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Implementation of cross-disciplinary projects to improve student engagement: a leadership study in building capacity for collaboration between middle school teachers

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IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PROJECTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: A LEADERSHIP STUDY IN BUILDING CAPACITY FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

by
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Dedication

To my father, Richard Horner,

My master teacher; my inspiration,

You are the leader that I aspire to be,

With all the gratitude and love I have,

For all the education I ever needed...you are and will forever be in my heart

To my mother, Elizabeth Horner, you continue to encourage and inspire me on a daily basis. You are an amazing woman and this dissertation is as much yours as mine. Thank you for your love and support and most importantly your belief that I can do anything.

To my sister, Mary Thomas, you have helped me through this process in ways that would seem minute to some, but have amounted to a great deal of your time. I cannot thank you enough for being so generous with your time, patience, support, and comedic relief. You are the best sister and friend (and personal assistant) one could ever have.

"You are braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

—Christopher Robin, *Winnie the Pooh*

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Last, but certainly not least, to my family and friends for their understanding and support while I completed this study, especially Ric, Carly, and Kim who have been there for me every step of the way. Finally, I think breakfast is in our future.

Abstract

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Educational Leadership

Most students, including at-risk students, enter school engaged in the process and eager to learn, like school, and comply with school routines (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Over time students' interest in school declines and they fail to connect within the school context and curriculum (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Disconnected and disinterested students exhibit off-task behaviors and apathetic attitudes toward school, which often result in student disengagement. The effects of disengagement manifest in the form of poor academic achievement, disciplinary problems, and poor attendance records (Lee & Smith, 1995; Miller, Leinhardt, & Zigmond, 1988).

Research indicates that teaching and presenting material in isolation of other subject areas contributes to student disengagement (Guthrie, Alao, & Rinehart, 1997; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988). Restructuring and designing curricula around the needs of students rather than making students fit the curriculum, improves engagement levels and achievement rates. Integrated curricula containing real-world connections, self-directed learning, and strategy instruction heighten intellectual engagement (Guthrie et al., 1997; Meece et al., 1988). Moreover, curricula need to be developed to provide

opportunities for collaboration among teachers as well as students. The benefits of student collaboration exist across the curriculum. Research indicates that participation in group projects promotes students' academic achievement, persistence in school, and positive attitudes toward learning (Colbeck, Campbell, & Bjorklund, 2000; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1997). Student collaboration ensures engagement and creates positive experiences and outcomes.

This study examined the role cross-disciplinary projects play on influencing student engagement practices in the Eberhardt School District in Southern New Jersey. My research purpose was accomplished through action research methods. The study was completed in four cycles that began by interviewing the 8th grade academic and special area teachers in the Holloway Middle School. In addition to the interview, the teachers completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Data collected were utilized to establish a starting point and influence subsequent cycles of the study.

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Chapter 1

Problem Statement

Introduction

Newmann (1988) states regardless of what educators teach or how they teach it, they try to teach too much. When districts focus on providing students with a comprehensive, standards-based education, superficial mastery, poor academic performance, and student disengagement often emerge (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley, & Vincent, 2003; Newmann, 1988; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). The current focus on standards-based education leads school districts, the Eberhardt School District (pseudonym) included, to teach to the test and present academic subjects as individual components rather than thematically linked units (Boser, 2000; Norrell & Ingoldsby, 1991; Newmann, 1988; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Popham, 2001). The lack of curricular coherence deprives students of connections between disciplines and ultimately authentic learning experiences (Newmann et al., 2001; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). Unfortunately, several years of band-aid and quick-fix solutions to improve mediocre test scores have resulted in an increase in student disengagement in the Eberhardt School District.

This study examined the role cross-disciplinary projects play on influencing student engagement practices in the Holloway Middle School located in Southern New Jersey. My research purpose was accomplished through action research methods. Implementing an action research project in the school district in which I work afforded

me the opportunity to grow as a leader and witness change as it occurred (McMillan, 2000). I collaborated with teachers and staff who are entrenched in the process and searching for solutions to problems they are currently facing.

Problem Statement

My change initiative was multi-faceted and involved working with eighth grade teachers to identify the root causes of student disengagement in their classrooms and academic disciplines. The data collected were used to develop cross-disciplinary lessons that encouraged collaboration and influenced student engagement. Until recently, the Holloway Middle School teachers were grouped by the subject that they taught and only communicated with others who taught within the same academic discipline. The teachers are currently teamed by grade level taught, however, they continue to teach their disciplines independent of the other subject areas. Presenting information to students as separate entities contributes to curricular disconnect and ultimately student disengagement.

In addition, the demographics of the Eberhardt School District have changed dramatically over the course of the last five years, however, the district continues to follow a one-size fits all approach to teaching. The curriculum is not tailored to meet the needs of all learners, especially a diverse population. Over time, students who find it difficult to connect with the prescribed school curriculum lose focus, fail to do their work, and become minimally involved in school activities (Dolezal et al., 2003; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Disengaged, they ultimately fail to attain academic success (Dolezal et al., 2003; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Several variables contribute to student disengagement such as, socioeconomic

status, the quality of instruction and curriculum, peer pressure, and community involvement (Dolezal et al., 2003).

Purpose of the Study

Multidisciplinary projects provide students with authentic learning experiences. Students need to connect material taught in school with their own personal experiences and prior knowledge in order to process and internalize the material studied (Vygotsky, 1986). Students are the active participants in learning when presented with thematically linked and authentic learning experiences (Newmann, Rutter, & Smith, 1989). Moreover, following the principals of Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1950), learners construct meaning out of their experiences. Knowledge is not a fixed object, rather it is developed through one's learning and environmental experiences.

Fostering collaboration between the academic teachers and special area teachers (art, physical education, world language, computer technology) in the Holloway School ensured that diverse learning tasks were created and connections between all academic subjects were made (Fraser & Fisher, 1982). Through collaborative efforts, interactive learning experiences occur and students are actively engaged (Ames, 1992; Colbeck, Campbell, & Bjorklund, 2000; Norrell & Ingoldsby, 1991). A thematic approach to teaching linked all areas of the curriculum and provided an in-depth understanding of the concepts taught (Newmann, 1988). When developing the projects, the teachers were reminded of Vygotsky's (1986) and Piaget's (1950) theories to ensure that their lessons were student-centered and provided authentic learning experiences for all learners.

Rationale for study

Understanding the context of the school and students' personal context is helpful in creating an academic context that meets the needs of all students, fosters motivation, and ultimately results in student engagement. Contexts work to support or undermine engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). My study focused on the Holloway Middle School in the Eberhardt School District. The Holloway School has a student population of approximately 400 students in grades 5-8, with an average class size of 23 students. The classes are heterogeneously grouped (with the exception of one math and one language arts class, which are accelerated, gifted and talented classes) and include students with special needs. The school district, set in a rural, middle-class area is comprised of 73% white, English speaking students and 27% Gujarati, Spanish, and Asian (2.1% of the 27% are limited English Proficient).

The teachers are grouped in units or teams by grade level and then again by subjects taught. Staff members work within their teams to develop methods to attain specified goals. Often times one or two members of a team will assume a leadership role and direct the group (Gladwell, 2000). Many problems and tensions arise between the teams as each works to attain success. Often times, teams work against each other or lose sight of the mission of the district. Better communication and guidance from the administration are needed, yet often not provided.

Research Questions

This study answered the following questions about student engagement.

1. What is the influence of multi-disciplinary curriculum projects on student engagement?

2. What is the influence of collaboratively developing multi-disciplinary projects on collegiality?
3. How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student engagement and teachers pedagogy?

The study answered the following question about my leadership.

1. In what ways will my leadership capacity to foster collegial collaboration, develop curriculum coherence, and positively influence student engagement develop and expand?

Answers to each of the questions were evidenced in the data gathered throughout the course of the project. Common threads evident in survey responses, interviews, and field notes were assessed and modifications were made throughout the cycles of the project.

Limitations and Consequences

All research maintains limitations and consequences. As a researcher, it is difficult to separate one's beliefs and perceptions from reality (Glesne, 2006). Since my action research project occurred in my place of work, I anticipated a few resisters potentially within the eighth grade team and the other grade levels. I needed to be sensitive to the possibility that participants would feel coerced to participate in the project or to respond in a certain manner.

Implementation of a concurrent triangulation mixed methods model required expertise to adequately analyze differing types of data and sufficient time. Discrepancies may arise when comparing quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, the circumstances under which data were collected, the context, and the participants in the study, all present possible limitations and consequences on the final conclusions and

findings of my project (Glesne, 2006). As a teacher and a colleague working with many of the participants in the study, some participants may have felt coerced into participating or done so out of peer pressure. Therefore, it was imperative that I recorded, coded, and analyzed data collected carefully, and was aware of possible limitations and biases of the study (Glesne, 2006).

Another potential limitation to my project was the halo effect, which occurs when an observer allows an initial impression to influence observations on other aspects (McMillan, 2000). Because I believe in the power of collaboration and cross-disciplinary learning, I needed to be careful not to assume that my initiative was beneficial. Instead I needed to look at the data for real evidence of the impact of collaboration and the implementation of cross-disciplinary projects on student engagement.

This study is unique to the Eberhardt School District and therefore cannot be replicated. The implementation of multidisciplinary projects occurred in the Eberhardt School District; therefore, the findings and generalizations may not be applicable in other school districts.

Finally, there is a gap in literature involving student engagement practices and thematic learning in middle schools. A dearth of current literature to support my change initiative is another potential limitation that I had to be aware of as I implemented my project.

Conclusion

Subsequent chapters of this dissertation reveal my leadership abilities and the role I played in the creation and implementation of multi-disciplinary projects in the Holloway Middle School. In Chapter 2 the leadership theories I ascribe to are discussed

in detail, as well as the core values that I aspire to follow as a leader. This study is based on existing literature, which is described in detail in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach that I followed to implement, collect, and analyze all data used in this action research project. Finally, the remaining chapters discuss the cycles of the action research project and the results of the collected data.

Chapter 2

Leadership Platform

Introduction: Leadership Approach

As the sole instructor of the gifted and talented program in the Eberhardt School District, I am responsible for the administrative and curricular issues involving the program. I depend on others to implement ideas and carry out tasks. Working with others helps me recognize my own capacities and better relate to all humanity. The power of a collective is greater than the power of one. Jaworski (1996) states that the workings of a collective group rely heavily on maintaining an open dialogue, committing to the task and group, and avoiding the traps that plague leaders when they forget that there are others around to support and work with them to carry out their visions. Opportunities arise as a result of connections, therefore, it is imperative to foster and nurture the connections made.

As a democratic transformational leader, I have successfully forged alliances between various groups with great success. I care about the quality of education each student receives and work to ensure that all students and staff members' needs are met. I have successfully developed and executed numerous projects involving gifted students, special needs students, and members of the community.

Bringing various groups together required cooperation and persistence, however, the results of the projects were truly rewarding and beneficial to all participants. When I initially began the collaborative projects, I had no idea the impact the projects would have on the students, staff, community, and parents. As a result, my experiences working

with the gifted students will better prepare and equip me to implement my change initiative on a much larger scale.

Moreover, and possibly most importantly, I do not foresee any major challenges to my leadership approaches as I attempt to implement my project. I envision growing as a leader and further developing my leadership abilities and skills as I carry out my vision. However, I recognize that challenges will arise and I must be prepared to address them. As an educator, I am a lifelong learner and will continue to assume the role of leader and follower as situations warrant. I do believe that the project and the participants in the project will fortify my leadership abilities and motivate me to exceed my expectations.

Leadership Theories that Inform my Practice

Leadership theories are as unique as the individuals who subscribe to them; what works for one does not necessarily work for all, however, a leader is defined by the theories followed (Bass & Bass, 2008). It is difficult for me as a leader in the field of education to align myself or limit myself to one dominant philosophy exclusively; therefore, my leadership can be classified as eclectic. I incorporate principles of various theories into my daily approach to leadership and work to improve and refine each technique as I grow as a leader. At the core of my leadership abilities are a strong democratic foundation, an ethic of care, and a necessity for collaboration with others to create change. I am a participative, transformational leader (Burns, 2003; Dewey, 1916; Rodgers, 2002).

Participative Democratic Leadership Theory. The participative democratic leader recognizes her limitations and acknowledges that others are needed to help her carry out her vision (Gardner, 1990). She is a superb listener, collaborator, influencer,

and team worker. The democratic leader appreciates her followers' input and attains commitment from her followers through their participation in the process (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004). Moreover, democratic leaders emphasize productivity (Hollanders, 2009; Viorst, 1997).

According to Lewin, Llippit, and White (1939) democratic leadership is the most effective leadership style in education. When working with a democratic leader or participative leader, group members are engaged in the process and are generally more motivated and creative. When I first entered the field of education, I worked under a truly democratic leader, who assisted in making me the leader I am today.

My Path of Leadership

My path to leadership in the field of education evolved at a fast pace and seemingly without my knowledge. I graduated from Drew University with a Bachelor's degree in French and Russian and aspirations of working for the United States government. While going through an extensive security clearance background check, I decided to substitute teach in a local middle school. Within days I was hired as a long-term sub for a full-time staff member who had fallen ill; two months later I was hired in the district on a full-time basis.

I worked under a powerful administrator who had a vision; he was motivating and inspiring and democratic in his management of the school. He exemplified all of the characteristics of a democratic leader described by Goleman et al. (2004). He was the first administrator hired in over 20 years and charged with guiding and leading a staff several years his senior and with years more experience in the field of education.

A new and young administrator, he was receptive to feedback from his new staff and was visible in classrooms and at community events. He subscribed to Heifetz's (1993) belief that leaders become wiser and better people by being involved and sharing in the process. He was effective in resolving the daily problems of the school and maintaining a dialogue between his staff and students. He had a vision and worked hard to overcome his limitations and those imposed on him. More importantly, he attained the trust of the staff (Covey, 2002; Evans, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). He acknowledged the complainers and gained their support, as well, by listening to their concerns and showing them respect (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). He taught me that anything is possible with work and determination. He was a transformational leader and a major influence on my current leadership style.

Transformational Leadership Theory

In his book *Leadership* (1978), James MacGregor Burns defined transformational leadership as more than a compliance of followers; rather, transformational leadership is a shift in the beliefs, values, and needs of the followers. According to Burns (1978), the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. Heifetz (1994) further describes the transformational leader as one who is able to adapt his leadership behaviors to the situation or issue at hand. Moreover, transformational leadership emphasizes the values and goals of equality, justice, and liberty, and motivates followers to support leader-intended change (Bass, 1985). The transformational leader does not attempt to change or transform her followers, rather motivates and engages them in a process. She fosters and maintains enduring bonds between herself and her followers, all

the while striving for higher levels of motivation and morality (Bass, 1985; Birnbaum, 1992).

There are four factors that a transformational leader encompasses: charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Chemers, 1997). The charismatic leader conveys the idea that she is trustworthy and highly capable of achieving a goal. She uses body language and presence to engage and entice her followers. The transformational leader is able to appeal to the follower through inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, and challenges the follower to be creative and think for herself. Finally, the transformational leader is recognized through individualized consideration. The transformational leader recognizes her followers' strengths and weaknesses and is able to "coach" them through the process, if needed (Bass, 1985; Chemers, 1997).

Charisma. In working with an older, experienced staff that is set in its ways, I learned that applying and carrying out transformational practices is not easily accomplished, however, it is possible. I have worked with the same group of educators for 12 years and I have met with a lot of resistance from several of them. They have invested their time and energy in the educational system for several years and are firmly established in their beliefs. As a result, they are often non-responsive to change and convinced that traditional methods of instruction are the only methods that truly meet the needs of all learners.

When working with difficult staff members, effective transformational leaders need to be charismatic and patient in their approach (Burns, 1978). In order to carry out a common vision, democratic transformational leaders must be in touch with the needs of

their constituents and reflect the needs of their institutions. The democratic transformational leader needs to reinforce and promote social harmony (Burns, 1978). Towards that end, I model appropriate ethical behaviors and ultimately establish a sense of trust between myself and those I serve. I recognize that my position is not important to my organization rather it is my behavior that is critical.

The establishment of trust. Identifying and recognizing the resisters is advantageous to a leader (Evans, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Kegan & Lahey , 2001). Effective leaders maintain and cultivate the culture in their organization (Fullan, 2001; Furman, 2002; Schein, 2004). Leadership that touches people emotionally and morally is essential to the success of any organization (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Gradually, I was able to establish a rapport with several of the eighth grade team members and collaborate with them on a shared vision. While I welcomed the resistant members, I remembered that patterns of interaction can undermine the team's progress and create pockets of toxicity; therefore, I did not force all members to participate (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Senge, 2007). The resistant members of the group watched as we proceeded without them and, ultimately, learned to trust and follow the vision as well. We formed a cohesive disciplined, vision-driven group. The process was difficult and transpired slowly over years– some members were resistant at first and maintained defensiveness towards the group.

As a result, I worked hard to establish a sense of trust between the resisters and me. I started small by seeking advice about academic topics from various members of the eighth grade team, conducted projects with individuals, and gradually moved into establishing a collaborative working relationship with several staff members. Establishing

trust and commitment was a long and frustrating process. At times, I had to adopt a charismatic approach when working with the more resistant staff members and convince them that I value their opinions and always act with the students' interests in mind (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Moreover, I had to convince them that I was committed to the process and my efforts were sincere. Many of the resistant staff members were senior staff members who experienced a revolving-door of administrators and were concerned about investing time and energy in someone who was not committed to the district (Evans, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Kegan & Lahey, 2001).

Individualism. I attribute the successful implementation of the eighth grade team's collaborative projects to my willingness to work with each member of the team on an individual basis. Democratic transformational leaders recognize each participant as individuals, rather than as a collective (Burns, 1978; Lewin et al., 1939; Sergiovanni, 1992). The eighth grade teachers now invite me into their classrooms, solicit my advice, and ask for help with their ideas or problems. They are comfortable working with me as individuals and as a collective.

Stimulation. Another critical characteristic of democratic transformational leadership theory is stimulation. I know how to approach the eighth grade teachers with an idea and how to effectively empower them to take the idea and develop it into a lesson that best meets the needs of their students. The interests and achievement of the students and the community are first and foremost on our agenda. In the last few years, the eighth grade teachers have become more receptive to new ideas; they no longer run away or roll their eyes when I approach them with a new project idea. We have established a bond of

trust and a level of competence. In fact, they seek help and guidance from me when necessary, and they even take initiative.

The eighth grade teachers subscribed to my initial vision and have contributed to the modification of that vision over time. They have attained success and have developed a passion to continue to grow as educators and individuals (Bass, 1997; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). They have been inspired and share a common vision.

Inspiration. Democratic transformational leaders are inspirational. As the director of the Gifted and Talented program in the Eberhardt Public Schools, my transformational approach to leadership is not limited to lesson planning and collaboration with the eighth grade team. My goal in the classroom is to inspire my students by teaching them to think creatively and critically and to empower them with knowledge. My job has always been to ask the questions and equip my students with the tools to respond. In an effort to dispel societal constraints placed on students when labeling them according to their ability levels, I challenge the gifted students to work with others. Each project is unique and requires the students to take initiative and responsibility. Followers identify with the transformational leaders' aspirations and work to emulate the leaders, while my students work to emulate the leadership qualities that I exhibit.

Ethic of Caring Theory

Transformational leaders are fueled by an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). The growth of those cared for is the most important aspect of an ethic of care (Noddings, 1988). In education, teachers are expected to model appropriate behaviors and treat their students with respect. In turn, they expect that the

same behaviors will be adopted and exhibited by their students. In an ethic of care, educators maintain open dialogue with their students and encourage the sharing of thoughts and ideas. Both parties must be familiar and comfortable with one another to establish a trusting relationship of care (Noddings, 1988; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Every human encounter presents an opportunity to care; simply bumping into someone on the street affects both parties physically and emotionally (Noddings, 1988). In education, such bumps serve as a metaphor for teachable moments or caring moments. The failure of an educator to act on the caring moments is a loss of opportunity to promote moral education and growth (Noddings, 1988; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Simola, 2003).

Core Values

Caring classroom. The growth of those cared for is the most important aspect of an ethic of care (Diller, 1988; Noddings, 1988). In education, teachers are expected to model appropriate behaviors, treat their students with respect, and assume that ultimately the same behaviors will be adopted and exhibited by their students. In a caring classroom, educators maintain open dialogue with their students and encourage the sharing of thoughts and ideas. Moreover, the caring teacher provides students with opportunities to practice caring.

All classrooms can be caring classrooms (Noddings, 1988, 1995; Sizer, 1984). In a caring classroom, the goal is to establish a caring community through dialogue, practice, and modeling (Noddings, 1988). Small group interactions or class sizes are optimal for caring experiences. Sizer (1984) explains that the majority of interaction

between teacher and students is brief or technical and needs to be meaningful. The caring teacher is a leader who connects with the students emotionally and morally (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Collaboration. The workings of a collective group rely heavily on maintaining an open dialogue, committing to the task and group, and avoiding the traps that plague leaders when they forget that there are others around to support and work with them to carry out their visions (Jaworski, 1996). While engrossed in a project, it is easy for a leader to maintain control and direct the project, however, effective leaders share the process (Heifetz, 1993).

As an instructor of the gifted and talented, I work collaboratively with the special education department to implement projects that require collaboration between gifted students and classified special education students. We combine our classes and challenge the students to complete various tasks. For example, we combined an 8th grade special education class with an 8th grade gifted and talented class and had the students create a web quest for a children's picture book. The students worked collaboratively to complete the task. Several of the special education students are known discipline problems and exhibit emotional problems and learning disabilities. The students had to learn how to work with each other and complete a comprehensive project that was academically challenging and stimulating; the students learned to become student and teacher. During the course of the project, the students grew mentally and emotionally; and the resulting final projects were better than we could ever imagine. The students presented their web quests at a technology conference held by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Equally important, combining the different ability levels worked because the teachers involved communicated and collaborated with one another. Throughout the course of the project, the special education teacher and I communicated and shared in the decision-making process. One individual does not rule or control the group as in a bureaucratic form of government with the pyramid and hierarchical structure (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The collaborative relationship is not to be confused with a cooperative relationship. A true ethic of care is not attained in a cooperative relationship where parties individually complete their assigned responsibilities and then piece things together to complete a certain task; personal connection is not necessary in such a relationship (Noddings, 1988). The art of successful collaboration stems from working with others, demonstrating understanding and caring, and maintaining patience (Diller, 1988; Fredricks et al., 2004; Noddings, 1988).

As a result of our collaboration, our students witnessed how we interacted, they comprehended the bond that is established, and recognized the care we have for one another and them (Beck, 1994; Stowell & Mead, 2007). We were role models for the students. Through collaboration we model a sense of care, which motivates and engages the students in the learning process and ultimately leads to the successful implementation of many classroom best practices.

My Research Connected to my Leadership Theories-in-use

As already stated, at the core of my leadership abilities are a strong democratic foundation, an ethic of care, and a necessity for collaboration with others to create change. I am a participative, transformational leader (Burns, 2003; Dewey, 1916; Rodgers, 2002). As a participative democratic leader, I recognize my limitations and

acknowledge that others are needed to help me carry out my vision (Gardner, 1990). I am a superb listener, collaborator, influencer, and team worker. I appreciate the input of others and expect commitment and creativity from those participating in the process (Goleman et al., 2004). The transformational aspect of my leadership compliments my democratic tendencies (Bass, 1985). I place a strong emphasis on the values and goals of equality, justice and liberty, and motivate my followers, all the while engaging them in the process (Birnbaum, 1992; Burns, 2003).

I believe that everyone possesses the ability to learn and grow regardless of age, socioeconomic status, or external factors. As educators, we have to explore and find the means to reach every student. I thrive off of collaboration and creativity and am a very patient person. Four types of interdependence contribute to effective cooperative and collaborative learning: goal interdependence, reward interdependence, role interdependence, and resource interdependence (Colbeck et al., 2000). Working with colleagues and students to create communities based on collaborative learning encourages and permits the development of cross-curricular instruction and will ensure the success of my change initiative project (Burrack & McKenzie, 2005).

Challenges to My Leadership

Transformational and democratic in a political, transactional district. The political frame is the dominant frame of the Eberhardt School District (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Members of the internal and external coalitions vie for control and power of the organization at all costs, often resulting in poor decisions and grave consequences (Mintzberg, 1983). Equally important in the district is the symbolic frame. The district is

heavily laden with tradition and ritual, which causes great difficulty for administrators attempting to implement changes.

As a transformational, democratic leader, I align myself with the human resource and symbolic frames, which is in direct contrast to the dominant frames of the district. I recognize and appreciate the traditions and rituals of the district and work to create new traditions; however, I also understand that some traditions and artifacts need to be buried in order for change to occur. Often staff members hide behind the past and fail to move forward, which is frustrating and often times counter-productive. Maintaining old traditions too long or discontinuing traditions too soon creates tension and resentment within the organization and often promotes toxicity (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

It was only after reading Schein (2004) that I truly understood the importance of understanding the culture of my organization and that the cultures were managing the organization. Over the course of the last few years, the district has seen several administrators come and go. The revolving door of administrators has caused a distinct rift between the administration and staff. The administration faces great resistance from the staff when attempting to share ideas with the staff or implement change programs. Factions of the staff maintain negative attitudes and fear change. The lack of trust and respect between the administration and staff has spawned pockets of toxicity, which permeate the building and impact the overall morale of the school (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Rather than deal with issues head on and admit problems exist, educators tend to avoid issues and cover them up, resulting in what Argyris (1990) refers to as fancy foot work and malaise. The challenge of working with those who avoid addressing issues and

communicating with their staff is overwhelming and frustrating. Often times, exasperated and overwhelmed, I reflect upon why I do what I do. However, I persevere and continue to be very analytical and critical of my current situation and hopeful that I will discover new methods for implementing and successfully initiating change initiatives.

Identifying the different cultures prevalent in the Eberhardt School District enabled me to better relate to members of the organization and work to bring about change in the often chaotic district (Wheatley, 2006). Wheatley (2006) explains that chaos is necessary for new order to begin. Chaos is always partnered with order in a cyclical process. The Eberhardt School District has undergone numerous change reforms in the last few decades, too numerous to count. Unfortunately, few reforms have successfully brought about the change needed to reform a fault-ridden system. As a result, many administrators and staff have adopted a cynical approach to reform and change, believing that innovative ideas and new ideologies are simply temporary solutions to a growing problem. A shift in the thinking of many in the field of education is necessary to successfully establish a culture of change (Senge, 1999).

The Possibility of Change

Strengthening my leadership- The implementation of a change Initiative. As is the case in the majority of school districts, the Eberhardt School District is currently in quest of answers and solutions to the many problems plaguing the district. Administrators attempt to implement change processes, however, they are met with great resistance and little buy in to their ideas. Recently, one of the most powerful, yet simplistic works read, *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell, 2000) had the greatest impact on my current leadership and

research. Gladwell (2000) presents corporate scenarios and common sense approaches to critical situations.

After reading *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell, 2000), I had a greater understanding of how to better utilize the resources within my district and bring about change. Gladwell (2000) espoused the belief that the law of few fuels an epidemic through social connections, energy, enthusiasm, and personality (Gladwell, 2000).

Working to bring about change is frustrating and overwhelming, however, as Gladwell (2000) explains, concentrating one's energy on resources in a few key areas can bring about the tipping point and spark an epidemic. Focusing one's attention on the seemingly trivial aspects of an organization often brings about the most critical and crucial changes. Identifying the change makers and agents of an organization will lead to positive results.

Conclusion

As far back as I can remember, I would watch people complete tasks and I would adopt bits and pieces of their actions until I was able to create my own style. I am left-handed in a predominately right-handed society. I was the first and only left-handed person born into my family, the first to travel outside of the country, the first to attend college, and will be the first to complete a doctoral program. I have always been my own person and treaded my own path.

It is only natural that my path as a leader in the field of education would be individualistic and complex. I literally fell into the field of education by chance. I never had any formal teacher training classes or completed student teaching. I attained my certification by completing the State of New Jersey's Alternate Route program and

flourished under an inspiring, caring, transformational leader. I have always traveled the road less traveled and it has made all the difference.

Currently, now a participative transformational leader, I possess a strong ethic of care. Every lesson I develop, every interaction I have with a student, administrator, or parent is driven by an ethic of care. Working with others to establish a caring and collaborative relationship in the truest sense earns me respect and a productive position in the community. I am democratic in approach and subscribe to a variety of theories and ideologies. I ascribe to an eclectic approach to leadership.

In the future, I will continue to challenge myself, keep an open mind to current and past practices in the field of education, and work with others to share my vision. I will grow as a leader and forge new paths.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Introduction

Identifying engaged students in the classroom is difficult. What does an engaged student look like? The manifestations of engagement are ambiguous and elusive and lack clear behavior or uniform manifestations. Many have written about keeping students engaged yet few have attempted to define engagement formally or to study it as an outcome of school processes (Alexander, Entwisle & Horsey, 1997; Finn & Voelkl, 1993).

Most students, including at-risk students, enter school eager to learn. They like school and comply with school routines, however, grades and academic performance spiral downward the longer the children are in school (Alexander et al., 1997). Disengagement affects all students regardless of ethnicity or ability; however, several personal factors can predispose or exacerbate the disengagement process. Identifying the underlying factors that contribute to student disengagement and working to overcome them will help promote student engagement and success for all.

This review of literature will examine student engagement as evidenced in the classroom. Promoting engagement practices requires educators to identify the obstacles preventing engagement in their districts and work to develop solutions to overcome them (Alexander et al., 1997; Ames, 1992; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Guthrie, Alao, & Rinehart, 1997; Lee & Smith, 1995; Marks, 2000; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986; McFadden & Munns, 2002; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988). Finally, the impact of school and

personal context, and the roles each plays in promoting or prohibiting student engagement will all be explored.

Defining Student Engagement

Student engagement is regarded as a way to ameliorate low levels of academic achievement, high levels of student boredom and disaffection, student alienation, and dropout rates in urban areas (Fredricks et al., 2004). Due to the lack of a clear-cut definition and considerable research on how students, think, feel, and behave, engagement has become an overused term in the field of education. Many regard it as a panacea to all that ails floundering school districts, simply because it is presumed to be a manageable or easily remedied issue (Connell, 1990; Fredricks et al., 2004). Engagement practices require students to interact with context or environment; therefore, students need a context amenable to their needs (Finn & Rock, 1997).

Researchers regard engagement as a multifaceted, meta-construct that is exhibited in two forms, procedural engagement and substantive engagement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Both forms of engagement require communication between students and teachers, as well as reciprocal interaction. Moreover, both forms of engagement support different outcomes.

Types of Engagement

Procedural engagement. Typically, few elementary and middle school students appear disengaged or off-task in daily lessons (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). The majority of students pay attention in class, complete their homework and assignments on time, and go through the motions of school. They exhibit competency in school procedures, however, often little academic achievement occurs.

The majority of student engagement exhibited in schools is termed procedural engagement, or procedural display (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Procedural engagement lasts as long as the task itself. Students work to please the teacher and gain social praise and recognition (Meece et al., 1988; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). They are responsive to extrinsic motivation and a need to be accepted (Ames, 1992).

Substantive engagement. Substantive engagement requires commitment to the task by both teachers and students (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Teachers must be devoted to developing and implementing lessons that provide all students with quality academic experiences. They must be cognizant of the learning environment in relation to their students and their achievement goals (Ames, 1992). Teachers need to recognize their students' needs and provide them with meaningful instruction that is authentic and relatable to their personal life.

Substantive engagement is associated with positive academic and social outcomes and is evident in achievement and persistence rates in schools (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). Classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, differentiation, and challenging, authentic learning tasks maintain higher engagement rates and achievement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Characteristics of substantive and procedural engagement exist in three categories or concepts: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Fredricks et al., 2004; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

Behavioral engagement. The next engagement concept, behavioral engagement, emerges from the idea of participation and involvement in academic and extracurricular activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). School officials regard behavioral engagement as

critical and necessary in achieving positive academic outcomes and ultimately preventing student disengagement. Behavioral engagement consists of conduct and participation.

Behaviorally engaged students exhibit positive behaviors. They follow the rules and adhere to classroom norms, hence, exhibiting positive conduct (Finn, 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement is often procedural in nature.

Participants' involvement in the learning process and the behaviors prevalent in the completion of academic tasks are critical aspects of behavioral engagement. Students who are involved in behavioral engagement put forth effort, exhibit persistence, concentration, attention, and contribute to class discussions (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Finn et al., 1995; Fredricks et al., 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Moreover, behavioral engagement depends on students' participation in school-related activities both academic and athletic activities (Finn, 1993; Finn et al., 1995; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Emotional engagement. Students need to recognize the value of the task in order to become emotionally engaged (Alexander et al., 1997; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Normally, four values are necessary to attain emotional engagement: interest, attainment value, utility value and importance, and cost (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Students must be able to connect, relate, and be interested in the task presented to them (Fredricks et al., 2004). When students attribute a value to the task and a sense of personal gain, they are more likely to partake in the activity (Eccles et al., 1983; Fredricks et al., 2004). Students recognize that development of an emotional connection aids in attaining future goals. Instilling values and creating activities that extend the

beliefs of the culture provide a sense of connection and understanding. The task gains validity and students buy into the process (Fredricks et al., 2004; Lee & Smith, 1995).

Finally, students determine whether they will partake in a task based on potential negative effects or costs they might incur (Fredricks et al., 2004). School experiences, context, peers, family factors, and curriculum all play a vital role in the choices students make (McDill et al., 1986). Sadly, the assigned tasks often do not fit the needs of the students and many find the costs outweigh the benefits and ultimately opt to disengage from tasks presented in school.

Cognitive engagement. Cognitive engagement rests on the idea of investment and motivation. Students exert the effort necessary to work through complex ideas and synthesize and apply information gleaned in a variety of ways. Utilizing several learning strategies such as rehearsal, elaboration, and summarization, students' are aided in the ingestion and digestion of material (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990).

Engagement Exhibited in Schools

Student engagement may exist on a social or academic level and may stem from opportunities in the school or classroom for participation, interpersonal relationships, and intellectual endeavors (Fredricks et al., 2004). The lack of substantive engagement by students greatly impacts achievement and behavior; however, interventions can counteract the lack of engagement and bring about a level of commitment. Establishing a level of commitment enables students to benefit from schooling and succeed in society (Finn et al., 1995; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Over the course of a decade, Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) collected data from 58 eighth-grade English classes, in 16 Midwestern schools regarding student engagement in language arts classes. They defined language arts classes as English, reading, communications, literature, etc. They examined the types of instruction that fostered student engagement and the effects of such instruction on achievement. Moreover, they concluded that the majority of students simply follow the rules and complete assigned tasks. Little mastery and processing of content occurred in the classes observed. On rare occasions, few students were genuinely engaged in academic problems and issues.

Interestingly, most students, including those identified as at-risk students, enter school with a strong desire to learn (Alexander et al., 1997). Students love school; however, the longer they attend school the more likely the desire to learn dissipates and grades, attendance, and overall performance decline (Alexander et al., 1997; Meece et al., 1988). Early school experiences play a critical role in the development of negative school outcomes. Students comply with expected behaviors and learn to work the system. Students learn quickly what is expected of them and what they need to do to be accepted and complete assigned tasks (Ames, 1992; Meece et al., 1988). Unfortunately, mastery of procedural engagement practices prohibits learning from occurring and disengagement results (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

Achievement occurs to the extent that students are personally immersed in the lessons (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Students need to process and digest material presented, be provided with authentic and open-ended questioning, provided with opportunities for meaningful discussion and substantive engagement. Students need to be active participants and recipients in the learning process.

Classroom instruction and tasks heighten intellectual engagement and curiosity. Engaging teachers incorporate a variety of strategies and mechanisms to motivate and engage their students (Dolezal et al., 2003). For engaging teachers, learning involves an active process of integrating and organizing new information, monitoring comprehension, and constructing meaning, and ultimately developing deeper meaning and understanding of the task (Meece et al., 1988). By constructing meaning and developing a deeper understanding of the tasks presented, students are provided with opportunities for mastery of concepts. Current classroom practices provide little time for mastery of concepts taught. Academic subjects are taught in isolation of each other and topics are frequently introduced, but not reinforced (Guthrie et al., 1997; Meece et al., 1988).

Assessing Engagement

Balfanz, Herzog, and Iver (2007) assert that educators have attempted to assess engagement practices through attendance, behavior, and academic achievement; such factors are indicators of behavioral engagement and are easily assessed in schools on a routine basis. The implementation of curricular interventions, the creation of small learning communities, character education programs, and parental involvement have gained success in individual cases, however, the attempts have done little to ameliorate the growing problem of student disengagement (Balfanz et al., 2007; Dolezal et al., 2003). The programs and reforms do little to improve cognitive and emotional engagement; they focus solely on behavioral engagement.

Balfanz et al. (2007) studied approximately 13,000 students over the course of eight years to identify causes of disengagement and student dropouts. They found that addressing attendance and discipline issues in the middle school grades greatly impacts

students' decisions to remain in school; however, they also discovered that improving attendance and preventing discipline problems does little to foster engagement. More importantly, Balfanz et al. (2007) discovered that the transition from elementary school to middle school is a critical period in students' lives. The majority of student disengagement occurs during this transitional period and the magnitude of the disengagement process is not fully understood. Due to the lack of assessment tools and the personal and subjective nature of engagement, educators find it difficult to assess engagement, let alone work to improve each (Dolezal et al., 2003).

Interestingly enough, as researchers and educators search for the perfect instrument to assess student engagement, they are discovering that the school context plays a small part in student disengagement (Kuh, 2003; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Students' peers and cultural heritage play a critical role in students' interest in school (Dolezal et al., 2003; Kuh, 2003; Rumberger &Palardy, 2005). Kuh (2003) observed students in classrooms replete with technology and resources, however, several students failed to participate in the instructional activities due to the lack of peer connections and cultural awareness. While the schools were rich in resources, lessons lacked opportunities for collaboration between disciplines and failed to provide authentic learning experiences for all students.

Disengagement

Disengagement exhibited in schools carries great consequences and manifests in underachievement and ultimately student dropouts. Disengagement is a hazard to performance (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). Due to the lack of engagement present in many large schools, the percentage of student dropouts continues to grow (Finn & Voelkl, 1993).

Disengaged students lack a connection with the school; as a result, they often cut classes, act out, avoid participating in school activities, and alienate themselves from their peers (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Fredricks et al., 2004).

In addition to the large school environment, early school experiences contribute to disengagement and lead to high dropout rates (Alexander et al., 1997). Dropping out is the culmination of a long-term process of academic disengagement (Alexander et al., 1997). As disengaged students travel through the education system, the more disaffected and alienated they become. The earlier disengagement occurs, the less likely the students are able to reengage in the learning process and overcome the labels that follow them.

Factors Contributing to Student Engagement and Disengagement

Contexts. Academic context, including school size, classroom structure and content, and academic ability grouping and curriculum, all influence student engagement and disengagement choices (Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003; Fredricks et al., 2004; Lee & Smith, 1995; McDill et al., 1986; Miller, Leinhardt, & Zigmond, 1988). Focusing on promoting academic contexts rich in engagement opportunities produces a learning environment where students excel and succeed. Moreover, creating a more cohesive curriculum and strengthening instructional coherence help to improve student achievement (Newmann et al., 2001).

School contexts work to support or undermine engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Understanding students' personal context and creating an academic context that meets the needs of all students fosters motivation and ultimately results in student engagement. However, tailoring context to meet the needs of all students is an overwhelming process that is frequently avoided at a great cost.

Motivation is contextual. Students appear motivated in some contexts, but not in others (Ames & Archer, 1988; Guthrie et al., 1997). The unmotivated student is inattentive, fails to complete homework, and resists participating in tasks (Ames, 1992; Ames & Archer, 1988; Guthrie et al., 1997; Lee & Anderson, 1993). Motivation is frequently compared to quantitative changes in behaviors such as, high achievement rates and time on task behavior, rather than qualitative changes and student's self perception in relation to the task, engagement in the process of learning, and response to learning activities (Ames, 1992).

Teachers often find it difficult to motivate students to engage themselves purposefully and actively in the learning process (Meece et al., 1988). When surveyed in a poll conducted by the National Reading Research Center (NRRC), teachers cited the necessity to promote and create interest in reading (Guthrie et al., 1997). The decline in intrinsic motivation in reading and classroom context gravely affects engagement practices in all academic areas. Reading is a vital part of all academic subjects. A direct correlation exists between a student's ability to read and motivation. Without the skills necessary to read on grade-level, students interest in the task wane and motivation and engagement decline. The lack of motivation to read is a serious issue educators must address, in middle and secondary schools in particular.

Curriculum. Members of National Reading Research Center (NRRC) collaborated with a group of 5th grade teachers, faculty members, and low-achieving students in Maryland to develop a classroom context aimed at increasing engagement (Guthrie et al., 1997). They focused on improving reading engagement in particular and implemented a concept-oriented reading program consisting of seven themes. The seven

themes defined the instructional context through real-world observation, conceptual theory, strategy instruction, self-directed learning, collaboration, self-expression, and coherence. The first theme, real world observation, created motivation and set the stage for all of the remaining themes. Students experienced learning in a meaningful and motivating manner and became involved and entrenched in the process (Guthrie et al., 1997; Marks, 2000). They developed an academic curiosity, which prompted students to engage in the activity and ultimately succeed.

Many progressive districts maintain integrated curricula containing real-world connections, self-directed learning, and strategy instruction. By restructuring and designing their curricula around the needs of the students, rather than making the students fit the curriculum, many districts have improved engagement levels and achievement rates (Guthrie et al., 1997; Meece et al., 1988).

Classroom instructional practices and tasks heighten intellectual engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Newmann et al., 1996). Engagement is enhanced in classrooms where the tasks are authentic and provide opportunities for students to assume ownership of their work (Newmann et al., 1996; Newmann et al., 2001). Newmann (1988) argues that too often curricula are designed to cover too much information in a relatively short time frame, which leads to only superficial understandings of the material by students and a lack of depth or mastery of concepts. Moreover, curricula need to be developed to provide opportunities for collaboration among teachers, as well as students. Creating tasks that encourage creativity and diversity, and providing opportunities for enjoyment help motivate students and ensure engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Miller et al., 1988; Newmann, 1991).

Improving motivation: Cooperative and collaborative learning groups. Classrooms that promote cooperative and collaborative learning permit students to assume ownership of their learning and are motivating and engaging (Casey, 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004). They provide students with authentic, diverse learning experiences, and foster higher order thinking skills and creativity. Students develop a want to learn when immersed in the collaborative process (Ames, 1992; Casey, 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Guthrie et al., 1997).

Improving motivation: Motivating instructional activities. In addition to the collaborative and cooperative instructional model, a central element of classroom learning is the design of tasks and learning activities (Ames, 1992; Newmann, 1988; Newmann et al., 1996; Newmann et al., 2001; Stewart & Brendefur, 2005). Tasks that involve variety and diversity are more likely to provoke an interest in learning and engagement. Ames (1992) suggests that the students' perception of control affects their engagement in learning and the quality of learning engagement. Dynamic teachers effectively design and implement tasks that offer variety and appropriate challenges to students (Ames, 1992; Casey, 2008). Unfortunately, not all teachers possess the tools to create challenging and motivating lessons, and not all students become engaged in all lessons.

Enhancing motivation means enhancing children's effort and level of commitment (Ames & Archer, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). Therefore, it is essential for teachers to develop their instructional practices and assessment practices around the same mastery goal (Ames, 1992; Guthrie et al., 1997; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993).

Teachers' expectations. Teachers expect the culture of their classrooms to become part of the consciousness of their students, however, the culture of the students must first be in the consciousness of the teachers (Bernstein, 1970; McFadden & Munns, 2002; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Students tend to be more engaged in classrooms where teachers and peers create a caring and supportive environment (Finn et al., 2003; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). When students recognize and feel a sense of belonging; they feel accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (Fredricks et al., 2004; Marks, 2000). Developing and maintaining classroom environments rich in acceptance and respect are essential. Subsequently, supportive and caring teachers foster behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Supportive and caring classrooms. Student engagement in the classroom leads to achievement and contributes to students' social and cognitive development (Finn, 1993; Fredricks et al., 2004; Marks, 2000; Newman, 1992). Patterns of low levels of engagement in the classroom exist across grade levels, however, class subject matter proves a significant factor in the engagement of both elementary and high school students (Marks, 2000). For example, students consider themselves more teacher dependent in mathematics, where the teacher is considered the source of knowledge. In other academic areas such as social studies and science, the teacher is regarded as an elaborator of knowledge. Students' school experiences impact engagement, consequently, student engagement tends to be higher in mathematics, where students interact with the teacher more than in other academic subject areas (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Marks, 2000; McFadden & Munns, 2002). Students' commitments to academic tasks depend on the

intellectual stimulation and quality of instruction. More importantly, students need to control or feel they control their school experiences. Students need the tools and self-esteem to control their beliefs, strategize, and develop a sense of self-efficacy (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Maintaining supportive and caring classrooms that promote engagement and self-efficacy requires teachers to relinquish control and encourage communication (McFadden & Munns, 2002). Students desire autonomy rather than doing things because their actions are controlled by others (Fredricks et al., 2004). The process gets messy and some teachers feel uncomfortable or insecure relinquishing control; however, it is at the messy point that students and teachers connect and students recognize that school is for them. The learning environment becomes purposeful, relevant, and productive (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; McFadden & Munns, 2002).

School context. Greater effectiveness in the elementary, middle, and secondary grades appears to be achieved in smaller schools (Finn et al., 2003; Lindsay, 1982; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992). Researchers assert that student academic achievement, morale, satisfaction, and responsibility occur at much higher levels in small schools (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). Fewer disciplinary problems exist in smaller schools and attendance percentages are better. Smaller sized schools provide students with a sense of belonging (Lee & Smith, 1995; Wehlage et al., 1992). Moreover, students in smaller school districts participate and engage in a wider range of extracurricular and social activities (Grabe, 1976; Lindsay, 1982; Schoggen & Schoggen, 1988). The relationship between school size and students' sense of obligation is critical to recognizing levels of engagement (Finn & Voelkl, 1993).

Discipline. Disciplinary practices and the need for order within school districts and individual classrooms often alienate high-risk students (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). A direct connection exists between structured and rigid school procedures and the severity of school disciplinary measures with the engagement levels of high-risk students (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Tightly structured schools and classrooms allow for little creativity and independence. Teachers' expectations of academic and social behaviors, and the consequences of failing to meet those expectations, place undue pressure on students and greatly impact the school climate and student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Most students want to impress their teachers, however, the teachers' expectations and disciplinary practices must be fair and consistent, and clearly communicated to all students.

Personal and cultural context. Lack of engagement exhibited at school is often attributed to factors present in students' personal backgrounds and behaviors (Marks, 2000). Marks (2000) cautions that prior achievement is generally not a significant factor in engagement or an indicator of a student's future achievement. Participation in tasks is often determined by a student's personal context (Marks, 2000; McFadden & Munns, 2002).

In addition to the influence of family and socioeconomic status on school engagement and achievement, students' peers play an integral part in students' engagement and behaviors (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Buhs & Ladd, 2001; DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 1994; Fredricks et al., 2004). Students gravitate to peers of similar levels of engagement and participation in school. Peer acceptance in both

childhood and adolescence is associated with satisfaction in school. Students with supportive peers and strong social support systems tend to cope better with stress, pressure, and school (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). On the other hand, children who are rejected during the elementary school years are at greater risk for poor conduct and lower classroom engagement (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; DeRosier et al., 1994). Students disengage out of a fear of peer rejection, especially minority students. Engagement is enhanced when class members actively discuss ideas, debate points of view, and critique each other's work (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Buhs & Ladd, 2001; DeRosier et al., 1994; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Promoting Engagement Practices

Promoting engagement practices that address all aspects of engagement, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional, will benefit all parties. By working to encourage collaboration, foster motivation, and work with and improve academic and personal context engagement practices will improve (Colbeck et al., 2000; Guthrie et al., 1997; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1997).

Collaboration to Improve Engagement

Student collaboration. The benefits of student collaboration exist across the curriculum. Research indicates that participation in group projects promotes students' academic achievement, persistence in school, and positive attitudes toward learning (Anderson et al., 1990; Colbeck et al., 2000; Louis & Marks, 1998; Newmann, 1991a; Newmann et al., 1996; Springer et al., 1997). Student collaboration ensures engagement and creates positive experiences and outcomes.

When students work with their peers, they learn more and participate in authentic learning experiences (McQuillan, 2005; Louis & Marks; 1998; Newmann et al., 1996; Van Meter & Stevens, 2000). Social interaction requires students to utilize and develop critical negotiating and problem-solving skills (Anderson et al., 1990). They develop conceptual thinking skills when their current understandings are challenged by contradictory viewpoints; therefore, it is essential that teachers plan group learning activities that permit students to succeed and interact interdependently (Louis & Marks, 1998; Newmann, 1991b; Piaget, 1926; Van Meter & Stevens. 2000).

Collaborative learning promotes independent thinking and interdependence. Lee and Smith (1993) caution that groups must be created based on social equality and less by ability. Teachers play a minor role in collaborative learning and often serve simply as facilitators and developers of interdependence (Anderson et al., 1990; Colbeck et al., 2000; Louis & Marks, 1998).

Teacher collaboration. Collaboration between teachers is just as important as collaboration among students. Students who attend schools that encourage team teaching and teacher collaboration tend to achieve at higher levels (Lee & Smith, 1993; Newmann et al., 1996). Unfortunately, school districts focus little on teacher collaboration and more on large-scale reforms (Wehlage et al., 1992). Districts boast team teaching and cluster teaching, however, researchers caution that such programs do not ensure curricular collaboration or clarity and coherence (Briggs, 2007; Stewart & Brendefur, 2005; Wehlage et al., 1992). Collaboration tends to happen spontaneously without predetermined goals. It tends to lack structure and planned steps or predetermined roles and accountability.

Through collaboration, the teachers gain ownership over the instruction process and a desire to make it successful. Teachers who work collaboratively and team-teach engage learners in higher-order thinking and engaging lessons more frequently and with greater depth than when presenting material in isolation or on an individual basis (Letterman & Dugan, 2004; Newmann et al., 1996). They commit to the process and the engagement and achievement of students. The collaborative process is continuous and promotes achievement, innovativeness, and engagement in students and teachers (Briggs, 2007; Colbeck et al., 2000; Lee & Smith, 1993; Newmann et al., 1996).

Several themes emerge from curriculum collaboration, among them, informal interactions, voluntary initiative, and fluctuating participation (Briggs, 2007). Creating a context rich in social capital, consisting of collaboration and participation in group activities, fosters loyalty, humanity, and volunteerism (Briggs, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Members of an organization rich in social capital support one another, collaborate, and form a community based on personal and professional trust and support. Trust and respect between members allows each to share his expertise with the group and motivate one another to grow and develop. Such camaraderie among staff members benefits both staff and students and creates a cohesive community of engagement (Briggs, 2007; Letterman & Dugan, 2004; Louis & Marks, 1998; Newmann et al., 1996; Stewart & Brendefur, 2005).

Cross-curricular instruction. Creating communities based on collaborative learning encourages and permits the development of cross-curricular instruction (Anderson et al., 1990; Burrack & McKenzie, 2005). A cross-disciplinary approach to instruction increases students' understanding and learning by providing them with

opportunities to work within each discipline and develop a thorough understanding of the topic studied. Teaching subjects in collaboration fosters motivation, attitudes, and academic engagement (Casey, 2008; Newmann et al., 1989; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993; Singh, Granville, & Dika, 2002). When taught in isolation, concepts are often not mastered, infrequently students fail to commit to the task, and an apathetic attitude toward learning is often adopted.

In addition to collaboration, teachers must identify common themes among disciplines to aid in developing cross-disciplinary projects and curriculum. Educators differ on their concepts and ideas of engaging lessons (Engle & Conant, 2002; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). Identification of common themes between disciplines creates a heightened awareness of concepts taught and ultimately success and achievement (Burrack & McKenzie, 2005). Researchers suggest that students' motivation to learn can be increased and improved when teachers create a curriculum that focuses on conceptualizing and creating meaning and relevance (Burrack & McKenzie, 2005; Newmann et al., 2001; Singh et al., 2002). Therefore, creating cross-disciplinary units provides opportunities to engage students in the learning process and fosters a cohesive environment that overcomes learning in isolation and disengagement (Burrack & McKenzie, 2005; Newmann et al., 2001).

Students and teachers engaged in cross-curricular lessons venture outside of their comfort zone and the context of the traditional classroom (Allen, Floyd-Thomas, & Gillman, 2001). All participants are challenged and grow as individuals, students, teachers, and as a community. Moreover, the incorporation of cross-curricular projects and lessons support and extend beyond the classroom experience (Henze, 1999).

Creating a culture of change. A review of literature revealed that several factors contribute to the level of student engagement exhibited in schools. School and personal context, curriculum and instruction, and motivation, are all critical to fostering student engagement. Developing an intervention that involves each of the critical aspects will promote engagement in all students. Moreover, creating a context free of negativity and disrespect enhances the learning experience and creates an environment more conducive to trust and ultimately engagement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Promoting engagement practices and improving the school culture requires effective leadership and time (Anderson, 2009; Fullan, 2001; Schein, 2004). Successful and sustainable change occurs with the leader.

Change Framework

Effective leaders challenge and motivate their staff to perform at a higher level and ultimately bring about change (Anderson, 2009). Effective leaders must maintain and cultivate the culture in their organization (Fullan, 2001; Schein, 2004). Leadership that touches people emotionally and morally is essential to the success of any organization (Sergiovanni, 1992). Sergiovanni (1992) referred to this as a leader's stewardship. Leaders as stewards regard others as people and develop relationships of trust with the entire community. Stewardship gives legitimacy and a respectable image to leadership and involves everyone. The leader who leads with purpose awakens the moral purpose in everyone (Fullan, 2001).

As a transformational leader, I align myself to the change framework outlined by Michael Fullan (2001) in *Leading in a Culture of Change*. Fullan (2001) identifies five themes successful leaders ascribe to in a culture of change: Moral Purpose,

Understanding Change, Developing Relationships, Knowledge Building, and Coherence Making. Each of the five themes builds upon and is dependent on the others.

Moral purpose. People change because the change message communicated touched them emotionally. Leaders who lead with moral purpose guide truths that influence the feelings of their followers, therefore, enabling them to institute change. Understanding the change process helps leaders lead better and change can be brought about through good leadership (Fullan, 2001).

The established culture or environment of an organization plays a critical role in ensuring its success. It is easier to be a better person in a positive environment, therefore, cultivating an environment based on trustworthy and moral leadership is critical for positive change to occur (Gladwell, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Leaders who understand the change process, strive to reach a level of sustainability and create leaders out of their followers (Fullan, 2001). Success is gained through collaboration and cooperation within an organization and trust in leadership. Moreover, followers must have a clear understanding of the change process, which is the next theme Fullan (2001) explains in his change framework.

Understanding change. Understanding the change process helps leaders lead better. Fullan (2001) states that there are five components to the change process; not to innovate the most, it is not enough to have the best ideas, appreciate the implementation dip, redefine resistance, reculturing, never a checklist, and always complexity. Change can be brought about through good leadership (Fullan, 2001).

In the first component to understanding the change process, not to innovate the most, Fullan (2001) asserts that understanding the change process is less about innovation

and more about innovativeness. What works best for one leader might not work for another. Fullan (2001) asserts that the change process cannot be managed or controlled; it can be understood and guided, but not controlled.

Leaders often attempt to bring about numerous changes and fail to create depth and coherence (Fullan, 2001). As I implement my project, I have to pay particular attention to this facet of the change process. The Holloway School teachers are accustomed to change, however, they have experienced too much change in a very short period of time. As Fullan (2001) discusses, the leader who acts as a pacesetter, maintaining a calm and thorough timing, is better equipped to motivate, engage, and implement his innovative ideas. He establishes the groundwork for a solid foundation, focuses on the steps necessary to bring about change, and maintains a sense of commitment. I need to be extremely cautious when implementing my project in the Holloway School and ensure that coherence and depth are achieved.

In the second component, Fullan (2001) is quick to caution that it is not enough for a leader to have the best ideas. Leaders must also be able to motivate others to support the idea and assist in successfully bringing about change. Similar to his belief that it is not necessary to innovate the most, without the support of some, change cannot succeed. Approximately two thirds of all change efforts fail to meet their goals (Bolman & Deal, 1999). Change initiatives often flounder and fail due to the lack of direction and leadership. By sharing ideas and listening to the ideas of others, leaders remain open to various perspectives and are able to facilitate change by assuaging fears.

People fear change. As a result, implementation dips occur during the change process (Fullan, 2001). In the third component to understanding the change process,

Fullan (2001) cautions that leaders need to welcome the implementation dip. Change requires new techniques and skills. As the change process proceeds, the performance and confidence levels of the change agents decreases. Effective leaders do not panic; rather, they recognize and work with the fears of others.

In the fourth component of the change process, Fullan (2001) asserts that the implementation dip is often the direct result of resistance. Leaders must rethink resistance (2001). Resisters present different perspectives and help guide the change process through the implementation dip (Fullan, 2001). Humans surround themselves with people they agree with and distance themselves from those who oppose them (Gladwell, 2000). Most leaders avoid office politics and do not like conflict (Bolman & Deal, 2006). However, Fullan (2001) points out the resisters are critical to the change process. They provide access to opportunities that are different from those in support of the change initiative.

The final component to understanding the change process requires leaders change the culture of their organization (Fullan, 2001). The culture of an organization affects every decision a leader makes (Bolman & Deal, 2006). Respecting the ideas of both those in support of the change initiative and the resisters creates a culture of change, or as Fullan (2001) refers to reculturing. Reculturing an organization takes time to develop. The reculturing process requires leaders incorporate new ideas and practices into the organization and constantly evaluate and modify the process.

Relationships. Relationships, the third component of leadership outlined by Fullan (2001), is potentially the most important to leaders immersed in a culture of

change. Fullan (2001) is quick to note that the development of genuine relationships built on authenticity and care is critical to an organization.

Leaders create relationships in organizations. Both individuals and the collective want to belong to the organization. They seek a genuine purpose and want to make a difference in the organization. Individuals like to contribute and see results. Effective leaders lead with heart. They recognize and celebrate the contributions of the members of their organization and recognize that people become frustrated and disenchanted (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). However, leadership is a team effort that builds on a collective identity and community spirit that perseveres through difficult times.

Schools claim to develop relationships to get results, however, they often focus on the development of individuals and not the collective. The development of professional learning communities is crucial (Fullan, 2001). When the emotional needs of others are met and connections with others made, humans are motivated to maintain those connections and grow (Maslow, 1943). The most effective leaders combine intellectual intelligence with emotional intelligence (Fullan, 2001). In a culture of change, emotional differences often exist. Fostering the emotional intelligence of others proves fruitful in developing productive and diverse relationships.

Knowledge-building. As Fullan (2001) discusses, building relationships among colleagues is a complicated process, however, forging relationships promotes knowledge sharing and building. Knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing are critical to the success of an organization (Fullan, 2001). Many organizations find it difficult to transfer information into knowledge. Fullan (2001) discusses that organizations invest a lot of money in professional development opportunities and training for their employees, yet

spend little time on knowledge-sharing. Effective leaders attempt to create environments conducive to knowledge-sharing. They encourage all participants in the organization to network and build relationships. The process is often very difficult to implement.

Students perform better and value education when they maintain personal connections with faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As a result, educators work to forge relationships with their students on a daily basis, however, little is done to promote or nurture collegial relationships. Promoting collegial relationships is critical to the success of my change initiative. As a leader, I will work to ensure that time is allotted for recreational activities that promote interaction between the project participants. Once the cultural and structural barriers that prevent knowledge sharing are overcome, and credibility and legitimacy are established between colleagues, the knowledge-sharing process begins (Fullan, 2001; Lieberman, 1988).

Schools successful at sharing and building knowledge create peer networks, utilize instructional consulting, visit other districts, and apply information learned. They rely on their mavens and connectors to share knowledge and create an epidemic (Gladwell, 2000). Interestingly, once educators begin experiencing the knowledge-sharing process, they yearn for more.

Coherence making. Creating coherence in an organization happens over time and requires leaders to take risks. Fullan (2001) cautions that there is a time to disturb and a time to cohere. Coherence leads to new ideas and interactions. Focusing on achieving outcomes is a powerful coherence-maker.

Fullan (2001) discusses the hidden coherence-making features apparent in the process. The first feature consists of lateral accountability. Fullan (2001) asserts that in

collaborative organizations, inactivity and resistance among members is apparent. Peer pressure is powerful and affects the actions of others. The second coherence-making feature concerns knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing in the sorting and validity process. Sorting of the knowledge-sharing process ensures that ideas are working and lead to the overall purpose. And the final coherence-making feature discussed by Fullan (2001) involves shared commitment. Members of the organization inspire and motivate each other to implement the best ideas, which lead to overall coherence.

Fullan (2001) states that the education system is currently riddled with too many innovations and ideas, which have created a disconnect between all parties. The demands placed on schools to produce results have led to the implementation of numerous programs and band-aid solutions to existing problems. The presence of too many initiatives creates more problems, which destroys the energy and morale of those involved. Productive disturbance exists when it is brought about with moral purpose and guidance. By changing mindsets and approaches to strategy, coherence is created and change emerges.

Change theory in practice. Working to bring about change is frustrating and overwhelming, however, as Gladwell (2000) explains, concentrating one's energy and resources in a few key areas can bring about the tipping point and spark an epidemic. Focusing one's attention on the seemingly trivial aspects of an organization often brings about the most critical and crucial changes. Following the five themes of the change framework outlined by Fullan (2001) and focusing on all aspects of the organization will enable me to implement my change initiative and attain positive results.

Conclusion

Promoting engagement practices that address all aspects of engagement, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional, will benefit all parties. The creation of a coherent and cohesive curriculum will further promote engagement and achievement (Newmann et al., 2001). By working to encourage collaboration, fostering motivation, and working with and improving academic and personal context, engagement practices will improve (Colbeck et al., 2000; Guthrie et al., 1997; Springer et al., 1997).

Finally, it must be noted that there is a noticeable lack of current literature regarding student engagement in the middle school context and multi-disciplinary approaches to pedagogy. The majority of current literature focuses on the movement of the education system toward standards-based education (Newmann et al., 2001).

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

Action research provides one the opportunity to identify a problem and facilitate change within an organization in collaboration with the parties involved in the research (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1990; McMillan, 2000). Implementing an action research project in the school district in which I work afforded me the opportunity to grow as a leader and witness change as it occurred (McMillan, 2000). I collaborated with teachers and staff who are entrenched in the process and searching for solutions to problems they are currently facing.

Through collaboration with staff members, examination of literature regarding student engagement practices, and data collected in Cycle 1, I developed a plan of action. The action research process typically leads to organizational changes that promote efficiency and efficacy (Hinchey, 2008). Moreover, the implementation of my action research project permitted me to grow as a leader and reflect upon my leadership theory in practice.

Study Overview

Action research. Action research traces back to Dewey and his beliefs that teachers should be active agents in the research practices applied in their classrooms (Hinchey, 2008). Dewey's beliefs were further developed and defined by Kurt Lewin who broke the action research process down as proceedings in a spiral of steps, composed of planning, action, observation, and the evaluation of the actions (Kemmis &

McTaggert, 1990). Using the spiral of steps, I analyzed the effects of collaboration and the implementation of cross-curricular projects on student engagement in the hopes of influencing student motivation and achievement in the Holloway Middle School. Action researchers attempt to address four basic themes through the spiral of steps: social change, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and empowerment of participants in the study (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1990).

Mixed methods. When implementing an action research project, the researcher may use a mixed methods approach to collect data (Creswell, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). A mixed methods approach involves both collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data and provides answers to questions that cannot be answered by qualitative or quantitative alone (Creswell, 2009). Using surveys, interviews, field notes, and journal entries, I gathered data pertinent to the change initiative and modified the project as I worked through the cycles. Furthermore, the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data enabled me to triangulate the data and increase reliability of my findings (Hinchey, 2008).

As a member of the eighth grade teaching staff, my role in the project was critical. I planned to utilize literature on student engagement and historical data collected to promote student engagement in all eighth grade students. I needed to proceed cautiously and ensure that all staff members' needs were met and that they were a part of the process every step of the way (Glesne, 2006).

Research Questions

The goals of this study were to examine the effects of cross-curricular projects on student engagement and the development of my leadership. This action research study sought to address the following four questions:

1. What is the influence of multi-disciplinary curriculum projects on student engagement?
2. What is the influence of collaboratively developing multi-disciplinary projects on collegiality?
3. How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student engagement and teachers pedagogy?
4. In what ways will my leadership capacity to foster collegial collaboration, develop curriculum coherence, and positively influence student engagement develop and expand?

Data Collection

Data collected in the various cycles of my action research study consisted of surveys, observer field notes, interviews, historical data, and journal reflections. When conducting action research, it is imperative that the researcher collects adequate and appropriate data in order to attain reliable and credible information (Hinchey, 2008).

Recording descriptive and reflective field notes as the project unfolded allowed me to chronicle the strengths and weaknesses of the project and actively remain a part of the project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Utilizing structured and semi-structured interviews permitted me to gain the perspectives of those participating in the project, as well as those who were not directly involved (Hinchey, 2008). Making note of the context in which the

field notes and interviews were conducted and recorded also provided me with valuable insight and ensured that I was an integral part of the process.

Collecting historical data, or artifacts in the form of absenteeism records, discipline referrals, academic grades, and standardized test scores were particularly useful because they were recorded pieces of ongoing experiences (Hinchey, 2008). Historical data collection permitted the researcher to identify patterns and changes as the project progressed.

In addition to collecting historical data, conducting interviews, and recording observations, I utilized a professionally developed survey published by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) at the beginning of the project and upon completion of the project. The NCSE granted formal permission for use of the survey instrument. The NCSE survey accurately assesses a student's level of engagement in classroom settings and proved to be a valuable tool in my project. Surveys, or questionnaire research as they are also referred, provide an efficient method to collect data and yield results that are easy to tabulate (Hinchey, 2008; Patten, 2001). Surveys can be used to canvas larger numbers of people and attain perspectives about the subject. The pre and post survey data were analyzed with SPSS software program.

Moreover, I maintained a journal throughout the course of the project, which allowed me to reflect on all aspects of the project, both positive and negative. Recording thoughts, feelings, and reactions in the form of a journal on a regular basis created transparency in the research process (Glesne, 2006; Ortlipp, 2008).

The data compiled throughout the course of the project were used to develop the succeeding cycles of the project. I analyzed the data, observed the project, and developed

the next cycle of the project (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; O'Connor, Rice, Peters, & Veryzer, 2003). Data collection occurred in four cycles.

Cycle 1

In the first cycle of this study, I interviewed the eighth grade and special area teaching staff to identify the teachers' perceptions of student engagement as evident in their classrooms. Moreover, I sought answers to questions regarding the teachers' experiences with collaboration and the methods of instruction that they currently use. In addition to the interview, the teachers completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Data collected were utilized to establish a starting point and influence subsequent cycles of the study.

Cycle 2 and Subsequent Chapters

The second cycle of the study details the emergence of my work with the eighth grade team and the special area teachers to develop projects that involve all areas of the curriculum. Prior to participating in the project, every eighth grade student completed the Student School Engagement Survey (NCSE, 2006). All data collected were analyzed for emerging themes and patterns. Information gathered throughout each cycle was used to make modifications to the project.

The third and fourth cycles detailed the implementation of a cross-curricular project and the emergence of collaboration among teachers. Data collection consisted of field notes and observations, interviews, and surveys.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define data analysis as the process of systematically arranging interview transcripts, survey data, field notes, and other data collected to

develop patterns and conclusions. Data collected over the course of my project were analyzed and utilized to further develop action research cycles and make modifications.

Data analysis entails organizing what is observed and heard to make sense of what is learned (Glesne, 2006). Data analysis occurred throughout the course of each cycle. The point of all data analysis is to identify patterns in the data (Hinchey, 2008). Hinchey (2008) explains that analysis is the point at which researchers must move from describing data to asking questions about it in a process referred to as interrogating the data. I interrogated the data to identify patterns and themes as they emerged. Identified patterns and themes were then organized into categories.

When working with qualitative data, it is necessary to gather, organize, and categorize data to identify patterns, develop theories, and hypothesize (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006). Glesne (2006) recommends analyzing data as one collects them. Writing notes to oneself, creating analytic files, and coding data help the researcher learn from and manage the data collected (Glesne, 2006).

The qualitative data collected were interrogated similar to the quantitative data and themes and patterns were noted. Patterns and themes were then coded by colors and organized into categories. The coding process moves data analysis to the conceptual level and requires the researcher to interact with the data through questioning, comparing, and uncovering hidden messages and concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data were examined as the study progressed to identify patterns and create new questions to inform the subsequent cycles of the action research project. I reflected on the data and made inferences at the end of every cycle. Finally, at the conclusion of my last

cycle, I examined the data to ensure that each of my research questions had been answered and reported my findings.

Reliability, Validity, Credibility

A common concern about action research is that it is not reliable and lacks validity (Hinchey, 2008). To ensure validity and reliability in my research I triangulated multiple data sources. The term triangulation is a mathematic term borrowed from trigonometry practices and utilized in the social sciences to establish credibility and trustworthiness between sources of information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Glesne, 2006). One source of data when examined alone might be inaccurate, however, when several sources convey the same idea validity is established.

I utilized a survey to assess students' perceptions regarding engagement and instruction before and after participation in the cross-disciplinary project. The two surveys were compared for deviations and similarities in the data. Administering the same survey ensured reliability and consistency in data collection.

Interview transcripts were recorded and detailed. To ensure validity in my analysis and interpretation of field notes and interviews, I shared my notes with participants. By providing participants a copy of the interview transcript, the participant can review his/her comments and confirm validity (Hinchey, 2008). The review process, or member checking, enhances the trustworthiness and validity of the study.

Since the participants in the action research study are minors under the age of 18, parental consent forms were completed by all students' parents prior to their participation in the project. Moreover, I sought approval from the Rowan University Institutional Review Board to conduct my study (IRB approval in January 2010). The completion and

approval of the IRB application verified and validated my commitment to act in an ethical manner and respect the confidentiality and beliefs of my research participants. I conducted all of my research in an ethical, fair, and honest fashion.

Limitations and Consequences

All research maintains limitations and consequences. As a researcher, it is difficult to separate one's beliefs and perceptions from reality (Glesne, 2006). Since my action research project occurred at my place of work, I encountered a few resisters. I needed to be sensitive to the possibility that participants felt coerced to participate in the project or to respond in a certain manner.

Implementation of a mixed methods model requires expertise and a sufficient amount of time to adequately analyze differing types of data. Based on the design of the study and the lack of control groups, cause cannot be determined. The circumstances, the context, and the participants in the study, all present possible limitations and consequences on the resulting conclusions and findings of the collected data (Glesne, 2006). Moreover, discrepancies may arise when comparing quantitative and qualitative data; therefore, it was necessary to record, code, and analyze data collected carefully, and be aware of the possible limitations of the study (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006).

Another potential limitation to my project is the generalizability of the study to other schools. This study is unique to the Eberhardt School District and therefore cannot be replicated.

Conclusion

By gathering qualitative and quantitative data in the form of surveys, interviews, and journal writing, I ensured validity and reliability in my research (Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Over the course of each cycle, teacher pedagogical methods shifted from teaching in isolation to collaboration in an effort to improve student engagement. Data collected reflected this shift in teaching and improved engagement practices.

I triangulated the multiple data sources and identified emerging patterns to develop future cycles in the project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The next chapter details the first cycle of my research. The purpose of this cycle was to assess teachers' perceptions about the engaged student and their efficacy in the classroom. During this cycle, I interviewed 11 teachers and administered the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Chapter 5

Cycle 1

Introduction

During the spring of 2010, I met with the Holloway School principal on several occasions to discuss the lack of collaboration between the grade level teams. New to the position, the principal was receptive to my observations and shared my concerns. The teachers were teamed according to the grade level taught to provide common planning time and promote communication, however, the majority of the teachers continued to work in isolation. More importantly, student behavior and academic performance was on the decline. Discipline referrals increased 50 percent over the course of one school year and the eighth grade absenteeism rate increased four percent (NJ School Report card). Discipline referrals and absenteeism were increasing while academic performance was decreasing. As a result, the Holloway principal granted me permission to work with the teams and offered his support in my efforts.

The first cycle of my action research project details the emergence of my work with the eighth grade teaching staff in the fall of 2010. The principal granted me permission to work with the grade level team of my choice. I decided to work with the eighth grade team first. Over the course of my 12 years in the Holloway School, I worked with each of the eighth grade teachers individually and believed that they would be receptive and open to piloting my change initiative. More importantly, I felt that with training and support the eighth grade team could become a more cohesive group; therefore, having a greater impact in the classroom.

In Cycle 1 I gathered information in the form of teacher interviews to help me identify teachers' perceptions of student engagement exhibited in their classrooms, their experiences with collaboration, and their current methods of instruction. In addition to conducting interviews, I administered Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale to gain a better sense of the teachers' perceptions of their efficacy concerning instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management. After collecting the data and identifying common themes, I was able to begin the planning process for Cycle 2 of my project.

Teacher Interviews

The purpose of this cycle was to assess teachers' perceptions of student engagement exhibited in their classrooms and their thoughts on collaboration with their colleagues. I asked all eight members of the 8th grade team (regular and special education teachers) and three special area teachers (Art, Physical Education, and Technology), if they were willing to be interviewed and complete a short-survey. All 11 teachers agreed to participate in the survey and interview. I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) when interviewing the 11 teachers, which permitted me the opportunity to ask additional questions depending on the responses of each interviewee.

Prior to utilizing the semi-structured interview protocol, I solicited feedback from peers regarding the clarity of the questions and revised the questions based on their feedback (Glesne, 2006). Each interviewee signed an informed consent document (Appendix B) and consented to being recorded. I provided each interviewee with background information about my study and clarified my purpose. Moreover, I assured

each interviewee that all responses would be kept confidential and their anonymity would be preserved.

All interviews were transcribed and each interviewee was presented with a copy of the transcript from his or her interview for member checking. Member checking enabled me to ensure that all information attained was correct and accurately presented (Hinchey, 2008). Finally, I used a system of coding to identify patterns and emerging themes between the interviews (Hinchey, 2008; Saldana, 2009). Throughout the coding process, I used color-coding and abbreviations to group individual items and assist in the organization process. I organized the information gathered into categories and then sub-categories and ultimately into themes. The themes that emerged in Cycle 1 were (a) perceptions of the engaged student, (b) disengaged behaviors exhibited in classrooms, (c) methods of addressing disengaged behaviors, (d) collaborative instructional practices, and (e) challenges to collaboration with colleagues.

Perceptions of student engagement. Each of the 11 teachers interviewed resoundingly defined student engagement as a student's active involvement in the lesson taught and on-task behavior. "Student engagement, to me, means that the students are actively involved in the classroom instruction and activities. Engaged students understand the objectives of the lesson and what is expected of them as participants" (Teacher interview, September, 2010). Another teacher stated, "Students are engaged when they actively take part in their education, they focus on instruction, work to learn the skills presented, ask for assistance when needed, and take responsibility for their education and learning."

All of the interviewees were confident in their abilities to recognize student engagement and cited examples of on-task behaviors evidenced in their classrooms. "Student engagement to me means that the students are involved and interested in the classroom activities, they are participating and completing hands-on tasks" (Teacher interview, September, 2010). It was evident that each interviewee perceived that their lessons needed to be interesting to their students in an effort to promote engagement. One teacher stated, "My students love when I allow them to complete hands-on activities, venture outside or anywhere outside the classroom desk and textbook." The more entertaining and interesting the lessons the more on-task, involved, and engaged they perceived the students to be.

When asked how engagement in students can be accurately assessed, the teachers referred back to student involvement and interest in the lesson. Several expressed that the finished product and completed task was a concrete means of assessing engagement in the lesson. Another teacher stated,

> Student engagement can be measured in the quality of the product the students produce, but more importantly and less tangible, student engagement can be measured as the quality of the experiences and processes that led each student to the product produced.

Each of the 11 interviewees used his or her experiences to support his/her thoughts regarding student engagement. Interestingly, no differences were noted between the teachers with the most experience (37 years teaching) versus the teachers with considerably less experience (5 years teaching); however, slight differences in the definitions of an engaged student existed for special education teachers when compared to the regular education and special area teachers. Both the special education teachers stated that the engaged student is on-task and working to his/her ability. I was struck by

the focus on ability in regards to the special education student. When asked to clarify, one of the special education teachers stated,

> A student's ability plays a critical part in his ability to engage in a lesson in a meaningful and authentic manner. When the subject matter is over his head, or ability level, the special education student finds the task overwhelming and will not engage in the lesson.

The special education teacher's comment and reluctance to challenge her students was disconcerting. It was apparent during the interview that her personal beliefs and fears were a direct obstacle to her providing her students with potentially engaging experiences.

Disengaged behaviors exhibited in classrooms. Disengaged behaviors manifest in a variety of ways, including "tapping on the desk, doodling, talking, and fiddling with pens, pencils, papers, etc." (Teacher interview, September, 2010). The 11 interviewees all agreed that the disengaged student is unfocussed and frequently appears off-task in classroom activities. They all expressed that often the lack of focus leads to classroom disruptions and the disengaged student frequently becomes a behavioral problem. One teacher interviewed stated,

> In general, the disengaged student will usually become a behavior problem. In my classroom, the disengaged student often fails to complete all aspects of a project to their fullest and usually has the most questions about what to do next.

Three of the teachers stated that the disengaged student is easily distracted and daydreams. One of the three stated, "A disengaged student may also daydream and become totally unaware of what is going on in the classroom. They sometimes too have a nonchalant attitude about their own learning." The perceived lack of caring about their learning was a concern expressed by each of the interviewees. "The disengaged student is

the one talking to another student, laughing, making inappropriate jokes and remarks during instruction, and humming."

As I conducted the interviews, it was evident that the disengaged student is of great concern to each of the teachers interviewed. Each teacher expressed a decrease in student preparedness for class, which they felt also contributed to the lack of engagement in their lessons. Moreover, the teachers all explained that they find it difficult to develop lessons that are engaging to all learners. One stated,

> The ever-changing needs of the student, and the rapid dependence on technology, place us in a difficult position as educators. We must develop lessons that are engaging, entertaining, and enlightening. I think the focus on entertaining lessons is becoming more and more necessary, yet more and more frustrating.

In addition to the concerns expressed, it was clear that a power-struggle exists between the interviewed teachers and the disengaged student. In discussing the behavioral concerns and disruptions to their classes, the interviewees spoke about trying to re-direct and re-focus the disengaged student in an attempt to prevent further disruptions and a loss of control in their classrooms. A teacher said, "One student in particular comes to mind. He is the class clown, the entertainer, I quash his behavior immediately before he has a chance to become too much of a distraction to the rest of the class." Each of the 11 teachers wish they better understood why some students connect with their lessons and others do not.

Methods of addressing disengaged behaviors. The teachers interviewed all address disengaged behavior in a similar manner. Each tries to re-direct the students to the task at hand and work with the student individually after class. One stated, "I speak with the student privately after class. I will ask the student to meet with me sometime

before the day is out to make up the missing work and discuss his or her classroom behavior."

Overall, the disengaged student poses several problems in the classroom, however, each teacher works to address the immediate behaviors exhibited. "If they forget something, I let them go to their lockers to get it; otherwise they will be sitting in class doing nothing." While another teacher stated, "I have extra pencils, paper, binders, and books. So the student who forgets something or is unprepared is provided with the necessary materials." Each teacher asserted that he/she addresses the disengaged student on an individual basis. "Depends on the student honestly, if it's a student that I know there are pressing issues at home that takes priority in the student's life not having a pencil for my class."

Addressing the chronic offenders becomes a bit more of a challenge for the teachers. One stated, "I monitor to see if a pattern arises and then address it accordingly by making contact home or by providing after school help." More often than not the repeat offenders suffer from "a loss of points for preparation and participation and receive lunch detentions" (Teacher interview, September, 2010). The Holloway School implemented a new lunch detention policy this year, which permits teachers to issue lunch detentions to unprepared students. The 11 teachers interviewed noted that the lunch detention policy is beneficial and has helped the students complete missing work and receive credit, however, the most disengaged and at-risk of failing students continue to be unprepared for class.

Collaborative instructional practices. In addition to student engagement and the disengaged behaviors exhibited in the classroom, the role of collaboration emerged as a common theme in each of the interviews. With the exception of the special education teachers, all of the interviewees expressed that the disengaged student found it difficult to work independently; however, when placed in a collaborative or cooperative learning group the student maintained better focus and was more productive. One teacher stated,

> I have used cooperative learning in my classroom and have found it to be a great asset to learning. In the classroom, it can be a vehicle to encourage learners of all types and levels to work together and to challenge themselves to work at a higher level.

While not necessarily a panacea to classroom issues, another teacher said,

> I like group activities and I feel that the students can help each other in the learning process. Sometimes things go on in a group activity that helps students in further retaining whatever concept is being enforced. Also, they need to learn to work in groups and hear and respect the ideas of others.

Interestingly, all nine of the regular education and special area teachers discussed the positive impact that collaboration has on the learning process and working with difficult students, however, only three of the nine actually encourage students to work with others to complete assignments or projects in their classrooms.

The math, art, and physical education teachers promote collaborative and cooperative learning on a regular basis. The math teacher stated, "In math collaborative learning is beneficial in comparing answers and helping each other. Students work in groups to complete tasks every day." While the art teacher encourages students to communicate and bounce ideas off of each other, "In the beginning stages of a project, I feel that talking to each other helps them to formulate better ideas and builds creative problem solving skills." The others interviewed who spoke positively regarding

collaborative and cooperative learning were much more reserved and hesitant to allow students to work in groups.

One teacher said, “All the variables need to be in place for a group activity. The assignment needs to be structured, the students behaved, and a lot of time needs to be devoted to the activity.” Several expressed the class dynamics did not allow for group activities and others cited time as a negative in promoting group work, therefore, only occasionally did they permit group work. Meanwhile the special education teachers do not use collaborative or cooperative learning in their classrooms. Both special education teachers asserted that group activities were not possible with their classes. One special education teacher stated, “The makeup of my class this year will not allow me to incorporate group activities in my lessons.”

Challenges to collaboration with colleagues. Similar to their thoughts about collaboration in their classrooms, all of the interviewees expressed an interest in collaborating with their colleagues. One stated, “The teachers in the Holloway School are the best I have ever worked with. I am always willing to collaborate with my colleagues at Holloway.” And another said, “I love it! Some of the best ideas are the results of collaboration!” However, very few of the teachers interviewed actually collaborate with their peers on a regular basis, if ever.

Resoundingly, all 11 interviewed cited time as a major obstacle to collaboration with colleagues. A teacher said, “I wish I had time to actually collaborate more. The lack of common planning time with anyone makes it difficult for us to implement projects.” Another stated, “The schedule that I have makes collaboration impossible.”

In addition to the lack of time, the interviewees expressed pressure to prepare students for standardized assessments and a lack of presumed administrative support in their endeavors. One teacher stated, "The current administration has made it clear where our focus needs to be and that is on improving students' performance on standardized tests. Every meeting and professional development session revolves around state mandates and testing." Collectively, the interviewed teachers' attitudes changed when they discussed the pressure they feel to improve student achievement rates.

All of the 11 teachers, including the special area teachers expressed their frustration that the standardized tests dictate what they taught in the classroom. One teacher commented, "I do not cover half of what I used to in a school year." Another interviewee expressed similar concerns, "I frequently reflect on projects that I conducted in the past and realize how little I now get through in a year. My instructional time is consumed with test prep, test prep, test prep." Perhaps the most interesting comment was made by the art teacher,

> Preparing the students for standardized testing has greatly impacted my classes between scheduling changes and a cut in the time students spend in their special area classes and the required shift in my curriculum. I barely cover anything, which is very frustrating, however, knowing that we are all in the same situation helps in some crazy way.

The teachers are teamed by grade level and share a common planning period. One teacher stated,

> Our prep period is often spent in grade level meetings with the principal, addressing the needs of a student, or completing paperwork. Honestly, I think I had more time to communicate with my colleagues prior to the new teamed schedule.

As I conducted the interviews, it was evident that the lack of time, scheduling, and communication are all obstacles that need to be overcome for the teachers to feel comfortable collaborating with their colleagues.

Teachers' Sense of Teacher Efficacy Scale

Teacher self-efficacy is an important variable consistently linked to positive teaching, student learning outcomes, and higher levels of student engagement (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Henson, Kogan & Vacha-Haase, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). In the fall of 2010, the Holloway Middle School Faculty was asked to complete the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Survey (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (2001) assesses teachers' perceptions of their efficacy regarding instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management (Appendix C).

Thirty-four teachers in the Holloway Middle School were asked to complete the survey and return it by an established due date; 23 teachers completed and returned the survey (see Table 1). The survey consists of 24 questions that assessed three categories: efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional practices, and efficacy in classroom management (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Participants responded to each question on a scale of 1 (none at all) to 9 (a great deal). Responses to the 24 questions are illustrated in Tables 2, 3, and 4 illustrated below.

Respondents' characteristics. The 23 survey respondents have been teaching in the Eberhardt School District an average of 13 years. Eleven of the 23 have a master's degree or additional schooling. All 23 teachers are white and six of them are male. Overall, they are an educated, experienced staff. Characteristics are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Respondents' Characteristics

Total Respondents *N*=23				
Years Experience	5+	10+	20+	30+
	6	12	1	4
Education	BA	MA	MA+	
	12	7	4	
Gender	Male	Female		
	6	17		

Survey results. Examining the survey responses it became apparent that the participants perceive that they are effective in the areas of classroom management and instructional strategies. When questioned about their efficacy in implementing instructional strategies, 83.15% of the responses were given on a scale of 7 (quite a bit) to 9 (a great deal). The participants appeared to be confident in their abilities to determine the effectiveness of their lessons and their means of assessment. The responses to the questions involving efficacy in instructional strategies are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Efficacy in Instructional Strategies Questions and Responses

Question	1 None at all	2	3 Very Little	4	5 Some Degree	6	7 Quite a Bit	8	9 A Great Deal
7.How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	-	-	-	-	-	5	8	-	10
10.How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	9	9
11.To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	5	13
17.How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	-	-	-	1	1	7	7	-	-
18.How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	18
20.To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	5	12
23.How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	5	12
24.How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	-	-	-	2	1	6	8	4	2
Overall Response Percentage	0	0	0	1.63	1.09	14.13	20.11	21.74	41.3

The Holloway teachers' responses to questions regarding classroom management strategies were very similar to their perceptions of their efficacy with instructional strategies. The participants assert that they clearly establish classroom expectations and convey their expectations to their students. Moreover, their responses illustrate that they are confident in their management of disruptive students and perceive that they are equipped to address all students' needs. When questioned about their efficacy in classroom management, 87.5% of the responses were given on a scale of 7 (quite a bit) to 9 (a great deal). No responses were given lower than a 5 (some degree). The responses to the questions involving efficacy in classroom management are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Efficacy in Classroom Management Questions and Responses

Question	1 None at all	2	3 Very Little	4	5 Some Degree	6	7 Quite a Bit	8	9 A Great Deal
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	6	4
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	-	-	-	-	-	6	5	4	8
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	-	-	-	-	-	2	8	3	10
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	-	-	-	-	-	1	5	5	12
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	-	-	-	-	5	6	10	1	1
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4	16
19. How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	-	-	-	-	1	2	3	3	14
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	6	12
Overall Response Percentage	0	0	0	0	3.26	9.24	28.26	17.39	41.85

Interestingly, the responses to the questions regarding efficacy in student engagement elicited much different responses than the questions addressing classroom management and instructional strategies. The largest percentage, 27.72% of responses,

were given in the 5 (some degree) category. Questions addressing the failing student and the teachers' perceived effectiveness in helping the floundering student elicited the lowest responses. Survey participants responded to questions between 1 (not at all) and 5 (some degree) with a resounding 55.36% uncertainty in efficacy in the area of student engagement. Reponses to questions regarding efficacy in student engagement are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

Efficacy in Student Engagement Questions and responses

Question	1 None at all	2	3 Very Little	4	5 Some Degree	6	7 Quite a Bit	8	9 A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to get through to difficult students?	-	8	10	1	4	-	-	-	-
2.How much can you do to help your students think critically?	-	-	-	5	8	10	-	-	-
4.How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	-	-	-	5	5	5	8	-	-
6.How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	-	-	-	-	9	6	8	-	-
9.How much can you do to help your students value learning?	-	-	-	-	1	7	7	8	-
12.How much can you do to foster student creativity?	-	-	2	-	8	-	6	2	5
14.How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	-	2	6	5	8	2	-	-	-
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	-	-	3	4	8	8	-	-	-
Overall Response Percentage	0	5.43	11.41	10.8	27.72	20.65	15.76	5.43	2.72

Reflections on the Cycle 1 Data

The data collected in Cycle 1 provided me with a solid foundation to establish my project. The interview responses complimented the Efficacy Scale responses and confirmed that the teachers perceive their efforts to address or redirect the disengaged student are not always fruitful. On the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), teachers overwhelmingly responded with a *5- to some degree* on all of the questions pertaining to student engagement; whereas, the questions pertaining to classroom management and instructional strategies resoundingly were responded to with *9-a great deal*. The information gathered has helped form subsequent cycles and actions of this project.

Limitations

All research has limitations (Glesne, 2006). As a teacher within the district, I have to be aware of the role that I play and any bias that may exist. Some colleagues may be uncomfortable being upfront or forthcoming with information since we work in the same district. In interviewing my colleagues, I had to ensure that all information collected was accurate and provided each interviewee with a copy of his or her responses (Hinchey, 2008). In addition to member checking, the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) has a standard deviation of .94, which can impact the overall scores reported.

Leadership Application

Harris (2002) asserts that there are four components to the teacher leadership role: participative leadership, brokering, mediating, and forging relationships. As a democratic participative leader, I subscribe to the belief that working together anything is possible.

Participative teacher leaders feel they are a part of the change process when they work with fellow teachers by taking a lead in achieving a collective goal. Cycle 1 of my project provided me an opportunity to connect with and relate to the teachers participating in the project.

I spent a lot of time with each participant while conducting my interviews, which provided me with a chance to learn more about each individual and gain insight into his or her role in the district. By forging relationships with the teachers, they will be more receptive to my change initiative (Fullan, 2001; Harris, 2002).

I lead with an ethic of care and work to ensure that the needs of all members of my team or my classroom are met. As I analyzed the interview data, I discovered that my needs and the needs of my colleagues were similar. Each expressed the need for time to plan and implement projects. I feel as if I am always battling the clock; however, I feel that it is a battle I must continue to fight. As a teacher leader, my colleagues look to me as a source of information and expertise.

Conclusion

The Cycle 1 data were used to establish subsequent cycles. In Cycle 1, professional development time was utilized to work with the eighth grade teachers and special area teachers, a timeline for future meetings was established and a collaborative, multi-disciplinary project was planned. At the conclusion of Cycle 2, all eighth grade students completed a student engagement survey (NCES, Student School Engagement Survey, 2006), which was later analyzed and compared with a post-project survey. Chapter 7 details the actions of Cycle 2.

Chapter 6

Cycle 2 Project Planning

Introduction

At the end of September, I met with the Principal of the Holloway Middle School and shared the Cycle 1 data. The principal found the data insightful and again offered his support to my initiative. The Holloway Principal reiterated that the Eberhardt School District did not have any money for outside professional development, however, he could provide me time on professional development days to work with the staff.

Cycle 2 of my project began in October 2010 and concluded in December 2010. Members of the 8th grade team and related arts teachers (art, technology, physical education, and Spanish) met on several occasions to plan the first multi-disciplinary project. Cycle 2 concluded with the 8th grade students completing a pre-project Student School Engagement Survey (SSES) developed by the National Center for Student Engagement (2006). The survey was administered again after students participated in the multi-disciplinary project in Cycle 3 and the data from the pre and post survey were compared to note changes or the potential impact of the project.

Project Planning

After reflecting on the interview and Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) data gathered in Cycle 1, it became apparent that issues needed to be addressed prior to implementing the project. The teachers expressed a willingness to collaborate with their colleagues, however, they stated a lack of time and resources prevented them from working together. Moreover, responses to the teacher

efficacy survey revealed that as a whole the teachers felt they had little influence on student engagement or found it difficult to reach the disengaged student.

The Friday of Columbus Day weekend is a scheduled professional development day for teachers in the Eberhardt School District. During the professional development session, I was provided a two and a half hour block of time to work with the eighth grade teachers and special area teachers to develop our first multi-disciplinary project. The two special education teachers did not meet with us due to a scheduling conflict. Subsequent planning time was scheduled during the 8th grade teachers' prep period, briefly after school, and in email communication, as needed.

Professional development. The first planning meeting established the tone for things to come (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). The session started with an icebreaker activity that required participants to share personal and professional thoughts, ideas, and beliefs in a creative manner. The activity served as an excellent means for grouping the teachers and motivating them. More importantly, the activity was something that the teachers could utilize in their classrooms.

> I never thought that such an interesting activity could be so revealing, motivating, and accomplish so many objectives. I utilize the activity on a regular basis to encourage cooperative and collaborative learning in my classroom. It is easy to modify and tailor the activity as needed. (SL, Personal communication, October, 2010)

I tried to approach every action and interaction with the group as an authentic learning experience – one that each could modify and implement in his or her classroom. The Eberhardt School District subscribes to the PD360 program (online subscription 2010), which contains numerous informational clips regarding various aspects of curriculum and pedagogy. I utilized the PD360 program to teach the group about

scaffolding, motivation, collaboration, and student engagement. After viewing a clip, the group discussed and reflected on the topic and related it to his or her pedagogy. The PD360 clips were used to encourage and demonstrate the effectiveness of the practices.

In addition to the PD360 instruction, participants brainstormed potential multi-disciplinary projects and a timeframe for implementation. The discourse was inspirational and needed little guidance from me. The group members fed off of each other and were excited at the possibility of working together. One member, the math teacher, was concerned that she would not be able to contribute to the group. "Math does not lend to working with other subjects. I am willing to do anything that the group decides on, but doubt that I will be able to do anything in class" (BA, Personal communication, October 2010). A shift in the teachers' thinking is needed to participate in the project. I reflected in my journal that evening, "the math teacher's perception that math does not lend to other subjects reflects the sentiments of her students who also perceive that math has little real-world value" (Personal journal, October 2010).

Ultimately, it was decided that the first project would be determined by the social studies or language arts curriculum and would take place prior to the winter break; the other academic and special area subjects would be able to modify their curriculums to accommodate. The math teacher remained skeptical and solicited ideas from the group. The session concluded with each member, including the math teacher, agreeing to research potential project ideas and establishing a meeting schedule.

Subsequent planning periods. Following the professional development workshop, I created an email distribution group and sent all project participants,

including the special education teachers, notes from the workshop, links to the PD360 video clips, and our goals for our next meeting.

The eighth grade team met again on 10/29/10, 11/3/10, 11/12/10, 11/19/10, 12/3/10, 12/10/10, and 12/17/10 during their prep period. The special education teachers were able to participate in the prep period meetings, however, the special area teachers attended on a rotating basis due to their teaching schedules. As I did following the professional development session, I utilized the email distribution list to send notes from the day's meeting. Utilization of the email distribution list was beneficial as a means of member checking (Hinchey, 2008), but also as a way to extend communication between members. Much to my surprise, members would reply to the group with comments, questions, or to relay information such as articles and literature. The emails became an extension of the prep period meetings.

Each meeting and communication was productive and informative. The team became more cohesive as the weeks passed and receptive to suggestions and criticisms from their colleagues. They were more communicative and collaborative. They expressed a desire to meet during the prep periods and after school. Absent from each meeting was negative discourse regarding students or school practices. Others noticed the change in the 8th grade team, as well. The Holloway Principal commented, "… a positive and contagious attitude emanates from the 8th grade team and others notice. A change in the eighth grade students is evident as well. Fewer discipline problems and an overall attitude change" (Personal communication, November 2010).

The project .During the 10/29/10 meeting, the group decided to develop a project around the media and the power of persuasion. Each member of the group then developed

a unit stemming from their discipline yet involving persuasion. For example, the language arts teachers worked on debating and persuasive writing, the science teacher conducted product testing and development, and the art teacher examined ad campaigns and the role of marketing on the public. The Spanish and math teachers had the most difficulty developing units, but worked with the group and ultimately were able to participate as well.

After developing a thematic focus and creating units addressing the theme, the group developed a comprehensive project that each student would complete. The comprehensive project, entitled Media Marketing Madness (MMM), required students to work in groups to identify a problem plaguing their community. The project addressed the following objectives: 1. Expose students to the world of marketing and advertising and the impact on their daily lives; 2. Stress the importance of team work to create a cohesive business and professionalism; 3. Foster critical and creative thinking skills; and, 4. Develop communication skills and formulate a persuasive argument.

Each group was required to create a business and work to develop solutions to the problem they identified and ultimately create an original product solution. Once the students tested their products, they developed a media campaign to promote the sale of their products. The project culminated with each group staging a marketing campaign, creating a commercial, website, and business portfolio (business cards, budget, mission statement, logo, action plan, etc.) and then persuading a group of community officials and business owners to support and fund their product. The project required a lot of time and planning on both the teachers' and students' parts.

Student School Engagement Survey

Prior to implementing the multi-disciplinary project, eighth grade students completed the SSES Survey (NCES, 2006) produced by the National Center for School Engagement (Appendix D). The survey consists of three overarching questions with 37 subsections. The survey assesses cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. The 37 questions are not presented to the students in categories rather they are randomly organized throughout the survey.

Respondent characteristics. Ninety students, 48 males and 42 females, participated in the project (November, 2010). The class ethnic composition is depicted below in Figure 1.

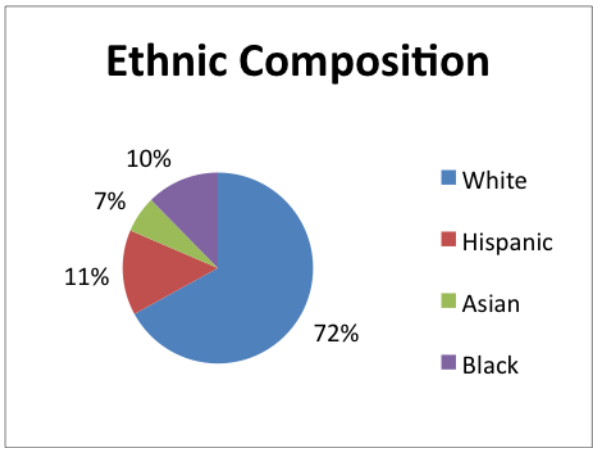

Figure 1. 8th Grade Class Ethnic Composition

Of the 90 eighth grade students, 7% are English as second language students (ESL) and 26% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch due to their parents' socioeconomic status. An overwhelming 34% of the eighth grade class receives special

education services and are covered by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan.

Student Engagement Results

Cognitive engagement. Questions assessing cognitive engagement examine the students' investment in the learning process and their ability to evaluate their learning as they complete academic tasks (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitively engaged students exert the effort necessary to work through complex ideas and synthesize and apply information gleaned in a variety of ways. Table 5 illustrates the average response given for each question.

Table 5

Cognitive Engagement Questions and Responses

1. How important do you think…	Very Important	Quite Important	Fairly Important	Slightly Important	Not at all important
It is to get good grades	74.7%	20.3%	3.8%	1.3%	-
The things you are learning in school are going to be to you later in life?	34.2%	38%	19%	7.6%	1.3%
2.How much do you agree with the following statement?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not at all important
I am getting a good education at school.	11.4%	5.1%	26.6%	54.4%	1.3%
3.How often are the following statements true for you?	Always/ Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never / Almost Never
I study at home even when I don't have a test.	3.8%	5.1%	13.9%	27.8%	49.4%
I talk with people outside of school about what I'm learning in class.	15.2%	8.9%	38%	25.3%	12.7%
I check my schoolwork for mistakes.	16.5%	27.8%	31.6%	21.6%	2.5%
I read things over again if I don't understand them.	38%	32.9%	15.2%	10.1%	3.8%
I try my best at school	58.2%	30.4%	7.6%	2.5%	1.3%
I get good grades in school.	36.7%	38%	19%	3.8%	2.5%
I enjoy the work I do in class.	7.6%	24.1%	41.8%	16.5%	10.1%

More than 54% of the respondents believe that they are not getting a good education at the Holloway Middle School. Their responses regarding classwork and school are very

negative. In addition to more than half stating that they are not getting a good education, more than 41% express displeasure in the assignments completed in class. Interestingly, the respondents perceive themselves as putting forth effort with more than 58% claiming that they try their best in school; however, they do not put in extra effort studying at home. The students' perceptions that they are investing time and effort in their work contradict their behaviors exhibited in the classroom and their performance on standardized assessments; however, their claims that they invest little time studying outside of school is supported by the lack of preparedness and achievement observed in the classroom.

Behavioral engagement. Behavioral engagement assesses the students' involvement and participation in school (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement is often procedural in nature and believed necessary for achievement to occur (Finn, 1993; Finn et al., 1995; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks et al., 2004).

The questions pertaining to behavioral engagement, illustrated in Table 6, are similar to the cognitive engagement responses. The respondents are aware of the importance of attending school every day (85.6%), coming to class prepared (91.2%), and respecting their teachers (89.8%). While they recognize the value of schooling, more than 40% express a disinterest in their classes and more than 38% feel their classes are not exciting. Interestingly enough, more than 45% of the respondents claim discipline at the school is not handled fairly.

Table 6

Behavioral Engagement Questions and Responses

1. How important do you think…	Very Important	Quite Important	Fairly Important	Slightly Important	Not at all important
It is to attend school every day?	40.5%	45.6%	12.7%	1.3%	-
2. How much do you agree with the following statement?	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	
The discipline at my school is fair.	31.6%	50.6%	10.1%	3.8%	31.6%
I learn a lot from my classes.	38%	59.5%	1.3%	1.3%	-
I respect most of my teachers.	62%	27.8%	3.8%	6.3%	-
Most of my teachers understand me.	35.4%	43%	16.5%	3.8%	-
I come to class prepared.	38%	53.2%	8.9%	-	-
I complete my work on time.	30.4%	60.8%	6.3%	1.3%	-
I treat my teachers with respect.	64.6%	34.2%	1.3%	-	-
I try my best on homework.	55.7%	39.2%	2.5%	2.5%	-
I follow school rules.	57%	39.2%	2.5%	1.3%	-
3.How often are the following statements true for you?	**Always/ Almost Always**	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never / Almost Never**
I follow the rules at school	59.5%	27.8%	11.4%	-	1.3%
I am excited about the work in school	6.3%	11.4%	38%	27.8%	16.5%
I am interested in the work I do in my classes.	8.9%	21.5%	40.5%	19%	10.1%
Most of my teachers praise me when I work hard.	24.1%	32.9%	26.6%	12.6%	3.8%

Emotional engagement. Four values are necessary to attain emotional engagement: interest, attainment value, utility value and importance, and cost (Fredricks et al., 2004). The SSES assesses students' perceptions of feelings and interest in school, learning, their peers, and teachers.

According to the responses presented in Table 7, the respondents resoundingly express that they are happy at school (87%), the Holloway School is safe (93%), and they have a close connection to individuals at the school (91%). Moreover, the students claim to like their teachers (94%) and that the teachers treat them fairly (90%).

When asked how strongly they feel about failing no matter how hard they try, 93% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they will fail no matter how hard they try. Such an overwhelming response to this question leads me to ponder if all the respondents understood what the statement was saying. Finally, it is important to note that 60% stated that their classes are boring.

Table 7

Emotional Engagement Questions and Responses

2. How much do you agree with the following statement?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
I feel close to people at my school.	43%	48.1%	7.6%	1.3%	
I feel like I belong in my school.	55.7%	32.9%	11.4%	-	
I am happy at my school.	50.6%	36.7%	10.1%	1.3%	
The teachers at my school treat students fairly.	44.3%	46.8%	6.3%	1.3%	
I feel safe at my school.	55.7%	38%	3.8%	1.3%	
I like most of the teachers at my school.	64.6%	30.4%	2.5%	-	
I will fail no matter how hard I try.	55.7%	38%	2.5%	1.3%	
Most of my classes are boring.	29%	26.6%	44.4%	-	
Most of my teachers care about how I'm doing.	51.9%	36.7%	5.1%	6.3%	
There's an adult in my school that I can talk to about my problems	32.9%	26.6%	27.8%	12.7%	
School is a waste of my time.	10.1%	5.1%	30.4%	53.2%	
I treat my classmates with respect	44.3%	39.2%	11.4%	5.1%	
3.How often are the following statements true for you?	Always/ Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never / Almost Never
I get in trouble at school.	17.7%	24.1%	35.4%	12.7%	-
My classroom is a fun place to be.	1.3%	5.1%	8.9%	31.6%	-
I feel that I can go to my teachers with the things I need to talk about.	30.4%	49.4%	17.7%	2.5%	-

SSES thoughts. The results of the SSES illustrate a disconnect between enjoyment and motivation in the Holloway Middle School. More importantly, the students claim to respect and appreciate their teachers. Utilizing their trust, the eighth grade teachers can build on it and work toward improving the students' motivation and enjoyment of school.

Finally, when reviewing the pre-project survey data, I was intrigued by the students' self-perceptions. They believe they are not receiving a good education, however, they feel that they are exerting effort and trying to do well. Moreover, they claim their concerns and displeasure stem from the classroom activities and lessons. In the next cycle, it will be interesting to note if the students' perceptions change by participating in the collaborative multi-disciplinary project and more importantly if the project will influence student engagement.

Limitations

As a researcher, it is difficult to separate one's beliefs and perceptions from reality. I am passionate about collaboration with colleagues and the need to improve our practices. As a result, I need to exercise caution and record, code, and analyze data collected carefully (Glesne, 2006). Moreover, the circumstances under which data are collected, the context, and the participants in the study, all present possible limitations and consequences on conclusions and findings reported (Glesne, 2006).

Finally, another potential limitation is the reliability of the SSES. The SSES (NCSE, 2006) is a one-dimensional survey; therefore Cronbach's alpha is appropriate (Marzano, 2003). Cronbach's alpha reliability is .88-.90 for the emotional engagement subscale of the survey, .87-.92 for cognitive engagement section, and .49-.80 for

behavioral engagement subscale. Coefficient reliability of .80-.90 is considered exceptionally high and may not be an accurate reflection of the students' responses.

Leadership Application

Preparing for the first meeting with the team, I was anxious and overwhelmed (Personal journal, October, 2010). There were various ways that I could approach the little time that I had working with the teachers; how would I know that I was doing the right thing and being the most productive? How would I engage and motivate them and not overwhelm them? I wrote in my journal the evening before "you only have a first chance once, make it work" (Personal journal, October, 2010).

I reflected on Fullan's (2001) principles of change and reminded myself that understanding the change process is critical. I have to pace myself and use the time granted wisely and effectively (Fullan, 2001). As a teacher leader, I kept Fullan's change principles in mind and reverted to what I do best; I teach. I approached the professional development session like I would a class by modeling the behaviors I expected and hoped my colleagues would adopt. My initial actions proved positive and productive; and in the end, I realized that as a teacher I am a transformational leader (Burns, 1978).

My democratic leadership (Burns, 2003; Dewey, 1916) abilities served me well in addressing scheduling concerns and the anxieties of a few participants, including my own. I remained patient, maintained open lines of communication with all project participants, and contributed equally to the process. Frequently, I found myself stepping away from the situation and observing the actions and interactions of my team and proceeding based on my observations (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). I worked to ensure that all participants contributed and were respected and heard (Fullan, 2007; Noddings, 1988)

Interestingly, I provided a snack and beverage during the professional development workshop and the first prep period meeting mainly because the teachers were giving their free time and had already worked half the day. Leaders can connect and unify an organization through the use of celebration and food (DuFour, 2004; Marzano, 2003). The gesture was well received and team members volunteered to supply the snack at the subsequent meetings. They regarded it as a time to share a favorite dessert or an opportunity to exhibit their baking skills. I regarded it as a means to connect individuals and form a community.

Conclusion

Cycle 2 laid the foundation for Cycle 3. A lot of time was spent meeting with eighth grade teachers and special area teachers assuaging concerns and fine-tuning the thematically linked multi-disciplinary project. Chapter 7 details the implementation of the project and the student post-survey results.

Chapter 7

Cycle 3 Project Implementation

Introduction

Cycle 3 details eighth grade students and staff members' reactions and reflections on their participation in the cross-curricular project. In addition, results of the post-project survey were analyzed and compared to the pre-project results. The information gained was then used to develop Cycle 4 of this study.

The first multi-disciplinary project was implemented in December 2010. Each eighth grade and special area (art, physical education, Spanish, and technology) teacher developed his or her lessons based on the influences of the media on teenagers. The project required each eighth grade student to work in a group of his peers to create a business and develop an original product and sales campaign. The project culminated with each student group presenting their sales campaigns to a group of business members and community officials.

The Project

Every eighth grade student in the Holloway Middle School was placed in a group of 4-5 students based on his or her special section (Section a, Section b, Section c, or Section d) and his or her language arts class (Mrs. J. and Ms. B.). The students studied various aspects of persuasion and examined the impact of the media on their daily lives in their academic and special area subjects. The students worked in their groups three times a week (approximately 45 minutes each session) during their language arts class period to create a business and develop an original product.

Observations

Prior to implementing the multi-disciplinary project both the superintendent and the middle school principal offered their support of the project and afforded me time to work with the teachers to complete the project. As a result, I had the opportunity to observe the students and teachers participate in the project. I recorded my observations and reflections as field notes and analyzed my notes for patterns and themes. Three overarching themes emerged from my observations: (1) students' attitudes and behaviors, (2) engagement and participation, and (3) the teacher's role.

Students' attitudes and behaviors. Over the course of the project, eighth grade students' behavior and overall attitude toward school improved. Eighth grade student attendance improved dramatically in December over the previous few months and when compared to the rest of the school. The Holloway Secretary stated, "the eighth grade students have not been absent from school in quite some time, are you guys doing something different. Bribing them with treats and gifts?" (Personal communication, December, 2010). By the final week of the project every eighth grade student was present. One student stated, "it's not possible for us to be absent. There is too much to do and too many people depending on us" (Personal communication, December, 2010). The eighth grade students wanted to be in school, to work with their groups, and complete the assigned tasks. Their attitudes improved as well.

Not only were the students attending school, they were coming to school prepared and ready to work. For example, students receive lunch detentions for unprepared behavior; on average 10 to 15 lunch detentions are issued a week. Only six lunch

detentions were issued the entire month of December (School records, December, 2010). The change in attitude was evident in disciplinary problems as well.

The current eighth grade class is notorious for being disrespectful and irresponsible, however, very few discipline referrals were made or detentions issued. One teacher stated, "it is so nice when you can ask a question and not receive a curt retort of what from a student" (Personal communication, December, 2010). While the project was being implemented there was a noticeable decrease in discipline referrals while the other grade levels saw an increase in disciplinary actions prior to the winter holiday break.

The overall attitude changes in the eighth grade students were noted by school personnel and administration. One of the cafeteria proctors expressed concern over the students changing seats during lunch. "Why the sudden change in interaction? Students who do not normally associate with one another want to sit together at lunch" (SK, Personal communication, December, 2010). She was concerned that the students wanted to change seats to misbehave or taunt others, however, the students wanted to sit with the members of their media project group. They formed friendships and wanted to interact with each other in social settings.

Engagement and participation. Observing students working with their peers to complete the project, I noted that group dynamics and the amount of work that each group was expected to produce were motivating factors that contributed to the success of the project. The groups were diverse and required students to collaborate with peers outside their comfort zone. The project was academically challenging and demanded a lot of time and effort from each group member.

Each group member was assigned a specific role (researcher, marketing manager, financial analyst, graphic artist, CEO, etc.) and was responsible for the completion of specified tasks. They established timelines and goals, and met on a weekly basis to modify tasks as needed and establish new expectations.

It was interesting learning the roles each student played in the project. When creating the groups, the teachers worked hard to ensure that students of varying abilities were placed in each group. Diverse groups were created with the belief that the high ability and gifted students would help the lower functioning and special needs students complete the tasks. Surprisingly, the lower functioning and special needs students emerged as leaders and challenged the high ability and gifted students to work harder. One teacher commented, "I never thought of the gifted and high ability students as lazy, however, I have yet to see one of them take initiative and lead his or her group" (Personal communication, December, 2010). Another teacher observed, "our average and low level students are highly motivated by this project; they are working really hard to complete the tasks assigned" (Personal communication, December, 2010).

Several groups had special needs students serve as CEOs of their companies. One company, the Bookworms, was composed of two special needs students, two high ability students (honors or advanced), and one regular education student. JB, a special needs student, who was frequently absent, failing three of his academic subjects, and a severe behavior problem, served as the CEO of his company.

> JB was purposely placed with two high achieving students. Much to my surprise, I thought we were doing him a favor placing him as we did; little did we know that JB would take control of his group and excel. (HB, Personal communication, December, 2010)

Another teacher noted,

> I was very surprised by some of the high ability students' lackluster attitudes. I am used to them being so competitive in the classroom that I was convinced they would take control of this project and their groups. I was really surprised by some of their passive attitudes. (SB, Personal communication, December, 2010)

The Superintendent of the Eberhardt School District served on the panel of judges who assessed the final projects and presentations. He expressed his surprise at the participation of each student in the project.

> I am speechless. The students who emerged as leaders and the interaction between the students - Wow! We read the research and know that peers play a critical role in the learning and growth of each other, however, they motivated each other and helped each other. It was truly a wonderful experience. (GJ, Personal communication, December, 2010)

The Superintendent was the only judge who knew all the students involved in the project. His knowledge of the behavioral problems and the low functioning students contributed to his interest and surprise with the students' accomplishments.

> JB floored me – I always see him in the main office. Whenever I speak with him, he mumbles or has the hood up around his head. Today, he was very well spoken, knowledgeable about his company's product, and a commanding presence during that presentation. (GJ, Personal communication, December, 2010)

The other judges were amazed at what the students produced in such a brief amount of time and at such a young age. One judge, the CFO of a casino stated, "I would love to have 14 year olds on my team. Several of them have a keen sense for business, which will be beneficial to them in the future" (WK, Personal communication, December, 2010).

Improvements in students' participation and engagement in the classroom were also observed. As already expressed students came to school prepared and ready to work. They were interested in the lessons taught and contributed to class discussions. As I observed various classrooms, I noted that students appeared more comfortable in the

classroom and confident. “When called on the students knew the answers. They connected the material taught to their personal lives; they all have stories” (Personal journal, December, 2010). Students who normally needed re-directing appeared on-task and participated in discussions. “No one has his / her head down; they are all sitting up and listening. No playing, talking, or staring out the window” (Personal journal, December, 2010). I also noticed a change in the quality of work being completed and submitted. Students appeared to take pride in their work and worked for quality. On one occasion, I journaled about the lack of discarded paper or those pesky fringes that frequently cover my classroom floor by the end of the day. Moreover, I noted that the doodling and pencil markings found on the tables in my room was also absent. Reflecting on the seemingly trivial differences in my classroom and the classrooms of the eighth grade teachers, I questioned if participation in the project could have such an impact in the school environment or if the planets were simply out of alignment. Based on the comments made by the teachers and school personnel and my observations, I concluded that the students were simply challenged and driven to complete the project; they lacked the time needed to doodle and misbehave. The changes were well received (Personal journal, December, 2010).

Teacher’s role. Implementation of the multi-disciplinary project afforded me the opportunity to observe my colleagues interact with students and each other. On several occasions the eighth grade teachers combined their classes and team-taught. I noted that as the project progressed the teachers combined their classes more frequently and presented collaborative lessons. The teachers were very comfortable teaching together.

By combining their classes, they taught to groups of 40 plus students but were unaffected by the larger class size.

> I believe that I am much more effective working with the larger group than with the smaller classes. There are many things that I can accomplish with a larger group that would not work with a smaller group. Of course, having another teacher in the room makes a huge difference. Things seem to go much more efficiently. (LS, Personal communication, December, 2010)

The eighth grade teachers teach four class periods a day. In combining their classes, the teachers delivered their material twice rather than four times during the course of the day. Moreover, the teachers were able to align their lesson plans that the information taught was related and enhanced the topic taught.

> The Social Studies teacher and I were able to develop our objectives and lessons that the students could make connections between the two subjects. The students appeared more motivated and receptive to what we had to say. (PH, Personal communication, December, 2010)

The teachers' role in the classroom changed throughout the course of the project also. Several of them moved from teacher-centered and directed instruction to student-centered classrooms. The teachers assumed the roles of facilitators rather than directors. The most experienced teacher, with 36 years experience, had the most difficult time moving from explicit, direct instruction to a student-centered classroom, however, she made the move and attained great success.

> I have been teaching for a very long time. If I am not the one in the front of the classroom or instructing the students than I feel like I am not doing my job. Plus I worried that I would be relinquishing control and I would never attain respect or management of the class again. Boy was I wrong! Now I ask why I did not try this years ago. (SB, Personal communication, December, 2010)

Several teachers' beliefs that student-centered instruction is a relinquishment of control were quashed when the teachers simply gave it a try; each of them attained great success. Ironically, the movement from direct instruction to facilitator appeared to earn

the teachers more respect and control in their classrooms as a result (Personal journal, December, 2010).

Post Project

The project culminated on December 22nd and the teachers participating in the project met for dinner that evening as a means to debrief and celebrate the holidays and their accomplishments. December 23rd was the last day before a 10-day winter recess. The community was buzzing with talk of the eighth grade mass media project and everyone left for the holiday break on a positive note.

Talk of the media project did not end on December 23rd. Two different local newspapers published articles about the project over the winter break and the teachers continued communication with one another through email.

Teacher Reflections

The students' final project presentations were made before a panel of judges consisting of prominent businessmen and community officials. None of the teachers involved in the project served on the panel or were present at the presentations to ensure fairness and objectivity. The teachers gathered outside the presentation room and waited patiently as each group presented. One teacher stated:

> Not being in the room with the students as they presented was an emotional rollercoaster. I was anxious, excited, nervous – you name it I felt it. I could not wait to hear how the students did and hoped that they all wowed the judges. (SB, Personal communication, December, 2011)

The teachers were just as anxious as the kids in the days leading up to the presentations, however, they all agreed that the time allotted to complete the project was sufficient.

> Providing students with such a meaningful and demanding task was beneficial. It is almost as if we were all too busy to focus on time and worked for efficiency. I think the same worked to our advantage as well. (BC, Personal communication, January, 2011)

Another teacher said,

> I entered the project citing the lack of time as a reason not to collaborate with my peers, yet we presented the students with a daunting challenge, they complained about the lack of time, just like we do. We stressed that we might have bitten off more than we could handle, yet somehow every group completed the assigned task and presented. And, we pulled off what we claimed to be impossible, as well, we collaborated. (RN, Personal communication, January, 2011)

By collaborating with their peers, the teachers were more efficient and energized. Their pedagogy methods improved and they were engaging and motivating, which reflected in the noticeable changes in the students' performance and achievements. The most experienced teacher admitted to learning from her peers.

> You have to understand, I'm old school. I present students with the tools to succeed and they leave. Having my colleagues in the classroom with me was very different. I was both anxious and intrigued by the process and amazed at the success my students were able to attain. (HB, Personal communication, January, 2011)

A shift in the thinking of the teachers yielded positive practices in their classrooms and influenced their students' behaviors.

Student Focus Groups

Throughout the course of the project, comments were made by students and their parents regarding the media project. Some of the comments were negative and expressed the students' and parents' concerns and frustration regarding the amount of work the students needed to complete. In an eighth grade parent meeting, one parents expressed her concerns regarding the project, "…how are the students expected to complete such a large task in such a short period of time and at the worse time of the year too. They are

only eighth graders" (Parent meeting, December, 2010). Her concerns were assuaged by the eighth grade teachers, who explained the project was being completed in class and the students were working in groups. Moreover, they clarified that no one individual was responsible for the completion of the project.

The negative comments were reflective of a shift in teaching by the eighth grade teachers. Comments such as the following were consistent with the negative criticism made by the students; "why do we have to do so much work?" "Other eighth grade classes haven't had to do all of this," and "My group members are not doing their work." For the most part, the comments made by others were positive.

Immediately following the final presentations, I invited students to participate in a focus group to discuss their experiences. Ten students returned signed permission slips and consented to participate in the group (Appendix E). The 10 students consisted of regular education, gifted and talented, high ability, and special education students.

I created two focus groups with five students each and met with each group the week following winter break (January, 2011). I asked both focus groups seven questions (Appendix F) and recorded and transcribed their responses. The responses to each question were coded to identify patterns and trends and common themes between the students' responses (Hinchey, 2008; Saldana, 2009). I organized the information gathered into categories and then sub-categories and ultimately into themes. The themes that emerged were (a) interest in school, (b) collaboration, and (c) improved self-esteem.

Interest in school. Resoundingly, all 10 students participating in the focus groups expressed an increased interest in their academic and special area classes while participating in the project. Several students claimed to like attending school more and

even felt more intelligent. One student said, "I never thought that I would say that I loved coming to school."

Several of the focus group participants felt the school atmosphere was more positive and that it contributed to their desire to be in school. "The day went by so quickly and everyone seemed happier. Even the teachers seemed to like us better," one student stated. Another student claimed her older brother was jealous that he did not have the opportunity to partake in the media project, "My brother got sick of hearing me talking about the media project. I think he was just annoyed that his class did not have the same opportunity."

Collaboration. The students agreed that working in their groups was critical to the success they achieved. They discussed the importance of disseminating information with the other student business groups and discovered that collaborating within their groups and with each of the business groups were equally important. "We motivated each other and all worked together not just with our groups. If one student or group discovered an easy way to do something or a trick, we shared it with the other groups" (Focus Group Student, January, 2011).

Several students asserted that collaborating with their peers required them to become much more responsible and organized.

> For the first time, deadlines mattered to me. If I did not do my part and finish something then my business failed and my classmates would have been mad at me. It is different than when I work by myself. If I do not do my homework then I fail but not others. (Focus Group Student, January, 2011)

Interestingly, the students noted that their teachers modeled collaborative behaviors, which helped them do the same. Both focus groups were very happy with the opportunity to interact with their peers on a daily basis and between classes. "I really feel that

working together is something that will help me later in life and I liked it," stated one student.

When asked if there were any negatives to collaborating with their peers, every student stated that he or she would prefer to choose his or her group. "One student did not work with us, no matter what we did," one student stated. "It is difficult to always work together. I guess like a family, my group had its share of problems, but we worked well together," another student astutely stated.

Improved self-esteem. It was evident from the students' responses that they were very confident in their achievements. They exhibited better communication skills and were very comfortable speaking during the interview. A few students explained that they were no longer afraid to interact with the perceived in-crowd.

> I became friends with classmates that never gave me the time of day. I thought they were the smart cool kids. You know better than me. I was always the stupid one, but I was the only one in my group who knew how to use Access. I helped them, and they were nice to me. A few of us even got together over Christmas break. (Focus Group Student, January, 2011)

Several students stated that they had a better outlook on their education and future. They all agreed that their achievements contributed to their desire to do better and continue to work in school. Resoundingly, they all stated that they hope to participate in more activities like the media project. One went as far as to question, "Why haven't we done anything like this before the media project?"

The focus group students' comments mimicked the comments heard from students in the classroom, the hallway, and at lunch. As illustrated in the teachers' reflections and the focus group participants, positive comments were noted and recorded during the project and after the project.

Post Project Survey

During the first week in January, the eighth grade homeroom teachers administered the SSES (NCES, 2006) again to attain post-project results.

Participants and procedure. Ninety students, 48 males and 42 females, participated in the project and completed the SSES pre and post project. The SSES was administered by eighth grade homeroom teachers during CAP (homeroom study hall period scheduled at the end of the day, Monday –Friday). Prior to administering the SSES, informed consent (IRB approved, March 2010) was attained from each participants' parent or guardian (November, 2010).

Methodology. The pre and post survey data were analyzed using SPSS data analysis software and Microsoft excel. After comparing the pre and post project survey data, I analyzed the responses and identified areas of considerable and notable improvement to determine the impact of the project on the students' engagement practices.

Discussion. When reviewing the data, responses to each question remained the same or improved. Students overall attitudes toward school and learning improved in each of the three engagement categories; cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. While improvement was noted in each category, responses to the emotional engagement questions improved significantly, which is a positive indication of growth and improvement.

Research supports that emotional engagement and motivation must improve in order to develop and impact behavioral and cognitive engagement practices (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004). Comparison of the pre and post SSES survey

data supports the input received from teachers and students participating in the project, as well as, my personal reflections and observations made throughout the course of the project.

Analysis and results. Results of the post-project administration of the SSES are illustrated in Tables 8, 9, and 10. The results are broken down by engagement category: 1) Cognitive Engagement, 2) Behavioral Engagement, and 3) Emotional Engagement.

Cognitive engagement reflections. Students are cognitively engaged in the classroom when they are able to maintain focus on a challenging task and recognize the importance of learning and growth (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006). Cognitively engaged students are motivated by the learning task and enjoy school. Responses to the questions regarding cognitive engagement are depicted in Table 8.

Table 8

Cognitive Engagement Questions and Responses – Post Survey

1. How important do you think…	Very Important	Quite Important	Fairly Important	Slightly Important	Not at all important
It is to get good grades	81.0%	16.5%	2.5%	-	-
The things you are learning in school are going to be to you later in life?	41.8%	39.2%	16.5%	2.5%	-
2. How much do you agree with the following statement?	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	
I am getting a good education at school.	11.4%	7.6%	35.4%	41.8%	3.8%
3. How often are the following statements true for you?	**Always/ Almost Always**	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never / Almost Never**
I study at home even when I don't have a test.	6.3%	3.8%	12.7%	27.8%	49.4%
I talk with people outside of school about what I'm learning in class.	24.1%	15.2%	43%	12.7%	5.1%
I check my schoolwork for mistakes.	17.7%	29.1%	31.6%	19%	2.5%
I read things over again if I don't understand them.	40.5%	35.4%	15.2%	6.3%	2.5%
I try my best at school	60.8%	32.9%	5.1%	1.3%	-
I get good grades in school.	35.4%	39.2%	20.3%	3.8%	1.3%
I enjoy the work I do in class.	16.5%	26.6%	35.4%	21.5%	-

Pre and post- project survey analysis. Post-Project survey responses demonstrated a positive shift in attitude and appreciation for learning regarding cognitive engagement. Prior to conducting the multi-disciplinary project, approximately 31.7% of

respondents claimed to enjoy the work they perform in class, whereas 43.1% stated they enjoyed class activities following their participation in the project. In addition, more students admitted to discussing school material with others (15% >) and working to earn better grades (2.5%>) than previously stated.

Considerable growth was identified in four questions regarding cognitive engagement as illustrated in Figure 2.

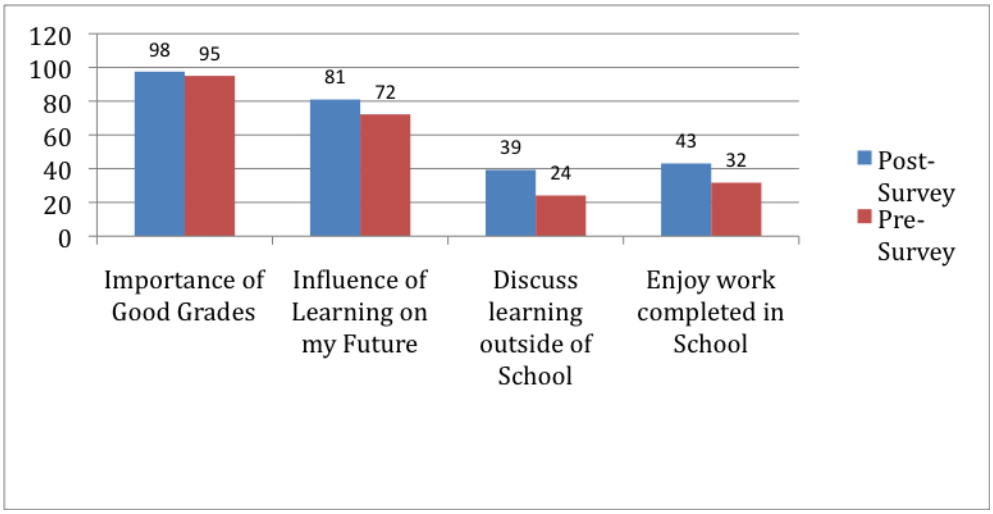

Figure 2. Cognitive Engagement Questions: Considerable Improvement

Noticeable improvement was noted in students' effort and diligence. After completing the cross-disciplinary project, 93.7% of participants claimed to try their best at school. They stated that they work for accuracy and quality by re-reading their work (2.5% >) and checking for mistakes (5%>) as depicted in Figure 3.

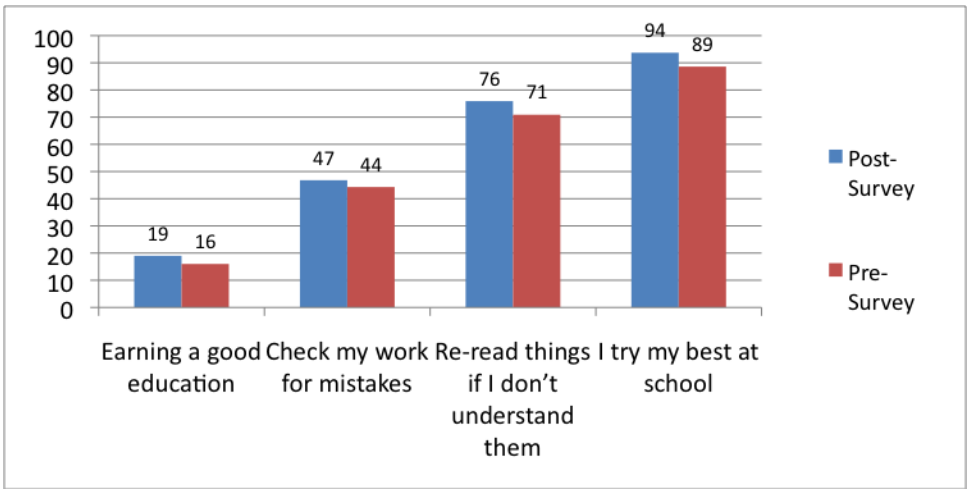

Figure 3. Cognitive Engagement Questions: Noticeable Improvement

Behavioral engagement. Behavioral engagement relates to the students' participation in school and the factors that promote involvement in their education (Fredricks et al., 2004). The questions addressing behavioral engagement assess the students desire to be in school, their behaviors, and perceptions of school and classroom management. Table 9 illustrates the questions assessing behavioral engagement and the participants' post-survey responses.

Table 9

Behavioral Engagement Questions and Responses- Post Survey

1. How often are the following statements true for you?	Always/ Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never / Almost Never
I follow the rules at school	60.8%	29.1%	10.1%	-	-
I am excited about the work in school	24.1%	15.2%	35.4%	17.7%	7.6%
I am interested in the work I do in my classes.	21.5%	27.8%	30.4%	13.9%	6.3%
Most of my teachers praise me when I work hard.	32.9%	32.9%	22.8%	10.1%	1.3%
2. How important do you think…	**Very Important**	**Quite Important**	**Fairly Important**	**Slightly Important**	**Not at all Important**
It is to attend school every day?	48.1%	46.8%	3.8%	1.3%	-
3. How much do you agree with the following statement?	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	
The discipline at my school is fair.	31.6%	50.6%	11.4%	3.8%	2.5%
I learn a lot from my classes.	41.8%	58.2%	-	-	-
I respect most of my teachers.	63.3%	27.8%	6.3%	2.5%	-
Most of my teachers understand me.	38%	43%	16.5%	2.5%	-
I come to class prepared.	48.1%	51.9%	-	-	-
I complete my work on time.	35.4%	60.8%	3.8%	-	-
I treat my teachers with respect.	68.4%	31.6%	-	-	-
I try my best on homework.	58.2%	38.0%	2.5%	1.3%	
I follow school rules.	57%	41.8%	1.3%	-	-

Pre and post- project survey analysis. Considerable improvement was noted regarding school attendance and preparedness. School attendance and the desire to attend school improved (8%>) between the pre and post survey. Students expressed a greater desire to attend school and attend prepared (8.8%>). Students responded that it is very important and quite important to attend school prepared as illustrated in Figure 4.

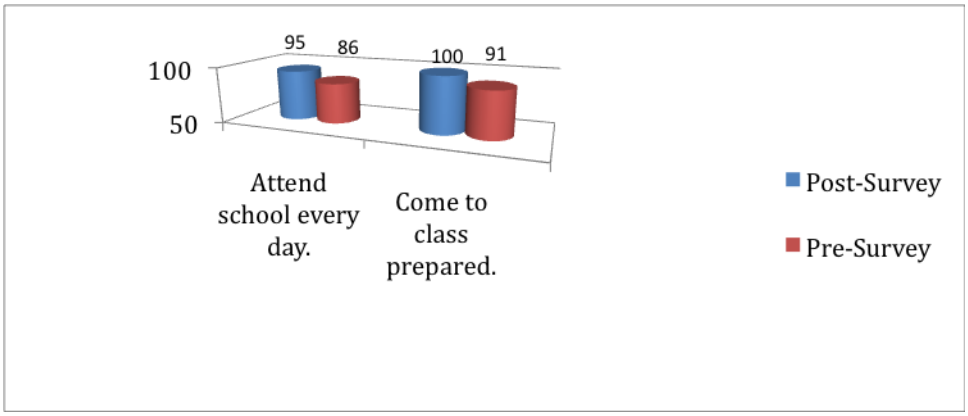

Figure 4. Behavioral Engagement Questions: Considerable Improvement

In addition to a shift in perceptions regarding school attendance and preparedness, a shift in behaviors was also noted. Respondants claimed to accept responsibility for their success and achievement. More students responded to value deadlines (5%>), work for quality and complete their homework (1.3%>), and learn from their class experiences (2.5%>). Pre and post response comparisions are illustrated in Figure 5.

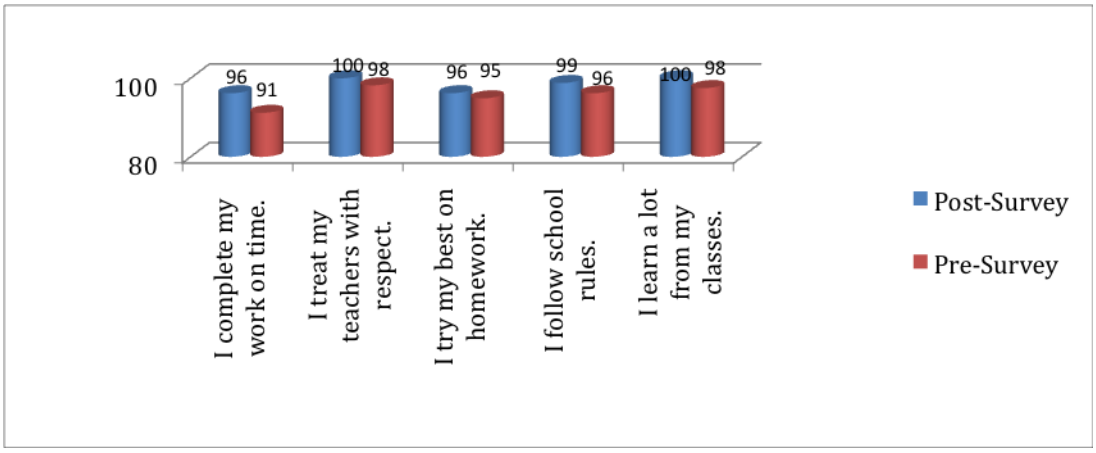

Figure 5. Behavioral Engagement Questions: Noticeable Improvement

Significant change was recognized in students' interest and appreciation of school and learning. On the post survey, 39.3% of the participants expressed excitement about completing work in school, as opposed to 17.7% who responded to the same question prior to participating in the cross-disciplinary project (21.6%>). Students' interest in school increased (18.9%>), as well as, their assertion that their teachers praise them for their efforts (8.8%>). Significant improvements in these areas are illustrated in Figure 6.

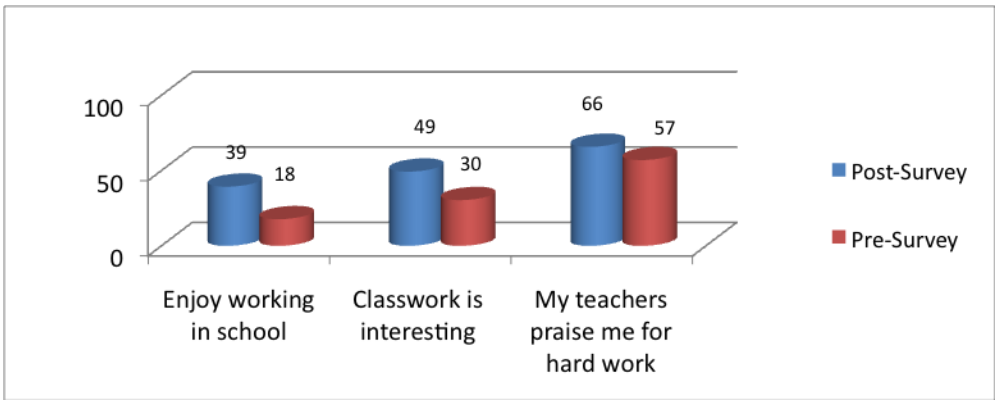

Figure 6. Behavioral Engagement Questions: Significant Improvement

Emotional engagement. Students' behavioral engagement often emerges from their emotional attachments, and reactions to students' affective reactions in the classroom, including interest, positive and negative emotional reactions, and anxiety all contribute to a student's emotional engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004). Improving students' emotional engagement is critical to improving behavioral and cognitive engagement. Responses to emotional engagement questions are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Emotional Engagement Questions and Responses – Post Survey

2. How much do you agree with the following statement?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
I feel close to people at my school.	49.4%	48.1%	2.5%	-	-
I feel like I belong in my school.	57%	35.4%	7.6%	-	-
I am happy at my school.	55.7%	36.7%	7.6%	-	-
The teachers treat students fairly.	46.8%	46.8%	5.1%	1.3%	-
I feel safe at my school.	57%	39.2%	3.8%	-	-
I like most of the teachers at my school.	68.4%	30.4%	1.3%	-	-
I will fail no matter how hard I try.	50.6%	34.2%	3.8%	6.3%	5.1%
Most of my classes are boring.	10.1%	20.3%	36.7%	22.8%	10.1
Most of my teachers care about how I'm doing.	58.2%	41.8%	-	-	-
There's an adult in my school that I can talk to about my problems	41.8%	27.8%	30.4%	-	-
School is a waste of my time.	5.1%	1.3%	22.8%	58.2%	12.7%
I treat my classmates with respect	48.1%	40.5%	11.4%	-	-
3. How often are the following statements true for you?	Always/ Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never / Almost Never
I get in trouble at school.	11.4%	20.3%	41.8%	17.7%	8.9%
My classroom is a fun place to be.	26.1%	14.5%	43.5%	15.9%	-
I feel that I can go to my teachers with the things I need to talk about.	34.2%	51.9%	12.7%	1.3%	-

Pre and post- project survey analysis. The most improvement was noted in the emotional engagement post responses to the SSES. Students expressed a sense of happiness about being in school (5.2%>) and improving their behavior (10.1 %<). It was evident that their overall self-esteem (5.1%>) and satisfaction with school improved (5.1%>) and was reflected in their actions (9.1 %<). Figure 7 depicts results of questions that showed considerable improvement between the pre and post SSES responses.

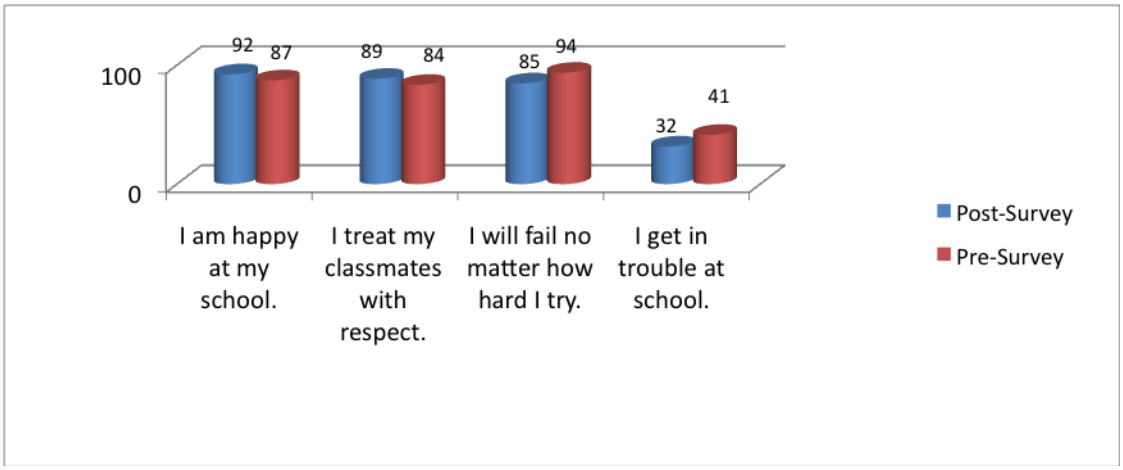

Figure 7. Emotional Engagement Questions: Considerable Improvement

Noticeable improvement was recognized in the questions involving teacher – student relationships. Respondents expressed that they feel closer to people in their school (6.4%>) and they are comfortable confiding in an adult within the school (9.7%>). The level of trust that their teachers and school officials treat them fairly (2.5%>) and care about their growth and well being (11.4%>) saw a dramatic increase also. The improvements in student-teacher relationships are depicted in Figure 8.

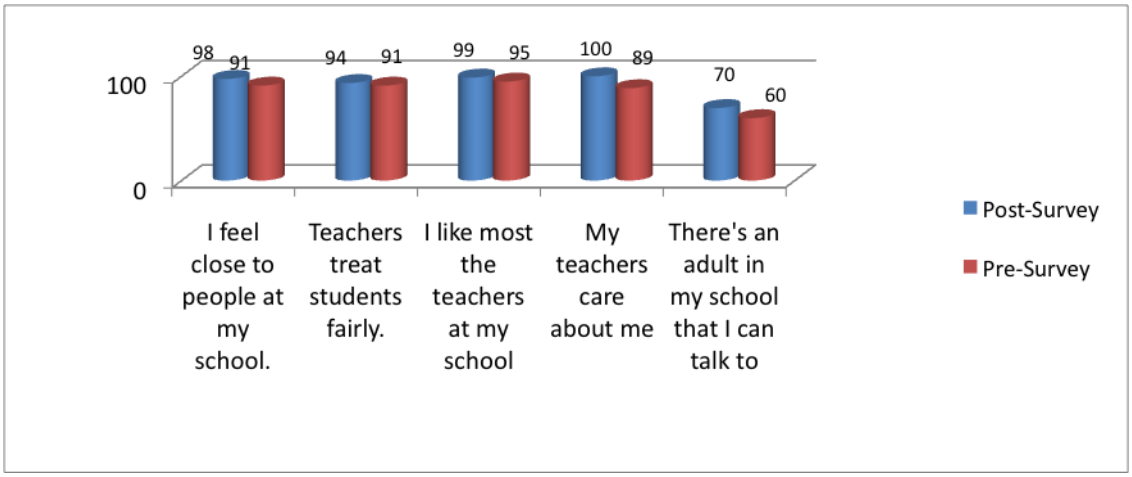

Figure 8. Emotional Engagement Questions: Noticeable Improvement

Another area of significant improvement noted between the pre and post SSES survey responses involves the classroom environment. There was a 15.2% decrease in responses to the question, my classes are boring, and a 9.8% decrease in the belief that school is a waste of time. In contrast, there was a 41.6% improvement noted in response to the question, my classroom is a fun place to be. Responses to the three questions are illustrated in Figure 9.

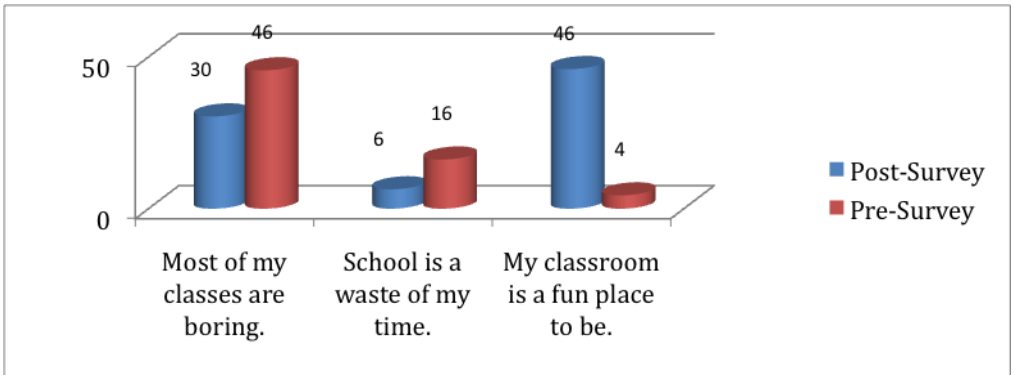

Figure 9. Emotional Engagement Questions: Significant Improvement

Leadership Application

Cycle 3 was the most challenging, yet the most rewarding. As an observer, I was able to step-back and reflect on my own actions and realize that I am a transformational leader. The implementation of the project was the most challenging part to my leadership abilities. Over the course of Cycles 1 and 2, I worked to help empower the teachers and students participating in the project, however, when it came time to implement the project I had to assume a new role; I became more of an observer. The move to observer was a familiar role to me, however, a role that I had not had the opportunity to assume in quite some time. A quiet person by nature, I tend to observe and reflect on all aspects of a situation prior to acting.

Assuming the role of observer, I witnessed the beginning of change in the Holloway Middle School. It truly was an exhilarating experience that I could not wait to share with others. Members of the eighth grade team and the special area teachers worked so well together, that when faced with logistical issues or resistance from a team member, they persevered and worked through the problems.

It was during this cycle that my leadership abilities were truly put to the test. While implementing the project I became ill, however, I was reticent to call in sick. I journaled that it was a bad time in the project for me to be ill and absent from work. What would my team think? How would the project continue to move forward if I was at home. I grappled with the idea of going against doctor's orders and going to work. To further complicate or muddy the issue, I panicked and second-guessed if I was in fact a transformational leader, because a transformational leader would trust in her team to

continue in her absence (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). In the end, I called in sick from work and all worked out in my absence.

Upon reflection, I realized that I do trust my team, my consternation stemmed from exhaustion and illness, but more importantly my work ethic and my resolve to push myself. I strive to model the behaviors that I expect others to display. It was the holiday season and teachers are known for taking mental health shopping days, however, the teachers involved in the project were all present the month of December. I worried that others would perceive my absence as weakness and a means of shirking my responsibilities. I worried that I would not be setting a positive example for my colleagues.

My absence in December began a shift in my leadership. While I expected the eighth grade teachers to move from teacher-centered instruction, I had to move from director to facilitator and ultimately observer, and grappled with the change. As already stated, I perceived the shift as a weakness or loss of control, however, I now recognize the move was necessary.

Limitations

Motivation and student engagement are contextual (Ames & Archer, 1988; Fredricks et al., 2004; Guthrie et al., 1997). Introduction of a new approach to learning could be a potential limitation since the participation in a cross-curricular project is fresh and new to the students. Teachers often find it difficult to motivate students to engage themselves purposefully and actively in the learning process (Meece et al., 1988). When presented with new concepts or approaches, students are more likely to be engaged in the

learning process; therefore, future cross-disciplinary projects may not yield positive or similar results.

Moreover, Klatt and Taylor-Powell (2005) caution the researcher to be mindful of response shift bias when utilizing a pre and post assessment instrument. Klatt and Taylor-Powell assert that the respondent may not have thought about or have knowledge of the question asked prior to participating in the activity being assessed; therefore, in the post assessment the respondent will be equipped with the knowledge and will respond positively.

Conclusion

In Cycle 3 I compared and analyzed the pre and post SSES results and noted areas of improvement between the two surveys. I also met with the eighth grade teachers and two student focus groups to seek their input and reflections on the implementation and participation in the cross-curricular project.

In Chapter 8, I will share the results of the pre and post SSES data with the staff and administration of the Holloway Middle School. Moreover, I will continue my work with the eighth grade team and begin working with the other grade levels to develop cross-curricular projects.

Chapter 8

Cycle 4 Project Sharing

Introduction

The fourth cycle of my action research project details the impact of the first cross-disciplinary project on the eighth grade students and staff and the emergence of my work with the other grade level teams in the Holloway Middle School. In Cycle 4, I continued my work with the eighth grade team during professional development time, prep periods, and through continued email correspondence. Moreover, I began working with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams on a curricular initiative.

I met with the Holloway principal the first week in January and presented him with the pre and post project results of the Student School Engagement Survey (SSES). I suggested that we continue to collect data in the form of attendance and discipline records and to seek the input of both students and teachers regarding the cross-curricular projects. He granted me more professional development time to continue my work with the staff and again expressed his desire for me to begin working with the other grade level teams.

Professional Development

Per the teachers' contract, teachers in the Eberhardt School District are required to participate in an hour and a half of monthly professional development. The professional development is conducted in-district and generally on the third Wednesday of the month. Due to budgetary constraints the district has relied on in-house training and the PD360 online professional development program to train the staff. After sharing the data collected in Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of my action research project, the Holloway principal and I

decided to utilize the January and February professional development time to foster collaborative relationships between the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams. Moreover, I continued my work with the eighth grade team and began the planning process for the second cross-disciplinary project.

January Professional Development

The January professional development in-service day was broken into two sessions. The eighth grade teachers were provided both sessions I and II to begin planning their next cross-disciplinary project. I met with the eighth grade team in session I and worked with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams in session II.

Session I. The eighth grade team discussed the successes and problems encountered while implementing the media project and began planning the next cross-disciplinary project. A month passed since the implementation of the first cross-curricular project and a lot of data was gathered regarding the project in the form of student focus groups, teacher interviews, personal communication, teacher created assessments, school attendance and discipline records, and pre – post SSES survey results. The data collected documented the successes of the project and areas needing improvement. The team agreed to examine ways to improve upon the project when planning the second cross-disciplinary initiative.

Successes to build upon. After much discussion, the eighth grade teachers agreed that improved motivation and school involvement, nurtured teacher and student collaboration, and the development of curricular coherence were the three most important successes attained while implementing the project. By identifying the keys to success, they hoped to build upon the successes and fortify future initiatives.

Motivation and school involvement. Motivation was identified as the greatest improvement observed throughout the course of the project. Motivation improved on three levels; students, teachers, and self. Student motivation was illustrated in attendance and discipline data, however, it was also apparent in improved attitudes toward academic success, peers, and self. Eighth grade students' academic grades improved throughout the course of the project and a dramatic decrease in unpreparedes occurred. Teachers shared that the students overall appearance and dress improved also.

> I noticed that students began to take pride in their own appearance – combed hair, shirts tucked in, and change in dress were all noticeable. Working with peers outside of their normal group seemed to have motivated them and challenged them to take pride in themselves and their work. (LS, professional development session, January, 2011)

Students' attendance and participation in school-based activities increased throughout the course of the project. "I really did not think about it before now but more eighth graders attended the December dance than ever, or at least as long as I have been in charge of them" (HB, Professional development session, January, 2011). While another teacher stated, "Eighth grade participation in student council activities and the gym show also increased" (SK, Professional development session, January, 2011). Students appeared to want to be in school and participate in school-based activities.

One teacher noted that the eighth grade teachers appeared more involved and motivated to participate in school activities as well.

> We implemented a challenging project at the worse time of the year. When we first started, I questioned what we were doing. It was December after all. Everyone knows the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is very hectic and a trying time for us both in and out of school. Upon reflection, this was one of the best things we ever did. I wanted to come to school and to be honest with you, implementation of the project helped keep me focused and better organized. (BA, Professional development session, January, 2011)

They all agreed that their desire to come to school and even volunteer their time after school increased while implementing the project. “The school atmosphere was different – positive,” one teacher stated (PH, Professional development session, January, 2011).

***Collaboration*.** The increase in motivation and school participation was directly linked to the collaboration taking place between individual teachers and the students themselves. The collaboration that occurred was identified as another important factor in the success of the cross-disciplinary project. Both teachers and students who expressed concerns over working with their peers attained success and overcame their anxieties by working together. One teacher stated, “Collaboration and motivation go hand and hand.” While another said, “Working with my colleagues is what fueled my motivation.”

The focus group students expressed similar sentiments following the project. Working together the learning became authentic and real. One student stated,

> Some of us did not like our partners and sometimes we had some group members who did not help as much as they should have but I learned a lot. We learned to work together no matter the circumstance. My mom said that is like real life.

Working outside of their element and comfort zone forced both students and teachers to learn to adapt and develop interpersonal skills. Interestingly, both teachers and students identified collaboration as a critical key to success and one that should be incorporated into future projects.

Curricular coherence. The teachers resoundingly expressed the recognized importance of teaching their respective subjects in collaboration. One teacher noted, “My students grasped the concepts taught and more in a very short amount of time. I believe by presenting the information like we did it helped present the students with a clearer picture and understanding of what we taught”(LS, Professional development session,

January, 2011). The teachers found that by aligning the curriculum, the information they taught was supported and enriched by the information taught in the other classrooms. One teacher stated, "I learned things that I never knew before in working with the other teachers. I focus on my subject but there is so much more to learn and teach to the students" (BA, Professional development session, January 2011).

The students participating in the focus groups questioned why they had not learned or studied subjects at the same time before. "Studying the same topic in science and social studies and all of the other subjects makes so much sense. I did not get confused once" (Student Focus Group Interview, January, 2011).

Areas needing improvement. The first cross-disciplinary project had its share of problems, which is to be expected when implementing a new project. Throughout the course of the project various problems occurred and were addressed. At the January in-service meeting the eighth grade teachers identified several areas that needed tweaking or improving to ensure the success of future cross-disciplinary projects. Three areas were identified as needing the most improvement and attention: (1) communication, (2) grouping, and (3) scheduling.

***Communication*.** Communication was a valuable contribution to the success of the project. The eighth grade team members communicated through email, in person on their prep period, during lunch, and after school. Each teacher maintained her page on the school website and posted assignments and information for students. The students found it necessary to communicate with their group members, other students, and teachers. So much focus was spent on communicating within the eighth grade team of teachers and students that problems arose between the other teams and parents.

The eighth grade teachers agreed that it was necessary to focus on improving communication with parents and the school when planning the next cross-curricular project. As a group, the eighth grade team is much more confident in their abilities to work together; therefore, communicating with the administration and parents will be easier with the next project. Moreover, the eighth grade parents are now aware of the changes the teachers have made to their instruction and appear happy with the positive results. "Only good things can come from including the parents in the learning process," one teacher stated.

Groupings. Assigning students to groups was one of the most difficult challenges the eighth grade team faced. For the first project, the teachers grouped the students based on their language arts classes and special area sections (a, b, c, d). The rationale was that by grouping them according to their special area subjects and language arts classes the students would be able to complete the assigned group tasks while in those classes. Several problems arose as a result, most importantly, ability grouping. Several of the gifted and talented and high achieving students are all in section D for their special area classes; therefore, section D groups were at an advantage over the other groups. It was first believed that the removal of the gifted and talented and high academic functioning students from the groups would be beneficial. The special education and regular education students would not feel as pressured or intimidated if they were not working with their gifted peers, and for the most part this worked. However, there were a few groups composed of extremely low functioning students who struggled to complete the project due to the challenges and demands of the project and the students' academic disadvantages. Moreover, the gifted students were grouped together with their gifted

peers and found it difficult to respect their peers and work together as a cohesive team. Competition is great among gifted students, which is positive when serving to motivate each other but not when used against each other (Lee, 2002). One special education teacher stated,

> We need to work on the groupings. If the special education students are to participate in the group projects, which I want them to continue to do so, I would really like to group them according to their strengths. The media project was so motivating and rewarding and each of my students did very well, but the agony that I experienced leading up to the final presentation. Can we work on this? (HE, Professional development session, January, 2011)

The special education teacher expressed concern about participating in group projects from the very beginning, however, many noticeable positive changes were observed in the special needs students throughout the course of the project, among them improvement in academics and behavior. Assigning the special needs students to groups was very challenging.

While the team was surprised by the special education teachers concerns, they resoundingly agreed that the gifted and talented students needed to be incorporated into the mix with the rest of the students. The students and the judges of the final projects both stated similar thoughts. After the final presentations, the eighth grade teachers had the opportunity to briefly meet with the judges to discuss the presentations. The judges questioned how the students were placed in groups. One judge said, "Each of the groups did an amazing job and should be commended; however, it was apparent that a few groups were much more mature and perhaps academically higher than the others" (Personal communication, December, 2010). The judges all asserted that it was apparent that two of the groups were much higher than the others and there were two groups who obviously struggled and appeared to be at an academic disadvantage.

As the eighth grade team discussed potential ideas for the next cross-disciplinary project, they agreed to explore other options for grouping. Of course, the focus group students had their own idea and solution to the grouping problem, "Let us chose our own groups." The eighth grade teachers did not foresee allowing the students to choose their own groups for the second cross-disciplinary project. The teachers were not ready for what they presumed would be a relinquishment of control to the students. One stated, "Maybe that will be an option for the third or fourth project that we implement. Right now, I'm not comfortable allowing the students to develop the groups. I can't see that happening just yet" (MJ, Professional development session, January, 2011).

Scheduling. Scheduling was the final problem that the eighth grade team decided to address and work to improve when planning the second cross-disciplinary project. The eighth grade teachers encountered several scheduling problems when trying to implement the first project. "There is little room to switch things up in the daily school schedule. We had to be creative," stated one teacher (BA, Professional development session, January, 2011). Being creative only goes so far though and the teachers did what they could.

In addition to daily scheduling issues, if the eighth grade teachers are going to change their approach to grouping, they need to find another way to schedule group meeting times. One teacher pointed out,

> We grouped the students according to their language arts and special area subjects because it was easier to schedule time for the students to meet with their groups. If we are changing our grouping approach to create more diverse groups, we need to also address another scheduling obstacle. (LS, Professional development session, January, 2011)

The Holloway Principal has offered his support to the eighth grade team and they claim that they will solicit his help in the planning and implementing of the next project.

Future. The team discussed two potential cross-disciplinary projects to implement. One teacher suggested the team apply for a foundation grant to support the implementation of one of the projects. The Eberhardt School District has an education foundation that supports school initiatives up to $2500. “Think of the possibilities and the opportunities we could provide the students with the money from an ed foundation grant. Look at what we accomplished without funding,” (PH, Professional development session, January, 2011).

Another discussed inviting community members in to assist and contacting neighboring organizations to incorporate their services. The rest of the session proceeded in a similar fashion with each member sharing ideas and working together toward a common goal. Unlike the first cross-disciplinary project, I had very little to contribute. Several of the eighth grade teachers had emerged as teacher leaders.

Session II. The original plan was for the eighth grade teachers to share their experiences conducting the cross-curricular project with the Holloway Middle School Staff in session II. However, the eighth grade teachers were the recipient of some nasty, negative criticism from several of their colleagues while implementing the cross-curricular project and were not comfortable discussing their success. While the eighth grade team received a lot of public praise, the negative comments directed at them by their colleagues and friends were a sore spot for several of them. In addition, several of them were anxious about presenting to their peers especially after one project.

As a result, I met with the Holloway principal and expressed the eighth grade team’s concerns. I suggested that we use Session II to work with the staff on a smaller,

team-building project and to allow the eighth grade team to continue the work they started in Session I.

I decided to seize the opportunity to lay the foundation for future work with the grade level teams. Session II was only approximately 45 minutes long, which was not very much time. I decided to conduct a team building activity with the group and encourage interdependence and communication. I then utilized the PD360 technology to discuss the impact of collaboration on learners and the benefits of incorporating the collaborative model into everyday lessons. The teachers were then placed in small groups and asked to brainstorm ways they could work collaboratively with their colleagues in the future.

Observations. Working with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams will be challenging. The group dynamics of each team are much different from the eighth grade team. I maintained field notes while conducting the 40-minute professional development, as well as, conferencing with the Holloway Principal immediately following the session. The session was challenging and exhausting. That evening I journaled:

> I became accustomed to being part of the eighth grade team and less of a leader. I guided and facilitated but never had to direct. Today was a much different experience for me. I felt like I had a bull's eye on my back and was the target of much criticism. Working with the other teams and sustaining my change initiative is going to be difficult to say the least. (Personal journal, January, 2011)

Throughout the course of the project, I was engrossed in the process when working with the eighth grade team and excited about the positive results attained with the first cross-curricular project. I was not anticipating the antagonism I faced from my colleagues during the professional development session.

After meeting with the Holloway principal, I identified common threads between my observations and the principals. We both agreed that more professional development and training was needed regarding the collaborative model, the resistant members needed to be incorporated into the process, and future work with the teams must be on an individual basis and not as a large group.

February Professional Development

Prior to the February professional development, I met with the Holloway principal and discussed the agenda for the in-service. Based on our observations from the January in-service, we decided to work with each team individually. I suggested that we focus on literacy and writing across the curriculum. Our students' performance on the writing portion of the NJASK is continuously poor. I explained that research (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Knipper & Dugan, 2006) supports the need for writing across the curriculum. By encouraging each team to develop writing prompts to be used in each content area the teams will work together to improve writing scores and ultimately literacy. Focusing on literacy and writing is a small step to encourage collaboration and teamwork.

Meeting with the staff. At his February staff meeting, the Holloway principal requested that each staff member plan out the concepts and units of study that he or she plan on teaching in March. He explained that we will be focusing on improving literacy and writing during our February in-service and he would like each staff member to bring any materials that he or she will need to help them plan out their March units.

We met with the staff as a group prior to breaking into individual teams and we conducted a team building activity. Three of the most resistant members showed up to the

in-service late and failed to follow the assigned directions to complete the task. I was furious and reflected on the behaviors in my journal that evening,

> It was very difficult to maintain my focus. I was so angry at the three members who showed up late. They were above everyone else. Not only were they late, but they were a distraction and talked over me. I do not see these behaviors in my eighth grade students. How do administrators tolerate or address such behaviors? (Personal journal, February, 2011)

The behaviors exhibited by a few were the very same that I witnessed them direct toward the administration in the past and now I was the recipient. I had to remind myself that the senior staff members are some of the most resistant on the staff due to years of frustration and changes in administration and leadership. Rather than invest in change and potentially fail at their attempts, the resistant members are content remaining part of the problem (Argyris, 1990). It was difficult to not take the behaviors personally especially considering I am their colleague and not administration, however, I recalled Fullan (2001) and his assertion that leaders are likely to learn more from those who disagree with their practices than those who agree and chose to learn from the experience.

Working with individual teams. Each staff member was to work with his or her team to create writing prompts that he or she will administer in the classroom prior to the March in-service. I had the opportunity to meet with each team individually for approximately 20 minutes. I recorded my observations as the day progressed, and conferenced with the Holloway principal. Reflecting on my observations and meeting with the Holloway principal, I noted the following patterns and themes that emerged: (1) teams are not created equal, (2) perceptions of students, and (3) lack of interdependence.

Teams are not created equal. In the short time that I met with each grade level team, I observed that the teams are not created equal. I noted that the seventh grade team was the more cohesive group of the three and the group that appeared the most willing to work with each other. However, I also noted that there were two members on the seventh grade team that did not work or communicate with the team at all. The rest of the team did all of the work and covered for the two who did nothing.

I was intrigued by the group dynamics that existed within each team and gained a better understanding of what needed to be done to create more cohesive groups and promote collaboration among the teams. Interestingly, I noted in my journal that a few of the teachers who I perceived to be resisters might not be as resistant as I first assumed.

> A few teachers act differently when with their colleagues than alone. They go along with the majority of the group rather than voice their concerns or opinions, however, after the meeting or when away from the group, they voice what their concerns or ideas. I have to identify the threats in the groups and work to make the followers more comfortable and help get their voices heard. (Personal journal, February, 2011)

More importantly, I also noted that I needed to be cautious of a few of the teachers who I believed to be compliant. "Sadly, some people talk a good game and claim to be doing one thing, but when the classroom door closes who knows what they are actually doing" (Personal journal, February, 2011). By proceeding with caution and identifying the teachers who are genuinely invested in the project and those who are not, I will know better how to proceed and work with each group and individual and bring about change (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Evans, 2001; Schein, 2004).

Perceptions of students. Each team worked together in a different classroom. As I approached each team, I noted that each was discussing current student issues that existed at their grade level. I recorded in my notes that the tone as I entered each classroom was

negative. I asked each team what they were doing to improve student issues. The responses I received varied from indignant to exasperated. Members of the sixth grade team were actually very offended that I would ask such a question. One stated,

> Why do we have to do something about the problems? The student fails to come to class prepared, does not complete his homework, does not make any effort in my classroom, and automatically it is my fault. I thought you were still teaching. Why would you think assume that we need to change something in our classrooms? (HV, professional development session, February, 2011)

The teacher who made the comment was the very same teacher who entered the beginning activity late and was rude while I was presenting. Her team members appeared to share her beliefs but did not say anything; at least I assumed that their silence was shared belief.

Members of the fifth and seventh grade team responded to my question in a much more positive and honest manner. One seventh grade teacher stated, "We do not know what to do. Honestly, we try and are open to suggestions. What I do know is that what we are doing is not working" (CA, professional development session, February, 2011). I probed the fifth and seventh grade teams further and asked them if the problems were due to disengagement. They were uncertain what the root cause was and appeared frustrated.

***Lack of interdependence*.** When I met with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams, I noted that the groups failed to work together. Prior to breaking into groups, we provided each team with a packet of handouts, the fifth and sixth grade teams photocopied the packet and completed the assigned task independent of their team. The seventh grade team attempted to work together, however, two of their team members were not present. They were in the bathroom, the office, on the phone, everywhere but where they were supposed to be.

The teams lacked communication. They did not engage in discourse regarding students and their pedagogy, rather they focused on negative student behaviors. I noted that several teachers appeared very uncomfortable completing the task. Two teachers stated that they would create their writing prompts later. Both cited a long and exhausting day as a reason not to complete the task. The two team members who were busy in the bathroom, the office, and on the phone worked very hard to avoid interacting with their seventh grade team. Their remaining team members were happy that the two were too busy to sit-down and work with them. They attempted to work together to complete the task and worked to help each other.

I explained to the fifth and sixth grade teams that the development of the prompts would be easier and work better if they worked together and communicated with each other. A few teachers appeared receptive to my suggestion, while others questioned why they needed to work together; they each taught a different subject area. Moreover several expressed that they were forced to complete tasks similar to this one in the past and that there was never any enforcement or follow through on the practice.

After thoughts. Following the February in-service, I received several emails from fifth, sixth, and seventh grade team members soliciting my help. The quiet team members who were overshadowed by their more vocal or defiant team members were interested in discovering ways to better reach their students and also sought advice on the creation of their writing prompts. The emails were very positive and a welcome surprise. The members who contacted me were grateful for my help and open to suggestions. Once again, I was intrigued by the group dynamics and hopeful that the success I achieved with the eighth grade team would transfer to the other three teams.

Leadership Application

While conducting the professional development workshops, I became more and more aware of my growth as a leader. As the cycles progressed, I became more confident and more comfortable in my approach to working with my colleagues. A quiet, introverted person by nature, I emerged as an advocate for the students and my colleagues. After meeting with the Eberhardt superintendent and the Holloway Middle School principal, I journaled that I was amazed at how receptive both administrators were to my ideas (Personal journal, January, 2011). They both offered their support and afforded me several opportunities to work with the staff.

> The opportunities and freedoms that my superiors have granted me are things that I never anticipated. Time and support - the untouchables in education. Is it just a matter of timing? The sheer lack of funding to conduct professional development and my ability to fill a gap that exists? Or have I truly made a difference within my district? (Personal journal, January, 2011)

The success attained in the first three cycles of my project fueled my want and desire to do more to implement more projects. My position in the district has been influenced and affected by my colleagues. Together we continue to grow and bring about change.

In the previous three cycles I grappled with the many roles that I had to adopt to implement the project and work with my colleagues. In Cycle 4 I realized that the various roles are really one in the same; they are all parts to a whole that create who I am as a leader. Also, I discovered that the attitudes of the administration and the staff were beginning to change.

Conclusion

In Cycle 4 I observed members of the eighth grade teaching staff emerge as teacher leaders. They were equipped with the tools to continue the work started in Cycle

1 of the project and recognized the influence that they have on student engagement. Cycle 4 also details the beginnings of my work with the remaining teams in the Holloway Middle School. I had the opportunity to observe each individual team and recognize the future challenges that I face. With perseverance and patience my change initiative will continue to be implemented with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams.

In Chapter 9, I will re-examine my initial research questions and identify the successes of my action research project.

Chapter 9

Overall Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will provide a summary of the four cycles of my research initiative. I will reflect on my research questions and project results, and review possible topics for future research. Moreover, I will reflect on my leadership development over the course of my action research project.

Research Questions

Using action research with a mixed methods approach, I enlisted the support of eighth grade and special area teachers, as well as, the Eberhardt School administration to implement my project. I interviewed teachers, conducted student focus groups, administered surveys, kept field notes, and maintained a journal throughout the course of the four cycles. The action research project began in September 2010 and concluded in February 2011. The study was designed to seek answers to the following three questions:

1) What is the influence of multi-disciplinary curriculum projects on student engagement?
2) What is the influence of collaboratively developing multi-disciplinary projects on collegiality?
3) How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student engagement and teachers' pedagogy?

A fourth question involving my leadership development was also a critical piece to my action research study:

1) In what ways will my leadership capacity to foster collegial collaboration, develop curriculum coherence, and positively influence student engagement develop and expand?

Overview of Action Research Cycles

Cycle 1. The first cycle of research began in September 2010 and consisted of 11 hours of teacher interviews and survey data collected from the teachers' sense of efficacy scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The goals of Cycle 1 were to ascertain a sense of the staffs' beliefs regarding their effectiveness in the classroom, the role that collaboration plays in their classrooms, and their perceptions of an engaged student. By gathering such data, I was able to plan and develop Cycle 2 of my project.

Cycle 2. The second cycle of data collection occurred from October 2010 to December 2010. Cycle 2 involved the teachers participating in professional development and planning a cross-curricular project, and the completion of the SSES (NCES, 2006) by students. The professional development and planning time were used to equip the eighth grade teachers with the tools needed to implement the cross-curricular project. Based on the information gathered in Cycle 1, I utilized the PD360 online professional development program to cover topics involving scaffolding, motivation, collaboration, and student engagement. In addition to working with the teachers, every eighth grade student completed a pre-project survey, the SSES (NCES, 2006), to assess the students cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. Cycle 2 ended prior to the implementation of the cross-disciplinary project and established a solid foundation for Cycle 3.

Cycle 3. The third cycle of data collection took place in December 2010 and commenced with the implementation of the first eighth grade cross-disciplinary project. Throughout the course of the cycle, I observed the students and teachers participating in the project and recorded my observations. The project spanned the course of four weeks at which time the students completed the SSES (NCES, 2006) again to attain post project attitudes. The post-project data were compared to the pre-project data and conclusions were drawn. In addition to the survey data, I conducted two student focus groups and met with the teachers to attain their thoughts and reflections after completing the project. The data collected in Cycle 3 served as the foundation of Cycle 4.

Cycle 4. The final cycle of data collection occurred from January 2011 to February 2011. The project data were shared with the Holloway principal and the eighth grade teachers. The January and February professional development sessions were utilized to continue working with the eighth grade teachers. The teachers reviewed and reflected upon the data collected in Cycle 3 and identified the areas of the project needing improvement and the areas of strength. They began planning future projects. In addition to working with the eighth grade teachers, I utilized the information attained in Cycles 1, 2, and 3 to begin working with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams and worked to ensure the sustainability and success of my project.

My change initiative began as a means to ameliorate or influence student engagement practices, however, it grew into much more. The eighth grade teachers rekindled their passion for learning and teaching, and became a more cohesive team as a result. My initial research focused on the students and the definitions of an engaged student. Throughout the course of Cycles 1 to 4, the study shifted more to the teachers

than the students. By building capacity for collaboration among middle school teachers, a shift in teaching and learning occurred.

Research Question Conclusions

In the four cycles of this change initiative, I searched for answers to three research questions. What is the influence of multi-disciplinary curriculum projects on student engagement? What is the influence of collaboratively developing multi-disciplinary projects on collegiality? How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student engagement and teachers' pedagogy? The following subsections detail my findings in regards to my research questions. I analyzed the data collected in Cycles 1 to 4 and identified the key factors contributing to the success of the project and serving as responses to the research questions.

Curriculum. Interviewing the teachers in Cycle 1 helped me determine how to proceed with the project. The teachers expressed their efficacy and confidence in their academic content knowledge, however, they resoundingly expressed concern about their inability to attain academic success with the disengaged student. I planned to utilize the teachers' strengths to improve their weaknesses and create a more cohesive curriculum.

In Cycles 2 and 3, the teachers developed and implemented the first cross-curricular project and I sought answers to my first and second research questions: 1) What is the influence of multi-disciplinary curriculum projects on student engagement? and 2) How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student engagement and teachers' pedagogy?

By using the PD360 program and team articulation, the teachers worked collaboratively to deliver their academic content. As a result, a more cohesive curriculum

was presented to the students and successes were noted. In Cycle 4 teachers identified curricular coherence as one of the most important factors contributing to improvements in their students. They recognized that the material they were presenting provided students with a clearer understanding and grasp of the material taught. The teachers' observations mimicked comments made by students participating in focus groups in Cycle 3. The focus group students asserted that they gained a deeper understanding of the material taught than they had when the material was presented as individual entities.

Finally, analysis of the pre and post project SSES illustrated considerable improvement in all three areas of student engagement; cognitive, behavioral, and emotional. More students expressed a sense of happiness and wanted to attend school than prior to participating in the project. Noticeable improvement was made in regards to their interest in school, attendance, and preparedness. When asked about the work completed in class and the curriculum, a 21.6% increase was noted between the pre and post survey completion. Participation in the multi-disciplinary project provided students with an authentic learning experience and greatly influenced student engagement.

Collaboration. In addition to curricular coherence, the teachers and students both cited collaboration as a critical factor contributing to the success of the project. Classrooms that promote cooperative and collaborative learning permit students to assume ownership of their learning and are motivating and engaging (Casey, 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004).

At the beginning of my initiative, I interviewed 11 eighth grade teachers regarding their experiences with disengaged students and collaboration with colleagues. The teachers stressed the importance of incorporating collaborative learning in the

classroom, however, they also expressed that they did not utilize collaborative groups in the classroom often. Moreover, they stated the benefits of collaborating with their peers, however, it was something that they claimed not to do. I was reminded of Fullan's (2007) belief that collaboration within schools allows teachers to observe one another's teaching, and adopt quality teaching practices. Through collaboration improvements were made in pedagogy and the students benefited.

In Cycle 3, the focus group students recognized and appreciated the teachers modeling collaboration in their instruction and also discussed the benefits of collaborating with their peers. One focus group student noted "I saw something different in my teachers during this project; they all are friends and all. I never even knew that they talked to each other let alone work together. It was cool." Several focus group students asserted that working collaboratively required them to be more organized and responsible. One student stated, "It is a lot different when others are depending on you. It was pressure and I did not want to be embarrassed. No one wants to be the kid who doesn't contribute."

The post SSES results further support an improvement in student engagement as a result of collaboration among peers. A shift in attitude and appreciation for learning were noted in all three areas of student engagement. The students expressed a want to complete tasks in school, contribute to the group, and assume their responsibilities.

Students develop a want to learn when immersed in the collaborative process (Ames, 1992; Casey, 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Guthrie et al., 1997). Students become interdependent on their peers and form positive bonds of trust and respect. The teachers

experienced similar experiences as they became more comfortable working with their colleagues.

The teachers claimed to be more effective in the classroom and covered their material in greater depth. One teacher stated,

> I was able to cover more in a shorter period of time than I think I have all year. Plus, I witnessed my students apply the concepts that I covered, which was great because I know that they retained what I taught them. (LS, January, 2011)

In Cycle 4, the eighth grade teachers asserted that they were more energized and motivated when collaborating with their colleagues. Several teachers discussed a shift in their instructional practices. They moved from teacher-directed instruction to student-centered learning and recognized the benefits (Laboard, 2003). Their classrooms were more efficient and inviting.

> I think I learned as much from the students as they learned from me. It was bizarre; I covered more content, witnessed my students enjoy learning, and my role in the classroom was different. I was not the focal point of every lesson. (SB, January, 2011)

In response to my second research question, what is the influence of collaboratively developing multi-disciplinary projects on collegiality? Collaboration plays a significant role on influencing collegiality as evidenced by the Holloway Middle School eighth grade teachers. They were willing to devote time and energy to communicate and work with their peers to create a positive learning environment for their students.

Professional development.

In Cycle 2 and Cycle 4 professional development sessions were planned around collaboration and curricular coherence. The sessions sought to address research question three. How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student

engagement and teachers' pedagogy? Utilizing the PD360 program and encouraging discourse between participants, I worked to equip the teachers with the tools needed to implement the multidisciplinary project.

The professional development sessions were productive and informative. The teachers cited several benefits from participation in the professional development sessions; improved communication between team members, knowledge sharing, and positive professional practices.

> Working with my peers during professional development time was extremely beneficial. We had the opportunity to articulate about content matter and not standardized test prep for a change. More importantly, we all gained access to several lesson plan opportunities through our discourse and the PD360 program. (BC, professional development, February, 2011)

The teachers learned new methods of instructional delivery, honed skills, and identified the benefits of collegial collaboration.

> In the nine years that I have been teaching, I have been so engrossed in the day to day tasks that I have allowed myself to become mundane and routine. Participation in the project and professional development sessions have energized me and quite possibly revitalized my career. (LS, February, 2011)

More importantly, the professional development sessions afforded the teachers an opportunity to discover new methods to address the needs of disengaged students.

Communication. Communication is another critical factor necessary to answer my third research question. How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student engagement and teachers' pedagogy? In Cycle 2, the teachers dedicated prep periods and after school time to continue the work started in the professional development sessions. Communication was critical to create curricular coherence and foster collaboration among colleagues (Fullan, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Communication was developed on all levels of the school: teacher-teacher,

students-teachers, students-students, teacher-administration. Everyone needed to find a voice and be receptive to the voices of others.

I addressed the importance of communication with the eighth grade teachers in Cycle 2. After reviewing the data collected in Cycle 1, it was apparent that the teachers teach their academic subjects in isolation of the other academic areas and that little academic communication occurs. When the teachers would meet, they would discuss student issues and nothing else. Opening lines of dialogue within the team was necessary. Moreover, those lines had to remain open. As the cycles progressed the teachers recognized that through communication they were able to overcome several scheduling issues and unforeseen problems.

The eighth grade teachers communicated on a daily basis in person and through email. When implementing the multi-disciplinary project, they required students communicate as well. Students met in their groups several times a week and were required to utilize google.docs and edline.net to save their work electronically. Both programs are internet based programs that afford students the luxury of accessing their materials at anytime and from remote locations. Moreover, the google.docs program allows students to establish a group. All materials saved in the group file are accessible to all group members.

In Cycle 3, the focus group students expressed the importance of communication. Several stated that they learned the hard way in the very beginning of the project that failure to communicate with their teammates caused many problems. In Cycle 4, the teachers shared similar thoughts. They identified communication as an area that needed improvement prior to developing their next multi-disciplinary project. They were very

careful to communicate within their team and with their students, however, they encountered problems with parents and school personnel that could have been avoided with better communication.

Self-esteem. In Cycle 1, I distributed the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Survey (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) to the Holloway School teaching staff to assess their perceptions of their teaching efficacy, their classroom management abilities, and their ability to engage all students. The teachers expressed confidence in classroom management and their teaching efficacy, however, they lacked confidence in their efforts to meet the needs of the disengaged student. The results of the TSES were further corroborated by information gained through personal interviews.

Through observations and personal communication, it was apparent that several teachers lacked confidence and self-esteem; therefore, they avoided collaborating with their colleagues. At the beginning of the project, one teacher said, "Everyone is so creative, I am not. Just tell me what to do and I will do it." In the end, she was able to develop several lessons and became an integral part of the project. Gradually, the teacher was able to trust her team members and herself, and ultimately her self-esteem and self-efficacy improved (Fullan, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Through professional development activities, we worked to build confidence and self-esteem between all group members and create a more cohesive group (DuFour, 2006). In addition to nurturing the self-esteem and self-efficacy of each group member, the teachers worked to develop similar traits in their students.

The teachers conducted similar activities to the ones I utilized in our professional development sessions in their classrooms. Moreover, participation in the collaborative

project helped build the confidence of the students as evidenced in the Cycle 3 post project SSES results. Students' self esteem and confidence improved. One student stated, "I had to speak before a group of professionals and the mayor, which was scary. I never talk and am much happier writing or being left alone." Not only did the student, who is a quiet student in class, have to speak before the group, but she assumed a leadership role and was critical to her group's success.

Interestingly, while building the students' self-esteem, the student-teacher relationship improved too. Students expressed a connection with their teachers and respected them. The post project SSES results illustrated a significant improvement in regards to the perception that the teachers care about the students' successes. Through collaboration, both teachers' and students' self-esteem improved. Improved self-esteem led to collegial and peer bonding; therefore, self-esteem and collaboration played a role in influencing collegiality and served as another response to my second research question. What is the influence of collaboratively developing multi-disciplinary projects on collegiality?

Emerging leaders. The final aspect answers research questions one and three: 1) What is the influence of multi-disciplinary curriculum projects on student engagement? and 2) How can curricular coherence and authentic learning experiences improve student engagement and teachers' pedagogy?

Early in Cycle 2, it became apparent that several teachers were emerging as teacher leaders. The teachers attained successes in the classroom and formed bonds with their colleagues. They were comfortable taking control of situations and moved forward without hesitation. More importantly, the emerging teacher leaders encouraged and

supported their colleagues (Peterson & Deal, 1998; Fullan, 1994; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

In Cycle 3, it was revealed that the emerging teacher leaders were being subjected to criticism and harassment from teachers on different grade level teams. Rather than complain or run from the criticism, the emerging leaders addressed the criticism and moved forward. Their behaviors were in contrast to the way they would have addressed criticism prior to collaborating with their colleagues. One teacher stated, "I chalked the criticism up to jealousy and continued to do what I was doing. I know that my actions are positive," (MJ, February, 2011) while another teacher claimed "A crier by nature, I was hurt by some of the snide comments directed toward us. Rather than cry, I invited the criticizer into my classroom to see for herself what was transpiring" (LS, February, 2011). As the teachers became more confident in the classroom, they shared their successes with their colleagues and sought help when needed.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) assert that the students benefit directly when their teachers emerge as leaders. Teacher leaders are aware of what works best for their students and maintain a higher morale in the classroom. Such practices model positive behaviors for students and often lead to the emergence of student leaders (Peterson & Deal, 1998; Fullan, 1994; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Several students did emerge as leaders while participating in the multi-disciplinary project. Several of the special needs and regular education students assumed leadership roles in their groups and maintained an air of confidence throughout the project. In Cycle 3 the Eberhardt Superintendent of Schools expressed his amazement at the students who surfaced as leaders.

Participation in the cross-curricular project afforded both teachers and students the opportunity to assume leadership responsibilities and attain success.

Topics for Future Research

As my action research project unfolded, several topics emerged as potential future research opportunities. Exploration of these topics may contribute to improved student engagement.

1) Group dynamics of the high ability and gifted and talented students.

2) The sustainability of cross-curricular projects within the eighth grade.

3) Assessing the impact of cross-curricular projects after a completed school year.

4) The continued emergence of teacher leaders in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams.

Further exploration of these topics could significantly impact members of the Eberhardt School District and continue to improve pedagogy and student engagement. As I implemented my project, I found myself referring back to my espoused research questions as a means to remain focused on attaining my established goals.

I was amazed at the support and involvement that I received from the eighth grade staff and the administration as I implemented the action research project. The staff was involved in the process and shared the vision; therefore, creating a culture of change and ensuring the continuance of such practices (Fullan, 2001). As I work with the other grade levels and my focus shifts to other projects, I question the sustainability of the cross-curricular projects with the eighth grade. While the eighth grade team was energized by participating in the project and continue to plan future projects, anything can happen to the current group dynamics. How will they maintain a level of engagement and interest?

What will happen if there is a change in the group or the introduction of a new teacher to the team in the future? Such changes could impact the sustainability of future multi-disciplinary projects.

In addition to the sustainability of the initiative, examining the long-term effects of the eighth grade team's collaborative efforts could provide valuable data for future curricular endeavors and academic achievement. Collecting data from future cross-curricular projects will provide a means of comparison and a more accurate overview of the impact of the projects.

Finally, another possible topic worth exploring is the group dynamics of high achieving and gifted and talented students. Gifted and high achieving students tend to be motivated and driven to succeed in the classroom; failure is not an option (Winner, 2000). The majority of the gifted and high achieving students exhibited lackluster attitudes throughout the course of the cross-disciplinary project, which was perplexing. Examining the group dynamics might provide further insight into the lack of drive and initiative observed in this study.

Leadership

During the course of my Doctoral Studies, my professors challenged me to reflect on who I was as a leader. I remember struggling to commit to one specific leadership style, claiming that I subscribed to multiple philosophies and ideologies. While I am an eclectic leader and a follower of several leadership styles, I was not always able to respond to my professors' inquiries. In the beginning, I never viewed myself as a leader; I was a student and a teacher, but I never regarded myself as a leader. I remember thinking

how can I be a leader, I do not possess any power. Moreover, I am a quiet person by nature and quiet people are not leaders.

As the semesters passed, I became more cognizant of my role within my school district and aware of my leadership abilities, which were reflected in my improved confidence level and ultimately the implementation of my action research project. I discovered that leadership is learned (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) and that a leader is defined by the theories she follows (Bass & Bass, 2008). While implementing my action research project, I recognized the importance of reflection and found it much easier to admit my strengths and weaknesses as a leader (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). I learned to trust others to complete tasks, accepted help when needed, and admitted when I did not know something. Ultimately the most important facet of my growth was my admittance and acknowledgement that I am a leader in the field of education.

Summary of Espoused Leadership

In Chapter 2, I described my espoused leadership as a participative, democratic, transformational leader (Burns, 2003; Dewey, 1916; Rodgers, 2002). As a leader, I recognize that others are needed to carry out my vision and value their input in the process (Goleman et al., 2004). More importantly, I strive to model expected behaviors and motivate others by encompassing Chemers' (1997) four factors of transformational leadership: 1) charisma, 2) inspirational motivation, 3) intellectual stimulation, and 4) individualized consideration. In addition to the four factors of transformational leadership, I worked to establish trusting and caring relationships with the eighth grade teachers (Noddings, 1988; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Charisma. Prior to implementing my action research project and in Cycle 1, I needed to establish a working relationship with each of the eighth grade teachers. Forging relationships with each of the teachers required me to be charismatic and gain their trust. I was reminded of Sergiovanni (1992) and the assertion that leadership that touches people emotionally and morally is essential to the success of any organization. I recognized that my behaviors were critical and needed to be appropriate and ethical. I relied on my experiences as a teacher and approached my colleagues in a similar fashion to my students.

> Another teaching opportunity has been presented to me. I must remain true to myself and those around me – active listening, honesty, and the golden rule of treating others how I want to be treated will all help me through this. Sometimes I feel like the teacher and the learner. (Personal journal, October, 2010)

In order to attain their trust, I had to be charismatic, sincere, and genuine; I became a colleague and a friend through my actions. I interacted with each teacher both in and out of the classroom. Rather than work through lunch, I made a concerted effort to eat with members of the eighth grade team and discussed instructional practices on a regular basis. York-Barr and Duke (2004) emphasize the necessity for leaders to promote growth, be active listeners, and communicate with their followers. The informal lunch meetings enabled me to further share my vision and establish trust with each teacher.

Inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. As a democratic transformational leader I rely on my knowledge to inspire others. I am goal-oriented and challenge those around me to do the same. Throughout the course of Cycles 1 to 4, it was necessary to maintain a high level of motivation and encourage the participants. In Cycle 1, the math and special education teachers were unsure of their roles in the project,

however, I found by maintaining their interest and inundating them with ideas and suggestions, ultimately they played integral roles in the project.

Individualized consideration. While collaboration and the power of the collective are critical to bring about change, it is equally important for the democratic, transformational leader to acknowledge her followers' as individuals (Burns, 1978; Fullan, 2001; Gladwell, 2000; Jaworski, 1996; Lewin et al., 1939; Sergiovanni, 1992). In Cycles 1 and 4, I found it necessary to work with individual teachers and help them work through their apprehensions and ultimately collaborate with their colleagues (Bass, 1985; Chemers, 1997). I journaled, "I made it a point to be present in each teacher's classroom and to work with each teacher to develop plans and activities" (Personal journal, 2010). People need to be recognized as individuals prior to forming a group and opportunities for articulation are necessary for change to occur (Fullan, 2007).

Project Leadership Synthesis

Throughout the course of my action research project, my role in the project and my leadership capacity changed and evolved. As already stated, my espoused leadership was reflected in my actions and interactions with the project participants. The following summarizes my leadership throughout the course of the project as demonstrated in each individual cycle.

Cycle 1. In Cycle 1, I relied on my democratic leadership abilities to connect with and relate to the teachers participating in the project. I demonstrated a strong ethic of care by ensuring that all participants' needs were met and their concerns addressed (Noddings, 1988). I also found it necessary to reflect on the practices of Fullan (2001) and

Tschannen-Moran (2004) to nurture relationships based on trust and to establish a culture of change.

My actions in Cycle 1 were critical to the implementation of the action research project. It was not until Cycle 4 that I recognized precisely how important my actions in Cycle 1 were. In Cycle 4, my work with other grade level teams began. While working with the remaining teams, I recognized that my democratic leadership and my ethic of care were critical elements in the early stages of the project. I had to be charismatic, intellectually stimulating, motivational, and focus on each group member as an individual; otherwise, I risked not gaining support and the buy-in of my followers.

Cycle 2. Again, as in Cycle 1, I relied on my democratic abilities and an ethic of care to continue the implementation of my action research project. The project was still in the infantile stages of development; I walked a fine line between overwhelming and motivating the participants. Again, I relied on Chemers (1997) and Fullan (2001) to keep my actions grounded and remain as a pacesetter.

My transformational abilities emerged in Cycle 2. I shared my goals and vision with the eighth grade team members in Cycle 1 and in Cycle 2 I worked to motivate and engage each member. I forged relationships among the team members and worked to empower them as a group. The more engaged the participants became, the more motivated and energized I became.

Interestingly, I discovered the power of food and utilized it to feed project participants who volunteered their time to attend meetings (DuFour, 2004; Marazano, 2003). At first, I felt like I was bribing the participants, but later realized that the food served as another means of forging relationships. The participants responded well to the

provided snacks and created a tradition by contributing the snacks at subsequent meetings. I noted in Cycle 2 that the individuals began to merge as a community (Personal journal, October, 2010).

Cycle 3. Cycle 3 entailed the implementation of the project that the eighth grade team developed in Cycle 2. My position of project leader shifted from director to facilitator to observer and was potentially the most challenging, yet enlightening cycle. I recognized the power of my leadership abilities and my transformational behaviors in Cycle 3 and more importantly the power of reflection (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Assuming the role of observer in Cycle 3, I was able to assume a balcony approach to leading (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) and assess the project as it unfolded. By assuming a balcony approach, I was able to gain perspective on the project and a clearer view of the whole picture. Stepping back and removing myself from the project, I witnessed a shift in thinking and change occurring. As exhilarating as it all was, I remained reticent and feared the halo effect (McMillan, 2000). I journaled, "Am I seeing only what I want to see or is this really happening? Is change occurring within the Holloway School?" (Personal journal, December, 2010). I proceeded with caution in an effort to ensure the validity of my data collection.

Finally, my leadership abilities were tested in Cycle 3 when I fell ill and needed to depend on the eighth grade team to ensure the project was implemented in my absence. In questioning my leadership abilities, I recognized that the strong foundation established in Cycles 1 and 2 and my initial leadership approach served me well. I trusted my team and was forced to test that trust in my absence. More importantly, I discovered that it is okay for a leader to show her followers her weaknesses.

Cycle 4. My leadership role shifted again in Cycle 4. I continued to work with the eighth grade team, however, I assumed the roles of director and facilitator once again. In Cycle 4, I found myself encouraging the eighth grade team to reflect on the project. I shared with them the importance of reflection on the growth and change process in hopes of ensuring sustainability to the project. More importantly, personally, I needed to know that the team could continue to work together in my absence.

In addition to my work with the eighth grade team, I began working with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams. I approached the three teams in the same manner I approached the eighth grade in Cycle 1, however, something was different. I had changed. I was much more confident in my abilities to lead. I referred to my personal journal and reflected on my actions in Cycle 1. Following my first meeting with the eighth grade teachers, I journaled,

> First meeting over, my action research project is beginning and I have a lot to do. Where am I going to start? How do I know that the eighth grade team is going to buy into my vision? Do leaders recognize the impact of their actions? What if I scare them off with my ideas? (Personal journal, October, 2010)

I was anxious and uncertain how to proceed in Cycle 1. New to the leadership role, I wanted my project to succeed. Working with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teams in Cycle 4, my journal entries were more reflective and analytical, almost matter of fact. "The February in-service was well received for the most part; nothing surprising. The usual suspects acted in their typical defiant manner. I need to work with the resistant members and proceed cautiously with the project" (Personal journal, February, 2010).

My journal entries reflected a shift in my thinking from novice to more experienced. More importantly, I reflected on the teacher leaders that emerged through

my work with the eighth grade team and through them I recognized my leadership influence and evolution.

Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)

In addition to my self-reflection throughout the course of my action research project, I utilized Kouzes and Posner's (2009) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) as an alternate method of studying my personal leadership. The LPI measures a leader's behaviors and provides valuable feedback to leaders who aspire to learn and improve their leadership abilities.

I utilized the LPI during Cycle 1 to establish a pre-project assessment and then again at the conclusion of Cycle 4 to attain a post-project assessment of my leadership. The LPI assesses five leadership practices: 1) Model the way, 2) Inspire a shared vision, 3) Challenge the process, 4) Enable others to act, and 5) Encourage the heart. Kouzes and Posner (2007) assert that when leaders are operating at their best they are operating within the five practices.

The LPI utilizes a ten-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "almost never do" to "almost always do" (Kouzes & Posner, 2009). Questions focus on the extent to which leaders model appropriate behaviors, inspire their followers, and nurture a shared vision. The LPI can be completed by the individual leader and colleagues or observers of the leader's abilities. Due to a lack of time, I utilized the individual assessment instrument only. Results of the pre and post LPI are illustrated in Figure 10.

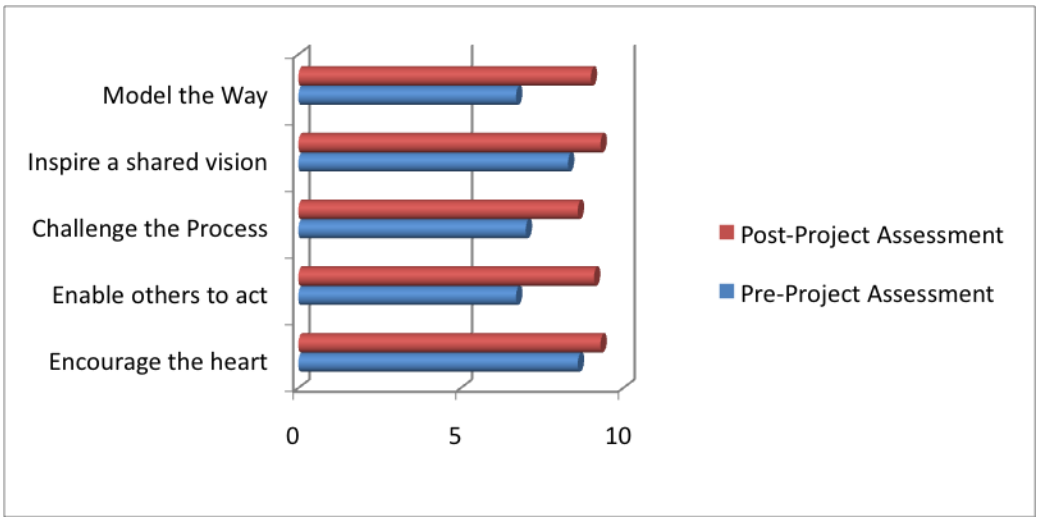

Figure 10. Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) Assessment for Barbara Horner

Pre-project assessment. When my action research project began, I was confident with my abilities to lead in the classroom, however, I questioned whether I would be able to lead my colleagues in a substantial change initiative. In Cycle 1, the LPI results reflected my initial concerns. I responded to questions regarding my ability to enable others to act and model the way with "sometimes" and "fairly often." While I appeared confident in my approach and behaviors, I clearly was not and had much room for improvement.

Results from the LPI further confirmed my beliefs in leading with an ethic of care and the power of collaboration. Responses to questions regarding inspiring a shared vision and encouraging the heart were answered with "usually," "very frequently," and "almost always."

Post-project assessment. Results of the post-project LPI reflected a shift in my leadership behaviors and confirmed my self-reflections. Growth was evident in all five facets of leadership, however, the most improvement was shown in my ability to model

the way and enable others. Responses in both areas improved by approximately two points on the Likert scale.

Concluding Thoughts

The results of the LPI and my self-reflection confirm my growth and development as a leader. In the end, I have become more confident in my abilities to lead, which is reflected in the successful implementation of this action research project. I have made measurable strides toward increasing my leadership capacity and have reaffirmed my need to become a better leader. Moreover, I recognize that I cannot go it alone and must depend on others to share my common vision and continue to progress forward.

Conclusion

This study began with a focus on understanding student engagement practices and building capacity between teachers to influence positive practices in their classrooms, however, it evolved into much more. Throughout the course of the project teachers emerged as leaders and successful classroom practices were implemented. Both students and teachers were receptive to the changes implemented and were actively engaged in the process.

Successes were achieved on all levels of the project – leader, teacher, and student. Moreover, my leadership abilities continued to emerge and develop throughout the course of the project. The project served as a positive learning experience for all parties.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Student Engagement - Teacher Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in my study. This interview is part of data collection for my dissertation. Through my action research dissertation I hope to learn more about student engagement and how we can improve student engagement practices in the Holloway Middle School. I am going to record your responses and all responses will remain confidential.

- Tell me a little about your background? (education, years teaching, position, etc)
- How do you define student engagement?
- What behaviors does the disengaged student exhibit in your classroom?
- Do you have students who come to class unprepared or unwilling to participate in classroom activities?
- If so, how do you address unprepared behavior?
- What are your experiences with collaborative and cooperative learning?
- Do you encourage students to work with others to complete assignments or projects?
- How do you feel collaborating with your colleagues?
- Do you collaborate with colleagues to design projects to implement with your students?
- What obstacles or challenges do you encounter in your attempts to collaborate with your colleagues?
- Is there anything else that I should know about your experiences with student engagement and collaborative learning practices?

Appendix B

Informed Consent – Participants over age 18

I agree to participate in a study entitled "Promoting Student Engagement through Cross Disciplinary Projects," which is being conducted by Barbara A. Horner, Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership at Rowan University under the supervision of Dr. Virginia Doolittle.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the philosophies, practices, and programs used by educators and individuals who work directly with students. The data collected in this study will be combined with data from previous studies and will be submitted in an action research study for the completion of my dissertation.

I understand that I will respond to several questions pertaining to the field of education and current practices surrounding students, and that my responses may be electronically recorded. My participation in the study should not exceed one hour.

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

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

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the State of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Ms. Barbara A. Horner at (609) 641-3329 x. 1611 or Dr. Virginia Doolittle at (856)-256-4500 ext.3637

_____ _____

(Signature of Participant) (Date)

_____ _____

(Signature of Investigator) (Date)

Appendix C

Sense of Teacher Efficacy Scale

Teacher Beliefs - TSES

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the nine responses in the columns on the right side, ranging from (1) "None at all" to (9) "A Great Deal" as each represents a degree on the continuum.

Please respond to each of the questions by considering the combination of your *current* ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your present position.

	None at all		Very Little		Some Degree		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
19. How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Appendix D

Student School Engagement Survey

NCSE | National Center for School Engagement

Student ID Number: _____

Date completed: _____

School: _____

Age: _____

Student Survey

We would like to find out a little more about you and how you feel about school. Your answers to the following questions will help us to do this. It will take you about 15 minutes to complete this survey. If you are unsure of how to answer a question, please answer it as best you can and then write a comment in the margin. All the information you provide is confidential. It will only be used to help us learn about how to keep children interested in completing school.

1. How important do you think...	Very important	Quite important	Fairly important	Slightly important	Not at all important
It is to get good grades?	①	②	③	④	⑤
The things you are learning in school are going to be to you later in life?	①	②	③	④	⑤
It is to attend school every day?	①	②	③	④	⑤

2. How much do you agree with each of the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel close to people at my school.	①	②	③	④
I feel like I belong in my school.	①	②	③	④
I am happy to be at my school.	①	②	③	④
The teachers at my school treat students fairly.	①	②	③	④
I feel safe in my school.	①	②	③	④
I like most of my teachers at school.	①	②	③	④
I am getting a good education at my school.	①	②	③	④
I will fail no matter how hard I try.	①	②	③	④
The discipline at my school is fair.	①	②	③	④
Most of my classes are boring.	①	②	③	④
Most of my teachers care about how I'm doing.	①	②	③	④

I learn a lot from my classes.	①	②	③	④
There is an adult at school that I can talk to about my problems.	①	②	③	④
I respect most of my teachers.	①	②	③	④
School is a waste of my time.	①	②	③	④
Most of my teachers understand me.	①	②	③	④
When I first walked into my school I thought it was good.	①	②	③	④
When I first walked into my school I thought it was friendly.	①	②	③	④
When I first walked into my school I thought it was clean.	①	②	③	④
I come to class prepared	①	②	③	④
I treat my classmates with respect.	①	②	③	④
I complete my work on time.	①	②	③	④
I treat my teachers with respect.	①	②	③	④
I try my best on homework.	①	②	③	④
I follow rules in school.	①	②	③	④

3. How often are the following statements true for you?	**Always/ Almost Always**	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never/ Almost Never**
I follow the rules at school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I get in trouble at school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I feel excited by the work in school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I am interested in the work I get to do in my classes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
My classroom is a fun place to be.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I study at home even when I don't have a test.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I talk with people outside of school about what I am learning in class.	①	②	③	④	⑤

I check my schoolwork for mistakes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
If I don't understand what I read, I go back and read it over again.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Most of my teachers praise me when I work hard.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I try my best at school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I get good grades in school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I enjoy the work I do in class.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I feel I can go to my teacher(s) with the things that I need to talk about.	①	②	③	④	⑤

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

Appendix E

Informed Consent – Minors under 18

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a Doctoral student in the Education Leadership Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Virginia Doolittle as part of my doctoral dissertation concerning student engagement. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research. The goal of the study is to determine how participation in cross disciplinary projects impact student engagement and learning.

The 8th grade team will implement projects that require collaboration and inter-dependence between academic and special area subjects. While participating in the projects, students may be asked to complete surveys or asked questions about the experience. To preserve each child's confidentiality names will not be used to identify individuals on any surveys or interview questions. All data will be reported in terms of group results; individual results will not be reported.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. At the conclusion of the study a summary of the group results will be made available to all interested parents. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (609) 641-3329 x. 1611 or you may contact Dr. Virginia Doolittle at (856)-256-4500 ext.3637. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Horner

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's homeroom teacher by March 1st.

___ I grant permission for my child _____to participate in this study.

___ I do not grant permission for my child _____to participate in this study.

_____ _____

(Parent/Guardian signature (Date)

Appendix F

Student Focus Group Questions

Improving Student Engagement in the Holloway Middle School: Its impact on academic learning and sustained change.

Good afternoon. I would like to thank you for taking the time to join me to discuss your experiences in the multidisciplinary project. This focus group is part of data collection for my dissertation. Through my action research dissertation I hope to learn more about your thoughts on collaboration and multidisciplinary projects and how we can continue to improve your experiences in the Holloway Middle School. This should take approximately 30 minutes and I invite you to speak openly and freely. As we proceed with this discussion, I will serve as the moderator and will record your comments both in writing and electronically. Please know that your comments will be confidential and no record is being kept of your identities.

The purpose of this focus group is to get honest feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of the multidisciplinary project and how it might be improved. I am also looking to learn about your beliefs regarding learning and collaboration. Before we begin, are there any questions? OK, let's begin.

1. In what ways, if any has participation in the multidisciplinary project had an impact on you?

2. How could the project be improved in the future?

3. Do you believe in general that participation in the project enhanced your learning? Why or why not?

4. How could the school better enhance your learning experiences?

5. What role does collaboration and cooperative learning play in your learning? In the multidisciplinary projects?

6. Do you believe that other grade levels would benefit from participation in multidisciplinary projects? If so why?

7. Is there anything else I should know related to your participation in the multidisciplinary project?