8-2015

One Instructional Leadership Team's Journey through a Professional Learning Cycle

Elizabeth A. England

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss

Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons

One Instructional Leadership Team's Journey through a Professional Learning Cycle

Elizabeth England

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G McGaw Graduate School

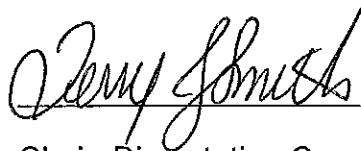National College of Education

National Louis University

August, 2015

One Instructional Leadership Team's Journey through a Professional Learning Cycle

Elizabeth England

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Approved:

Jerry Smith
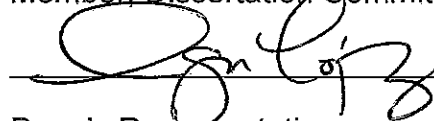
Chair, Dissertation Committee
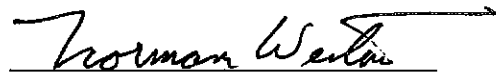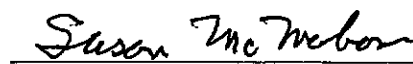
Norman Weston

Program Director

Deni Spinella

Member, Dissertation Committee

Susan Mc Mahon
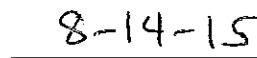
Director, Doctoral Programs

Jack Denny

Member, Dissertation Committee

[signature]

Dean, National College of Education

[signature]

Dean's Representative

8-14-15

Date Approved

ABSTRACT

Schools often set a large number of goals, making it difficult to plan, support, monitor, and match strategic levers in a systematic way. This study narrates the actions and findings of one instructional leadership team as they implement an eight week cycle of professional learning around a single focus. Scripted observations of teachers and students, achievement data, student work samples, as well as exit slips with action items recount the team members' perspectives and experiences. The team chronicled its journey, which proved to be one of inquiry, trial and error, reflection and retooling. The study closes with highlighting the changes in both teachers' instructional practices and school-wide improvement systems, the challenges and benefits, and the researcher's interpretations and implications for school staffs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their time and patience as I writing of this dissertation.

- My chair, Dr. Terry Jo Smith, for accepting my time management style and always providing constructive and encouraging feedback. I appreciate your "mom" stories, belief in this important work, and understanding.
- My mom, dad, brother, best friend Tracy, and grandparents, for always pushing me to the finish line and for their unconditional love and confidence in me. Mom, thank you for babysitting too!
- My husband, Kourtney, my son, Kamden, and Grandma Cherron for managing life so I could complete this task. You all came along when I was almost done and completely delayed this process, but I would not change a thing. I am so thankful for you. Thank you Grandma for telling everyone that I am a "Doctor."
- My mentor, Herald "Chip" Johnson, for inspiring me more than you will ever know. Your dedication to making others strong and your leadership and faith will always resonate with me. I love witnessing your passion and how you interact with our students. Thank you for always being yourself, my friend, and my boss.
- My original true mentors and teammates, Dr. Little, Toni, Lorraine, Mary, Linda, and Sled, for mentoring me as a young woman. You all gave me the confidence I never had before, believed in me and pushed me. Although we do not work together anymore, "Great teams last forever." I will forever remember each of you for how you make me feel and for taking me under your wings. I am who I am because of you!
- My colleagues in the Chicago Public Schools for inspiring me with their dedication to students and families. Your countless hours and efforts do not go unnoticed.
- My dissertation committee and National Louis University for their mentoring, thought partnering, guidance and support through my coursework and dissertation exploration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure   Page(s)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As an eager student taking undergraduate education courses, I believed I would be prepared for teaching upon completion of my program. Once in my own classroom, I struggled with trying to understand and adapt to the complexities of teaching. During my first year of teaching I received limited support and was left to learn by trial and error. Year after year, multiple consultants, administrators, and coaches came in and out of my classroom, observed my instruction, and provided contradictory feedback. Although I made an effort to always attend professional development sessions and contribute in grade level meetings, I still continued to struggle with making my learning align to my daily instructional practices.

The discrepancy I identified between educational theory, delivery of instruction, and student results prompted me to return to graduate school to obtain a master's degree in reading. Fortunately, the reading pedagogy and best practices that I acquired in my graduate program afforded me a position as a literacy coach. This promotion was not a typical linear move at the school level, but rather a huge switch to the district level where I would support many schools across the city and provide professional development to teachers and principals. It wasn't until I observed in numerous classrooms and met with varied-ability level teachers, that the interconnectedness of teaching and learning truly became clear to me.

Working alongside teachers and viewing their actions and decisions through an instructional lens, my overall concern and observation is that most teachers genuinely believe they are teaching well. Every day I witness teachers assigning and reviewing as opposed to modeling and scaffolding instruction. When debriefing with teachers, many get defensive and sometimes angry. This is where my coaching language and trust building is critical to both my

success and theirs (Bloom, Costagna, Moir, and Warren, 2005). Overall, I noticed school staffs working hard, but there wasn't a process in place to systematize the work. Schools' missions, visions and goals were planned in isolation, not supported, and rarely brought to fruition.

Rationale for Study

The school district I work in estimates that a minimum of 150 million dollars a year is spent on professional development. As an instructional coach, I am responsible for attending some of this professional development as well as providing it. In my role, I aim to use what I observe about the professional development sessions I attend to inform how I deliver information to my colleagues. I try to ensure that the content and processes I plan for are suitable to the needs of my audience, can be taken back for implementation, model best practices, and contain opportunities for reflection. I believe if these issues are not taken into consideration, most in-service ideas will not transfer into the teachers' classroom practices. Over the years I have concluded that the manner in which many workshops are presented often affect why the material does not transfer. In some cases teachers simply just do not know how to incorporate the new thinking, and many administrators do not follow up to monitor the fidelity of implementation.

For the past two years my district has focused on developing Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) at every school to encourage shared decision making and distributive leadership. These teams are comprised of various teachers, staff members, and administrators whose main objectives are to use data and the Common Core State Standards to set goals, create action plans, and monitor progress to ensure students are achieving measureable results.

Their peers, comprised of representative teachers from varied grade bands and departments, elect this school level team and ultimately lead the instructional work in the school. The intent is that all other teachers in the school, such as, grade level, special education, bilingual

or departmental teachers, are linked to an ILT member to ensure that transfer and shared leadership occurs. The critical work of the ILT includes the following: developing the school's plan for instructional improvement and monitoring progress on the plan; learning through the analysis of data about what is and isn't working and making adjustments to school wide improvement strategies; supporting and building the capacity of teacher teams; facilitating two-way communication between the ILT and engages all staff in decision making that advances the school's strategic focus; and engaging in on-going reflection upon its own team processes and effectiveness to take action and improve its functioning. Although there are often multiple teams or committees in a school, this team's main function is to develop and execute a strategic instructional plan.

Every year there are new initiatives, new evaluation frameworks, new curriculum, new principals, new teachers, as well as, changes in central office staff, which can be overwhelming. In this study, I seek to guide and develop a newly formed Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) through a cycle of professional learning. I will strive to be cognizant of teachers' realities and frustrations, help to revitalize their commitment, and focus their attention to increasing student learning at all times. This school- based ILT team and I will engage in a series of recurring professional learning activities. The Framework for Powerful Teaching is an overarching model that utilizes 6-8 week targeted learning cycles. These cycles of inquiry were developed by Targeted Leadership Consulting Company (TLC) and provide a structure to not only gather evidence of implementation, but to also support teachers with a series of inputs along the way. In implementing the Framework, all school improvement efforts, meetings, and professional development are coordinated and connected.

Teachers have all been prepared in some way or another; most receive extensive amounts of professional development, yet what impacts their teaching once they close their classroom doors? As an instructional coach working for a large urban district, I am charged with partnering and guiding these school teams to effectiveness. I am committed to this topic in order to serve as a thought partner while "learning by doing." I seek to explore a team's journey of choosing one "big ticket" instructional practice, supporting it through a cycle, and ultimately seeing growth in student achievement. Five teachers, an administrator and I serving as an Instructional Leadership Team will engage in a series of focus groups, multiple observations of one another, and facilitated discussions to help explore and analyze their teaching and student outcomes. To frame this inquiry, the group of teachers will alter the manner in which they function as a team. Rather than sit through countless isolated and unrelated professional development sessions, this group will utilize a cycle of learning that incorporates professional development into daily school and classroom rhythms (Nelson and Cudiero, 2009). Over the course of one school year, the team will meet weekly for an hour and a half to identify a school wide strategy, and to plan, reflect, and refine the instructional capacity in their school. These sessions will be facilitated by the teachers with guidance and support from the principal and me. Ultimately, the role of the ILT's engagement in this professional learning cycle is for teachers to collaborate and communicate with their peers to essentially develop a school wide focus and professional development plan. With support, school processes will become self-sustaining over time as teachers work with school leadership to impact a single area of instruction.

Research Questions

Schools endure a plethora of goal setting and initiatives from year to year. When meeting with principals, many recite a long list of school-wide foci. When debriefing with teachers,

many exhibit a sense of confusion as to their expectations and how everything fits together. In my own professional development, I happened to come across a model (Nelsen & Cudeiro, 2009) of whole school improvement that I believe could aid and assist me in my role as an instructional coach. Being assigned to multiple schools with various priorities, I needed a method to help focus administrators and teachers.

Figure 1

The Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycle of Professional Learning (Nelsen and

Cudeiro, 2009)
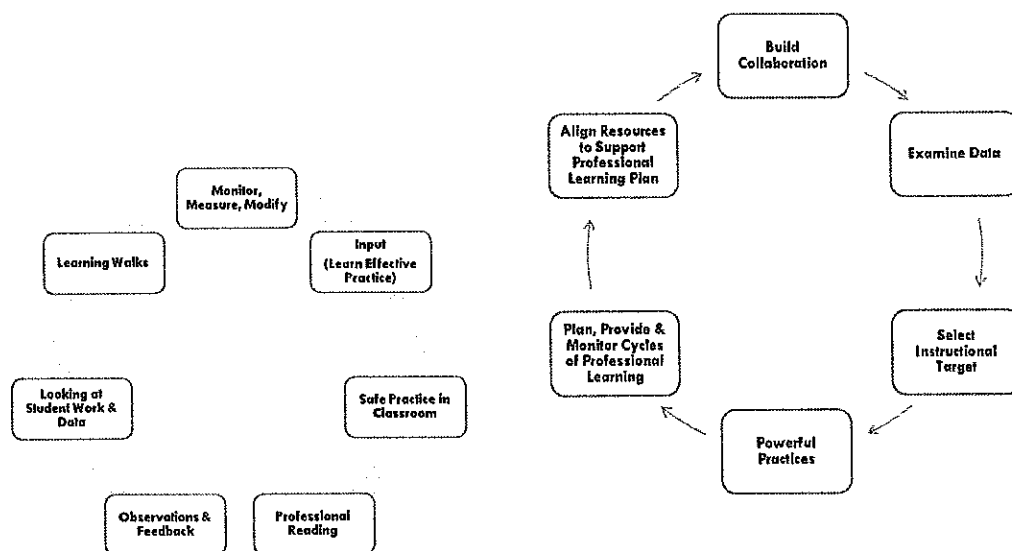
The larger framework (on top) and sub-professional learning cycle (in yellow) require schools to identify, agree, and commit to an annual instructional focus. School teams are then equipped to match accompanying powerful practices as they implement a series of ongoing, intensive eight-week cycles of support and follow up measures. The notion of transfer and following a targeted initiative through to the end prompts the following questions for this study:

1. What does a cycle of professional learning look like and entail when it is lived out collaboratively by a group of teachers?

2. How do teachers' instructional practices change by engaging in and completing a cycle of professional learning?

3. What part(s) of the cycle do teachers find most helpful to their practice?

4. What part(s) of the cycle are the most difficult for teachers to incorporate?

5. How do teachers make sense of this cyclical process?

For the purpose of this inquiry, I will facilitate as a group of teachers build collaboration, examine data, and select a targeted instructional area. Together we will support this focus and strategic practice in a cycle of professional learning. The design will explore how specific stages of the cycle, such as: the inputs, safe practice, aligned professional readings, observations, coaching, feedback, analysis of student work, and targeted learning walks might contribute to the success and change in teaching and student learning. My goal is not to simply understand these facets, but through collaboration, observation, and reflection change teachers' thoughts, planning, and delivery of instruction. Ultimately, I believe this will result in raising student achievement and revitalize teachers' practices.

Problem statement

Based on my experiences observing in hundreds of classrooms, I have concluded that teachers are often unclear about "how and what to teach." With the addition of the new Common Core State Standards and a new Teaching Evaluation System in my district, teacher teams are expected to analyze and examine student outcomes now more than ever. Having clear expectations about what students should know and be able to do and working alongside colleagues to push and probe their thinking is a huge shift. Traditional professional development and school initiatives are nothing new, yet most are never fully implemented. I attribute this to multiple factors: fidelity of training, lack of monitoring, and often an unclear connectedness.

6

Pfeffer and Sutton's (1999) "knowing-doing gap" describes the phenomenon that resonates with educators around the transfer of knowledge into desired student results. In accordance with Joyce and Showers (1996), one time training around a buzz word strategy is not likely to produce a change in implementation. Schools and teams need a structure or systematic way to provide support and fix up along the way. Strategically providing inputs and training, practicing, observing others, reflecting, and refining together through the ownership of a professional learning cycle can lead to increased teacher capacity and student learning.

Impacting Teacher Development through Professional Development

In urban settings, many problems are cited as the cause of limited student achievement. Allington (2005) states that teachers are directly responsible for delivering and ensuring student attainment of content and life-long strategies and skills:

> Recent studies have demonstrated the enormous impact of high-quality classroom instruction... These studies, and others like them, simply point to incredible power of providing children with high-quality classroom instruction... They found that nothing was as powerful as the quality of the teacher in predicting the achievement of children. Neither parents nor the socioeconomic status of the family were as powerful as good instruction in shaping the academic futures of students. (p. 142)

Confirming what we know about the importance of quality teaching, we must examine how teachers learn within their own schools. Drucker (1994) examines the use and acquisition of knowledge and learning in the workplace. With so many variables and factors present during a regular school day, teachers are faced with numerous on-the-spot decisions and actions. Most teaching professionals find a typical day "fraught with surprises" (Shulman, 1999, p. xiii). To engage successfully with these daily surprises and the fluid demands of teaching so that student learning remains paramount, teachers must develop strategies for reflective practice: the analysis of their teaching interactions, questioning, and thoughtful adaptation of teaching methods.

Teachers who can do this with automaticity are more likely to be successful at changing their practice and raising student achievement.

Professional development is a key component for most district and school improvement plans. Therefore, educators have implemented professional development workshops all around the country to increase student achievement and improve classroom instruction (e.g., Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Current professional development practices include collaboration in which participants are actively engaged and sharing ideas (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Thus, many workshops are held locally in order to make use of timely school and student data.

By functioning as an Instructional Leadership Team, teachers are given the opportunity to work collaboratively in a professional learning community primarily focusing on instruction. These teachers take the lead to help refine and develop their colleagues in their respective teacher teams. This notion differs from the traditional top down approach as seen in many schools where the administration makes all of the instructional decisions and disseminates information to the staff. New reform movements require "most teachers to rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never done before" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597). Since professional development activities usually occur during the school day, many teachers complain about not having enough time to carry out their assigned tasks. According to Darling-Hammond (1993):

> Time is rarely available for planning, for working with other colleagues on changes in the school organization, for meeting individually with students or parents, and for working on the development of curriculum or assessment measures -- activities that are not considered part of the teacher's main job. In contrast, teachers in most countries work with large groups of students only 15 to 20 hours per week and spend the other 20 to 30

hours per week working individually with students and parents, planning and consulting with other teachers, and developing curriculum and assessments (p. 756).

Darling- Hammond is calling for administrators to make it a priority and part of their belief system to include additional time for teacher planning and collaboration. In addition to time constraints, Guskey (2000) noted that some teachers perceive professional development activities to be oftentimes ineffective; and therefore merely tolerate them or do not engage in them. Although professional development programs are designed to enhance teachers' instructional strategies with the intent to maximize the possibility of increasing student achievement, the reactions from teachers and results from standardized test scores do not necessarily confirm the effectiveness of professional development programs. Professional development therefore must be planned carefully and should be job embedded to ensure application and transfer. ILTs are essentially becoming the think tank in which training and supports are designed and carried out.

The ILT in this study included five teachers, one administrator, and an instructional coach. The teachers ranged from: a second- year, female social science teacher; a twelfth-year, female reading teacher; a seventh- year, male teacher who was serving as the school counselor at the time; a first- year male Spanish teacher; and a twenty-first- year, female kindergarten teacher. The administrator was in his ninth year and the school had been on probation for the last four years. The team was newly formed this school year and all members were elected by their peers. Two members, the reading teacher and the counselor had served on multiple committees and teams in the past, yet never the Instructional Leadership Team.

Research shows there is increasingly more attention being brought to teachers' attitudes. Teachers' self-efficacy and beliefs are said to shape their professional development choices and their efforts to change (Corson, 1999). How teachers feel about themselves, their practice, and the idea of schooling in general affects the internalization of the presented material. "Teachers

9

enter professional development programs with certain attitudes and behaviors that affect implementation." (Lumpe & Chambers, 2001, p. 93). If they feel they already know the information, if it doesn't apply to them, or if it is simply another mandate, many will show up, disregard the information, and still get paid for attending. Consideration of teacher attitudes is essential to the success of the professional development experience and ensures that classroom implementation will occur (Steyn, 2005). In addition, the satisfaction that teachers experience in their everyday task performance can be related to factors such as job attrition and sense of self-worth (Pillay, Boulton-Lewis, Wilss, & Lankshear, 2003).

The volume of literature on the development of teachers' self-efficacy has grown over the years. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy are likely to be more persistent and restorative (Bandura, 1997). A study by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) found that teachers" efficacy levels have a direct relationship with their actions and performance in the classroom. The authors stated that "efficacy affects the effort teachers invest in teaching, the goals they set, and their level of aspiration" (p. 783). How then can we rethink and attend to teachers' self-efficacy in schools, in professional development sessions, and even in preparation programs?

At a time when teachers are being held to performance management and results-oriented accountability measures, it is paramount to understand how to support educators. Whether it is how effective professional development sessions are, the lack of time, examination of teachers' beliefs, or the lack of proper preparation, teachers must begin to renew their thinking and instructional practices for the betterment of all students. In order to increase student achievement, teachers must discuss and examine ways to increase student learning

10

collaboratively. For this study, I want to affect and change teachers' actions and planning. I feel a need to work with a small group of teachers to choose one change agent and collectively alter the services we provide to students.

Professional Stance

My professional stance is one aspect I have struggled with mainly because it requires, conflicts against, and questions many of my personal qualities. I used to fret about how others perceived me and I doubted my abilities and knowledge. In the beginning of my career, I was the typical forgotten teacher. I witnessed the same staff members called for administrative meetings and allowed further opportunities for growth. All I longed for was to be included and for my voice to be heard. Fortunately, after my fourth year of teaching, I was offered a reading specialist position, not in a school, but in the district office. This nontraditional move caused me to deal with comments and opinions from others due to my position and age. Many in-school specialists wanted to know how I received the job, if I had ever worked at the school-level, and what experience I had due to my young age. At first teachers often viewed me as a spy for the district or their administration. They sometimes resisted the best practices and strategies I had to offer and doubted my competence. I had to pull from my personal stance to find my tough skin in order to stand firm in my instructional decisions and support of district mandates.

When I encountered resistance due to my age or from teachers lacking a "growth mindset," I had to learn not to take it personally and remain committed to my goals. In addition, I built up the courage to take risks and respectfully challenge new ideas and practices. Now my stance has evolved into my inability to accept complacency and to push forward in the flywheel with creative and innovative solutions to help increase teacher and student learning (Collins, 2005).

I was hindered at times when certain words and actions of others made me second guess

my approach and knowledge. In the beginning of my career, I sat back and observed as a

spectator. I tried to learn as much as possible from as many people as possible. I then took what

I learned and transformed into a conversationalist, coupling my thinking with that of others to

adjust and form new conclusions. I would use what I heard combined with what I believed to

put my own twist on things in order to explain my thinking to others. When conversing with

many educational outsiders, I can see times in which I was a storyteller, painting the picture by

using my experiences as truth and providing specific anecdotes for evidence.

My professional world has been influenced by colleagues, theorists, administrators, and

most importantly students. I admire Deborah Meier for her emphasis on trust building, peer

observations, and shared strengths (2002). The ideas of shared strengths and peer observations

are now practices I am committed to as a practitioner and as a researcher. I implement many of

Richard Elmore's instructional rounds theories as a coach and have learned the value of digging

deep into what teachers and students are actually doing (2009). Ultimately, teachers and students

afford me with an abundance of experience and learning opportunities on a daily basis. It is from

them that I have evolved as a person, leader and researcher. Through my reflection and

observations, I am privy to where they are coming from and the needs they hold. This pertinent

information is vital as I aim to be successful at supporting and transforming them.

As an instructional coach, I am drawn to Howard's notions of Rigor, Relationship and

Responsiveness (2006). I have used this transformational approach to help myself, as well as,

teachers and administrators look deeply at teaching and learning to increase student achievement.

The term rigor has been thrown around for years in education, yet many people define and

explain it differently. To instruct rigorously, teachers must first believe ALL students can learn.

They must transition across the continuum and get to know their students' strengths and weaknesses as well as their own in order to find ways to reach and motivate them. To become transformational, educators must continue to be reflective and actively refine their thinking as they go along. They need to seek out additional information, advocate for change, challenge many sacred cows, and collaborate for a broader perspective. Once these actions take place and this new thinking evolves, student achievement will increase.

Values, Beliefs, and Experiences of the Researcher

As a novice teacher and in reform efforts today, I have witnessed the absence of a teacher's voice. This has prompted me to value and become dedicated to learning more about increasing teacher capacity and leadership. I am dedicated to teaching and learning and believe many teachers, just as students, are left behind. My personal experiences of ageism as well as being one of the few non-African American teachers in an 100% African American school have also helped shape my current beliefs and structures around improving teacher leadership. I am now conscious of my critical theorist abilities to question and acknowledge where the true power and values lie (Hinchey, 2010).

In my ten years as an educator, I believe I have traveled a wide spectrum of learning stances and have grown both personally and professionally. The difficult part is intertwining everything and seeing how it all fits with who you are. To provide a little history, in the beginning of my career, I felt isolated and unaware of best practices in teaching and learning. I was offered limited paths to growth as I was rarely given a chance to share concerns or opportunities to grow professionally. I desperately wanted to be heard and to be a part of the decision making group. It was not until I went back to school, gained additional curricular knowledge, and met my mentor that helped me become the leader I am today. My mentor

13

instilled confidence in me and continued to force me to act. She empowered me by knowing how and when to delegate responsibilities. Similar to Meier (2002), my mentor believed in placing people in positions to do the right thing. She valued time and encouraged colleagues to communicate and collaborate. I once heard her say that people do not take time to mentor young people nowadays. As I reflect on that statement, many educators and staff are simply waiting to be challenged or pushed into new thinking and action as I was as a novice teacher. Mentoring and coaching are now practices I am committed to and passionate about.

My current practices include coaching teachers and leaders together in order to build teacher capacity. In correlation with Elmore's instructional rounds, my hopes are to get teachers into as many classrooms as possible to observe, discuss, and support a common practice. Student teaching and occasional peer observations alone are not sufficient. Teachers and leaders need to see a lot of teaching. They need to analyze a lot of student work. We, as educators, must make it priority to study and discuss the teaching we see using all epistemological stances. Looking back, if I knew half of what I know now as a coach, my teaching would have been extremely more thoughtful and targeted.

With data at the forefront of leadership and instruction, I constantly reflect and have committed myself to learning more about the "change" process, school improvement, and building teacher capacity. Sergiovanni (1999) and Donaldson (2006) found that the more skilled the teachers, the more successful a school and its students will be. If teachers are the driving force behind student success, then it is my duty along with administrators to tap into their strengths, reel them in, and together identify instructional goals to increase student achievement. I anticipate this work having a positive effect on students mainly because teachers will discuss and plan their instruction together to ensure their lessons are rigorous, account for all learners,

align to grade expectations, and ultimately exceed state standards. The evidence will show in the actual teaching, student and staff dispositions, samples of student work, and numerically in assessment results. As a whole, student achievement will increase and teacher reflection and collaboration as a professional learning community will evolve.

Acknowledging my own stages of growth has helped me support other teachers and redirect efforts to increasing student achievement. The primary focus of this dissertation is to change teachers' thoughts, planning, and delivery of instruction through collaboration, observation, and reflection. The questions that will guide the inquiry are:

1. What does a cycle of professional learning look like and entail when it is lived out collaboratively by a group of teachers?

2. How do teachers' instructional practices change by engaging in and completing a cycle of professional learning?

3. What part(s) of the cycle do teachers find most helpful to their practice?

4. What part(s) of the cycle are the most difficult for teachers to incorporate?

5. How do teachers make sense of this cyclical process?

To delve deep and truly impact instruction, this research will examine the complexities of teaching and learning as teachers experience challenges and success while engaging in a professional learning cycle. To help understand and change the manner in which teachers think about, plan, and deliver instruction, the cycle will consist of strategic protocols around collaboration, observation, and reflection in order to examine the study's research questions and to provide next steps. The process itself will be implemented using a participatory action research design.

In chapter 2, I will explore how factors such as: the professional leadership and learning cycles, the change process, professional development, professional learning communities, may

help support teaching and student learning. Facilitating this participatory action research with a small group of teachers will provide authentic insight regarding the teaching and learning observed in classrooms. The outcomes will afford the researcher, teachers, and students with the necessary reflections and actions to help change and positively impact student learning.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Teachers work in isolation the majority of the time, meaning they are in their own rooms interacting with students daily with limited supervision and collaboration. How then do they improve, compare, or consult on best practices? According to Marshall (2009), a shared definition of good teaching must be established and articulated in order for teachers to hear and accept feedback and ultimately take ownership for student learning. Through this study, I hope to rally teachers as we develop a professional learning community and challenge each other to rethink current practices and ratchet up our quality of instruction. By convening teachers on an Instructional Leadership Team who possess varied backgrounds, I believe support will organically become differentiated as members of the group commit to and invest in a cycle of professional learning. This action research will be centered upon implementing a framework that will assist teachers in building collaboration, examining data, selecting a targeted instructional area with an accompanying powerful practice, and using classroom based lab sites to practice and align resources. This chapter will examine the literature on the cycle of improvement and factors such as: the change process, adult learning, professional development, and professional learning communities.

Change Process

In a time of rigorous standards for students and high accountability for educators, attention to a teacher's self-efficacy is crucial. Administrators, parents, and communities all want confident and positive teachers in front of students. The expectations and beliefs a teacher possesses can very well translate into the efforts they put forth and the language they utilize with

students in classrooms. My overall concern and observation is that most teachers genuinely believe they are teaching well. Historical reform initiatives have often been examined alongside teachers' practices and overall intentions. The related literature spans from several decades to examine the notion of self-efficacy as a factor influencing teacher effectiveness. From my own experience, as a beginning teacher I truly believed I was doing all that I could to advance the learning of my students. I was working hard, but definitely not as smart as I could have. Once equipped with additional knowledge and skills, I discovered that my newfound attitude and confidence drastically altered the way I planned and delivered high quality instruction to students. These experiences were just the beginning of the change process ahead of me.

Self-efficacy links people's beliefs in their own abilities to their actions. These beliefs can thus impact one's behaviors and affect their tenacity when encountering and coping with challenges. The concept of self-efficacy is said to have originated over 30 years ago when the RAND Corporation conducted teacher surveys on their agreement to posed belief statements (Protheroe, 2008). Henson (2001) suggested powerful effects from a teacher's belief in his or her ability to positively impact student learning is critical to actual success or failure in a teacher's behavior (p.17). Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) link a teacher's self-efficacy to their behaviors, efforts, and goals in the classroom. Self-efficacy is related to one's perception of their competence rather than their actual competence (Tschannen-Moran et al., (1998). In a study by Ware and Kitsantas (2007), teachers reporting high self-efficacy results were more likely to overcome challenges, were more optimistic, gave greater effort, and took responsibility for their teaching and student learning.

Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher (2005) believe eight drivers are keys to create effective and lasting change:

1. Engaging people's moral purposes

2. Building capacity

3. Understanding the change process

4. Developing cultures for learning

5. Developing cultures of evaluation

6. Focusing on leadership for change

7. Fostering coherence making

8. Cultivating tri-level development

They believe you must first have knowledge about the why of change, or the moral

purpose. Moral purpose in education involves the commitment to improving society and citizens

through education and learning. To build capacity, especially organizational capacity, you must

shift the current infrastructure. Implementing the professional learning cycle is one way to

provide and define this infrastructure. Group capacity is difficult because it involves working

together in new ways. In this case, working as an ILT was new. Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher

(2005) believe to make change work, the energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership of all those

implementing is required. They caution that ownership is not available at the beginning of the

change process, yet it is something created through a quality change process. Developing a

culture for learning involves a set of strategies designed for people to learn from each other and

become collectively committed to improvement. Successful change involves learning during

implementation. By developing a culture of evaluation, I believe schools can analyze multiple

data sets on an ongoing basis, enabling teachers to use the information for action planning and

next steps. In the Cycle of Professional Learning, these are all seen through the peer visits,

coaching, and learning walk components. The focus on leadership for change is evident in the

Instructional Leadership Team's development and cycle work because here the principal isn't the dictator. They are instead a facilitator who fosters innovativeness and decision making in others. Fostering coherence is clear in the cycle because it shows how the strategies and the process of improvement are all interconnected.

To learn how teachers interpreted their situations and justified their practices, Kennedy (2004) used an interview strategy, which included videotaping lessons and having both teachers and researchers view the tapes in which specific moments were selected to discuss. The interviews investigated how the teachers interpreted their actions and decisions while teaching, as well as the beliefs and values that influenced their thinking as events unfolded throughout their lesson. The results showed that teachers and observers often perceive things differently. Teachers explained how and why they did or did not choose to implement suggested reform ideas or see the value in the practices once in the act of teaching and once real life issues arose (2004). This phenomenon has great implications for administrators and teacher leaders as they seek ways to develop colleagues and ensure professional development and new learning transfers into daily teaching practice and increased pedagogy. Leaders and teachers must calibrate around what good teaching looks like as well as take into account how dynamics change once students are engaged in classrooms.

In *Change Leader*, Fullan argues that practitioners need focus, coherence, and persistence-resources one will find in themselves (2011). Fullan's idea that practice is a powerful tool for change in rooted in his beliefs that multiple approaches and experimentation lead to new learning. Rather than try to figure out or act upon others' theories, he recommends using practice to get at theory and to discover strategies that work for the individual (2011).

Effective leadership is shared and crucial to the success of an organization. To receive buy-in and sustainability, leadership must include creating or rebuilding customs that are grounded in collaboration and trust. Leaders have to be steadfast at motivating and lifting the expertise of others as well. Due to the fact that schools in general are incredibly complex organizations, leadership must maintain their focus on teaching and learning, empower teachers as real instructional leaders, shift the culture, and provide significant support (Pitcher and Nelsen, 2010). "There is so much going on all the time that it is easy to fall into a pattern of being ruled by the "tyranny of the urgent," and responding to what's most important right now (2010)." By forming an instructional leadership team (ILT), schools can begin to hone in on real instructional issues and create a sense of ownership, dialogue, and dedication around what's important to them.

Deutschmann (2009) believes when you walk the walk, you demonstrate what comes first, share in the struggle and risk, gain first-hand experience, and ultimately learn more about the issue. Every moment offers an up close opportunity to teach, train, and lead all while others learn from the steps you take. Leaders must be present as learners and have their boots on the ground (Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin 2010). Change leaders use more group learning than anything else. Once capacity reaches a certain level, its peers become the main source of innovation. The establishment of new practices and experiences galvanizes passion. This is the essence of the change leader- the capacity to generate energy and passion in others through action (Fullan, 2011). Leaders then both guide the process and learn from the dynamics.

Although creating collaboration is critical to ensure effective leadership and change, teams must be mindful that clarity is everything. The ultimate purpose of the work has to be crystal clear as does the objectives of the organization as a whole (Wageman et all, 2008).

Therefore, coaches and teacher leaders alike must take on a systems leader point of view to ensure structures are organized to create, develop, and sustain the conditions for instructional improvements on all levels (Fullan & Knight, 2011).

Professional Development

In my eleven years in a large urban public school system, it has been my observation that our district often allocates large amounts of resources and time to professional development. Without the proper follow-up and support, many of the practices learned or acquired in professional development sessions do not transfer with fidelity into teacher practice (Schmoker, 2006). So how do professional development structures and processes affect teachers' knowledge, practice, student achievement, and even efficacy? Issues and questions of fidelity have plagued the education world for some time. Schmoker (2006) states that initiatives are often thrown out altogether or halted mostly because professionals aren't implementing them exactly the way they were meant to be. Sometimes the professional development objectives are not connected to timely student data or even a school-wide goal, which in turn does not then get supported nor monitored.

When teachers feel educational research is disconnected to their practice, they are less likely to think the knowledge is useful (Kennedy, 1997). With regard to reform initiatives around teaching, Kennedy believes that the kinds of problems teachers actually are facing could possibly be different from the kinds of problems researchers are trying to resolve. Kennedy investigated why many reform ideals have failed. One explanation was that these practices could be unrealistic in everyday teaching. The types of changes in practice require more time and energy than teachers in reality actually have; and the ideals often conflicted with each other. For example, teachers tend to refrain from intellectual engagement because they believe that

initiatives will go away and that they must maintain lesson momentum in order to cover a prescribed content (Kennedy, 2005).

Professional learning was more likely to improve student learning outcomes if it increased teachers' understanding of content, how students learned the content, and how it was presented in meaningful ways (Cohen & Hill, 2000). Elmore (2009) maintains that if professional development is not rooted in the instructional core centered on the interrelationship between students, teachers, and content, then it will not have a significant impact on achievement. Active learning on the part of the teacher as well as being provided with feedback and modeling are vital components of professional learning (Joyce & Showers, 1982). Hawley and Valli's (1999) research indicated that examining student work collaboratively was a critical part of an effective professional learning program. In addition, Fullan's (1982) notion of follow-up support was cited as an important, yet often neglected feature.

Battey and Franke (2008) attempted to better understand the dilemmas and choices teachers face in making use of learned practices. They sought to answer how professional development can be rethought to allow teachers to make sense of their knowledge, skills, and identities in relation to classroom standards. A teacher's identity was also examined as a way to help document, analyze, and understand teacher learning and classroom practice.

Relevant literature concurs that despite the frequency and dominance of professional development in schools, there is variability in implementation and limited research has been concluded on how professional development makes its way into the classroom (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Even when teachers participate in high quality in-services, there still remains a large and often undocumented variability in how teachers make use of the new ideas (Kazemi, 2004). Focusing on identity as a part of learning has enabled these researchers to view teacher learning as

both situated in practice and as an integrated, complex system embedded in the structures, histories, and cultures of schools. This construct of identity helps in understanding why professional development can look differently as teachers embrace new ideas and incorporate them into their daily practices. Identity is shaped by the knowledge and skills we acquire and shapes the knowledge and skills we seek to develop. So identity does not sit separately from knowledge and skills; acquiring new knowledge and skills play a critical role in reshaping identity (Franke & Kazemi, 2001).

Involvement in a community of practice can often lead to the development of a newfound identity. Professional development can be identified as a space and time for acquiring new knowledge, re-crafting identities, and challenging existing cultural and social practices. As teachers share experiences and engage in the work during these sessions, they situate themselves and their narratives to define their roles. Through their opinions, reflections, and pushback we gain a sense of their identity, how they view themselves in relation to teaching, to the content, to students, and to the community.

According to Borko (2004) and Darling-Hammond (2000), quality professional development can change teachers' practices and positively affect student learning. Professional development should be anchored in teachers' reality, sustained over time, and aimed at creating peer collaboration (Chan & Pang, 2006; Richardson, 2003).

Many reform initiatives, school improvement plans, and action items invest heavily in professional development as a means of ensuring that the teaching is consistent with the vision of the organization. Although research highlights qualities of effective professional development, there is little research about how it is incorporated in teachers' curriculum and instruction and how organizations use professional development to implement their vision of schooling, while

building new knowledge about teaching and learning (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Many

teachers report changes in their practice following professional development, but to what degree

is unknown exactly (Cohen, 1990; Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry & Hewson, 2003;

Weiss & Pasley, 2006). Districts, leaders, and schools place emphasis on professional

development as a strategy for organizational success, but they must guarantee their programs

embody distinct aspects that will affect teaching and learning: coaching, training, extended time

devoted to learning new content and pedagogy, and opportunities for reflection with peers

(Killion, 1999).

Professional development choices and expectations should be intentional, communicated

to stakeholders, tied to some form of data, and followed up on. Often it is common language

used to articulate and bridge the desired outcomes to the implications on the instructional core in

the classroom that makes a teacher in-service successful. Administrators and teacher teams must

collaborate and communicate to ensure these sessions are differentiated and support is provided.

Job-embedded safe practice with support from colleagues and administration is crucial to the

improvement of one's instruction. This input or training can best be supported and developed

amongst colleagues when a culture of collaboration is the norm.

Adult Learning

The ongoing coursework and workshops teachers and leaders take rarely address the

adult learning curve and ways to support adult learners. Kegan's (2000) principles of

constructive development theory helps to explain the ways in which learners make sense of their

experiences (as cited in Drago-Severson, 2009). His theory aims at explaining how adults

respond differently and therefore require varying types of support. Kegan sees development as a

dynamic, lifelong, interactive process between the person and the environment (in Drago-

Severson, 2009). Drago-Severson (2008) believes educators must be cognizant of developmental diversity in order to understand and attend to the different ways of learning. She suggests a learning-oriented model of leadership that encompasses the three different ways of knowing: the instrumental, the socializing, and the self-authoring. This model helps explain one's beliefs about their role and responsibilities as a teacher, leader, and learner. Just as teachers must know their students in order to meet their needs, administrators should come to know and learn how the adults in their building learn best too. Teachers who have an instrumental way of knowing tend to follow rules and feel supported when provided with specific actions and procedures. These learners thrive when placed in groups when exposed to multiple perspectives to help shape their beliefs. Learners that possess a socializing way of knowing often value reflection and validation. They typically need to share and clarify their beliefs before sharing out in a large group setting. Adults with a self-authoring way of knowing can assess other people's expectations and demands and compare them to their own internal standards and judgments. These learners need an environment that challenges them to see other perspectives.

Drago-Severson (2008) proposes four pillar practices to support adults with different ways of knowing. Each practice centers on adult collaboration and creates opportunities to engage in reflective practice as a tool for professional and personal growth. The four pillars are:

1. Teaming

2. Providing leadership roles

3. Collegial inquiry

4. Mentoring

These pillars are evident in the intent and structures of both Instructional Leadership Teams and the Professional Learning Cycles. The ILT and Cycle provide a safe environment for different types of learners to engage in true discussion and inquiry about student learning. By assigning roles and responsibilities to all members of the team, school administrators inherently distribute leadership. Mentoring and peer coaching take form as teachers collaborate to observe one another and provide feedback for reflection.

Teams as Professional Learning Communities

As national leaders and educators search and grapple with reform initiatives, the concept of collaboration and communication amongst staffs has received growing attention. The "professional learning community" model has thus become a way of life and common practice for many educators and schools recently. In the professional learning community (PLC), student achievement is the priority as staffs collectively put their heads together to ask questions, acknowledge challenges, create solutions and designate resources to improve student outcomes. Payne (2008) agrees that one of the main impediments to improving instruction is due in part to teacher isolation from one another and even reformer isolation. In order to enhance teaching and learning capacity, schools can build a professional learning community that is rooted in a shared purpose, collaboration, and collective responsibility (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37). Wenger and Snyder's (2000) "communities of practice" help focus teachers and administrators work by accepting roles to assist in developing capacities, building and sharing information, transferring best practices, and solving "problems of practice." Deborah Meier (2002) contends that building relationships based on trust is a key component of school improvement in which one person's strength often becomes a shared strength.

In the book *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools,* Dufour et al. (2008) defined professional learning communities as:

"Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators (p. 14)."

The Dufours et al (2006) present the most common PLC framework and its six components as:

- a focus on learning;

- a collaborative culture stressing learning for all;

- collective inquiry into best practice;

- an action orientation (learning by doing);

- a commitment to continuous improvement; and

- a focus on results.

Schmoker (2006) believes professional learning communities have emerged as arguably the best, most agreed-upon means by which to continuously improve instruction and student performance (p.106). He prefers PLCs over traditional staff development and workshops. True learning communities encourage the "experts among us" to recognize and share the best of what they already know opposite to workshops that fail to follow up and adjust instruction (Schmoker, 2006). PLCs involve developing communities of learners in which teachers and school leaders work together to improve the learning conditions and results of students (Fullan, 2006). Once teams stop "doing" professional development and begin to live as a true learning community, teachers can then take ownership for their practice and begin to examine processes and procedures that can help them get there.

Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycles of Professional Learning

School leaders are often expected to engage in numerous goal setting and planning sessions every year. In my experience, when asking principals what their school wide focus is or what have they really been investing in, I often hear a laundry list of initiatives, foci, or get handed multiple templates and checklists. Many are not very adept at having or sharing their "30 second elevator pitch."

"An elevator speech is a short (15-30 second, 150 word) sound bite that succinctly and memorably introduces you. It spotlights your uniqueness. It focuses on the benefits you provide. And it is delivered effortlessly. (retrieved Jan 7, 2012 from http://www.dalekurow.com/elevator_speech)."

Just as teachers are expected to have a clear teaching objective for every lesson, with checks for understanding, adjustments, and assessments- schools too should have an elevator speech that provides a clear focus for improvement, supports, and checks and balances. This is where the majority of work actually begins. Schools, leaders, and teachers are all trying to do or accomplish too much and therefore do not do any one thing well. According to Schmoker (2006), the mirage of school improvement planning ensues. "Schools and districts get lost in strategic planning" (p. 34). When committing to these weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly planning templates "fragmentation, overload, and failure is guaranteed (Fullan, 1996, p. 420 as cited in Schmoker-Results Now, 2006). Collins observes that such plans ensure that organizations become "scattered and diffused, moving on many levels"- doomed to "pursue many ends at the same time" (2001a, p. 91). The aligning of thinking, practicing, support, and reflection included in a professional learning cycle seeks to overcome this challenge and push educators to shift to a common focus. In the book, *Simplexity: Why Simple Things Become Complex (And How Complex Things Can Be Made Simple)*, Kluger (2008) calls leaders to

choose a small amount of core priorities to pursue by building capacity in a nonjudgmental climate and establish a transparent learning relationship between practice and results.

Nelsen and Cudeiro (2009) hope to parallel adult learning with that of student learning as they describe a professional learning model as repeated cycles of learning sessions lasting six to eight weeks linked with supports such as observation and coaching, professional readings, the analysis of student work, peer observations, and focused walkthroughs. Joyce and Showers (2002 as cited in Nelsen and Cudeiro) agree that these supports are necessary for effective learning to take place. Elmore believes these actions around a selected "problem of practice" have the potential to move a school and teachers toward coherence and tighter coupling making a study common across the school (as cited in Nelsen and Cudeiro, 2009). The model includes repeated cycles so leaders and teachers learn the process of continued and supported learning and begin to conduct business differently. In this cyclical structure, there are multiple learning opportunities that include: time for safe practice, opportunities to observe colleagues, feedback, professional reading support, peer discussion, data and student work analysis, as well as constant measuring, monitoring, and modifying all around a specific and agreed upon focus.

Figure 1

The Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycle of Professional Learning (Nelsen and Cudeiro, 2009)
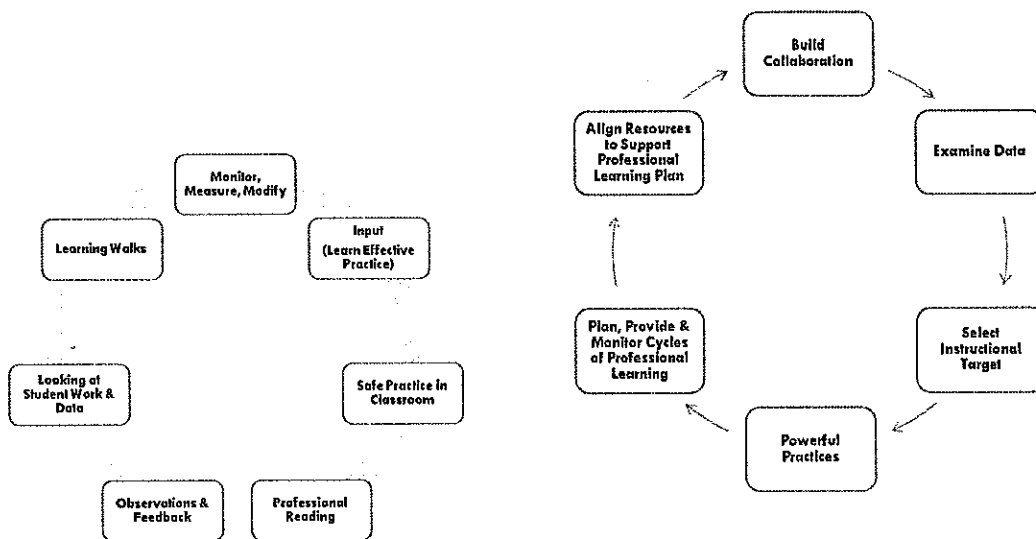
Summary

The goal of professional learning communities, change initiatives, and any cycle for improvement is to develop shared leadership that includes building and often rebuilding a culture of collaboration. Administrators must work alongside teachers in order to create and foster teacher and student growth. An effective leader knows how to: build trust, bank on expertise, convene others around data, target specific instructional practices, examine student work, align resources, and partner with families and communities.

To be transparent with alignment, structures in schools should be cyclical and anticipated by all to ensure objectives are related in order for practices to be implemented with fidelity. Tapping into teachers' strengths and empowering them to take on leadership roles, assists in the change process and transforms one's self efficacy. Being inclusive and choosing a few powerful practices together allows for ownership and change to evolve organically through dialogue and

reflection. Having a process that measures professional development choices, training, and other inputs and expectations that are intentional, communicated, urgent, and followed up on are the quickest way to see results. Often times it is the common language used to articulate and bridge the desired outcomes to the implications on the instructional core in the classroom that makes teaching and learning successful.

This chapter reviewed current research in five areas: the change process; professional development; adult learning; teams as professional learning communities; and the Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycles of Professional Learning. The focus of this research project is the observation and documentation of a team of educators as they live through and reflect upon a focused whole school improvement structure.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

In order for true change to occur, instructional leadership, professional development, and

teaching all must be relevant, responsive and constantly evolving in context. Practice, support,

and reflection when instituted and examined in a cyclical fashion can lead to insightful

professional learning. This particular case study's bounded autonomy will chronicle a group of

instructional leaders as we engage in an eight-week professional learning cycle. As a participant

and facilitator, this action research will inform both my own learning as well as the teams' as we

continue to build and live as a professional learning community. The questions guiding this

research are:

1. What does a cycle of professional learning look like and entail when it is lived out collaboratively by a group of teachers?

2. How do teachers' instructional practices change by engaging in and completing a cycle of professional learning?

3. What part(s) of the cycle do teachers find most helpful to their practice?

4. What part(s) of the cycle are the most difficult for teachers to incorporate?

5. How do teachers make sense of this cyclical process?

I will co-facilitate, serve as a probing thought partner, and participate in the professional

learning alongside an instructional leadership team (ILT) from a school I am currently assigned

to as an instructional coach. This team is comprised of an administrator and 5 teachers

representing various grade bands and one content area in a K-8 school on Chicago's south side.

As an equal contributor on the team, I hope to capture the learning experience and specify

implications for teacher and student practice.

Context

I have been an instructional coach for a network of thirty elementary schools in Chicago

for six years. In a large, urban, and political district that contains over six hundred schools, one

can only imagine how many times my job title, assigned schools, and supervisors have changed

over the years. The constant expectation though for me and others in my role has always been to

lift the instructional capacity of teachers and administrators across varied performing schools and

neighborhoods.

After years of being a mediocre teacher myself and observing and reflecting with

hundreds of overwhelmed teachers, I realized most are working hard, but grapple with

understanding how to connect their learning to practice. All of my assigned schools had teams in

place, but most were not high functioning or adept at choosing and sticking to a school-wide

focus. I finally came across a researched based model in my own professional development that

I strongly felt could aid and assist teams of educators as they sought to refine and hone their

craft. This framework and cycle of professional learning requires teachers and leaders to

approach improvement differently by investigating something important, pulling from the

collective expertise around them, and using specific processes and procedures as checks and

balances.

It has been my observation that many staff development days and meetings are full of

information, but lack time actually dedicated to delving deep into instructional areas. I believe

schools could benefit from coordinating their efforts around a single area of instruction. First

cultivating strong teams and professional learning communities in order to foster trust and

collegiality is essential. The initial phase in the professional learning cycle is to build

collaboration, therefore, my entry plan will require me to assess and get a sense of how the

34

instructional leaders actually function as a team. Once I am familiar with the team's overall "culture," I will be better equipped to support them. How the ILT operates will dictate whether or not we need to infuse effective team practices into our work as we identify an instructional focus and commit to a framework for improvement.

Participants

My sample was somewhat strategic. I identified Taylor School-which recently dropped from "tier 2" status to "tier 3" status. In our district, schools are ranked a 1, 2, or 3 according to overall achievement and growth measures set by district metrics. Higher performing schools are ranked a 1, whereas the lowest are ranked a 3. These rankings are based on a combination of metrics including: student growth, student attainment, overall attendance, and school survey results. After an initial conversation with the principal, I determined that this particular school would be an ideal candidate for the study because it represents a common conundrum. The school had multiple teams in place, some that met frequently, several which focused on instruction, and some that tended to meet more about organizational issues in regards to agenda items. One challenge I noticed immediately is that the various teams and leadership rarely created and followed through on action items. At this time, the school was desperate to turn things around and get off probation.

The administrator and I agreed that the focus of our work together would be strictly with the instructional leadership team. This team would serve as our vehicle for whole school reform. The team members participating would learn and plan together in order to take knowledge and skills back to their grade or course-alike colleagues. I would participate as a member of the team and try to bring coherency through the use of the professional learning cycle. Rather than build a team from scratch by allowing teachers to nominate their peers or volunteer, this team was

35

already identified early in the school year by the principal. The team consisted of: the principal, a 1st grade teacher, a 4th grade teacher, an upper grade language arts teacher who teaches 6th-8th grades, the bilingual specialist, and an intermediate special education teacher. The teachers on the team represented various grade bands and specialty areas, but not all content subjects.

Taylor school and their ILT were ideal for this cycle work mainly because the team was eager to get back on track instructionally and willing to learn and grow professionally. In addition, I had an initial coaching relationship established with them already.

Methods

This study will follow an instructional leadership team through a cycle of professional learning using qualitative methods. My hope for this inquiry is that it fosters reflection and commitment by everyone involved to help improve their practice (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). Creswell (2005) describes qualitative research as an approach to inquiry that is useful to explore and understand a common phenomenon. As a bounded case study, participatory action research methodology will guide our team as we undergo observations and weekly focus groups to give insider understanding on our experiences, reactions, and refinements. Data collection therefore will be in the form of observation notes, journaling, action plans and exit slips after each meeting, and session recordings.

Case studies draw attention to what specifically can be learned from a single case (Stake, 2000). In this particular instance, I will be drawing upon the conversations, actions, and changes that occur during this team's inquiry. According to Stake, this type of research is an "instrumental case study" due to the fact that we are collectively gaining insight, advancing our understanding, and drawing generalizations of how effective the cycle is in our everyday teaching and learning (2000). Briggs and Coleman describe it as an evaluative case- which sets

36

out to explore an educational program, system, project or event in order to focus on its worthwhileness (2007). As a qualitative researcher, this case will be bounded to the execution of our "phenomena." The "phenomena," in this instance, is the team's engagement in the professional learning cycle. I will seek patterns of data and triangulate key observations, and ultimately develop generalizations based on my interpretations (Stake, 2000).

Since case studies are not a methodological choice, but rather a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2000), I am electing to engage in participatory action research in order to study this case. I have chosen a qualitative action research design in hopes that the discussion data from focus groups, classroom observations, and probing questions will assist in changing teachers' thoughts and behaviors. I envision these methods not only answering my research questions, but also altering the daily actions and practices of the teacher leaders.

Kemmis and McTaggart have identified three attributes often used to differentiate participatory research from conventional research (2000). The first is shared ownership. The members of the instructional leadership team in this study have all agreed to dedicate their efforts to living out this cycle of improvement for their own learning. The second is community-based analysis of the problems. As a team, we anticipate that the process will be messy and we welcome the challenges to help us learn and grow as professionals. The last attribute is an orientation toward community action. Our goal in this practice is to determine if this cycle positively influences our practice so that we in turn may assist in developing our colleagues in teacher teams. In theory, participatory action research requires participants to take the construction and reconstruction of their reality into their own hands, knowing that they are not alone, and taking an active role in changing it (2000). This type of research frequently emerges when people want to make changes thoughtfully, after critical reflection. It emerges when

people want to think realistically about where they are now, how things came to be that way, and from these starting points, how, in practice, things might be changed (p.573)."

Participatory action research or "insider research" is also said to involve a spiral of self-reflective cycles of: planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, reflecting on the processes and consequences, and then re-planning, acting, and observing, reflecting, and so on (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Similar to the cycle of professional learning, the stages of action research may overlap and success will not be measured by how strict the steps are followed, rather by whether the participants gain a strong and genuine sense of development and evolution in their practices, understandings, and situations. The seven key factors of this type of research include:

1. Participatory action research is a social process.

2. Participatory action research is participatory.

3. Participatory action research is practical and collaborative.

4. Participatory action research is emancipatory.

5. Participatory action research is critical.

6. Participatory action research is recursive.

7. Participatory action research aims to transform both theory and practice (2000).

Action research aims to explore practice. Since participatory action research is heavily grounded in collaboration, social and didactic dynamics will play a major part in our learning. Our weekly instructional leadership team meetings will serve as focus groups in which we will examine data to identify and agree upon an annual school-wide target with accompanying eight week practices that are meaningful and important. Qualitative data instruments will consist of tape-recorded focus groups, observation templates, participant journals, and researcher field

notes. These tools will help document discussion that stems from our selection of powerful practices, analysis of student work and achievement data, as well as our debrief conversations following our learning walks. The group sessions will be tape-recorded and scripted using field notes in order to capture trends and implications of the cycle on our practice. Close analysis of the participants' views, dialogue, and understandings will guide our work and help us make sense of the findings and reflections during our time together. This cyclical school-wide and teacher action research coupled with the spiraling nature of the actual professional learning model is directly tied to the instructional core as we hope to positively impact the classroom and students.

Summary

Despite all of the curriculum, leadership, and initiative changes in our district, a school's instructional leadership team and I are striving to determine if adhering to a professional learning cycle will help focus our efforts to improve instruction. Collectively we agreed that a system needed to be in place to efficiently identify, support and monitor our progress. This study will focus on one school's team, or case, in order to commit to an action research method of participating in a cycle of inquiry. The action research design and the work the team will actually engage in are both cyclical processes. Transforming thinking and procedures to get educators to act routinely in this way will provide us with new insight and evidence around teaching and learning.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Framework for Powerful Results and a Cycle of Professional Learning in Action

Introduction

Superintendents, principals, politicians, community members, parents, and teachers all seek the magic solution to accomplishing whole school reform. As an instructional coach, I dreamed of having a framework that would guide school leaders' and teachers' actions towards increased student achievement. To me, the Framework for Powerful Results and its Cycles of Professional Learning seemed to hold promise for providing both the structure and supports necessary to unify staff around a single focus and ultimately raise student achievement. To try and understand this framework through implementation, I strategically selected a school whose scores had been declining, yet one whose faculty and administration were still eager and motivated to find solutions. The school's Instructional Leadership Team and I would partner to implement a year- long overarching Framework and an eight week Cycle of professional learning. The six-member team was comprised of teachers from various grade bands and subjects as well as administration and support personnel. This group of educators was tasked with collaborating weekly, devising protocols to analyze data and student work, and taking best practices and instructional support back to their teacher teams. The Framework and Cycle helped to coordinate professional development and adult learning efforts school wide. In order to understand how this was enacted in one particular school, my research investigated the following questions:

1. What does a cycle of professional learning look like and entail when it is lived out collaboratively by a group of teachers?

2. How do teachers' instructional practices change by engaging in and completing a cycle of professional learning?

3. What part(s) of the cycle do teachers find most helpful to their practice?

4. What part(s) of the cycle are the most difficult for teachers to incorporate?

5. How do teachers make sense of this cyclical process?

In this chapter, I describe the process involved when implementing the "Professional Learning Framework" and a "Cycle of Professional Learning." I will narrate a week-by-week account through an eight-week cycle implemented by an Instructional Leadership Team. As a researcher and facilitator, I collected data in various forms. I scripted my observations of both students and teachers in classrooms, as well as observations of staff interactions in ILT meetings. I compiled student level data in the form of work products and achievement data. I also collected all of the next steps that were identified in each week's action plans, conducted individual interviews, and tallied exit slip responses after each meeting.

The foundation of the Framework and Cycle is change. The cycle seeks to affect change in both teacher practice and in student tasks. These changes are supported overtime and then tracked to determine if there is ultimately increased student achievement. Collectively, as a team we were looking for impact and implementation of our goals. Prior to beginning, I knew that establishing a strong team structure and a culture of shared leadership and trust was critical in order to examine data, plan, provide, and monitor instruction. My goal in seeing a Cycle through to the end was to have a school commit to a common instructional focus and provide the proper support and monitoring along the way in order to see true changes in both teacher and student practices. Chapter 5 will detail the results from my second research question regarding how teachers' instructional practices changed due to implementing the cycle. Chapter 6 includes descriptions of what teachers found helpful and challenging as well as how they made sense of the entire process. In chapter 7, I will illustrate how I made sense of this course of action as a

researcher and narrate the lessons learned in terms of future implications for school leaders, coaches, teams, and teachers.

Figure 1

Targeted Leaderships' Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycles of Professional Learning (Nelsen & Cudeiro, 2009)
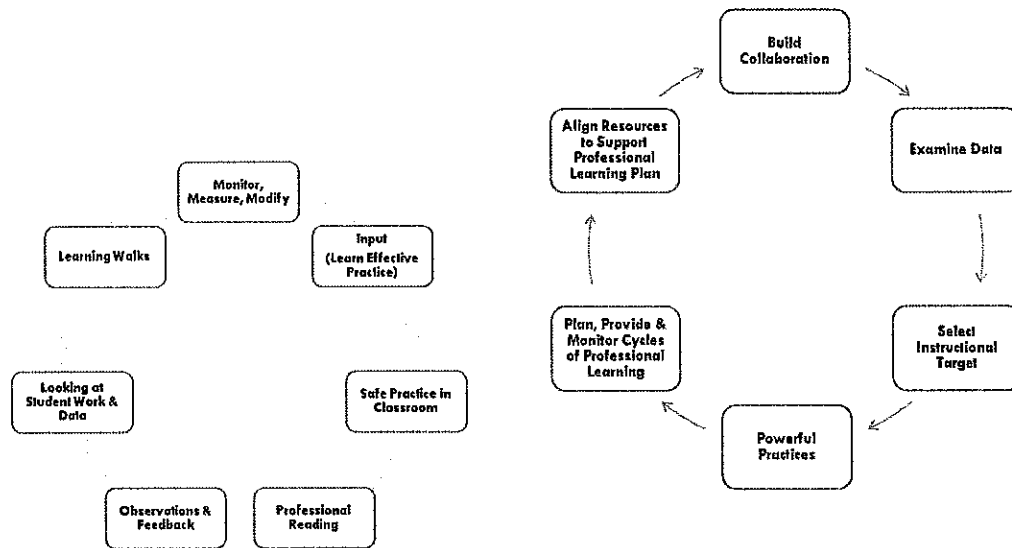
Below I will explain how both diagrams above are part of an interrelated process. An Instructional Leadership Team must choose and commit to this ideology to help initiate and sustain change. The white diagram is the overarching "Framework for Powerful Results" and the yellow components are part of the actual "Cycles of Professional Learning." Together, an Instructional Leadership team is implementing these processes. The recurring structure of the Cycles of Professional Learning is what I am researching in this study, although it is contingent upon the Framework. The team and I had to do a lot of work upfront with the Framework before we could even begin a Cycle. We lived

42

through one of these cycles for 8 weeks, but the entire process took almost an entire semester of the school year.

The six components of the Framework for Powerful Results

1. **Build Collaboration-** an Instructional Leadership Team is formed that represents all staff groups, deals only with instructional issues, receives training as a team, guides the school through the Framework, and facilitates other teacher teams at the school.

2. **Examine Data-** teams analyze standardized and local measures, set SMART goals, determine if data is actionable, engage all staff, teach the data for understanding, use protocols for analysis, and select a Targeted Instructional Area

3. **Select a Targeted Instructional Area (TIA)-** one thing the school hopes to do better, is based on data, engages all staff (teachers in every grade level, subject, specialty, and support staff), is measureable, is representative of students' needs, improves instruction, is clear and easy to communicate, encompasses standards, objectives, and benchmarks, can guide the work over time

4. **Review/Select a Powerful Practice-** a research proven practice or strategy that connects to teaching and learning and can advance the Targeted Instructional Area.

5. **Plan, Provide, and Monitor Cycles of Professional Learning-** ILTs design and implement 4-5 cycles per year around a powerful practice, each is approximately 6-8 weeks long. The cycles are intentional about setting clear SMART goals for both teachers and students so that expectations and end results can be communicated and achieved. Teachers receive support and monitoring in order to become proficient at the powerful practice and to see increased student outcomes.

6. **Align Resources-** Time, people, talent, and funding are rethought and allocated

   strategically. Teams begin to determine "what they can stop doing."

The above Framework is the overall high leverage structure in which the selected school has

chosen to engage in for their own professional learning and inquiry. Embedded within the

Framework are the seven components of a Cycle of Professional Learning that I chronicled for

my research.

The seven components of a Cycle of Professional Learning:

- Inputs- any training, learning, and modeling around the selected powerful practice

- Safe Practice- time when teachers can try out the strategies and become confident,

  free of evaluation

- Professional Reading- additional support, information and research regarding the

  powerful practice/strategy

- Observation/Coaching/Feedback- opportunities for teachers to observe others

  trying out the same strategy, a way to build a common vocabulary and to give

  suggestions

- Looking at Student Work and Data- a way to measure and monitor the impact of

  new strategies on student learning, informs if adjustments need to be made to

  meet student needs as indicated by the SMART goals

- Learning Walks- visits to all classrooms to gauge implementation, and to gather

  informal data to inform additional learning and resource allocation

- Monitoring, Measuring, and Modifying- results are reported to the entire school,

  determines expertise to inform the next cycle

Taylor Elementary School's Journey through the Framework for Powerful Results and an Eight Week Cycle of Professional Learning

At the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, Taylor Elementary had just received their school performance rating. This new status dropped them from a level 2 school to the lowest standing, level 3. This rating gave Taylor the designation of being in Low Academic Standing and "On Probation." With the disappointing news, the administration and ILT were eager and committed to turning things around. Taylor school served 596 students grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade. As of 2011-2012, the largest demographic at Taylor was Hispanic making up 88.1% of the student population. The second greatest demographic was Black at 9.9%. 96.5 % of students were low income with 12.4 % of the student population receiving Special Needs services and 34.1 % being English Language Learners.

In an initial data analysis meeting, the team and I examined their past and present reading data to determine any glaring performance problems and some possible root causes. The data from the past year's Illinois State Achievement Test indicated that 68.1 % of 3rd-8th grade students were meeting or exceeding state standards in Reading. Their current interim assessment results measuring growth from the beginning of the year (BOY) to the middle of the year (MOY) on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) exam for grades 3rd-8th indicated 54% of students were improving their mean scores in reading, yet still needed additional instruction in informational text and vocabulary to meet their growth projections. Qualitative "walkthrough" snapshots from every class in the school suggested that student tasks did not align with the teaching objectives and whole group instruction with minimal student discourse was common. Armed with this data, we decided that "Reading" should definitely be the big focus and the success of this professional learning cycle would be a by-product of the ILT's effectiveness. The

team landed on a 70% goal for the End of the Year as a result of the cycle implementation. In order for change to occur, the ILT would have to function strategically to lead this work. This collaboration and communication would be vital to the implementation and results of our inquiry.

Framework Component #1- Build Collaboration:

From September to February, months before the ILT and I could dive into the framework and cycle, we first had to establish our purpose together and agree upon how we would work together. The team had to create effective operating norms and procedures. To begin our work together, I scripted a coaching Entry Plan in order to gauge where the team was and the types of structures they had in place. The Entry Plan consisted of components such as: an introduction of me as the researcher to the ILT and principal, an explanation of my coaching role, various questions to the team in order to learn about their core instructional program, professional learning systems, instructional leadership team's functionality, and to establish our working relationship, milestones, and next steps.

Based on the feedback I acquired in my initial entry, the next phase consisted of our creation and agreement of working norms such as: equity of voice, active listening, confidentiality, etc. to ensure our sessions were productive and respectful. We also decided upon a rotation of roles for our meetings (facilitator, time keeper, recorder, process checker, etc.) The team began sharing the leadership responsibility by taking turns creating agendas for weekly meetings, which was very different from the past in which the principal was accustomed to preparing and leading the sessions. In addition, the ILT and I collectively created an ILT rubric to help monitor our team effectiveness and align our work to ensure connection to all other district and school initiatives. As a team, we informally assessed ourselves using the rubric to

gain an initial sense of where we were and where we were going. The rubric allowed the team to

monitor whether or not they were taking the instructional action items back to their teacher

teams. We also grounded our thinking by reading chapter 2 of Elmore, City, Fiarman and

Tietel's *Instructional Rounds in Education* entitled the Instructional Core (2009). This reading

provided us with a backdrop to always remember the student -teacher-content relationship. One

member of the team felt that usually when reform initiatives occur, students are often forgotten.

She stated, "Students should always be the focus and the teaching should always influence the

students." The team agreed and valued this sentiment so much that we decided to add it to the

center of Targeted Leadership's Framework/Cycle graphic.

Framework Component #2- Examine Data:

The school ILT was expected to anchor all decision making in data. When beginning to

adopt the framework, the team members were accustomed to looking at standardized test data,

but didn't have a protocol for doing so. They simply looked at the most recent interim

assessment data to decide that "Reading" should be their focus because that was the category in

which their scores were the lowest. It was clear that the team did not have experience looking at

multiple sources of data to deeply analyze, ask hard questions, and determine root causes or

brutal facts. I had to remind them to consider other data sets such as student work, and

observation data in addition to assessment data. The conversations were very short and team

members did not probe or ask "why" questions.

I was not surprised that analyzing student products was an uncommon practice. I know

that teachers and schools are on data overload, but I truly wanted teachers to see that "tasks

predict performance." If we want increased results, we need to model and provide students with

the appropriate opportunities. Looking at student work alongside assessment data is powerful. I

immediately thought of some basic data analysis protocols to introduce to the team. We had to

dig deeper to get to the root causes. The team ultimately decided on an end goal of 70% of

students in grades 3rd-8th meeting/exceeding growth projections on the NEWA assessment, a

16% increase from the year before.

Framework Component #3- Identify a Targeted Instructional Area:

The team decided based on their data analysis that **Reading** was going to be their

Targeted Instructional Area (TIA). As their coach, I pushed and probed them to think deeply

about the area of reading as it is so broad. Reading should include the connections between

vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing. It is meant to be taught across all core subject

areas. It has multiple approaches and the most instructional minutes of the school day. It was

not enough to just pick "reading" because it was their lowest subject area. I had to use my

coaching stems to draw more out of them. I asked, "Which grades contain the most students "at

or above the 50th percentile?" I also asked which classes had the highest growth. I probed

further around the teachers in those grades from the previous school year to the current school

year. Were they the same teachers? We looked at cohorts of students over 2 years. Some

teachers mentioned the discontent with the various curricula available to teachers; others blamed

a lack of a common scope and sequence to follow. Afterwards, they came to consensus that they

would look more specifically at Reading Comprehension in both Literature and Informational

texts. Although Comprehension was still a large spectrum, I was committed to "learning by

doing' alongside the team in order to go through the process and for them to take ownership of

the work.

Tasked with Reading Comprehension, the ILT and I went through a TIA protocol

provided by Targeted Leadership Consulting Nelsen & Cudeiro, 2009), which allowed us to

weigh our version of a TIA against the characteristics of a strong targeted instructional area. We asked ourselves questions such as: Does our TIA include all students? Can it be applicable across all disciplines? Will it enable us to produce concrete results and reach our measureable objectives? Can it guide us in making decisions, aligning programs, and allocating resources? Is it important for our students and does it reflect their needs? Is this an area that we can dedicate our efforts to for the next few years?

After the team agreed to stick with Reading Comprehension as their focus, we began to revisit and refine how to make it work for the school. What would advance reading comprehension throughout the school? How would it be incorporated across all subject areas? As a team, we discussed how every teacher in every content area would work with every student on it every day. We started planning how to communicate our focus to all other stakeholders such as the whole staff, students, families, and the community. If this was going to be our focus, everyone should know and be committed to it almost like a mission and vision. This planning and discussion helped shape our thinking in terms of what evidence we would like to see throughout classrooms and the entire school building.

Framework Component #4- Review and Select a Powerful Practice:

The next component is vital as it establishes the focus for professional learning. The eight to ten week Cycle of Professional Learning is to ensure that teacher and student learning are all centered on one powerful practice or strategy that aligns to the Targeted Instructional Area. In this case, the school selected reading comprehension as their TIA and "Close Reading" as their Powerful Practice. The selection of a powerful practice was a major struggle amongst the ILT, staff, and administrators. The principal and 2 of the 5 ILT members really wanted to choose "Close Reading" because they felt it tied into the shifts required by the new Common

Core standards and thought it could really advance reading comprehension as indicated by NEWA assessment results in all grades and in all subjects. Some members of the ILT disagreed and argued that it was simply a new buzz word in education and that it wouldn't lead to improved reading. They instead preferred Guided Reading as a powerful practice due to needs they identified during classroom observations. Several members of the team also pushed back on Guided Reading stating that it had too many parts and that they've focused on it before with little fidelity of implementation.

In an effort to use local data to inform this decision, I organized classroom observations to review the current state of time dedicated to actual reading of text and teacher-student discourse around text. After the peer visits, the ILT was shocked to find out that only 3 of 12 classrooms had students actually engaged in reading of a piece of written text, whereas the others showed students working on isolated projects or worksheets. In our observations, most teachers were asking students questions, but not requiring them to refer back to the text to support their reasoning. Many of the questions asked to students could have been answered without even reading the text. The team debated for a while around low versus high level questioning and the use of Bloom's taxonomy to guide their question formulation. After 2 weeks of debating and researching Close Reading and other practices, the team came to consensus on committing to Close Reading as their Powerful Practice for this 8 week cycle of professional learning. Overall, the team agreed that it was the best choice and could be utilized in math, and with informational texts in science and social science, whereas Guided Reading would be problematic and isolated to certain subjects and teachers. Exit slips from the week's ILT meeting noted that teachers felt "Close Reading" would integrate higher level thinking by encouraging students to always go

50

back into the text to support their answers and reactions. This strategy could be used in any subject and lent itself to numerous Common Core Standards.

Framework Component #5- Plan, Provide, and Monitor Cycles of Professional Learning:

Typically, teams and schools thoughtfully plan out three-to four Cycles to span the course of an entire school year. In this instance, we had taken over half of the year to build ILT structures and thus decided to implement just one Cycle of Professional Learning at the end of the school year. To begin our 8 week Professional Learning Cycle, the ILT and I first had to engage in some in-depth planning upfront. We completed a **Cycle Implementation Plan** that spelled out which parts of the cycle we would do at specific times (See Appendix A).

The plan was developed using the Backward Design Framework (McTighe & Wiggins, 1999). As a team, we thought long and hard about where we wanted to be at the end of the cycle, and what success would look like. From there, we built out a week by week plan that detailed at every level what would take place to get us to our end goal. Collectively we built out the ILT and Teacher Teams actions by keeping the predetermined SMART goals and end of cycle assessment as our end result in mind. The plan included headings that mirrored our actions such as: Dates, Inputs (Professional Readings and Professional Development), Safe Practice of Learned Strategies, and built in Feedback Loops (Peer Visits, Coaching/Feedback, Learning Walks, and Looking at Student Work). Creating this Cycle Implementation Plan took a significant amount of time because the ILT had to first identify where they wanted to be by the end of the cycle and create SMART goals. By beginning with the end in mind, they could then plan what training, readings, and professional development they would be engaged in to scaffold the inputs over time and ensure the proper amount of support and follow up. As a team, we also agreed upon what we wanted students to be able to do at the end of the cycle, therefore creating

our end of cycle assessments for each grade. These goals and assessments assisted the ILT

members in organizing our actions over the course of 8 weeks.

Below, I now provide a week-by-week narrative recounting the aligned activities

included in a Cycle of Professional Learning. This account represents a major shift from the

overarching Framework into to the second part of the process, the Cycle. I have structured this

reporting by presenting each week of the cycle according to the headings in the Cycle

Implementation Plan: What the ILT did, what the Teacher Teams did, what Professional

Readings occurred, what PD was given, if any Peer Visits occurred and if any Learning Walks

were scheduled.

Cycle of Professional Learning

Week 1:

ILT- The ILT meeting this first week was a long one. What normally lasted an hour and a half,

took 2 hours and 45 minutes this time. The team began by self-assessing their functioning using

a school-created ILT Effectiveness Rubric. This rubric simply has ranges of 1 to 3 (1- being

emergent, 2- meaning developing, and 3- meaning proficient) that a school team could use to

gauge how successful they were operating with positive conditions (See Appendix B).

We wanted to gauge our effectiveness and operation as a team while simultaneously

evoking change by way of the cycle. Here, their overall score on the entire rubric was 2 out of 3.

As a coach, I had to push them to think of evidence to support their ratings. For example, when

the team scored themselves a "2" on the analyzing data section, I asked them to list what data

protocols they have used, at what time interval, and to be specific with which data they selected.

We decided to revisit this rubric at various checkpoints throughout the cycle to see if our

functioning was improving.

Next, the team engaged in a protocol in which we used a template to "unpack" the first Common Core State Standard in grade bands to fully understand what students are expected to know and be able to do. The team had difficulty coming to consensus on the expectations of the standard. This "unpacking" helped the team debate and push back in order to set "End of Cycle Goals" aligned to their Powerful Practice of "Close Reading."

It was critical that we developed this goal collectively as it guided us to begin with the end in mind. Knowing our expectations ahead of time helped ensure all inputs and practice led to our desired outcomes for both students and teachers. It was imperative that the ILT understood the connection between the Targeted Instructional Area (TIA), the Powerful Practice (PP), and the "End of Cycle Goals" in order to communicate it to all staff and stakeholders this week. The team initially had challenges developing these goals. It seemed as though many of the team members were not used to thinking with the end in mind; therefore creating these goals was not easy. I wanted to push them to think of student outcomes first as well as what we would see change in teacher practice. Because it was the end of the school year, identifying student achievement data pointing to the need for our chosen powerful practice, Close Reading would not be difficult. The ILT could use recent data from the middle of the year NWEA exam. Below are the "End of Cycle Goals" the ILT created:

Teacher Implementation: By the end of the cycle in June, 100% of teachers in grades K-8 will implement the Powerful Practice with fidelity as indicated by the following observation foci:

- teachers selecting grade-appropriate complex texts
- teachers asking text-dependent questions
- teachers modeling text marking (annotation) and verbally prompting students to return to the text to cite evidence
- teachers allowing opportunities for students to engage in conversation about parts of texts

Student Performance/Achievement: By the end of the cycle, 70% of the students will meet/surpass their growth targets showcasing their ability to analyze and comprehend complex texts as evident in the End of Year (EOY) NWEA assessment. The in-class observation student foci would be:

- students referring to parts of text as they respond and/or pose questions
- students rereading texts multiple times for different purposes
- student to student interaction/dialogue
- writing samples (in response to reading) using evidence from text

In regards to the "End of Cycle Goal" created for Student Performance, ideally as their coach, I wanted the team to think about how this practice of Close Reading would impact students and push the team to think about what evidence they would use. I probed the team around looking at End of Year (EOY) NWEA data as an evidence indicator, but according to the exit slips from this week's ILT meeting, three out of five teachers felt that although they should see an improvement in NWEA scores as a result, they first wanted to look at their own assessments to see what students could do. I reminded them that the ultimate goal is to see increased achievement and that in this learning process they can always adjust where needed. If they were going to use their own assessments to gauge student mastery, then they'd have to calibrate across grades and subjects with a common rubric and task. The teachers agreed they were not up for this challenge and that it was best for their staff to use the End of Year (EOY) NWEA assessment results. Prior to beginning the cycle, Taylor School had 54% of students in grades 3rd-8th meeting/exceeding their growth projections. The team set the overall goal for this 8 week cycle at 70% of students meeting/exceeding growth projections.

Environment: By the end of the cycle, 100% of the classrooms will display evidence of the following foci:

- student copies of complex texts with annotations

- instructional wall charts with examples of text marks

- teachers asking text dependent questions and-students referring to parts of text as they respond and/or pose questions

- students rereading texts multiple times for different purposes

- student to student interaction/dialogue

- writing in response to reading using evidence from text

Teacher Teams- In grade level and department meetings this week, each representative from the ILT met with their fellow grade band teachers to make a case for this Cycle Implementation work. Together, the ILT member and the grade band teachers first reviewed class and grade level data (identified reading areas of promise, areas of concern and specific students for grouping); and frontloaded the school-wide powerful practice of Close Reading by sharing the cycle implementation plan and "End of Cycle Goals" to outline the upcoming work. The teams agreed upon and revised the goals for Student Achievement and Teacher Implementation. Every teacher read a portion from Chapter 4 of Charlotte Danielson's book, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*. The section of this chapter emphasized that a teacher's skill in questioning and in leading discussions makes a powerful contribution to student learning and is valuable for many instructional purposes: exploring new concepts, eliciting evidence of student understanding, and promoting deeper student engagement (Danielson, 2007). The team also took a closer look at CCSS English Language Arts Anchor Standard 1. We went through a protocol to "unpack" what the standard meant in regards for teachers and students.

Professional Reading- The first reading the ILT identified to ground their thinking and planning was a portion of chapter 4 from Charlotte Danielson's book, Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching. When I asked why they chose this reading and not one specifically on

the practice of "Close Reading," the team stated that because the district was moving to Danielson's framework for teacher evaluation, they wanted to connect the how and what of implementing the practice. Upon further review of the chapter, it discussed using various questioning and discussion techniques for teachers to consider. The ILT's rationale was that it would build the foundation for close reading to gain background on asking and answering questions so teachers can get in the habit of grounding both in text, thus improving their instructional delivery.

Week 2:

ILT- This week the ILT began their meeting by discussing the feedback and outcomes from the prior week's teacher team meetings and revised their cycle plan based on responses from their colleagues. The team used the "Four A's" protocol to read and respond to Chapter One of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by Fisher and Frey (2012). The team selected this book as an anchor text to help guide their learning throughout the cycle. In this chapter, Fisher and Frey define the term "text complexity" and name out its importance as indicated in the Common Core State Standards. They emphasize the need for students to struggle with text and how teachers must revisit how texts are both read and taught.

The Four A's protocol used with chapter 1 called for the teachers to read, record, and share quotes that they agreed with, parts they argued, assumptions made by the author, and parts they aspired to. To ensure they were on the right track, they watched a Close Reading sample video, created a "look-for" list to use when observing, and practiced a whole group modeling of a Close Read using a Sandra Cisneros excerpt entitled "Salvador." In addition they agreed to create and come to consensus around teacher made reading assessments for grades K-8.

Teacher Teams- Similar to the ILT, the teacher teams used the same "Four A's" protocol to read/respond to Chapter One of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading by Fisher and Frey. They reviewed, added onto, and agreed upon the Close Reading "Look Fors." Teachers also watched the sample video and observed the modeling of the Salvador piece by an ILT member. As the teachers watched the modeling, they then had to name and identify the close reading "look fors" that were observed. The ILT member also ensured the teachers created a peer visit schedule.

Professional Reading- This week the entire staff read Chapter One of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by Fisher and Frey. This chapter again gave the case for students struggling when reading and why it is important to consider both quantitative and qualitative measures when matching kids to texts.

Safe Practice of Learned Strategy- This week the staff was free to try out some of the activities, lessons, and strategies they've learned. The intent was for teachers to engage students in asking and answering questions based on textual evidence.

Week 3:

ILT- Members of the ILT planned PD for their upcoming staff Development Day. They made school wide and grade band specific Annotation charts to distribute and use with students during instruction. The team read Chapter Two of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading by Fisher and Frey-Quantitative Measures of Text Complexity. This chapter explained the first step, the quantitative approach, to which texts should analyzed for "readability." It detailed various formulas and measures used to calculate surface level features of texts such as sentence length, word frequency, and digitalized computation of text. After reading, the team realized this chapter was not as much related to what they were trying to accomplish in regards to close

reading, so they moved to Chapter Three- Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity. This chapter helped the team review the purpose of looking at text features and enabled the team to gain common understanding of the various Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity. The team was then able to review Fisher and Frey's Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity Rubric, and practiced assessing a sample piece's complexity as a group.

Teacher Teams- In teacher team meetings the teachers reviewed the Close Reading "look fors" again. They shared, discussed, and altered school wide annotation charts. The annotation charts were simply charts that listed the most common marks readers make on text as they read such as writing margin notes; placing a question mark next to a part they have a question about, or an exclamation mark next to an interesting part. These charts were to be posted in classrooms to remind students to think and "annotate" the text as they read. The teachers also read Chapter Three of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by Fisher and Frey. They assessed the same text together for complexity. Based on what they learned, the teachers shared how the professional reading influenced their own questions.

Professional Reading- The entire staff read Chapter Three of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by Fisher and Frey-Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity. This chapter expounds on the various text features and knowledge demands to consider when selecting texts for students.

Peer Visits- Nine classrooms were observed by their peers

Safe Practice of Learned Strategy- The staff continued to practice anchoring their instruction and student tasks in "finding evidence."

Week 4:

ILT- This week the ILT's time was spent mostly preparing for Staff Development. They reviewed and revised the cycle plan based on progress and discussed the peer observation process and how to deliver timely feedback to teachers.

Teacher Teams- The teachers looked at sample student annotations as a form of informal assessment and discussed what they told them about student understanding. They collectively reviewed the text complexity rubric in preparation for creating text dependent questions to be used as a pre/post assessment.

Professional Reading- This week the staff read Fisher's, *Text Complexity* article. This article addressed the term text complexity, as defined by the Common Core State Standards and its importance to teaching and learning. The team selected this reading because it aligned to the previous Chapters Two and Three that they were reading in Fisher and Frey's book, *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading*. Fisher and Frey explained the three measures of text complexity and how educators can use these measures to evaluate text, ensure the texts used are appropriately complex for all students, as well as how to support student learning with complex text. The teachers wanted to see if there were any additional useful tools or information to utilize in their PD presentations.

PD Day- This week, May 3, 2012 was the first Staff Development Day led by the ILT. The ILT modeled a Close Reading using the Gradual Release of Responsibility to the whole staff. The Gradual Release of Responsibility is the notion of a teacher modeling first, followed by students practicing together with the teacher's guidance, and then the students trying something out on their own in order to scaffold students towards independence. They offered break-out sessions on annotation, assessing text complexity, and creating text dependent questions for teachers to choose from. At the close of the PD, teachers reflected on their "take-aways" and successes.

Peer Visits- Teachers continued to visit classrooms on their planning periods to observe colleagues utilizing Close Reading strategies. They reflected and gave feedback on the observations using an exit slip on the Google Drive that was shared with the staff.

Week 5:

ILT- The ILT planned for additional support based on the PD and peer observation data. They decided that select teachers needed more practice with creating questions. Members of the ILT decided to meet with these teachers the following day to craft questions together. The team analyzed grade-level data in the form of student artifacts. They also analyzed the teacher feedback on the exit slips regarding peer observations. The team reviewed the protocol for conducting the Targeted Learning Walk.

Teacher Teams- The teachers looked at sample teacher-created text dependent questions in lesson plans. They discussed the level of questioning and assessed student annotations from passages. Teachers agreed to teach students how to go back and annotate with a different color pen on later readings to further inform instruction.

Learning Walk: The first Targeted Learning Walk by the ILT was conducted this week using the Classroom Observation Note-Taking Form (See Appendix C). This document recorded evidence of the Powerful Practice implementation.

Week 6:

ILT- The ILT reviewed the Learning Walk results and plan next steps around individual teacher support. One trend was the lack of student discourse. The team planned for how to increase collaborative conversations around texts in classrooms. They read and used the Final Word protocol with an article and unpacked CCSS Speaking and Listening Standard 1.

Teacher Teams- The teachers analyzed student responses to text dependent questions as a group. They also followed the Final Word Protocol using the "Collaborative Conversations" article by Fisher and revised lesson plans to include increased opportunities for student to student discourse.

Professional Reading: The staff read "Collaborative Conversations" article by Fisher and Frey. This article gave implications on how to use the Common Core Speaking and Listening standards to ensure students have opportunities to communicate effectively and build on each other's ideas.

Week 7:

ILT- The team analyzed additional Learning Walk feedback and created "next-step" goals around developing questions and increasing accountable talk. They identified teachers/grades that required additional support/development.

Teacher Teams- The teachers watched videos on the Fisher and Frey channel to continue observing sample lessons of collaborative interactions amongst students and teachers.

Week 8:

ILT- This last meeting was dedicated to analyzing the percentage of students who met their end of the cycle growth targets. The team re-assessed their functioning using the ILT rubric. They concluded that they grew the most in the data analysis section. The ILT discussed keeping the same powerful practice for next school year or selecting a new one. They decided to poll the staff to gain consensus and they celebrated all of their hard work this cycle.

Teacher Teams- The teachers looked at the end of cycle data and shared their successes and ideas for moving forward.

Conclusion

This chapter chronicled the detailed actions occurring at every level as also indicated in Taylor School's Cycle Implementation Plan. The Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycle of Professional Learning provided structured support and accountability for the staff at Taylor Elementary. Every key member involved began to see that each component did not have to be done in sequential order and that the true learning rested in their reflections about what worked and what did not work. Once teachers realized that this form of inquiry was not some new buzz word or trendy initiative, they started to see how each part was essentially a best practice and could be done at any time, with any priority, and at any school. The keen data focus forced teachers to consistently align their actions to the students' changing needs. This type of support and tracking had never been done before as both teachers and administration now worked collaboratively to problem solve and plan ahead. Chapter Five couples both the observed and stated themes that emerged from the changes in teachers' practice as a result of "living" through this cycle work. Chapters Six shares teachers' challenges, benefits, and impact of the cycle on their practice, whereas Chapter Seven is my interpretation of the impact from a researcher's standpoint.

CHAPTER FIVE

Changes in Teachers' Instructional Practices

Introduction

This chapter highlights the changes in teacher practice observed in classrooms as well as the experiences of the ILT participants in this study. I captured the ILT members' reflections by scripting their interactions during weekly meetings as well as in exit slips and action items completed at the conclusion of every meeting. The professional learning cycle definitely informed and created the regular rhythms and routines at Taylor Elementary. Although I witnessed many individual changes across teachers and classrooms, multiple "cultural" changes also occurred throughout the school due to the cycle implementation. According to one teacher, "the manner in which this school is organized and the way we do business is completely different now. My thinking as a teacher and the way I plan with my colleagues has also been turned up a notch." From a coach's perspective, I have noticed a shift in the entire school's attention to instruction and results, and most notably, the transformation of the Instructional Leadership Team. The team went from focusing on multiple topics, having minimal data conversations, being principal directed, and simply following district mandates, to instead having consistent and dedicated members, one specific focus, job embedded professional development, and being ILT directed. Their attention was now directed to their own teaching delivery and actual student tasks and products. The team also had network support and an accountability structure to guide their work. Teachers reported numerous changes in their planning, thinking and practice. The common themes that emerged from interviewing the teachers were as follows: an entire systems change, student culture changes, and professional culture changes.

Systems change

The Instructional Leadership Team was the cornerstone of the Framework for Powerful Results and Professional Learning Cycle at Taylor School. An abundance of time and effort was put into making this team function as a well-oiled machine. No longer did the Principal and Assistant Principal lead all of the work. One ILT member concluded, " Our meetings were no longer informational with 10 or more agenda items for "coverage." Instead, now the agenda had one or two items inclusive of data analysis and planning. We lead our own grade level meetings with our colleagues as well as plan and deliver Professional Development sessions with the entire staff." For the first time, we were focused on quality, not quantity and student outcomes were at the forefront."

The ILT initiated the changes at Taylor and were successful mostly in part to the norms and responsibilities they agreed to operate under. Their honest, timely, and two-way communication helped to push the work forward and get buy-in from their fellow teachers. The team learned to push back effectively when they didn't understand or if they felt actions weren't plausible. This group learned to identify and use protocols when engaging in professional readings and data analysis sessions. This, they quoted, "helped keep everyone accountable and ensured takeaway and participation." Another change observed in the Instructional Leadership Team's functionality was their ability to coach and support other teachers.

During cycle implementation, as teachers practiced new strategies, the ILT served as a springboard for alternate ideas by giving feedback and bringing challenges and successes back to the large group for consideration. "Check-in" time was built into every meeting so all teachers could share how things were going and receive additional suggestions. For example, during the 4th week of implementation, an ILT member expressed her frustration with selecting and locating appropriate texts to use for close readings with her students. She shared that she knew she

needed to choose a complex text, but that she wanted something specific that would hook the kids and spark conversation. "I am having a difficult time searching for and finding these engaging texts, she stated. Everything is boring to the students or outdated." After going around the table at the ILT meeting, one of her colleagues suggested that she use an online resource entitled, Achieve 3000 to search for possible texts. The team member explained that all of the articles are based off current events or tied to an adolescent theme and can be accessed by simply typing in a high Lexile level or a topic in the search box. The teachers forgot about this resource that was purchased for the school and were eager to go and try it out.

At the next week's meeting, three of the ILT members came back and agreed that it was simple to use and said that they had luck with locating short engaging texts. Locating and using the Achieve 3000 short passages became an action item for the staff. One member prompted the team to visit Chapter four of Fisher and Frey's book. He stated, "I remember seeing this chapter entitled, *Matching Readers to Texts and Tasks*. There is even a checklist in that chapter for us to use when considering texts for groups of students." This new support was now a common rhythm and teachers were encouraging their colleagues to locate and share these textual resources.

The learning cycle was the first opportunity teachers could actually engage in cross-classroom observations to see a common practice in action. Before this, only administrators observed in classes. In exit slips, teachers expressed valuing this routine and learning from what they saw and heard. "Wow, a true eye-opener," one teacher wrote. "I had no idea what my colleagues were doing in their classrooms before this process." Now we all can observe each other and share helpful tips." These learning walks gave us insight into what each other was either doing or not doing." Even though the teachers needed to be coached on how to create

"look fors" and give feedback after an observation, the overall practice of organizing and scheduling learning walks helped create a culture of professional learning. "This is the true learning. I learned more from watching my co-teacher than I've learned in most training sessions. We have to do this more often. We have experts amongst us and need to hear and see things in action."

Learning Walks were not "I got you" sessions in which teachers did not know why they were being observed and what the administration was looking for. Teachers now knew exactly when the walks were and were given the opportunity to "showcase" their teaching and their students' learning as a result of having lots of planning, practice and feedback ahead of time. Collectively, the communication between all stakeholders became tighter and trust was built. For the first time, follow-up and monitoring systems were put into place to ensure that all of the hard work was paying off and results were accounted for.

The Learning Walks uncovered a lot about student mastery and achievement as well. The teachers were astonished to learn about the tasks their colleagues created that were expected to be aligned to standards. While walking around, observing, and talking to students, it was eye-opening to see how pockets of students performed differently on these tasks. This variance prompted the team to think of alternate PD foci as well as additional ideas of how to support one another in curriculum and assessment planning.

Changes in student culture

In addition to the changes in school functioning, the student culture was also noted as transforming at Taylor. "For the first time, student achievement and student work was prioritized," stated a 5th grade teacher. End goals for what students were expected to know and be able to do were created in the beginning to help guide the work and keep any and all efforts

on track. The teachers agreed their implementation would only be as successful as determined by what students could do as a result. Decisions in the school around scheduling and resources were all made based on what was best for students. The data protocols utilized in professional development, ILT meetings, and grade level meetings ensured that there was consistency across classrooms. Teachers articulated that they now felt more comfortable talking to their peers, answering administration's questions, and discussing students' performance with parents because of the increased attention to student data. They admitted that now they understood the data and were equipped to plan and discuss students' abilities using the data. This was a major accomplishment for all learners, both teachers and students. Teachers began setting goals with students in one-on-one data sessions to help them track their own growth and take ownership for their learning. Students could now state the learning objectives in their classes, articulate why the powerful practice or strategy was important to their learning, and also how to integrate and apply it across other subject areas. Student achievement was each meeting's focus and data was revisited consistently in order for teachers to adjust their instruction.

Changes in the professional culture

The professional culture at Taylor was transformed from a culture of compliance to a culture of inquiry. It was now safe and encouraged for teachers to ask questions and to disagree. Teachers now had common habits, clear expectations, and a routine to guide their work. In an exit slip, one teacher wrote, "I never knew what to do or expect before the cycle implementation. We didn't work together. I just planned in isolation, waited for administration to hand out student data, and to tell me if I was doing something wrong. I used to dread the mandatory grade level meetings because I just showed up, sat and got." Now, this same teacher is a leader amongst her staff. She helps coach her peers, crafts meeting agendas, knows exactly what

artifacts to ask for and bring, as well as how to accomplish certain tasks in between meetings to make each session is more productive. During a staff PD day, the principal stated, "It is now customary at Taylor school to see teachers planning together and us prioritizing time for collaboration during these in-service days." I even heard that the principal requested substitutes one day so teachers could organize their staff development presentations and for teachers to receive additional time to unpack standards together. It was now common to see that every action and resource aligned directly to their selected powerful practice.

Overall, the cycle work helped teachers begin planning with the end in mind. Improved classroom walkthrough data indicated that the cycle goals were more evident in classrooms now more than ever due to the goals being set and communicated upfront. One correlation that was brought up by the teachers was the idea of starting with the SMART goals in order to plan for the cycle began to transfer into the way teachers planned. Teachers could now see the connection to backwards planning. They became more adept at setting student goals and looking at the assessments first before planning their instruction. They identified moments where they could check for understanding and comparing that to the component of the cycle in which you observe, give feedback, and analyze student work in order to retool. This connection made me extremely happy as a coach. Finally, rather than looking at this work as something else to do, teachers were seeing that the components were in fact all best practices that can be done at any time. Two teachers in the focus group articulated now being able to engage parents in the learning process as well. The powerful practice gave them activity and lesson ideas to in-service parents on during workshops or after school sessions. As one teacher stated, "it gave us a common language to talk about strategies used in-class that were also aligned to homework assignments."

Conclusion

All teachers expressed their satisfaction with sticking with one focus throughout the school year. They were tired of having a new initiative or buzzword every few months and trying to guess what good teaching looked like. At the end of this eight-week cycle implementation, I asked the ILT members to complete an exit slip indicating how they felt about the overall process. Four out of the five teachers agreed that adhering to the Targeted Instructional Area and Powerful Practice until their SMART goals were reached was rewarding. They could see the clear connection between action, practice, follow-up, and results. The school culture was not only developed, but also strengthened over the course of the framework and cycle execution. We saw evidence of this in: teacher to teacher interactions; teacher team to principal interactions; and in teacher to student interactions. Although culture and climate expectations had to be built on the front end, everyone could definitely see the results during and afterwards as a result of the implementation.

CHAPTER SIX

Teachers' Challenges, Benefits, and Sense Making of the Framework and Cycle

Introduction

Typically, near the end of the school year, educators, schools, and teams often slow down and stop doing things. From year to year, administration and district directives change; staffs criticize people and programs; and new initiatives arise after not seeing the desired outcomes. I was committed to the cycle structure in order to empower the team with best practices for student learning and whole school improvement that would sustain overtime. This chapter gives insight into what the teachers specifically grappled with while implementing the cycle plan, what parts they found to be beneficial, as well as how they made sense of the recurring process. I used the teachers' responses in weekly meetings, in interviews, and in their exit slips to inform this chapter. The challenges that arose helped informed our next steps. When we got hung up on parts, we reflected and retooled in order to move forward. As a team, we wanted to learn from one another and determine the impact of our actions.

Challenges identified by teachers

The team and I encountered a host of conundrums along our way. These challenges later proved to be the crux of our work together. Time, peer coaching, capacity versus resistance, and accountability were all themes trending from interviews, scripted interactions in ILT meetings, and in exit slips. From my interviews with teachers, the most common concern was the amount of time needed to do this work. The other themes that emerged were surprisingly all interrelated. These themes are discussed in this section.

Time

The old saying "time is money" applied directly to this school and its teacher capacity building around the professional learning cycle. In this case, teachers' time costs money. With new union contract negotiations and a widening budget gap in our district, school leaders had strict guidelines on how much time they could spend on professional development and rules for teacher compensation. This proved difficult for administration in terms of planning both inside and outside of the school day. Teachers were only required to give up one 40 minute preparation period a week for common planning and if the principal wanted to pull teachers during the day, paid substitutes would have to be utilized. After school professional development could only be optional and teachers could either attend if they wanted to without pay or administration could pay them for their extra time if monies allowed. Teachers that were not on the team often voiced their opinions about wanting to be a part of the decision making, yet rarely attended optional meetings regardless if they were paid sessions.

To ensure attendance, the Instructional Leadership Team met during the school day and the Principal utilized substitutes to cover their classes for an hour a week. One teacher on the team declared,

> These meetings are not enough time to look at data, plan, and discuss next steps. They
> always last longer than the agenda states and action items often require attention outside
> of the regular school day.

One ILT member stated, "We always talk and go around in circles never getting anything accomplished in our allotted time. We had to collectively devise a code word to say aloud in order to get the entire team's attention and back on track." As a coach, I had to help the team begin to work smarter. The creation and usage of meeting norms, roles, and protocols ensured our time was spent more wisely as agendas were sent to members ahead of time, and discussions

71

that typically went off subject or went a little longer were now curtailed. Through the role of the "process checker," the team was reminded to adhere to the set time frames and specific protocols provided focused discussions.

Take into account the amount of time and planning in the following scenario stemming from a weekly exit slip:

In this week's cycle plan, we as an ILT team were committed to not only planning a 6 hour training session for our colleagues for the upcoming Staff Development Day, but also making school wide charts to hang up, reading a chapter of our focus text, and reviewing a rubric in preparation for practicing a task as a whole group. All of this was to occur in a one-hour block. In our initial planning, we totally underestimated the amount of time it takes a group of 6-7 people to plan and agree on anything.

To be an effective team, planning and preparation are essential to ensuring action items and next steps are accomplished. In fact, all ILT members felt that they needed more time to meet. They proposed moving the meetings to after school for the future, but discussed that two hours after school made for a long day. They came to consensus that the ILT would meet for an hour and a half after school every other week going forward.

Peer Coaching

Interview results detailed that four of the six Instructional Leadership Team members found it difficult to coach their fellow teachers. For instance, one ILT member who was fairly new to the school stated, "I am the young energetic girl trying to give pointers to a veteran teacher. They hate to see me coming." Two teachers actually expressed that at first in weekly meetings some teachers would show up armed to grade papers or would just sit quietly and not contribute to the discussion or activities. This led to the principal attending as many grade level

72

sessions as possible. Others stated that their meetings with teachers went more smoothly when administration was not around because it was a safe and trusting environment for teachers to speak about their planning and their students' achievement. As a facilitator and researcher, I was committed to finding out where the breakdown was occurring and working with the team to devise a plan to rebuild the trust and create some norms around accountability.

The largest issue according to the teachers on the ILT was that they did not have the power to "force" teachers to implement the strategy. One teacher felt like no matter how much she supported her peers and offered to stay after school to help them plan, her efforts went unnoticed. She stated, "They just don't want to do it. No matter how many times we talk about it, I do not see them trying to transfer the practice into their lesson plans nor their instruction." She was afraid this new teacher leader structure was building an "us versus them" mentality.

Teacher Capacity versus Resistance to Change

The troublesome peer coaching aspect expressed by most of the teacher leaders sparked the topic of teacher capacity in our weekly ILT meetings. Members questioned their colleagues' ability versus their will to change. When working with their peers in weekly grade levels, many of the teachers on the instructional leadership team received "pushback" from their colleagues. Some attributed the challenges to the fact that the teachers on the ILT were seen as the administration's spies or know it all's. Other teachers on the team felt that their peers often seemed on board during grade level meetings, yet when it came time for observations, they would not see evidence of anything they had discussed or worked on. The teachers on the ILT began to wonder if their peers were being resistant to change or if they simply lacked the capacity and understanding of the practice at hand. In this case, the teachers' sentiments echo Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher's (2005) need for a reengagement of one's moral purpose. This

73

implementation required the understanding of the change so that all participants had energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership.

Three teachers on the ILT expressed that their peers' lack of participation and negativity was a sign of limited capacity. In planning sessions or during data protocols, the ILT members recalled their colleagues getting frustrated, confused, and sometimes admitting that they did not know how to plan or analyze data in this way. One ILT member even stated, "My coworker always asks to see my lesson plans the day before they are due, yet she never wants to plan together during our grade level meetings."

Accountability

In terms of follow-up and monitoring, all of the ILT members agreed that this was the most difficult and uncomfortable part. They stated that "only administration could enforce the changes brought on by the cycle." As peers, it was hard for ILT teachers to encourage the other teachers to adhere to deadlines. In confidential one-on-ones with ILT teachers, three of them expressed the lack of follow-through on the principal's part as one of the reasons some teachers did not include the powerful practice into their lessons. Many of them felt like there was a fine line between supporting teachers and still ensuring they were implementing with fidelity. "All we can do is ask questions and work with our fellow teachers during the time we are given." One teacher informed me that she felt uncomfortable when the principal asked her which teachers in her grade level were not participating in the planning sessions. This, she stated, put her in a compromising position. Although she was disappointed in a few of her colleagues, she did not want to tell on them and break the trust she had built. When conducting peer observations, four teachers admitted they were frustrated by what they saw. They were in disbelief that the teachers they have known for years either disregarded the support given or the

sarcastic tone in their implementation. They blamed the lack of follow through on the fact that administration had not monitored the initiatives as thoroughly as originally planned.

Debriefing with the ILT members and reflecting on their exit slips during implementation as well as conducting interviews after implementation provided me with an abundance of qualitative data for analysis. I liken my take-aways to DuFour's and Marzano's three big ideas that drive professional learning communities (2011). The first big idea places emphasis on student learning, but not absent of the importance of teaching. Too many reforms swirl around, but not within the classroom. The purpose of a Professional Learning Community is to create the conditions that help educators become more skillful in teaching because great teaching and high levels of learning go hand in hand (2011). This echoes my beliefs regarding the power of analyzing student tasks. These work products, in my opinion, are the best form of data to tell us what students can or cannot do. The second big idea repeats that notion that teachers must work collaboratively in a collective effort. So teaming together to achieve common goals with mutually accountability must be fostered through embedding regular time for collaboration in school routines is key. The last big idea focuses educators on results and the hunger for evidence to drive continuous improvement. These three big ideas are the cornerstone of professional learning communities and they all emerged throughout our cycle implementation.

Benefits identified by teachers

Teachers overall enjoyed the cycle implementation and new learning. They expressed difficulty seeing the light at the end of the tunnel at times, yet once they made it through an entire cycle, they definitely saw changes in both the professional and academic culture within the school. The components of the cycle that teachers felt were the most valuable were: the ILT's

75

coaching model, the clear expectations they had for their work, the built- in planning support, and the focus on student results.

Although there were instances in which teacher to teacher coaching was challenging, most teachers surveyed agreed that they felt more comfortable discussing their instruction and student data with their peers versus only administration. They felt that their colleagues were more credible in their recommendations because they were actually engaged in the work themselves too as opposed to someone simply coming in and telling them what to do or change.

Teachers agreed that for once they knew exactly what to do and what was expected of them. There was a focus and rhythm embedded throughout the school. For the first time, people were clear about how things connected. The ILT would meet separately every week and then carry over their planning and support to the teacher teams. Professional development looked and felt differently as well where classroom observations and student work analysis were all aligned to the school's powerful practice. These routines helped to make teachers feel more comfortable when being observed because they knew exactly what their peers or administrators were looking for. It was no longer an "I got you" session and the feedback tightly matched what they were supported around and working on.

Teachers complimented the new and increased planning that occurred in grade level meetings. They were now given time to be more thoughtful and creative to work with their colleagues to plan and reflect upon lessons. This differed from before when they only planned in isolation or had to schedule time outside of the school day to communicate and collaborate around their lessons and student tasks. Teachers felt more supported and successful, thus helping to change their self-efficacy and attitudes. One teacher and the principal documented that the professional readings helped anchor their thinking in grade level meetings. The teacher stated,

"When my colleague was stuck on how to match her students to text, I reminded her that we just read about that in Danielson's chapter." She stated that it was helpful to keep returning to the articles to clarify and affirm our thinking and actions. The principal echoed stating that he constantly found himself reading and searching for new books and articles to align to the focus. He said, "My staff is probably so tired of checking their email and mailboxes because I continue to send them short excerpts that I find on Close Reading and text complexity."

Most agreed that being given the time to plan with their peers was one of the most significant changes and benefits. They were no longer going in alone and they valued the ideas brought in by their fellow teachers as they tried to figure out what kids were expected to know and be able to do. As a result, the ILT and I saw increased alignment between the teaching, the tasks assigned, and the objectives. This was a major win for us.

Lastly, teachers communicated liking the new process of follow-through and monitoring. They admitted it made them uncomfortable at first, yet the increased look at student attainment helped to keep them focused and able to reteach when necessary. This was a huge paradigm shift for most teachers who were used to simply assigning and giving grades whether they were good or bad. As one teacher stated, "this new accountability structure is so supportive, it is almost impossible for teachers and students to fail." Every week, teachers said they calibrated their plans and instructional delivery methods to design targeted activities for students. This was followed by an intense data analysis protocol in which student work and achievement data was scrutinized. If something needed tweaked, they had time and safe practice to try again. They also received feedback and support from their colleagues before the administration came in to observe and evaluate.

How Teachers made sense of the Framework and Cycle

Based on the interviews, exit slips, action items, and discourse during meetings, the teachers concluded that this process was difficult and eye-opening, yet beneficial. The teachers agreed that to be successful in this work and engage in this process, one has to be open to being a good listener. We instituted the rule "Three before me" in order to monitor each other's "air time." After speaking, each person then had to wait for three other people to talk before they could share again. By following this rule, members who rarely talked were now encouraged to speak and everyone heard multiple perspectives. Team members agreed that more teachers had a voice now. Interview results from the team indicated that the Cycle and Framework provided: Leadership training, intense coaching, the ability to build and act as a professional learning community, as well as an organizational structure around school improvement.

Leadership training

The cycle implementation brought in tools, strategies, protocols and practices linked to a specific research-based model that was focused on improving teacher practice and student results. The teachers in the past rarely used protocols and were not guided by a systematic, yet organic process of inquiry and follow-up. They valued being treated as leaders, observing in other classrooms and having their voices heard and acted upon.

Coaching

The ILT members stated that the cycle provided structured, job-embedded support for the instructional leadership team with support and guidance from the network representative. For once, the teachers, school administration, and an "outsider" were all on the same page, looking for specific practices. "Coming up with the goals and look fors and communicating them to peers upfront is what made the difference," said one member. All team members valuing the classroom observations and talking about what they saw afterwards. One teacher summed up by

78

stating, "To become a better reader, a student needs to read a lot. Well the same applies to teachers. To become a better teacher, one needs to see a lot of teaching."

Professional Learning Community

In addition to providing the novice team with leadership and coaching opportunities, the team began to function as a community by building working norms to operate more efficiently. For the first time, they began to collaborate to craft meeting agendas. They searched for specific protocols to examine student work and performance data in order to identify and implement evidence-based instructional practices. The team committed to never leaving a meeting without specific action items, deadlines, and owners. This community therefore began to grow and function with purpose and goals in sight.

Organization and School Improvement

The team made sense of the framework and cycle by ultimately learning by doing, trusting the process, and seeing it through to the end. They realized that there is never really an end. The inquiry was constant and they had to retool and reflect along the way. Each hiccup encouraged them to change and press forward for the next time. "The challenges are what drove our learning. When we as a group faced or noticed difficulty, we had each other to help us problem solve," stated one teacher. One example was when teachers noticed classrooms and students were all using different annotation marks across the school. This prompted the team to create school wide annotation charts to help build coherency across the grades. This newly acquired "growth mindset" made them stronger as a team and as teachers of students.

At around the 5th week, teachers automatically began thinking of the next 8-10 week cycle that would potentially start the next school year. They expressed wanting to continue their focus on "Close Reading" mainly because members felt renewed every time they continued to

locate and bring additional professional readings to the meetings. Some felt that after investigating "Close Reading" more deeply, there were multiple considerations such as text complexity, annotating text, and questioning. One member reminded the team that the sole purpose of the cycle is to remain committed to one focus and not to get off track with too many topics. In the end, the team did not suggest changing their focus, yet they wanted to continue an additional cycle with the same focus in the fall. In the 7th week, a teacher summed up the cycle as "development, and support for strategic planning, goal setting, and overall school review that renews morale and propels teacher and student development."

Conclusion

As a coach, I benefited equally as much as the ILT members experiencing this process by pushing their thinking and often listening and learning alongside them. Through facilitation of this cycle, I was able to see the changes in teachers' daily practices first hand as well as the impact it had on student behaviors, tasks and achievement. The team's honesty, challenges, and questioning helped move the inquiry forward. In the following chapter, I share my reflections and experiences as well as discuss the implications of this work for educators.

CHAPTER SEVEN

My Interpretation of the Process as a Researcher and Implications for Educators

Introduction

This dissertation described the implementation of the Framework for Powerful Results and a school's journey through a Cycle of Professional Learning. Using action research as a method, we captured this case study's effectiveness in a K-8 school on the south side of Chicago. Through a collaborative approach, I helped cultivate and lead an instructional leadership team, including a principal and 5 teacher leaders through an ongoing process of reflective inquiry. The reflections of the team provided us with meaningful insight along the way and the challenges we encountered led to increased ownership, empowerment, and significant changes in thinking and in actual practice. In this chapter, I reflect more directly on my experiences as an instructional coach leading an action research project, including lessons learned during the process. Since this work has passed, I have reflected more deeply, read more, and will narrate how my own thinking has changed after having lived through the cycle work.

My Interpretation

The underlying conundrum at the heart of this structure was that as a group we lacked a common definition of what quality instruction looked like. Without establishing this first, our ideas of inputs and "look fors" varied drastically and the question of compliance over fidelity haunted us throughout the entire cycle. When the team and I began to set our SMART goals at the beginning of the cycle work and even while conducting peer observations, there were varying definitions of what close reading truly looked like and the fidelity of implementation. This caused us to regroup and retool at various intervals to maintain our focus on what we were trying to accomplish. For example, after peer observations in week four, there was a discrepancy

amongst ILT members around the "look fors." Although we took time during the previous

weeks to craft and agree upon the "look fors," it wasn't until members actually observed their

peers in action that additional implementation questions arose. One teacher noticed that her

colleague was questions that referred kids back to the text, but once she examined the text, she

felt as though it was not complex enough for that group of students. She stated, "Upon first

glance it appears as though this teacher is really trying out some close reading strategies, but

when you consider the text she's using and you run through the text complexity rubric in your

head, the task is not very challenging." The group reflected...

One thing I constantly had to remember and remind others of was that this was a process

of inquiry and not a step by step right or wrong way of doing things. We had to spend a

significant amount of time first building a functioning and productive team. At times, I had to

listen and let the team "fail forward" as an integral part of the learning. An example of this was

when the team debated which chapter to read to help anchor their learning about close reading.

Two members wanted to go in order and insisted on reading Chapter Two after Chapter One, but

once they read it, they realized they could have just skipped to Chapter Three which was more

related to their goal of analyzing texts for complexity to inform instruction. Rather than always

stop them and give them my opinion, I tried to let the team learn by doing and encounter

difficulty along the way. My real pushing tended to come during and afterwards in order to get

them to reflect and adjust. My goal was to get the teachers to see that this type of inquiry and

improvement could really happen and to stick with it. The cycle and its elements were not

temporary or simply another initiative; they were best practices and could be done all of the time.

As a researcher and as a team, it was hard to link the results of our exact practice to the

data. Even though we planned our end in mind in the beginning, we did not realize how difficult

it would be to match our efforts with both quantitative and qualitative data. We could definitely measure and monitor the teachers' practice, yet the actual impact on student learning proved challenging due to many factors. All we could do is look for trends to see if there was a correlation between when we started our cycle to that of increased achievement. For example, the professional development and inputs provided to teachers needed to be planned well ahead of time to ensure fidelity and application or transfer to the intended audience. The teachers were all attempting to engage students in close reading activities, yet we didn't know for sure if that is what raised the school's NWEA reading scores. The most helpful pieces of data were the student work products. The team definitely saw a change in the before, during, and after samples. Tasks were now aligned to standards and teachers could articulate how a task connected to their big picture.

We learned that one eight week cycle was just the beginning, yet not enough to see the results we ultimately desired. A lot of work had to be done upfront to: build our team, conceptualize data, create the big plan with the end in mind, and then to implement it and retool. Although we did not meet it, I do not think our goal of 70% meets/exceeds was too lofty. The team worked extremely hard and long to connect the dots. From what I hear from the team, Taylor's staff did stay committed to their same Powerful Practice and implemented two more quarterly cycles the next school year.

Since 2012, I have coached 2 other teams around implementing Professional Learning Cycles. The big takeaways for me as a researcher and coach are that team dynamics and leadership play a huge role in the rollout and success in this type of professional learning. Influencing teams of educators to rethink what support and monitoring looks like is huge. For example, one of my new teams was extremely savvy with using achievement and student work

data as a means of monitoring, yet they had an "ah ha" when they began to understand that many adult learners respond more to professional readings and peer observations more than to a power point or interactive PD session. They have since revamped their professional learning model to include the different styles based on their teaching staff.

Another team I worked with really started to do some intense training with their community and family partners to help further the impact of their cycle implementation. This team dedicated additional time and funding to empowering and equipping families with strategies aligned to their Powerful Practice of collaborative conversations. They held PD for parents and community organizations to teach them how to use various sentence starters and stems when writing and speaking to push and encourage a back and forth dialogue. This extra effort, I am told, has families thinking and acting differently. Schools are seeing an increase in both teacher-student discourse as well as in student to student discourse, which relate to both reading comprehension and writing abilities.

In my current position, I am the Lead Instructional Coach for 36 schools (29 elementary and 7 high schools). My network of schools contains some of the top performing schools in the state and in the country as well as some of the lowest performing schools in the Chicago Public Schools district. My new team and I have struggled with how to support all of these schools that are all at varying levels of team capacity and achievement. We have decided that the structure of the Framework for Powerful Results/Cycles of Professional Learning is the best support we can offer our new schools. This structure allows for both top and low performing schools to select their own focus based on data and for our supports to be differentiated. Based on my learning overtime while utilizing the cycle model, I have decided to now match "like schools" based on their focus with each other so that they can collaborate across schools. This will include 2

schools with a similar focus observing at one another's schools, sharing professional readings and resources as well as joining for PD sessions. I have learned to believe in the power of our teacher teams and the in the collective knowledge of people in groups.

One author I started studying after this cycle, Paul Bambrick, forced me to rethink the planning and effects of professional development. In *Leverage Leadership*, Bambrick spoke to the inevitable professional development sessions that all educators must attend and participate in. Bambrick questioned what happened to the new ideas and possible changes once the session ended. He believes great PD workshops can be divided into three parts: what to teach using data to guide you, how to teach by leading effectively, and how to make it stick by holding teachers accountable (Bambrick, 2012). To determine what teachers need, Bambrick suggests beginning with data, whether it is interim assessment data or even observation data. He is adamant about leaders starting with knowledge about what teachers need and using this knowledge to focus on the right things. By leading with data analysis, schools can confirm suspicions about problem areas and identify trends. Once relevant areas of practice are identified, the next step is to land on a specific objective for a session (Bambrick, p.133, 2012). As a team, we identified where we wanted to be in the end, yet we needed to do a little more thinking around each PD session and how the outcomes of each small part contributed to the larger end goal.

"Professional development will succeed only if it is a clear, measurable, and bite-sized objective. Effective PD must answer: What will teachers be able to do at the end of this session? It is not enough for teachers to "know" something or "be aware" of something. The bottom line is, what will they be able to do when they walk into their classrooms the next day?" (Bambrick p.137, 2012).

To help "live the learning" or assist teachers with how to teach, professional development should include five key components: airtight activities, sharing, framing, application, and reflection. Activities should guide the participants to the right conclusions with minimal facilitation from the presenter (Bambrick, p. 141.) Video clips and role plays should be short, and the audience should be directed to look for specific things. Sharing is also a huge component. Similar to instructing students, adults need time to process and think with others. Framing involves the leader putting the answers in a "formal language." This simply means restating the key ideas and discoveries to ensure the overall message is clear. Effective workshops strategically embed time for teachers to practice what they have learned. Often times, this step is skipped due to time constraints, but it is vital for participants to do what they are being in-serviced on. For example, if you want teachers to write better lesson plan objectives, it is important to have them take the time and share out sample ones they have rewritten in the session. This practice helps to ensure internalization and transfer.

Finally, reflecting after a PD workshop helps make the learning stick. Having teachers record their takeaways in a memorable place makes it more likely that they will return to their key learning. By implementing all of the above built-in drivers for accountability, PD is more likely to change teacher practice. A leader or presenter can look across teachers following the PD to see whether there is evidence of implementation. Analyzing interim assessment results should also let you see if these improved practices are contributing to increased student learning. This accountability structure must be in place to guarantee that the desired outcomes stick. School leaders are ultimately the masterminds and facilitators behind the vision, delivery, and impact of professional development.

Implications for Principals

The Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycles of Professional Learning provide leaders and schools with a structure to help focus the development of teachers' practice and student achievement. The instructional core should always be the focal point and building principals must assemble the right people in teams to design, carry out and help maintain all actions towards this instructional end. It is important that school leaders create the conditions to help their staffs succeed. This includes building trust and allowing true learning to occur with open communication and collaboration. Teachers feel empowered when their leader is committed to helping them become successful in their work (Dufour and Marzano, 2011). Providing the supports, guidance, and resources necessary for teachers to try new strategies proved to be paramount in this instance. The challenges that arose throughout the weeks indicated that leaders must possess a strong capacity for conducting observations and providing feedback while maintain a monitoring rhythm.

Principals first need to build a strong team and ensure positive conditions for success are established. Once the team is functioning effectively, the principal needs to become a facilitator and be comfortable allowing others to lead. The true sign of an effective leader is one who builds leadership in others and in essence "coaches themselves out of a job." It is important that school administrators push and probe their staffs during the professional learning to get teachers to reflect and maintain strategy. In this study, the administrator was unaware of the additional supports the team would require around creating "End of Cycle Goals" as well as how to conduct walkthroughs. Principals must gauge these needs and build in extra time for frontloading the new knowledge and skills with their staffs. They must also encourage their staffs to practice safely, while having a plan for holding people accountable. Monitoring is a huge and vital

component that leaders often overlook. Yes, the team can loosely hold people accountable, but the Principal is the one who can legally evaluate and have tough conversations with teachers.

The building administrator must maintain the fidelity of the professional development that occurs while overseeing the coaching supports provided to teachers. To help build session objectives towards an end goal, leaders must ask: Is this objective actionable? What is the timeline for support and results? Is it evaluable? Is it feasible? In this school, the principal struggled with managing and planning PD purposefully. This was one of the initial reasons to implement the Cycle structure. Bambrick stresses that great PD begins with knowledge about what teachers need (Leverage Leadership, 2012). Once the school analyzed their data to determine their needs, their focus became how to structure PD going forward. The ILT team committed to designing and modeling "airtight activities,' essentially practices their peers could take directly back and transform student behaviors. The other new part of this was the accountability factor involved with PD. The principal and the team had to think about and plan the monitoring of new learning before, during, and even after implementation. It was important for the team to be effective in their communication of expectations and help to build a common language around what quality instruction looked like. This involved keeping the overall goals and any data transparent at all times.

Implications for Coaches

Since many schools do not have staff in formal coaching roles, they have to become creative in how to provide coaching and feedback to their teachers. In Taylor's case, they did not have a "freed coach," or someone whose sole responsibility was improving teaching and learning. The principal had to rearrange the ILT members' weekly schedules in order to have a block of time available to conduct and host peer to peer observations and conversations.

In the case of freed coaches or trained facilitators, it was vital to work closely with the ILT and build relationships upfront. One lesson learned was the importance of actually creating a cycle of learning from the beginning alongside a school team versus trying to question and fix up one that had already been hammered out by a team. As a coach, in retrospect, I also realized how difficult is to coach the building leadership at the same time of implementing the Cycle. There were so many issues that surfaced around observation and feedback, prepping for PD, and organizing meetings, that we were forced to learn by doing. The largest and most difficult part of my role was pushing the team around the data. I needed to be skillful at not only aggregating the data, but pushing the team to critically think about what the data suggested. We had to conduct quite a few SWOT analyses (a protocol that asks teams to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) as well as re-examine the brutal facts by uncovering the root causes and asking a lot of repeated "why" questions to get to the underlying issues. This required the team to use their norms and relational trust so that members were not defensive. We all served as thought partners and were invested in a common goal.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers implementing the cycle and its components must be open to change. Leaders should know their staffs in order to work on changing the professional culture and climate at the school. How teachers view of this type of inquiry and learning can heavily impact the way they interact with their colleagues and may even stifle growth if they do not see the elements as beneficial. Allowing teachers a fair opportunity to be a part of the ILT can also help build cohesiveness so that no one feels less superior or deems administration as choosing their favorites. This becomes extremely important as peer coaching and observations are essential

components in the structure. Teachers have to be open to the safe feedback from their colleagues as well as trust the process in order to get the most out of the learning.

Teachers should also be invited to provide input at all points during this cycle work. I believe there would have been even more buy-in if teachers, not on the ILT, were able to offer suggestions for the powerful practice beforehand.

Implications for Teams

The success of the Framework for Powerful Results and the Cycles of Professional Learning relies heavily on the team's formation, leadership and perseverance. Teambuilding is not an easy task. Lencioni's (2002) research shares that teamwork in most organizations remains elusive and that organizations fail to achieve teamwork because they unknowingly fall prey to five predictable dysfunctions: (1) the absence of trust, (2) the fear of conflict, (3) the lack of commitment, (4) the avoidance of accountability and (5) the inattention to results. Lencioni's stance on teamwork is that it needs to be learned, explored and reflected upon regularly. Once our team was formed at the beginning of the school year, the team had to not only get into a genuine rhythm of creating agendas and maintaining norms, but it was imperative and took almost half a year to build trust and to get comfortable being candid in front of school leadership and an outsider (me as the researcher and not a regular part of the teaching staff). "Pushing back" professionally as a critical friend was not commonplace at the school nor on the Instructional Leadership Team prior to this cycle commitment.

Teams must learn to weather the cycle, meaning they cannot stop and give up when things get difficult. The true learning occurred when the conundrums arose. The challenges pinpointed what systems and processes needed increased attention. It is important to remember that total release and independence is not recommended. Yes, certain practices will become

routine, yet the cycle's structure has built in checks and balances. Schools and best practices need sustainability, if not the learning will not continue. After a few cycles, schools should shift roles so that once the process is internalized the coaching focus is then shifted to the content. The cycle merely gives teams and schools a framework to follow. A huge revelation for the team was the actual selection of the powerful practice. We debated and agreed that the selection of a powerful practice can make or break a cycle. Some practices have too many other components to consider and some are simpler to implement. The team must stay focused and keep the new learning to a minimum to see growth in both teacher and student practice.

Team dynamics and norms are huge factors that influence a team's functionality. According to Fullan, 2011, effective PLCs "get amazing results" because "peers are supporting and pressuring each other to do better." This peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague or the team is a powerful motivator (Lencioni, 2005). No one wants to come to meetings unprepared or to be observed as ineffective by their colleagues. The power of this cycle structure is that it not only has follow-up measures and feedback loops, but upfront support is provided so teachers can feel successful.

Teams must be mindful and become adept at utilizing protocols, especially when reading professional articles, looking at data and analyzing student work. Creating data systems is also an integral part of monitoring progress towards a school's goals. The ILT and administration must have their monitoring system thoroughly planned out in advance. Setting goals to indicate the impact and implementation look fors is vital in order to begin with the end in mind. After that, all inputs and efforts can align to what the team is trying to accomplish. This is where most teams fall short. Inputs have to be tight. In order to achieve all of this, teams need to anticipate and allow extra time for: learning walkthrough procedures, learning how to create impactful end

goals, as well as learning how to utilize strategic protocols. These actions cannot be glossed over as they contribute heavily to the success and functioning of the team.

The manner in which new learning is delivered, practiced, and monitored is crucial to the success of any professional development or initiative roll out. Teams must consider who is providing the message and support, the "what" or content, and the how in terms of engagement of stakeholders in professional learning. They have to know where they are trying to go before they embark on this journey; otherwise true movement will not occur. Some things may be loosely monitored, whereas others must have tight accountability.

A revelation for our team was the importance of connecting and sometimes even replacing the school's learning to that of their school improvement plan. The cycle work should not be seen as a separate effort, focus or initiative. It should be a strict priority outlined in the school's improvement plan with actions and milestones paced out over time. This work has to be articulated and understood by all stakeholders in the school. By making this part of the school's improvement plan, all data analysis, professional development, readings, and classroom observations can assist in furthering the common goal.

Conclusion

The time spent with the Taylor ILT codified my thinking and actions as a researcher, and left me with many questions that truly pushed my leadership and strategy around school improvement. Many of my further questions come directly out of the time spent reflecting with the team. So much of the cycle's success is determined by the team's goal setting and functionality. Teams need an abundance of leadership training, guidance and norm building on the front end for this work to be impactful.

My research touches on the idea of working alongside an Instructional Leadership Team to follow a structured cycle of learning. Based on the challenges we encountered, another productive study would be to follow the abilities of a team to both work cohesively as one leadership group as well as leaders for their peers when supporting learning in their respected grade level teacher teams. This makes for a strong study mainly due to the common dysfunctions that exist between one team and even across teams. Additionally, the dynamics of leadership can unintentionally pit people against each other within the hierarchy of a school, and it takes a skillful leader to maintain equity, positive culture and climate as well as student achievement as priorities.

The whole goal of this study was to explore a team's journey through a professional learning cycle and to document what they learned to ultimately determine if the learning was linked to increased student achievement. Measuring the impact of our efforts on student achievement and teacher practice would therefore enhance the team's leadership as well as my own. I am currently an instructional coach and my roles and responsibilities include not only developing teachers and leaders with content and best practices, but also determining the appropriate strategy to get schools and teams to increased results for students. Conducting this research convinced me that there are many factors involved, but that building and developing a thoughtful and dedicated team is crucial. The countless team meetings and observations at Taylor School proved many of our assumptions were correct as well as surfaced things we had never thought of.

I truly feel that I accomplished my goal to go deep with an instructional leadership team as we struggled through a cycle of professional learning. This process encouraged me to reflect upon how our learning could benefit additional schools and teams and what advice I could give

them in terms of our wins and tweaks. The research, given its span over the course of the 2011-2012 school year, has also made me a better coach and leader amongst my own team of colleagues. I have since taken on more of a leadership role to help guide and push my fellow coaches and superintendent around the Framework and Cycle. I have organized and facilitated several guided visits in which 13 school leadership teams engaged in cross visits to neighboring schools to observe their cycle work and ILTs in action. As I continue this work on a larger scale across multiple schools now, I strive to push my peers and other ILTs to build strong and effective teams in order to carry out this type of inquiry and data collection. I am truly grateful to have been able to foster such invaluable interactions and rapport with the various staffs at the schools and I owe my learning, growth, and insight all to them.

References

Allington, R. (2005). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research based programs.* NY: Addison-Wesley Longman.

Bambrick, Paul. (2012). Leverage Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control.* NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Battey, D., & Franke, M. L. (2008). Transforming identities: Understanding teachers across professional development and classroom practice. *Teacher Education Quarterly Summer 2008,* 127-146.

Berman, L. M. (1987). The teacher as decision maker. In F. S. Bolin & J. M. Falk (Eds.), *Teacher renewal: Professional issues, personal choices* (pp. 202-216). New York: Teachers College Press.

Bloom, G., Castagna, C., Moir, E., & Warren, B. (2005). *Blended Coaching*: Skills and strategies to support principal development. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Briggs, A. & Coleman, M. (2007). Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management. Sage......

Brown, J., & Moffett, C. (1999). *The Hero's Journey: How Educators can Transform Schools and Improve Learning.* Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Bullock, S.M., & Christou, T. (2009, May). Exploring the Radical Middle between Theory and Practice: A collaborative self-study of beginning teacher educators. *Studying Teacher Education, 5*(1), 75–88.

Collins, J. (2005). *Good to Great and the Social Sectors.* A monograph to Accompany Good to Great. San Francisco: Elements Design Group.

Corson, D. (1999). *Language Policy in Schools: A Resource for Teachers and Administrators.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching,* 2nd ed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1993). Reframing the school reform agenda: Developing capacity for school transformation. *Phi Delta Kappan, 74*(10), 752-761.

Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M.W. (1995). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76,* 597-606.

Donaldson, G. (2006). *Cultivating Leadership in Schools: Connecting People, Purpose, and Practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Drago-Severson, E. (2008). Four practices as pillars for adult learning. NSDC. Fall 2008. Vol. 29, No.4 JSD 61

Drago-Severson, E. (2009). Leading Adult Learning. Corwin Press. Thousand Oaks, CA.

Drucker, P. (1994). *The new realities.* NY: Harper Business.

Dufour, R. & Marzano, R. (2011). Leaders of Learning. How district, school, and classroom leaders improve student achievement. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Elmore, R.F., City, E., Fiarman, S.E., and Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional Rounds in Education.* Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2012). Text complexity: Raising rigor in reading. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Fullan, M. (2008). *The Six Secrets of Change:* What the best leaders do to help their organization survive and thrive. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2011). Change Leader: Learning to do what matters most.

Fullan, M. (2006). Change theory: A force for School Improvement. Centre for Strategic Education . Seminar Series Paper No. 157, November 2006.

Fullan, M. & Knight, J. (2011). Coaches as Systems Leaders. Ed Leadership October 2011.

Fullan, M., Cuttress, C., Kilcher, A. (2005). Eight Forces for Leaders of Change. National Staff Development Council Fall 2005 Vol. 26, No. 4. 54 JSD.

Gallucci, C. (2003). Communities of practice and the mediation of teachers' responses to standards based reform. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 11*(35). Retrieved October 9, 2010 from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n35/.

Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Hinchey, P.H. (2010). *Finding Freedom in the Classroom.* A practical introduction to critical theory. New York: Peter Lang.

Horn, I.S., Nolen, S.B., Ward, C., & Campbell, S.S. (2008). Developing Practices in multiple worlds: The role of identity in learning to teach. *Teacher Education Quarterly, Summer 2008,* 61-72.

Hoy, W., Hoy, A., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research, 68,* 202-248.

Ignat, A. & Clipa, O. (2010). The impact of self-efficacy and locus of control on the professional development of the teachers. *Buletinul. Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești, 62* (1A), *180-185.* Retrieved October 9, 2010 from

Ingvarson, L., Meiers, M. & Beavis, A. (2005, April). Factors affecting the impact of professional development programs on teachers' knowledge, practice, student outcomes and efficacy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13* (10). Retrieved October 12, 2010 from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n10/.

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1996). Educational Leadership. March 1996 v53 n6 p12(5). The Evolution of Peer Coaching.

Kagan, D. M. (1992). Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychology,* 27 (1), 65-90.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (2000). The handbook of qualitative research. Sage Ch 2

Kennedy, M. M. (1997). The connection between research and practice. *Educational Researcher, 27,* 4-12.

Kennedy, M. M. (2005). *Inside Teaching: How Classroom Life Undermines Reform.* Harvard University Press.

Kennedy, M.M. (2004, April). Reform ideals and teachers' practical intentions. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 12* (13), (page range goes here).

Klein, E.J. & Riordan, M. (2009). Putting professional development into practice: A framework for how teachers in expeditionary learning schools implement professional development. *Teacher Education Quarterly Fall 2009, 61-80.*

Kurow, Dale. ELEVATOR SPEECH retrieved Jan 7, 2012 http://www.dalekurow.com/elevator_speech

Lencioni, P. (2002). *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.* San Francisco, CA; Jossey-Bass.

Lencioni, P. (2005). *Overcoming the five dysfunctions of a team: A field guide for leaders, managers, and facilitators.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lindsey, R.B., Robbins, K., and Terrell, R.D. (2009). *Cultural Proficiency.* A manual for school leaders. Corwin Press: California.

97

Lumpe, A.T., & Chambers, E. (2001). Assessing teachers' context beliefs about technology use. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 34(1),* 93-107.

Marshall, K. (2009). *Rethinking teacher supervision and evaluation: How to work smart, build collaboration, and close the achievement gap.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (1999). Understanding by Design professional development workbook. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Meier, D. (2002). *In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization.* Beacon Press: Boston.

Musanti, S.I., & Pence, L. (2010). Collaboration and teacher development: Unpacking resistance, constructing knowledge, and navigating identities. *Teacher Education Quarterly Winter 2010,* 73-89.

Nelsen, J. and Cudiero, A. (2009). Lasting Impression: Targeted learning plan has a maximum impact on teacher practice. *National Staff Development Council,* 30(5).

Newmann, F., & Wehlage, G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators by the center for restructuring schools.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Payne, C. M. (2008). *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Pfeffer and Sutton (1999). The Knowing Doing Gap. Harvard Business Review Press; 1 edition.

Pillay, H., Boulton-Lewis, G., Wilss, L., & Lankshear, C. (2003). Conceptions of work and learning at work: Impressions from older workers. *Studies in Continuing Education, 25(1),* 95-111.

Pitcher, M.A. & Nelsen, J. (2010). Building a Culture of Collaboration: The Chicago High School Network for College Success. Winter 2010 retrieved January 15, 2012.

Protheroe, N. (2008). Teacher efficacy: What is it and does it matter? *Principal, 87*(5), 42-45.

Reiter, T. D. (2008). Why we teach as a second career. Unpublished master's thesis. Ohio University.

Roehrig, A. D., Turner, J.E., Grove, C.M., Schneider, N., & Liu, Z. (2009). Degree of alignment between beginning teachers' practices and beliefs about effective classroom practices. *The Teacher Educator, 44,* 164–187.

Rozenholtz, S. (1989). *Teacher's workplace: The social organization of schools.* New York, NY: Longman.

Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Shulman, L. (1999). Foreword. In Darling-Hammond, L., Sykes, G. Eds. Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice (pp. xi-xxiii). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Stake, R.E. (2000) The handbook of qualitative research. Sage Ch 16.

Steyn, G.M. (2005). Exploring factors that influence the effective implementation of professional development programmes on invitational education. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice, 11,* 7-34.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17,* 783-805. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ640149).

Ware, H., & Kitsantas, A. (2007). Teacher and collective efficacy beliefs as predictors of professional commitment. *Journal of Education Research, 100,* 303-310.

Wenger, E. and Snyder, W. M. (2000). Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier." *Harvard Business Review* 78, no.1.

Wageman, R., Nunes, D., Burruss, J.A., & Hackman, J.R. (2008). Senior Leadership Teams. What it takes to make them great. Harvard Business School Press.

APPENDIX A

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

Setting End of Cycle SMART Goals are the 1st step in Cycle Planning:

End of Cycle Goals:

Must have implementation and impact goals.

Teacher Implementation (Change in teacher practice)	Student Performance (How will student learning behaviors change and affect performance data.)	Environment (What will we see in the classroom)
By the end of the cycle, 100% of teachers in grades K-8 implementing the Powerful Practice with fidelity as indicated by the following look fors: • teachers selecting grade-appropriate complex texts • teachers asking text-dependent questions • teachers modeling text marking (annotation) and verbally prompting students to return to the text to cite evidence • teachers allowing opportunities for students to engage in conversation about parts of texts	**By the end of the cycle, 70% of the students will meet/surpass their growth targets showcasing their ability to analyze and comprehend complex texts as evident in the End of Year (EOY) NWEA assessment.** **Growth from middle of year (MOY) to end of year (EOY) data in informational text, literature, and foundational/vocabulary skills.** • students referring to parts of text as they respond and/or pose questions • students rereading texts multiple times for different purposes • student to student interaction/dialogue • writing in response to reading using evidence from text	**By the end of the cycle 100% of the classrooms will display evidence of:** • student copies of complex texts with annotations • instructional wall charts with examples of text marks • student portfolios of marked text excerpts, writing samples

APPENDIX A

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

Date	Inputs				Feedback Loops			Data Analysis	Family/Community Engagement
	ILT	Teacher Teams	Professional Readings	PD Day	Peer Visits	Learning Walks		Looking at Student Work / Data Wall/ NWEA/TRC/ETC.	
Week 1	Self-Assessment of ILT functioning using ILT rubric Create SMART GOALS to guide the Cycle Implementation Plan Share/complete the Cycle Implementation Plan with teachers Identify a series of Professional Readings aligned to Close Reading for	Review achievement and observation data and share feedback regarding the selection of the powerful practice of Close Reading Agree on/Revise the SMART goals for Student Achievement and Teacher Implementation Read Ch 4 from Danielson	Ch 4 from Charlotte Danielson's book, Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching.	N/A	Safe Practice Time	Safe Practice Time		Complete grade level planning sheet in grade level meetings using NWEA data (group students)	Inform Local School Council of our chosen powerful practice/focus on Close Reading Send parent letter home detailing Close Reading Share the goals and cycle process

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

	the quarter Unpacking CCSS Standard 1	Unpacking CCSS Standard 1					
Week 2	Discuss feedback and outcomes from prior week's teacher team meetings to possibly revise/retool plan Use "4 A's" protocol to read/respond to Chapter 1 of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by Fisher, Frey & Lapp Watch video, create a "look-for" list, and practice whole group modeling of a Close Read of "Salvador" excerpt as a team Locate or create end of quarter reading assessment for grades K-8	Use "4 A's" protocol to read/respond to Chapter 1 of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading by Fisher, Frey & Lapp. Review and agree upon the Close Reading "Look fors." Watch video and observe the modeling of the Salvador piece. Name/Identify the close reading look fors. Schedule peer visits	N/A	Chapter 1 of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by Fisher and Frey.	Safe Practice Time	Safe Practice Time	N/A
Week 3	Plan PD for May 3rd Staff Development Day	Review the look fors	N/A	Chapter 2 of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by	Peer visits Rooms	Safe Practice Time	Look at current teacher created- text Update Local School Council members on ILT's

APPENDIX A

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

					dependent questions in lesson plans	action items around Close Reading as a Powerful Practice
	Make school wide-grade band specific Annotation charts Read Chapter 2 of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading by Fisher, Frey & Lapp-Measures of Text Complexity Review the Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity rubric Practice assessing a text's complexity as a group using the rubric	Share/discuss/alter school wide annotation charts Read Chapter 2 of "Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading" by Fisher, Frey & Lapp-Measures of Text Complexity Assess a text's complexity together Share out how the professional reading influences teacher created questions	Fisher, Frey & Lapp-Measures of Text Complexity		112, 203, 209, 210, 301, 309, 308, 310, 304		
Week 4	Prepare for Staff Development Review/revise Cycle plan as needed Discuss peer observations and	Look at sample student annotations Collectively review the text complexity rubric in preparation for creating text	Text Dependent Question article	May 3, 2012 Staff Development Day: ILT will model a Close Reading using the Gradual Release	Teachers will continue to visit classrooms on their planning periods to observe colleagues utilizing Close Reading strategies	N/A	Teachers will direct students to do a "cold reading" of a complex text and assess using teacher-made text dependent questions

APPENDIX A

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

			of Responsibility	Teachers will reflect on observations using an exit slip on the Google Drive		Next teachers will select a purpose for rereading and will support students in doing a close read of that same text. Upon completion of the task, students will be given the same questions that they were given in the "cold read" Data gained from the two assessments will be used to inform instructional practices.
	feedback protocol to teachers	dependent questions to be used as a pre/post assessment	ILT members will offer break-out sessions on annotation, assessing text complexity, and creating text dependent questions Teacher teams will chart teacher "take-aways" and celebrations			
Week 5	Plan for additional support based on PD and peer observation data Data analysis of grade-level student artifacts (teacher selected texts and questions, student annotations, etc)	Analysis of peers' teacher created, text dependent questions in lesson plans Assess student annotations, teach how to go back and annotate with a	N/A	N/A	Teachers will visit classrooms on their planning periods to observe colleagues utilizing the Close Reading technique Teachers will reflect on observations using an exit slip.	**Targeted Learning Walks** by ILT using Classroom Observation Note-Taking Form (document evidence of implementation of our Powerful Practice) *Tuesday, May 8th* Rooms: 303, 302, 307, 107, 109, 211	Review teacher created text dependent questions Use student annotations as an informal assessment of what kids know/do not know Students will complete an at-home project requiring parental support. Students will be assigned a complex passage and must teach their parents how to Read Closely.

APPENDIX A

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

Week 6	Analysis of teacher feedback (exit slips) regarding peer observations / Prepare for the Targeted Learning Walk-review the process	different color pen on the next reading	N/A		Continue as needed	*Wednesday, May 9th* Rooms: 205, 206, 208, 111, 114	Informally assess or possibly script student responses and conversations	N/A
	Review Learning Walk results in order to plan next steps / Plan for how to increase collaborative conversations around texts in classrooms / Read and use Final Word protocol with Collaborative Conversations article and CCSS Speaking and Listening Standard 1	Analyze student responses to text dependent questions / Final Word Protocol using "Collaborative Conversations" article by Fisher / Revise lesson plans to include increased opportunities for student to student discourse	"Collaborative Conversations" article by Fisher			Targeted learning walks will include weekly ILT visits. A checklist will be used to document implementation of our PP based on observations. *Monday, May 14th* Culmination Targeted Learning Walk Rooms 112, 203, 209, 210, 301, 308, 309, 310		
Week 7	Analyze additional Learning Walk feedback and create "next-step" goals	Watch videos on Fisher and Frey channel to continue noticing the	N/A	N/A	As needed	N/A	Assess 2nd and 3rd set of student annotations on same text	Invite parents to the Close Reading Celebration

APPENDIX A

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

	Identify teachers/grades that require additional support/development; collaborative interactions amongst students and teacher prompting to return to the text						Inform LSC about next school year's plan to continue the same powerful practice
						School wide reading post-assessment	
					Classroom gallery walk		
			N/A	N/A			
Week 8	Analyze the % of students who met their end of the cycle growth targets; Share successes; Re-assess ILT functioning using ILT rubric; Collaborate and select a new PP for the next Cycle Plan; Celebrate successes!	N/A					

APPENDIX A

School Name: Taylor
Targeted Instructional Area: Literacy- Improving Reading Comprehension
Powerful Practice: Close Reading of Complex Texts

Cycle: Q4
Begin Date: April 9, 2012
End Date: June 6, 2012

End of Cycle Goal Achievement(Actual Goal Achieved after the cycle has been completed)

Implementation Goal: By the end of the cycle, 100% of teachers in grades K-8 implementing the Powerful Practice with fidelity as indicated by the following look fors: -teachers selecting grade-appropriate complex texts -teachers asking text-dependent questions -teachers modeling text marking (annotation) and verbally prompting students to return to the text to cite evidence - teachers allowing opportunities for students to engage in conversation about parts of texts Results at end of cycle: 13/17 teachers selecting grade-appropriate complex texts 17/17 teachers asking text-dependent questions 17/17 teachers modeling text marking (annotation) and verbally prompting students to return to the text to cite evidence 17/17 teachers allowing opportunities for students to engage in conversation about parts of the text	**Impact Goal: By the end of the cycle, 70% of the students will meet/surpass their growth targets showcasing their ability to analyze and comprehend complex texts as evident in the End of Year (EOY) NWEA assessment.** **Growth from middle of year (MOY) to end of year (EOY) data in informational text, literature, and foundational/vocabulary skills.** Results at end of cycle: At the End of the Year (EOY) 2012, Taylor Elementary had **62%** of students in grades 3rd-8th meeting/exceeding their growth projections in reading on the NWEA assessment. *Although Taylor did not make their 70% end goal, they increased from the previous year, which was 54%.	Environment Goal: By the end of the cycle 100% of the classrooms will display evidence of: -student copies of complex texts with annotations -instructional wall charts with examples of text marks -teachers asking text dependent questions and-students referring to parts of text as they respond and/or pose questions -students rereading texts multiple times for different purposes -student to student interaction/dialogue -writing in response to reading using evidence from text Results at end of cycle: 17/17 rooms had evidence of student copies of complex texts with annotations 17/17 rooms had instructional wall charts with examples of text marks 17/17 rooms had teachers asking text dependent questions and-students referring to parts of text as they respond and/or pose questions 14/17 rooms had students rereading texts multiple times for different purposes 17/17 rooms had student to student interaction/dialogue 17/17 rooms had samples of writing in response to reading using evidence from text

APPENDIX B Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) Rubric w/Evidence

Element	1	2 (Developing)	3 (Proficient)
Team Purpose	Few or no team members understand the team's purpose or priorities	Most team members have a common understandings of the team's purpose and priorities	Team members share a common understanding of the team's purpose and priorities
	Evidence:		
Meeting Frequency	Meetings take place infrequently and/or irregularly	Meetings take place at least once a month, but not more, and/or last less than an hour	Meetings take place at least twice a month and last a minimum of one hour
	Evidence:		
Roles & Responsibilities	Team members are unaware of their responsibilities and do not have assigned roles	Team members are assigned roles and responsibilities, but do not execute consistently	Roles and responsibilities area assigned to team members (permanently or on a rotating basis), who execute their responsibilities consistently
	Evidence:		
Norms & Trust	The team may have norms, but inattention to violations make them irrelevant. Interactions may be cordial, but lack of trust prevents team members from fully engaging in discussion.	Team has norms, but norm violations are rarely attended to and/or is only addressed by the principal. Team members are cordial and engage in dialogue, but tough issues are not addressed as trust is still developing.	Team members know and follow established norms to ensure productivity and build trusting relationships. Team members call attention to instances when norms are violated. Team members demonstrate trust in one another and do not hesitate to dive into tough issues.
	Evidence:		
Equity of Voice & Use of Protocols	Several team members do not contribute to the meeting, or do so only in superficial ways. Protocols are used superficially, if at all.	The majority of team members contribute to the conversation in meaningful ways. Protocols are attempted, but are not adhered to consistently.	All team members contribute meaningfully to conversation. Protocols are effectively utilized accordingly.
	Evidence:		
Agendas & Use of Time	Session lacks an agenda or clear objectives; the meeting frequently loses focus and team members get off-task	An agenda and/or objectives exists, but they are not followed consistently; the meeting occasionally loses focus or is focused on non-instructional matters. Efficiency or effectiveness is compromised.	Each meeting is guided by an agenda with clear objectives that are focused on the school's priorities related to improving instruction and student outcomes. Time is effectively and efficiently utilized.
	Evidence:		

CONDITIONS FOR TEAM SUCCESS

Element	1 (Emerging)	2 (Developing)	3 (Proficient)
Data-Driven Decision Making	Data is rarely used to inform decisions, or is used to draw conclusions that do not relate to improving instruction.	Data sometimes informs decisions or is only discussed in superficial ways that do help inform decisions.	The team uses data and evidence to inform decisions that improve instruction. Data is relevant, timely, and helps the team better understand an issue.
	Evidence:		
Action Items	No action items generated address improvements to the the instructional core and/or are outside the ILT's sphere of influence. Action items are assigned without designating an owner and/or do not have deadlines.	Action items sometimes focus on the instructional core; occasionally action items focus on external factors. Most action items have owners, but may not be listed as specific people (e.g. Administration, ILT, Teachers, etc); action items sometimes have deadlines or have unrealistic deadlines.	Action items focus on improvements to the instructional core and are within the ILT's sphere of influence. Each action item has an assigned owner and reasonable due date.
	Evidence:		
Monitoring Process	ILT has no tool or protocol for monitoring the implementation and success of action items generated in meetings	ILT may have a tool for tracking/monitoring action items, but the tool is used inconsistently and/or in an ad hoc or disorganized way	ILT has a systematic way to track action items and consistently monitors both their success and implementation
	Evidence:		
Goals	Goals are not clear or measurable.	One or more goals are not aligned with scorecard or TIA.	The school has established clear, measurable goals for student achievement aligned with scorecard metrics and school-specific TIA.
	Evidence:		
Theory of Action (TOA)	The school has not crafted a TOA, is not explicit in identifying a TIA or powerful practice, or most of the cycle components.	The school's theory of action begins to outline a focus and cycle components, but may be missing components or may be unclear.	The school has established a clear theory of action that outlines the school's TIA and powerful practices and incorporates the professional learning cycle components. TOA is updated during the school year as needed.
	Evidence:		
Targeted Instructional Area (TIA)	TIA is not identified, or is identified with little evidence schoolwide.	The school environment reflects the TIA. Professional development is focused on the TIA. Mixed evidence in classrooms of TIA and/or not all staff relate to the TIA.	All teachers and students can relate to and articulate the TIA; the school environment reflects the TIA. Classroom implementation of powerful practices is at a rigorous level.
	Evidence:		
Resource Alignment	The school has not yet begun to align resources to its TIA.	The school has aligned some of its resources to focus on its TIA.	The school aligns its resources (time, people, and money) to focus on its TIA.
	Evidence:		

STRATEGY & GOALS

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CYCLE

Element	1 (Emerging)	2 (Developing)	3 (Proficient)
Cycle Calendar & Implementation (NOTE: For 2011-12, only 1 cycle is expected to be implemented)	ILT has implemented less than 4 cycles with missing components.	ILT has implemented 4 cycles but is missing some components of the cycle.	The ILT is leading the school in at least 4 cycles per year, implementing all components of the Cycles of Professional Learning around one or two Powerful Practices. Cycle calendar fully developed and outlines ILT and teacher team activities on a weekly basis.
			Evidence:
Professional Reading	Practice not systematically incorporated as part of learning cycle	Staff read articles and texts pertaining to effective teaching strategies in the TIA at least once per cycle	Staff read articles and texts pertaining to effective teaching strategies in the TIA at least three times per cycle
			Evidence:
Powerful Practice	Practice not systematically incorporated as part of learning cycle	Selected practice is not a pedagogical practice, does not connect to TIA, and/or does not integrate higher-level thinking skills.	Selected practice is a pedagogical practice that connects to TIA and integrates higher-level thinking skills into learning (aligned to CCSS)
			Evidence:
Input/Training	Practice not systematically incorporated as part of learning cycle	Staff trained, but not all staff are targeted or training is of low quality.	Staff understands success criteria for selected powerful practice as a result of ILT-planned training/modeling.
			Evidence:
Observing Colleagues: Learning Walk	Practice not systematically incorporated as part of learning cycle	The ILT observes classrooms but strays from focus on powerful practice and/or does not use learning walk to identify additional supports.	The ILT observes classrooms focused on the use of the powerful practice, following a period of safe practice. The ILT identifies additional training and supports.
			Evidence:
Observing Colleagues: Peer Observations	Practice not systematically incorporated as part of learning cycle	Some teachers observe each other.	All teachers observe each other at least once per cycle and learn from each other.
			Evidence:
Receiving Feedback	Practice not systematically incorporated as part of learning cycle	Only administrators provide feedback and/or feedback is neither timely nor relevant to the powerful practice.	ILT members provide timely and relevant feedback that reinforces teachers' positive actions and suggests specific improvements.
			Evidence:

Element	1 (Emerging)	2 (Developing)	3 (Proficient)
TEACHER TEAMS			
Looking at Student Work & Data	Practice not systematically incorporated as part of learning cycle	Teachers begin to use data to identify student needs and areas for improvement, but teachers are varied in using this information to change practice.	Teachers use internal/external assessment data and LASW data to inform their practice, craft their own assessments, and address student needs.
	Evidence:		
Teams Established & Meeting	The majority of teachers are not part of a teacher team that meets at least twice a month	Some teachers are not part of a teacher team that meets at least twice a month.	All teachers are members of at least one teacher team that meets at least twice a month (ideally, weekly).
	Evidence:		
Support & Coaching	ILT does not provide support for or understand Teacher Team goals, protocols, or action items	ILT has some understanding of Teacher Team goals, protocols, and/or action items but does not track their implementation or effectiveness	ILT supports teacher team through training and coaching and understands all the teams' goals, protocols, and action items as well as their resulting impact on student achievement
	Evidence:		
COMMUNICATION			
Staff & Teacher Teams	ILT does not systematically communicate with the staff, and some teachers are unaware of what the ILT does.	Team meeting calendars are created but not shared widely. ILT activity is shared with all staff sporadically.	ILT & teacher team calendar is shared widely. ILT members communicate ILT activity to the school's faculty members at large after each meeting.
	Evidence:		
Parents & Community	Parents and community are unaware of targeted instructional area	Parents and community are aware and understand the targeted instructional area	Parents and community actively support student progress in the targeted instructional area
	Evidence:		

Element	1 (Emerging)	2 (Developing)	3 (Proficient)
2011-12 District Expectations for Implementing Common Core State Standards			
Standards Familiarity	Less than half or only those attending the Q1 ILT PD are familiar with CCSS.	The majority of teachers have been introduced to CCSS.	All staff have been introduced to the CCSS, their structure, and where they came from.
	Evidence:		
Unpacking Standards	Less than half or only those attending the Q2 ILT PD have experience unpacking CCSS standards.	The majority of teachers experience unpacking at least one CCSS standard using a protocol with colleagues.	All teachers have experience unpacking at least two standards using a protocol with colleagues.
	Evidence:		
Performance Assessments	Less than half of the teachers can identify the features of a high-quality performance assessment and can articulate the process for developing one.	The majority of teachers can identify the features of a high-quality performance assessment and can articulate the process for developing one.	All teachers can identify the features of a high-quality peformance assessment and can articulate the process for developing one.
	Evidence:		
Unit Planning	Less than half of the teachers understand the process for developing standards-based units	The majority of teachers understand the process for developing standards-based units	All teachers understand the process for developing standards-based units
	Evidence:		

Element	1 (Emerging)	2 (Developing)	3 (Proficient)
2011-12 District Expectations for Implementing CPS Framework for Teaching (available in March?)			
Framework Understanding	Less than half or only those attending the Q4 ILT PD can describe the four domains of the Framework.	The majority of teachers can describe the four domains of the Framework.	All staff can describe the four domains of the Framework.
	Evidence:		
Initial Teacher Self-Reflection	Less than half of the teachers have started to use the rubric rubric to reflect on practice to identify areas of strength and growth opportunities.	The majority of teachers have started to use the rubric rubric to reflect on practice to identify areas of strength and growth opportunities.	All teachers have started to use the rubric rubric to reflect on practice to identify areas of strength and growth opportunities.
	Evidence:		

CCSS

FfT

APPENDIX C

Learning Walk/Classroom Observation Note-Taking Form
Taylor Elementary School

Focusing Question or Powerful Practice: **Is there evidence of students using close reading strategies to read, discuss, and understand complex texts?**

Date: April 6, 2012	Subject _____ Grade: ____	Subject _____ Grade: ____
	Room _____ Time: 9:00- 9:10 AM	Room _____ Time: 9:15- 9:25 AM
Teachers What is the teacher doing? Teacher is . . . • Setting a purpose for reading • Asking text-dependent questions • Using a short piece of complex text • Modeling text annotating - (e.g. underlining, highlighting, circling, writing in margins • Prompting students to return to the text to cite evidence • Providing students time to discuss with each other		

What is the teacher saying?

- Script the teacher's questions and responses

Students	
Students	
What are the students doing?	
Students are...	
• Annotating the text- (e.g. underlining, highlighting, circling, writing in margins, using "Think Marks" (?, *, ;, !,C, P, etc.),	
• Rereading for a different purpose	
• Quoting/referring to text when responding	
• Writing in response to their reading using evidence from the text	
• Discussing the text	
What are students saying?	
• Script the students' questions and responses	

Environment

What in the environment supports the powerful practice?

Look for …

- Instructional wall reference charts that support Annotation marks

- Texts with student annotations

- Student conversation norms

Additional Notes