. To what extent, if any, do you think implementing team-building activities in your school affects teacher collaboration?

III. Conclusion

1. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher will summarize the comments made during the interview and will ask if the summary is correct.
2. The researcher will then remind the participants that she plans to write a dissertation based on the research findings.
3. The researcher will conclude the session and ask for additional comments.
4. The tape recorder will be turned off and the researcher will ask if there are any additional comments that need to be off the record.
5. At the end of the session, the researcher will thank everyone for his or her participation in the study.

APPENDIX H

Interview Guide for the Administrator Individual Interviews

I. Introduction

1. In face-to-face individual interviews, the researcher will begin with an introduction and thank the participants for being willing to talk about the team-building activities used at their school.
2. The researcher will request they use their own words to analyze the actions taken on that day and their perceptions of the aftermath. The researcher will also inform the participants that the information from the interviews will be in a manuscript submitted for publication.
3. The researcher will assure the participants that this study will remain anonymous. Although quotes from the interviews may be used in the final research report, no names will be associated with these quotes.
4. The researcher will inform the participants that the interview session should take approximately one-hour and will be tape recorded.
5. The researcher will define team building for the interviewee. The definition is an effort to improve communication and working relationships by planned and managed change involving a group. Team build is “improving performance by developing team working skills by using any appropriate method” (Team-wise, 2008, p.1)
6. The researcher will ask for any questions before the tape recorder is started.
7. Next, the researcher will ask the interviewees to read and sign the informed consent form. Each participant will receive a copy of the informed consent.
8. The researcher will ask the participants for permission to record the session. After this is completed, the tape recorder will be turned on.
9. Once the tape recorder is turned on, the initial interview questions will be asked.

The researcher examined the perspectives of administrators and teachers related to the following research questions:

II. Main Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, describe the communication at your school.
2. As an administrator, do you feel your personal work morale is an example of the school's morale as a whole?
3. What changes have occurred in the past few years that affected morale at your school?
4. Do you feel implementing team-building activities into inservice, faculty workshops and meetings can influence teacher morale? Please describe.
5. What team-building activities have been implemented at this school this year? In the past?
6. To what extent, if any, do you think implementing team-building activities in your school affects teacher collaboration?
7. What are your expected outcomes from team building?
8. Can you think of any other way you, as a principal, can ease the work-related stress on your faculty?

II. Conclusion

1. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher will summarize the comments made during the interview and ask if the summary is correct.
2. The researcher will then remind the participants that she plans to write a dissertation based on the research findings.
3. The researcher will conclude the session and ask for additional comments.
4. The tape recorder will be turned off and the researcher will ask if there are any additional comments that need to be off the record.
5. At the end of the session, the researcher will thank everyone for his or her participation in the study.

APPENDIX I

Approval Form from School District

REQUESTORS NAME Nanci Autume Edmonds

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building

STEP 1: RESEARCH OF CURRICULUM DIVISION

_____ We temporarily withhold approval of your proposal until you address the questions we have raised about it in the attached letter. (Include this form with resubmission of your proposal.)

_____ We conditionally approve your proposal and you may proceed in making contact with principal(s), but it is necessary for you to address the questions we have raised about your proposal in the attached letter.

_____ We approve your proposal and you may proceed in making contact with principal(s) at the appropriate school(s).

_____ Signature, Curriculum Division Reviewer _____ Date

STEP 2: PRINCIPAL'S EVALUATION

_____ I temporarily withhold approval of your proposed research being conducted in my school for reasons stated in the attached correspondence. (Include this form with the resubmission of your proposal.)

PRINCIPAL #1: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #2: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #3: _____ DATE: _____

_____ I approve of your proposal. Please forward this form to the central office for approval of the director.

PRINCIPAL #1: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #2: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #3: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #4: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #5: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #6: _____ DATE: _____

PRINCIPAL #7: _____ DATE: _____

STEP 3: DIRECTOR'S EVALUATION

_____ I withhold approval of your proposed research being conducted in our schools for reasons stated in the attached correspondence. I am forwarding a copy of your proposal, a copy of this form, and a copy of our correspondence to the curriculum division reviewer who will communicate with you further.

_____ I approve of your proposed. Proceed with your research according to the conditions agreed upon in the preceding sections of this form and your research proposal.

Signature of Director

Date

NOTE: The signed copy of this form should be returned to the curriculum division for its records.

APPENDIX K

Letter to Teacher Requesting Observation

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
XXX Any Road
Any City, TN 37xxx

Date:

Dear Teacher:

I am a student at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City working toward a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I am currently writing my dissertation on *Improving Teacher Morale with Team Building* and I would like you to be part of the study.

The intent of this study is to explore the use of team-building activities and the influence of those strategies on the perception of teacher morale in elementary schools. If you are a willing participant, I will conduct observations during teacher planning sessions, committee meetings, faculty meetings, workshops and in service training. I will be looking at ways team building-activities may improve or cause a decline in teacher morale and how team building influences teacher collaboration, student learning and the overall climate of your school. Participants may withdraw their data at any time if they decide they do not want to participate.

Participants' identity and personal information will be kept confidential and will be destroyed as soon as the study is completed. By participating, you will be giving permission to quote you; however, your name will not be used in any form when quoting. The results will be published in a dissertation and possibly a qualitative journal or higher educational journal.

Your participation of this study is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time. If you are interested in learning more, please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also email me at nautumne@hotmail.com or edmondsj@jcschools.org.

Sincerely yours,

Nanci Autumnne Edmonds
Graduate Student
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

First Grade Teacher, Maynardville Elementary School,
Union County Schools, 1992 – 1997

Chapter One Reading Specialist, Luttrell Elementary School,
Union County Schools, 1991-1992