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How Four Reform Initiatives Helped Develop Attitudes

Regarding Change in Two Middle Schools in East Tennessee

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by

Vicki A. Clevinger

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Dr. Eric Glover, Chair

Dr. Catherine Glascock

Dr. Elizabeth Ralston

Dr. Pamela Scott

ABSTRACT

How Four Reform Initiatives Helped Develop Attitudes

Regarding Change in Two Middle Schools in East Tennessee

by

Vicki A. Clevinger

Schools and districts are implementing more change initiatives because of an increase in accountability through national, state, and city requirements. Teachers and administrators are responsible for adhering to change initiatives and producing the results to bring the reform initiative to a successful fruition. This study explores the attitudes that are prevalent in the schools regarding reform initiatives and the change process.

A qualitative research method was used to explore the prevailing attitudes about change among teachers and administrators. Teachers were not opposed to changing if their students would benefit from the change; however, changing just for change sake was not acceptable. Themes of teacher empowerment and voice were prevalent. Teachers wanted to be heard because they had the expertise within the classroom with their students and they wanted the autonomy to shape reform initiatives to fit the needs of their classrooms. School support, district support, and community support were important systems to ensure success of reform initiatives. Within each support system were important roles and responsibilities teachers depended upon for resources as a reform initiative progressed. In addition, teachers spoke candidly about essential professional development opportunities and collaboration within their schools. Teachers addressed

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the 4 reform initiatives pertinent to this study and discussed the impact of the initiatives on the classrooms.

Reform initiatives are not cure-alls for what is ailing the public schools; however, there is a place for reform within each school and district. Teachers want to have valid data and clear cut goals and objectives to support the reform. Principals and superintendents have roles and responsibilities before, during, and after a reform initiative because teachers look to them for cues regarding reform. The 4 reform initiatives studied are still having an impact on classes today, some more than others.

This study adds to the development of knowledge about the change process and change initiatives. It provides a framework for administrators involved with change to understand the preconceived notions and explore ways to reshape those notions. It may also aid future developers of reform initiatives as they develop programs for schools to adopt.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family. My father and mother James and Libby Bissett taught me at an early age to strive for excellence. I watched my father start his own companies and I learned tenacity. I watched my mother raise a family and support my father and I learned what it meant to be devoted. Their love for me gave me stability and self-assuredness, and, when I moved 1,000 miles away, I took those with me. My father-in-law and mother-in-law Jack and Shirley Clevinger accepted me into their family from the first time they met me. They consider me their daughter and I am in and out of the Will more times than I can count. They have supported my every goal, and they have selflessly provided the resources I needed to attain those goals. My husband Ed Clevinger is my best-friend and my soul-mate. He knows me better than I know myself because he kept telling me that I needed to go back to school for my doctorate. He knew I would not be satisfied until I did. He kept me on track and urged me on with, "You need to be downstairs typing." He has sacrificed as well during this endeavor and I appreciate that he allowed part of his life to be put on hold for me to accomplish this. My family, along with their love and support, is responsible for this research coming to fruition.

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My friends and my coworkers were right there with me from the beginning and I appreciate them all. Specifically I want to thank the following individuals:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With the publication of <u>A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform</u>, the 1983 report on American education by U.S. Education Secretary Terrel H. Bell and the National Commission on Excellence in Education, school systems throughout America continued to be a target for what was wrong with the country. Whether it was the slow job market, the declining economy, or the failure of the family structure, the blame was placed on the shortcomings of public education. The warning bell was sounded by the local and national policymakers because they took this publication as a prediction of the demise of the public school system and even the nation itself. The report concluded that the American education system was no longer successful, and change was needed within the individual schools and systems. The National Commission opened its report by stating, "Our nation is at risk," and subsequent panels and commissions verified that some of our schools were failing, various secondary programs were too lax, a number of high school graduation standards needed to be raised, college entrance qualifications had to be more rigid, and the federal government had to give a new direction to the schools and accept responsibility (Ozmon & Craver, 1986). Government agencies were formed to study the problem and devise a plan. School systems became sufficiently convinced of the mediocrity of their programs and the failure of their schools that they were willing and ready to participate in reform initiatives and programs, hoping they would mitigate the perceived downward spiral in time to provide corrective action.

Various reform initiatives have taken on names such as school renewal, school improvement, school redesign, and school restructuring. According to Chernow (2000) it is hard to decide what to call educational change because U.S. educational history is littered with the debris of repetitious reforms. Adding to the confusion of the name is the lack of consensus as to what is in need of reform, on other words, what needed to be changed into an improved form. Some reformers call for charter schools and school choice, while others push for national standards and new accountability systems (Marschall, 1999). The school reform advocates are in the majority in this 21st century; however, there are those who are not convinced that an educational crisis actually exists. Henig (1994) noted that the American educational system has weathered numerous crises in the course of its development and there is no reason to believe that this crisis is more serious than any of the preceding crises. Furthermore, there are those who deny our schools are in need of reform because today's students are actually achieving as much, or even more, than students of the past (Marschall, 1999). However, the steady stream of low test scores and a persistent achievement gap between whites and most minority groups have resulted in action by the federal government (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Bloomfield and Cooper (2003) stated that NCLB moved the United States, for the first time, toward a national standard in education based on state-determined standards and tests, along with a set of processes and consequences that were federally mandated. NCLB requirements and deadlines call for states to work diligently to make sure they close the achievement gap of subgroups of students and to make sure all students, disadvantaged or not, achieve academic proficiency.

Accountability procedures are being applied on the local, state, and national level with report cards indicating progress. Through the influence of the federal government, states are to set standards, test students, report results by student, type, school, and district, and establish consequences for schools that fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003).

The requirements and deadlines of NCLB have caused school districts and individual schools within districts to take action. It has been mandated through NCLB that 100% of students will be proficient in the areas of reading, language arts, and math by the year 2013. NCLBs Four Pillars have become reality as schools address the tenets of the act which are (a) stronger accountability for results, (b) more freedom for states and communities, (c) proven education methods, and (d) more choice for parents. Schools and systems have been held responsible according to a variety of accountability measures, funding decisions, rigorous curriculum changes, and parental involvement enacted through NCLBs Four Pillars (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). The state, system, and school report cards gave more insight to the principals and superintendents regarding curricular areas needing improvement. These various assessment tools showed that school districts, individual schools, and specific subgroup populations have not been making Adequate Yearly Progress. Hence, a direction was given. Now the schools had to formulate a plan.

Berends, Bodilly, and Kirby (2002) warned the federal and state policymakers to consider carefully what they were asking the school systems to simultaneously generate. The policymakers promoted high-stakes testing, requested school systems to foster comprehensive school reforms that centered on rigorous and innovative curricula and

instructional strategies and encouraged the adoption of multiple additional reforms. The

simple plans school districts and schools may have originally envisioned have grown

disproportionately as the federal and state government has mandated its set of changes.

Hunt (2005) referred to various reform initiatives as the 'magic elixir' and warned they

will meet with failure because of the lack of knowledge regarding what needed to be

reformed and the appreciation of the history of educational reform. Many of these reform

initiatives began in the 1830s and 1840s with the establishment of the common schools,

adoption of devotional readers, and the instillation of the "Life Adjustment" curriculum.

The number of reform initiatives increased in the 20th century with the National Defense

Education Act, open schools, performance contracting, behavioral objectives, modular

scheduling, and site-based management (Hunt, 2005).

Sergiovanni (2000) warned that some politically motivated policymakers may see

the success of the reform initiative in the "process over the substance." He continued by

stating:

> Increasingly, schools are considered successful if they adopt state-mandated
>
> standards, invent clever strategies for aligning the curriculum with these
>
> standards, figure out how to teach this curriculum, and get good scores on state-
>
> provided standards assessments. The better schools are at implementing this
>
> chain of events, the more successful they are thought to be at improving (2000).

Accountability processes and resources have made tracking the success of reform

initiatives easy and user-friendly. Data from students are placed on spread sheets and

then analyzed for growth within grade levels, within cohort groups, and by teacher. The

process of seeing growth is simple, but the method in which growth is obtained is complex.

Background of the Problem

Within the last 20 years, Kingsport City Schools have participated in numerous reform initiatives and projects with a similar goal in mind – to better educate children in such a way that their learning and achievement continue to increase steadily. However, it has been impossible to adhere to and maintain all the requirements and recommendations of each of the reform projects, especially when new reform initiatives have been added and adopted. It is important to explore the perceptions of both teachers and administrators regarding reform initiatives within their schools and their impressions regarding the durability, sustainability, and longevity of those various reform programs.

Purpose of the Study

It is the purpose of this phenomenological study to address four of the most familiar reform projects of the last 20 years in the Kingsport City Schools, to determine if and why these reform initiatives continue to influence teaching and assessment, and to investigate teacher and administrator perceptions regarding change in the form of reform projects and initiatives. The four reform initiatives to be addressed are (a) single-gender instruction, (b) inclusion, (c) cooperative learning, and (d) the Southern Regional Educational Board's Making Middle Grades Work.

Research Questions

The primary question this study addresses is, "How do experiences with school reform programs impact the attitudes of faculty members regarding change?" The

secondary questions are as follows: How did teachers develop commitment and have a voice in the creation and development of reform initiatives? What processes are used in the adoption of reform projects? How are teachers trained to implement the reform initiatives? From a teacher's perspective, what makes a reform project successful? What prevents a reform project from being successful? From an administrator's perspective, what makes a reform project successful? What prevents a reform project from being successful?

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

Schools have been thrown into a continual change shift due to increased demands for teacher accountability and student productivity. Teachers and administrators find themselves at the center of many reform initiatives without fully understanding what particular change may be brought to their schools. Much has been written regarding change theories and the impact even a simple change can have on schools and districts. Because it is the role of the teachers and administrators to implement various reform initiatives and programs, we need to listen to them and their perceptions regarding the success or failure of change initiatives within their schools.

This study will add to the developmental base of change theory and will give insight to the various strategies that enhance the longevity of reform initiatives along with the shortcomings of failed reform initiatives. Superintendents, principals, and teachers will be able to glean information that may serve their system or school in preparation for future change initiatives.

Organization of the Study

       This study is presented and organized in five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the

introduction, background of the problem, purpose of the study, and significance of the

study. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature pertinent to the study. Chapter 3

describes the research methodology and procedures used in the study. Chapter 4 contains

an overview of the interview process, information from the participants, and an analysis

of the data using manual coding techniques. Chapter 5 is devoted to a summary of the

study, conclusions, recommendations, and future implications.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature pertaining to the subject of school reform. Topics included in this chapter describe change in the educational setting, teacher empowerment and voice, the support systems of school, district, and community, and the four particular reform initiatives addressed in this study: single-gender, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work. It is organized in such a way that the broad spectrum of change in the educational setting will be reviewed first; then, the review will become more specific with three particular support systems necessary for reform. Finally, the 4 selected reform initiatives addressed in this study are reviewed.

Each section is pertinent to the primary research question, "How do experiences with school reform programs impact the attitudes of faculty members regarding change?" A fundamental knowledge of change in the educational setting is essential for presenting the fundamental qualities needed for change and addressing the enormous challenges ahead for educators who participate in reform initiatives. Reeves (2009) remarked that the attitudes of faculty members regarding change can be swayed positively or negatively depending upon the support offered by the leadership of the school, the district, and the community. Emphasizing the four familiar reform initiatives of single-gender, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work focuses the input of the interviews toward the sustainability and progress of these reform initiatives through the eyes of the teachers and administrators who were involved in the programs.

Change in the Educational Setting

Teachers are the first to say that their jobs have changed in the last decade. Whether it is because children have changed, families have changed, government has changed, or society has changed, teachers must address how they teach and what they teach differently. Demands for change are not new to teachers, and sometimes those demands for change come fast and furious depending on results of various assessment and accountability indicators. Ultimately, the heavy burden of responsibility for change rests on the shoulders of the teachers. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) warned that if teachers do not adopt the change and improvements as their own and translate them into effective classroom practice, the changes and improvements will amount to nothing. Goodlad (2002) mentioned that teachers are sometimes labeled as resisting change when they question the arguments leading toward a change initiative, or reform project, and they know that saying 'it's all for the children' only exacerbates the problem when truly it is not. Teachers are distrusting of reform initiatives because they are typically characterized by volatility, they have little impact on instruction or learning, and are implemented in shallow ways (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006). Goodlad likened this era of volatile school reform as having an eduvirus that addresses reform with simplistic prescriptions. Eduvirus is Goodlad's term for the reform epidemic and the effortless manner in which reforms are addressed. The simplistic prescriptions serve limited purposes and can be costly to the district. Ultimately, the eduviruses can create roadblocks that hinder the serious redesign and improvement needed in schools.

Systemic reform that relies on uniform strategies from one school to the next is not the answer when schools need to be individually assessed and holistically evaluated.

When schools or districts adopt external models, they fail to focus on changing the culture of the school, and consequently the models fail to become embedded (Fullan, 2003). Fullan et al. (2006) defined a school that has embedded a model of reform as one that puts the child at the center and provides an education that is tailored to that student, it uses a precise individualized assessment system centered on data, and the faculty is engaged in focused, ongoing learning. Finn and Ravitch (2002) preferred a 'reinvention' approach to school reform that concentrated on standards and accountability individualized for each school and system. The reinvention approach simply rejects the proposition that schools must be centrally managed according to a single formula and welcomes diverse strategies contributing to school reform. Students and families should also be free to match themselves to particular schools that suit them best.

School reform and business reform have been coupled with each other since vocational curricula were established and test scores were compared from one district to another so taxpayers would know their tax monies were being well spent (Cuban, 2006). The assumption that schools and businesses are alike continues to be fixed in the minds of most corporate and civic leaders along with many parents and educators. This assumption has fundamental flaws. Advocates of business-inspired initiatives need to be reminded that public schools serve multiple purposes, are service oriented institutions, and serve diverse cultures (Cuban, 2006). Fullan (2003) advocated for the type of knowledge development and knowledge sharing that resulted when people in businesses collaborate. However, Fullan commented that it is not just about collaborating but whether the people in the organization added knowledge and contributed to the development of knowledge in others.

Fullan (2001) examined the barriers to school change that included traditional, teacher-centered beliefs in conjunction with the beliefs of administrators, students, and parents. He also examined teachers' knowledge bases and their personal characteristics, such as age, experience, and academic training and the traditional organization of the school. The beliefs of teachers have had a significant impact on teaching practices; therefore, teachers with the highest levels of reform-based teaching practices also exhibit the most reform-based beliefs (Roehrig & Kruse, 2005). These reform-based beliefs are critical in the implementation of the reform initiative and its subsequent strategies.

Nonetheless, each politically driven reform initiative puts policy and practice out of balance (Goodlad, 2002). The United States' education policies have directly tied schooling and school reform to the nation's economic health, and politicians want the message that 'our schools are failing' to remain in the minds of their constituency. Goodlad (2002) maintained that it is the issue of school reform that spreads the infectious negative ideas regarding education and even if school reform did outrun its usefulness and victory on the educational front was declared, it would be found that the nation's economy was not being nor had ever been propelled by our schools. Goodlad predicted that there may be a time reform initiatives and programs would no longer need to be adopted and implemented for schools to move toward educational excellence. Goodlad also warned that at that time what is left over by various school reforms would promote dangerous assumptions about change, would have damaged specific human beings and their career of teaching, and would denigrate the effectiveness of our educational institutions and the democracy needed for the educational infrastructure.

A 1995 report generated as part of a Congressionally mandated study of effective schools programs and other school-based reforms identified features common to schools successfully engaged in reform (Quellmalz, Shields, & Knapp, 1995). A mail questionnaire to administrators in 1,550 districts about the status of comprehensive school-level improvement efforts in schools and 32 site visits resulted in a three-part list of successful reform strategies.

1. Challenging learning experiences for all students that included high expectations, a more challenging curriculum, alternative configurations of students and teachers, and alternative measures to track a student's success.

2. A school culture that nurtured staff collaboration and participation in decision-making that reformulated the roles and authority exercised by teachers and administrators.

3. Meaningful opportunities for professional growth that result in staff development priorities, strategic plans, teaming and coaching, visits to classes, and pooled resources (Quellmalz et al., 1995).

The second strategy listed above for successful reform begs to be addressed further. The success of reform initiatives depends on the reformulation of roles within a school. These roles need to be shaped and structured toward a more positive and enduring school culture that allows teacher empowerment over decision-making and a voice to participate.

<u>Teacher Empowerment and Voice</u>

Empowerment has been defined as a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems

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(Short, 1994). According to Short (1994) empowered teachers believe they have the skills and knowledge to act on a situation and improve it. A teacher is apt to be recognized as having a voice when he or she is considered professional in the accumulated skill, wisdom, and expertise in the specific and variable circumstances of the classroom (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Teachers have purpose for what they do and these purposes must be voiced as well. However, many initiatives in school restructuring and reform have too often been mandated without the involvement or consent of teachers (Hargreaves, 1997).

In order for faculty and staff to work effectively together and experiment with various activities and partnerships, they must possess a feeling of autonomy, control, and voice in what they are doing (Beyer & Ruhl-Smith, 2002). Autonomy, a dimension of empowerment, refers to teachers' beliefs that they can control certain aspects of their work life. The hallmark of autonomy is the sense of freedom to make certain decisions (Short, 1994). Teacher autonomy is an important aspect of teacher work motivation and a key factor in school reform (Short, 1994); it is also positively linked to teacher behaviors that foster student learning (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Pearson and Moomaw (2005) found that increases in teacher autonomy are related to decreases in job-related stress and increases in satisfaction as well as perceived empowerment and professionalism.

Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) have viewed teacher empowerment as a moral activity of the principal and as a moral basis for teacher autonomy and professionalism. Effective principals nurture that subtle process of enabling teachers to work together to generate solutions within that feeling of autonomy and control. Empowerment may

begin by allowing more freedom for teachers to have within their classrooms. Later this empowerment will manifest itself in working collaboratively with other teachers and ultimately lead to taking responsibility in a leadership role in the school (Beyer & Ruhl-Smith, 2002). Ultimately, every teacher will begin to assume some responsibility for accomplishing the mission of the school. Providing teachers with a significant role in school decision-making is a key element in empowerment as teachers gain the opportunity to increase control over their work environment. However, for teacher involvement in decision-making to happen, teachers must believe that their involvement is genuine and that their opinions have critical impact in the outcome of decisions (Short, Greet, & Michael (1991).

Blase and Blase (1997) stated that empowering teachers may not come easily to some principals and they may need to develop leadership practices and policies that maximize teacher empowerment. Such practices and policies may include the use of a more facilitative approach to leadership rather than a managerial approach. Leaders who are facilitators provide resources and opportunities for examining data and ensure that opportunities exist for collective goals and objectives (Blase & Blase, 2001). Practices and policies may also include the promotion of participation that will lead to decision-making from the bottom up and consensus building (Chandler, 1999), and use of leadership strategies that appoint teachers to various leadership roles, provide release time for teachers to pursue vertical team options, and invite teacher input in hiring and in scheduling decisions (Giba, 1998). The benefits of teacher empowerment include increased job performance and productivity, improved teacher morale, increased teacher

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knowledge in subject matter, and higher student motivation and achievement (Keiser &

Shen, 2000).

Lieberman (1992) addressed the fact that most of the reform initiatives primarily

called for quick fixes rather than comprehensive changes in the education system.

Principals not attuned to leading in a culture of change make the mistake of seeking

external innovations and taking on too many projects (Fullan, 1999). In addition, these

reform plans often failed to involve teachers, which doomed the efforts from the start, or

substantially diminished their potential for success. For real education reform to occur,

teachers must have direct involvement and voice. Teachers become stakeholders in

school change efforts and this ownership allows accountability for specific outcomes and

increases the likelihood of successful reform (Gable & Manning, 2004).

Fullan (2001) remarked that empowering teachers for school reform is a worthy

goal. One way to empower teachers is to form a support group of people who have the

same goals. Establishing a network is both a method for empowering teachers and a

catalyst for reform in classrooms (Weidemann & Humphrey, 2002). These professional

learning communities are empowered all the way up the line and across it. They engage

in lively, vigorous debates of how best to improve learning and raise achievement

through dialogue that respectfully question existing practices (Hargreaves, 2008). Isaacs

(1999) defined dialogue as a "conversation with a center, not sides" (p. 19). Reaching

new understanding is the intention of dialogue, thus leading to a totally new basis from

which to think and act. It is from this context of new thinking that new agreements might

come and shared meaning might lead to a coordination and alignment of actions and

values. Glover concluded that "good teachers change practice when they perceive the

change is beneficial to their work" which then led him to focus his leadership upon the conversations with teachers that explored change possibilities (in press). Glover concluded that the challenge of finding new meaning for school leadership rests upon the leader before it rests upon others. Because the challenge rests upon the leader, leaders, as well as teachers, need to experience the benefits of having a voice. Both teachers and administrators need the empowerment necessary to make key pedagogical, management, and budgetary decisions (Lipsitz, Jackson, & Austin, 1997).

Ultimately, teacher empowerment and voice can only be as useful as the support systems in place that allows them to exist. The support systems of school, district, and community are instrumental for the success of any reform initiative and are vital for the sustainability and longevity of the reform strategies.

<div align="center">Support Systems</div>

School Support

Fundamentally, as Fullan (2001) stated, change takes place within the classroom; however, in addition to curricular changes and changes in teaching, there must also be change in the educational leadership of a school. It is the principal's vision, dedication, and determination that provide the mobilizing force behind any reform effort. The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become. Ultimately, the direct responsibility for improving instruction and learning rests in the hands of the school principal (Beyer & Ruhl-Smith, 2002). Improving instruction and learning depends on principals who can foster the conditions necessary for sustained education reform in a complex, rapidly changing society. The dilemma of a leader is that on one hand failing to act when the environment is radically changing leads to extinction, while

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on the other hand making quick decisions under conditions of mind-racing mania can be equally fatal (Fullan, 2001). Change leaders are needed more than ever right now and reculturing the environment within a school is the main work of change leaders (Fullan, 2005).

Reeves (2009) simply defined culture as "the way we do things around here" (p. 37). Reeves remarked that cultural change is challenging and time-consuming, but it is possible and necessary. Transforming culture, changing what people in the school value and how they work together to accomplish it, leads to deep, lasting change.   Fullan (2001) called the type of principal who recultures the school as the Cultural Change Principal. Cultural Change Principals display palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope. In addition, Fullan characterized the Cultural Change Principal as having five essential components. A Cultural Change Principal has moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, skills to improve relationships, the ability for knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence-making strategies. Along the same characterization, Reeves described four imperatives for the leaders of cultural change: (a) leaders must define what will not change, (b) organizational culture will change with leadership actions, (c) leaders need to use the right tools for their school and system, and (d) change in culture requires relentless personal attention by the leader.

Effective principals focus on their students and allow the data to drive their focus. Administrative school support is when teachers and administrators together plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Shared decision-making is critical to any reform movement. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) agreed that the bottom-up and top-down tension in bringing about reform is a symptom of

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fundamental dilemmas and problems in bringing about educational change. A possible

remedy is to have all staff members engage in conversation because the total support of

the faculty will be a key to the success of any initiative.   When the entire staff is

involved in investigating its own performance, it is highly probable that the staff will give

more commitment to changes intended to correct distressful situations (Hall & Hord,

2006).

Principals can successfully contribute to the success of change within a school

through budgeting and scheduling as well as allowing shared-decision making. The

decisions a principal makes in the area of budgeting and scheduling influence the

availability of programs and resources to students during the school year. The desire to

change does not bring with it an open pocketbook. Principals need to be aware of the

curriculum being taught and the instructional strategies used in the classroom to arrive at

sound scheduling decisions. Classroom observations are a basis for dialogue with

teachers and can lead to individualized professional development opportunities (Beyer &

Ruhl-Smith, 2002).

Fullan (1993) noted that important change involves anxiety and conflict, and

principals need to resist the temptation to lessen the emotional cost of the reform. Fullan

likened the emotional cost of reform to raising and lowering the temperature in the

school. In other words, the school leader needs to raise the temperature at times and

lower the temperature when needed, constantly making adjustments. Principals raise the

temperature by bringing attention to the hard issues and keeping them as their main focus

(Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Principals lower the temperature when they step back and

address the small problems, when they temporarily reclaim responsibility for the tough

issues, and when they slow down the pace and process of the challenging norms and expectations (Fullan, 1993).

Roehrig and Kruse (2006) remarked that there can be no school renewal without teacher renewal; therefore, an important facet of administrative school support is allowing and encouraging professional development that supports the change initiative, along with increasing teacher knowledge. Effective principals use several strategies to increase teacher knowledge. They provide opportunities for professional development, they circulate current professional literature, and give additional support by supplying basic resources. They also make themselves available to teachers to talk and share thoughts about teaching (Blase & Blase, 2001). Reform-based change, change using the curricular and pedagogical strategies that align with the practices promoted by the reform initiative, needs to consider accompanying professional development because reform initiatives often require radical changes in teachers' belief systems (Roehrig & Kruse, 2006). Professional development and school renewal are inextricably linked because they support and reinforce each other. Teachers reported that their participation in workshops, seminars, and conferences positively affected their self-esteem and sense of support. In addition, their motivation, classroom reflection, and reflectively informed behavior were affected most dramatically increasing their innovation and variety of teaching methods in their classrooms (Blase & Blase, 2004).

However, misguided approaches to staff development contribute to the problem rather than offering a solution. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) proposed that, "Many staff development initiatives take the form of something that is done to teachers rather than with them, still less by them" (p. 17). Inservice opportunities need to take into account

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the total teacher in regard to age, gender, and personal values (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Huberman (1991) said that staff development taps into and builds upon, the more positive focusers who do not ignore innovation but respond to it cautiously and selectively.

Hord and Boyd (1995) presented five models for professional development.

1. Individually guided staff development – a teacher develops and carries out a personal plan for professional learning activities.

2. Observation-assessment – a teacher solicits feedback about his or her teaching practices after an observation by a peer or other observer.

3. Involvement in a development and improvement process – a teacher develops new programs or curriculum or participates in decision-making with regard to problems identified in a school improvement process.

4. Training – a teacher attends sessions to learn new skills or obtain further knowledge.

5. Inquiry – A teacher, either alone or with other teachers, follows a problem-solving process in which data are collected and analyzed and changes in practice are made based on this analysis.

School administrative support also allows teachers time to collaborate regarding the various aspects of initiating and maintaining a reform project. It is through this collaboration that teachers talk about lessons and their delivery methods, discuss various discipline problems associated with innovative methods of teaching, and share new approaches to the otherwise old way of doing things. Improvement in teaching is a collective rather than individual enterprise, and analysis, evaluation, and experimentation,

in concert with colleagues, are conditions under which teachers improve (Thiessen, 1991). In fact, cultures of collaboration among teachers seem to produce greater willingness to take risks, to learn from mistakes, and to share successful strategies with colleagues that lead to teachers having more positive senses of their own efficacy, beliefs that their children can learn, and improved outcomes in learning (Fullan, Bennett, & Rolheiser-Bennett 1991; Thiessen, 1991).

The implementation of reform-based ideologies often requires a transformation in teachers' ideas about and understanding of their subject matter and teaching. In fact, Roehrig and Kruse (2005) warned that if teachers held beliefs that were in opposition to the intents of the reform initiative, the result would not be reform-based instruction at all. Teachers' interpretations of what change means for them influences what they subsequently do and how they do it (Sikes, 2002). Gideon (2002) used four collaboration strategies in a high school in Austin, Texas to build a strong, better functioning school: (a) develop a campus leadership team, (b) organize learning communities, (c) provide time for grade level meetings and department meetings, and (d) organize supporting cadres that will plan and implement school projects.

Teacher collaboration can be a powerful tool of change. The benefits can include reducing the isolation of being a solo practitioner, sharing the responsibility for the teaching of a diverse group of students, learning new skills and approaches, reflecting upon practice with nonsupervisory colleagues, and adding enjoyment to teaching (Little, 1999). When teachers have the time and structures in place to meet together, continuous critical inquiry and improvement will become norms that govern their behavior. These norms will both sustain and encourage innovation (Hord & Boyd, 1995).

Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) found that just as there needs to be a unified approach within the leadership and staff of a school when a reform initiative is being considered, there also needs to be a reform initiative within the district that will require all central office members to share responsibility for meeting the needs of the students through the reform programs. District goals and plans provide a framework for schools' improvement plans that in turn are carried to particular departments and classrooms. Central office personnel need to see themselves as the technical assistance team to the individual schools. Collaborative planning and shared decision-making must go beyond the walls of the individual schools to the central office, boards of education, and higher levels of decision-making. Evidence has shown that structural reforms can work but only when human and social resources are organized to provide particular forms of support for schools and students (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) stated that school restructuring by initiating reform projects needs to have the full support of the superintendent of the school district. Collaborative efforts at the building level will not succeed unless supported and modeled at the district level. The adoption and fulfillment of school reform initiatives must be a unified effort between the district and the individual schools. Both need to have a complete understanding of collaboration, empowerment, community, and other related issues (Beyer & Ruhl-Smith, 2002). Teachers, principals, and central office personnel need to have an emphasis on coleadership because school-wide implementation of instructional and curricular initiatives is virtually impossible without facilitation and

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support from the district (Elmore, 2000). It is the district's leadership role to create a sense of urgency for change and some districts may have to learn to operate in new ways.

Little (1999) suggested that the school district and the individual schools will have some essential, specific outcomes that will be expected with the reform initiatives, and these outcomes will come more readily if school district leaders do the following: (a) work with all stakeholder groups to develop a shared vision of a unified system, (b) support a planning process to re-examine past practices, (c) secure resources for the needed changes, and (d) monitor initiatives to ensure progress, make midcourse corrections, and sustain momentum.   In addition, districts need to provide an infrastructure to support and encourage the implementation of school reform with professional development, teacher and administrator evaluations, and budgeting (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Successful outcomes for all students through reform projects require the district administrators to take leading roles in initiating and monitoring the various steps toward school restructuring. In addition, there must also be a commitment by the district to maintain the program through a sometimes turbulent implementation stage and to give the program time to have an impact (Schaffer, Nesselrodt, & Stringfield, 1997). Significant change in the form of implementing specific innovations can be expected to take a minimum of 2 to 3 years; bringing about institutional reforms can take 5 to 10 years (Fullan, 2001).

According to Roehrig and Kruse (2006), the role of the district, linked with school support, is to provide the necessary professional development, fostering a more explicit understanding of the rationale of the pedagogy behind the reform initiatives. The district needs to provide professional development in a timely manner so teachers can

become comfortable with the reform project prior to the beginning of the implementation year. Successful school improvement efforts and reform programs have been directly linked with the district commitment to ongoing staff development supporting the school improvement effort (Schaffer et al., 1997). Hightower (2002) argued that school districts need to offer professional development for principals where they can learn about exemplary instructional practice and ways to support teacher and student learning. Required monthly principal conferences will allow principals and district administrators the opportunity to discuss reform implementation.

Community Support

Gable and Manning (2002) found that educational reform requires the joint efforts of families and schools. The spirit of collaboration that is consonant with school change must leave the school boundaries to form alliances with families, community organizations, and social service agencies. There are compelling reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and the community, and help teachers with their work (Epstein, 1995). Reeves (2009) said that teachers and administrators should never underestimate the power and drive of a few committed community members who support their school and their reform programs. These community members invest their time and effort into the school because they care where the school is going. In turn, they became an external pair of eyes for the school and also became critical friends, able to provide a new perspective and constructive criticism.

Schools and school districts can get tough about student learning, use their minds to identify new and better ideas, and establish strategies and mechanisms of development, but successful strategies have always involved relationships (Fullan, 2007). Educators have to go into their communities with empathy and interact meaningfully with their constituents. Henry (1996) argued that being professional can no longer mean remaining isolated in the school   Partnerships properly structured and instituted constitute one form of bridge-building that can be supportive of common goals in school restructuring (Pankake, 1991). Burke (2005) suggested that teachers, administrators, and community members meet twice a year for a strategic work sessions. The staff and faculty can use their expertise to direct the community toward a united goal with the school. It is no secret that a goal of these strategic meetings is to have the community talk about the school reform projects in a positive manner.

The way schools care about children has been related to the way schools care about the children's families (Epstein, 1995). Fullan (1988) called the establishment of school councils with parent and community participation in advisory or decision making roles a phenomenon of major proportions. Through school councils, a relationship is reframed with an environment that has become more intrusive and boundaries that have become increasingly transparent. An astute principal recognizes that school councils are part of a systemic shift in the relationship between schools and community and that greater interaction is essential to long-term success. Nothing, said Fullan, motivates a child more than when learning is valued by school, family, and community working in partnership.

In recent years, the school district in this study has undergone four major reform initiatives. It is through these four reform projects that teacher empowerment and voice, school support, district support, and community support are examined and reported.

<u>Four Reform Initiatives</u>

<u>Single-Gender Instruction</u>

Tyre (2006) reported that single-gender instruction has been studied and implemented in various school systems to meet the progress standards mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, for remedial students, and for English language learner students. Single-gender instruction applies the data-driven strategies and techniques of teaching for each gender with its own specific needs and challenges. Children today face many more daunting difficulties than in the last decade or two. Tyre said that more males are inclined to be drug dependent at an early age, a number of girls become alcoholics, and higher numbers of both males and females find themselves in parent roles before they end their formal public schooling. Due to the increased challenges and struggles, boys and girls both wrestle with the mandates of schooling, class structure, and curriculum requirements. Numbers speak loudly when boys in elementary school are twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with a learning disability and twice as likely to be placed in special education classes. In addition, boys in high school have been receiving lower tests scores as compared to girls in standardized writing tests. This has been reflected in higher education as well. Thirty years ago men represented 58% of the student body and in 2006 they represented the minority at 44% (Tyre, 2006). It was imperative that public schools and its advocates address options that could benefit both males and females with single-gender instruction.

Both Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson and Senator Hillary Clinton crossed party lines to craft new legislation legalizing single-gender education in American public schools (Sax, 2005). A decision made in November 2006 by the U.S. Department of Education allowed same-gender education any time schools thought it would improve achievement, expand the diversity of courses, or meet students' individual needs. This ruling gave more flexibility to a previous ruling that only allowed single-gender education in limited cases, as in gym classes and sex education classes (Bauer, 2007). As long as enrollment is voluntary and any child excluded from the class must get a substantially equal coed class in the same subject, single-gender classes are not violating Title IX, a federal law aimed at ending gender discrimination in public schools (Richmond, 2005). Coupled with the previous ruling, the federal No Child Left Behind Act contained a provision that made it easier for schools to offer, and parents to choose, a single-gender classroom environment in a coed public school setting (Meals, 2006).

Sax (2005) reported that "male and female brains are organized differently, with functions more compartmentalized in male brains and more globally distributed in female brains" (p. 12). Scientists verified this fact by the mid-1980s; however, at that time they believed that these differences were due to hormonal differences (Sax, 2005). Research found that these differences were not hormonal. They were genetically programmed and present at birth. As Sax professed, "Girls and boys play differently. They learn differently. They fight differently. They see the world differently. They hear differently. Girls and boys behave differently because their brains are wired differently" (p. 28). Hanlan, Thatcher, and Cline (1999) concluded that the areas of the brain involved in

language, spatial memory, motor coordination, and getting along with other people develop in a different order, time, and rate in girls as compared with boys.

Sax (2005) stated that girls and boys have different educational styles and different expectations for the teacher-student relationship. Girls are more likely to do their homework because they want the teacher to think well of them. Boys, on the other hand, will be motivated to study if they find the material intrinsically interesting and not to please an adult. Girls are more likely to assume that their teacher is an ally and a friend. Boys are less likely to make that assumption. Girls are more comfortable asking the teacher for help when they need it. Not so with boys. Small group self-directed learning works for girls but not for boys. Many young boys are energized by confrontation and time-constrained tasks; however, just a few girls will flourish under that kind of high pressure.

As of 2007, 253 public schools across the nation offered single-gender classes and 51 schools were entirely single-gender (Bauer, 2007). For many of the schools scheduling single-gender classes, data are not the only reasons to continue with the initiative. Principals, teachers, and parents have attested to fewer distractions and interruptions and the students are more attentive to the task at hand. The single-gender classes also allow students to be more inquisitive and less self-conscious about reading aloud or speaking out (Richmond, 2005). In addition, single-gender classes may encourage students to expand their horizons with girls pursuing careers in the fields of mathematics and science and boys pursuing their interests in the arts.

There are plenty of same-gender classrooms that have failed as well. Too many teachers are not provided with the appropriate training to teach each individual gender

with the techniques and strategies warranted, or they are forced into accepting this reform initiative without any supporting enthusiasm or interest in results. Flannery (2006) stated that for single-gender classes and instruction to work, teachers must first be given a choice to participate then they must be given the proper professional development for training.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent possible and in the least restrictive environment. In an inclusive classroom, the special education support services are brought to the child rather than the child moving to the services as in a pull-out program. Inclusion requires only that the child benefits from being in the class and that appropriate modifications and accommodations are individualized according to the student's needs. Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1995) stated that proponents of inclusion believe that a child should always begin in the regular environment and be removed only when appropriate services cannot be provided in a regular education classroom.

There are two federal laws that govern the education of children with disabilities, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Neither requires inclusion; however, both do require a significant effort being made by the school to find an inclusive placement for all special education students. IDEA maintains the assumption that least restrictive environments begin with placement in a regular education classroom; however, IDEA also recognizes that it is not appropriate to place all children in regular education classrooms. The law only requires that school districts have a continuum of placements available and that the degree of inclusion be driven by the student's needs as determined by the Individual

Education Program (IEP) team. Within the student's IEP, there is a specific justification for decisions regarding a student's participation with nondisabled peers in academic, extracurricular, and nonacademic activities (Lipsky, 2003). Ultimately, the intent of IDEA has always been to educate many students with disabilities as possible in the regular classroom while still meeting their unique needs (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1988). Baker et al. (1995) explained that any recipient of federal funds under Section 504 must provide for the education of each qualified person with disabilities, along with persons who are not disabled, to the maximum extent appropriate to meet the needs of the person with disabilities. Therefore, a student with disabilities is to be placed in the regular educational environment with the use of supplementary aides and services unless the student cannot receive a satisfactory education.

A number of studies including meta-analyses have pleased proponents of inclusion because of results supporting an inclusive classroom compared to a segregated classroom for student achievement and gains. One particular study was conducted in 1985 at Johns Hopkins University through a school restructuring program called Success for All. The most dramatic gains and improvements occurred among the lowest achievers placed in an inclusion classroom compared to a segregated classroom. Only 4% of the then fourth grade students placed in an experimental inclusion setting in school had to be held back in one or more grades. The failure rate of the fourth graders who had failed one or more subjects was 31% (Allington & McGill-Frazer, 1990). A study was also conducted of high school graduates with special needs in 1989. Over a 15-year period, the employment rate of high school graduates with special needs who were served

in inclusion classrooms was 73% compared to 53% representing those high school graduates with special needs in segregated classrooms (Piuma, 1989).

When students with disabilities were placed in regular education classes, both regular education students and special education students showed positive signs regarding a reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness (Peck, Carlson, & Helmstetter, 1992), growth in social cognition (Murray-Seegert, 1989), improvement in self-concept of nondisabled students (Peck et al., 1992), development of personal principles and ability to assume an advocacy role toward their peers and friends with disabilities, and warm and caring friendships (Bogdan & Taylor, 1989). In addition, Bricker (2000) noted that including children without disabilities offered the children with disabilities relevant and appropriate models for learning new skills and information. In fact, teachers reported that when they were at a loss on how to teach the acquisition of a developmental skill to students with disabilities, they watched their students without disabilities for ideas and teaching strategies (Bricker, 2000). In addition, creative teachers with adequate support can find numerous ways to incorporate functional life skills into more typical academic settings, often benefiting all the students in the class (Sapon-Shevin, 2004).

When inclusion practices are part of a school restructuring program, there are several key components of success to be followed and implemented. Schools need to allow for a flexible learning environment for both the special education and general education students within the classroom. All students, both general education and special education, need to work toward the same overall educational outcomes but at different levels with differing degrees of support. A focus needs to be on high expectations for all

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students in the inclusion setting and teachers need not regress to a prescriptive, remedial teaching approach. Ultimately, an inclusion classroom will celebrate the diversity within its walls and understand that it is a reality to be valued not just tolerated and accommodated (York et al., 1993). There is a word of warning, however, for schools restructuring their programs toward inclusion programs. They should not focus all of their attention on merely getting the students into the classroom but should concentrate attention on educating the teachers in the effective teaching methods and strategies appropriate for children with special needs (Kauffman, 1994).

According to Lipsky (2003), the most common methods used for inclusion are as follows:

1. Co-teaching/full-time places a special education and general education teacher in the same classroom, jointly sharing responsibility for the entire class.

2. Co-teaching/part-time has a special education teacher dividing his or her time between two general education classrooms.

3. Indirect support involves the special education teacher providing consultative support to the general education teacher in whose class students with disabilities are included.

4. The special education teacher takes primary responsibility for modifying materials and developing alternative instructional and testing strategies for several students.

5. The special education teacher serves a cohort of students along with a team of teachers.

An inclusion classroom does not look like a traditional classroom. Colleagues work together to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. Teachers feel comfortable sharing their knowledge, stepping out of old roles and learning new roles, learn from other fellow professionals in the building, and learn by observing strategies intuitively employed between students. There is differentiated instruction because the needs, intelligences, and learning styles differ in an inclusion classroom. No Child Left Behind, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 proposed by George Bush and signed into law on June 4, 2001, contains six subgroups: White, Black, Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, Asian Pacific Islander, and Economically Disadvantaged. The subgroup Students with Disabilities includes the special education students in inclusion classrooms. General education and special education teachers have to balance what their students know and are able to do with the requirements of NCLB achievement gains. It is through IDEA that teachers are given additional support through supplementary aids and services that provides the means for teachers to teach a broader range and greater diversity of students (Lipsky, 2003). Inclusion programs have been successful when both parents and staff are committed to the philosophy that all children will learn and benefit from the opportunities in an inclusion classroom and when every child has been assured he or she is a valued member of the classroom community (Bricker, 2000).

Cooperative Learning

Considerable attention continues to be focused on cooperative learning pursuant to its inception in the early 1900s. During the 1980s, cooperative learning methods received considerable attention because of their potential to serve as an alternative to the

traditional competitive classroom compared to a cooperative classroom (Manning &

Lucking, 1991). Slavin (1983) defined the cooperative learning process as a set of

alternatives to traditional instruction systems or rewards and sometimes grades based on

the academic performance of their group. Cooperative learning will look different in

different classrooms because age groups and subject areas lend themselves to different

aspects of cooperative grouping. In addition, all students bring different talents and

abilities to the classroom and ultimately to individual groups.

There are two reasons that have explained why cooperative learning continues to

be instrumental in classrooms today. The first reason is that the competitive environment

does not encourage students to learn in a cooperative fashion (Manning & Lucking,

1991). This does not mean that a student will not feel success in an individual job well

done; however, it does mean that within the parameters of cooperative learning, success

only comes when the group achieves the goal together. There are no rewards for

outperforming peers, rather the cooperative group listens to its peers and assists and

teaches each other. The second reason is that more and more evidence proves that

properly implemented cooperative learning contributes positively to academic

achievement, social skills, and self-esteem (Manning & Lucking, 1991). Data from

several studies showed low achievers demonstrated greater gains while some studies

revealed that high achievers showed the greater gains was proof that cooperative learning

looks different in different classrooms. Slavin (1989/1990) concluded that cooperative

learning methods can and usually do have positive effects on student achievement and

achievement effects do not result from all forms of cooperative learning. In addition,

cooperative learning is an effective teaching strategy in inclusion classrooms.

Cooperative groups have helped create positive student and teacher dynamics and also encouraged greater peer support along with student to student interaction (Dyson, 2001).

Sharan and Sharan (1989/1990) suggested that cooperative learning that produces positive classroom achievement has two features. The first is that there are group goals established whereby team members work interdependently toward success. The second is that group success depends upon individual contributions and learning for all its members. However, Johnson and Johnson (1989/1990) explained that simply placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not produce cooperation and high achievement. The classroom teacher must set parameters and specifically teach the necessary skills to assist cooperative learning in groups. Johnson and Johnson also found that students must get to know one another and learn how to resolve conflicts constructively. As important as outward achievement gains are, inward self-esteem gains must not be overlooked. Manning and Lucking (1991) stated that cooperative learning addresses the feelings of being liked by peers and experiencing academic accomplishments (Manning & Lucking, 1991). Students have experienced greater self-esteem because they have more friends and have more positive feelings about their education and academic achievement (Slavin, 1989/1990). In typical classrooms, students become either winners or losers, and that in itself can foster negative attitudes. Towson (1985) found that by cooperative learning, groups of students see each other as academically and socially competent colleagues rather than competitors.

Listed below are eight commonly used cooperative learning structures, along with the author of the particular method.

1. Learning Together (Johnson & Johnson 1987)

2. Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (Slavin 1978)

3. Teams-Games-Tournament (DeVries & Slavin 1978)

4. Jigsaw (Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, & Snapp 1978)

5. Jigsaw 2 (Slavin 1987)

6. Team Assisted Individualization (Slavin, Leavey, & Madden 1986)

7. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (Madden, Slavin, & Stevens 1986)

8. Group Investigation (Sharan & Sharan 1989)

Sapon-Shevin (1999) found for cooperative grouping in a classroom to succeed, the teacher needs to be fully committed to student-directed learning and to be familiar with the cooperative learning structures that will most appropriately benefit the particular classroom environment and students.   Developing appropriate, interesting curricular lessons using the cooperative grouping method takes time and effort. The teacher becomes a monitor and the guide of actions of the classroom and not the single source for information. Sapon-Shevin concluded that a cooperative learning environment enhances a student's ability to make decisions, think critically, and work cooperatively, and these learner characteristics are valued in the work force of today and the future.

Making Middle Grades Work

Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW) is a Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) school reform program specifically designed for the middle schools and junior highs. Their premise is that if schools create an environment that motivates children to make an effort to succeed then those students will be able to master rigorous academic studies that will lead to academic gains and achievement. Making Middle Grades Work

focuses first on motivating students to achieve at a higher level. When that motivation is in place, Making Middle Grades Work practitioners have suggested the following:

- Students will learn a rigorous academic core taught in ways that enable them to see the usefulness of their studies.

- Supportive relationships between students and adults will provide them with the extra help and support they need to meet challenging course standards and make a successful transition to successive grades.

- Teacher advisors will assist students and their parents to set goals and select more rigorous courses that prepare students for college-preparatory classes in high school.

- School leadership will focus on supporting what and how teachers teach by providing common planning time and professional development activities aligned with the curriculum, school improvement plan, and the Making Middle Grades Work Key Practices (Southern Regional Education Board).

Baseline data are gathered for Making Middle Grades Work through standardized tests that measure achievement levels for middle school students. Currently they are using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for scores in reading and mathematics. These scores indicate whether students are prepared for challenging high school studies as well as being on track for college readiness. The information gleaned from this testing is used to base the prescription and the mission for the individual schools engaging in the MMGW reform initiative. Making Middle Grades Work encourages comprehensive school improvement through a framework that facilitates and encourages higher level performance from the students, staff, faculty, and administration.

One facet instrumental in the success of Making Middle Grades Work depends on a rigorous academic core of mathematics, science, college-preparatory English, and social studies consistent with what students must know, understand, and be able to do. Consequentially, all eighth grade students are now enrolled in prealgebra rather than any basic math or resource math class. The revised science curriculum calls for additional laboratory and technology experiences incorporated into the classroom. Reading is to be incorporated into all subject areas with emphasis on techniques and strategies pertinent to reading across the curriculum. The language arts curriculum expects a minimum of 10 books of various types being read, ultimately leading to 25 books, short weekly papers being written, and one or more research papers being written. The social studies curriculum is to engage students with knowledge about their heritage, their government, their world, and their economic principles (Southern Regional Education Board).

In addition to the curricular goals and benchmarks, Making Middle Grades Work embraces core values that each school and school system should incorporate in its framework for school reform. These are as follows:

- All students matter and need an adult adviser who will work with them, giving structured guidance and advisement.
- High expectations for student work and learning can be aided with a system of extra help and time.
- Classroom practice needs to engage all students and give students opportunities to use new skills and concepts in real-world applications.

- Teachers need to work together to formulate a support team that will examine what students need to succeed in challenging academic subjects and related arts studies.

- Parents must clearly understand the higher standards for performance and communicate often with the teacher so progress can be tracked and changes can be made.

- Teachers must be highly qualified in the core curricular area and have an in-depth knowledge of their subject along with various teaching strategies that will engage and challenge students.

- Districts, schools, administrators, and teachers need to use the data available at their schools to determine student and teacher performance and to make needed revisions in school and practices.

- The middle grades need to provide ample opportunities for students to use technology to improve their skills.

- Principals must encourage teachers and work together with them in planning and implementing research-based improvements (Southern Regional Education Board).

Research Triangle Institute contracted with the Southern Regional Education Board to test the validity and reliability of SREBs assertions regarding the high functioning schools who participated in the Making Middle Grades Work reform initiative. Their findings are as follows:

- Schools that fully implement the Making Middle Grades Work initiative are more likely to have students who score significantly higher than other students in systems not implementing this reform initiative.

- More students are likely to perform at or above Proficient levels in standardized achievement tests.

- Assignments become more challenging, rigorous, and meaningful.

- Teachers develop a personal interest in their students and extend extra help and time to ensure learning of the content (Southern Regional Education Board).

Making Middle Grades Work is a total reform program that can ultimately remake a school into a progressive and exciting place to learn and teach by establishing a culture of high expectations and letting students know that their middle school years are important to their futures.

Summary

Efforts to increase achievement for all students in public schools have often been addressed with a succession of changes in the form of new and improved reform initiatives or projects. Considering the primary question of this study, "How do experiences with school reform programs impact the attitudes of faculty members regarding change?" there is a myriad of possibilities simply due to how particular school systems and schools decide to handle change. Understanding the concept of change and reform readily establishes the parameters under which successful change can take place. The establishment of teacher voice and the available support systems during the change process can positively or negatively alter the attitudes of those affected by that change. Single-gender classrooms, the special education program of inclusion, cooperative

learning, and the Southern Regional Education Board's reform initiative Making Middle

Grades Work lend themselves appropriately to the study of reform and change initiatives.

Each of the four depends on the support of the faculty, staff, central office personnel, and

the community for their successful implementations and positive results.

The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests the following conclusions:

- Instrumental in the success of any reform or change initiative is the voice and

  empowerment given to the teachers who will be carrying out the process in their

  classrooms.

- Principals give teachers a sense that their principal trusts them, and that the

  principal recognizes the value of their input (Blase & Blase, 2001).

- Teachers attributed greater commitment, honesty, collegiality, and focus to their

  increased sense of belonging and being needed (Blase & Kirby, 2009).

- Successfully bringing a reform project to fruition depends on the commitment and

  support of the principal in the school, the central office personnel in the district,

  and the stakeholders in the community.

- At the heart of the school's capacity to successfully engage teachers and staff

  toward a change initiative is the principal who focuses on the development of

  teachers' knowledge and skills, professional learning communities, program

  coherence, and technical resources (Fullan, 2003).

- Administrators and staff in the school district office can make important

  contributions in efforts to move implementation of interventions and change

  processes (Hall & Hord, 2006).

- Interactions between school, family, and community are instrumental in the change process because these partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students (Epstein, 1995).

- The welfare of the child and the child's best interest is what pulls the commitments of the principal, the district, and the community together.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter details the methodology used in the study. It includes a discussion of

the research design, a description of the context of the study, participant selection,

development of the interview, and treatment of the data.

Research Design

The goal of this study was to understand how experiences with school reform

programs impacted the attitudes of faculty members regarding change. The qualitative

research was conducted using the design component of a case study that allowed an

understanding of attitudes and practices involved and facilitated informed decision-

making after data collection. An elite interview allowed the researcher to gain valuable

information from the well-informed participants in the school.

Questions may still arise regarding the validity and vulnerability of qualitative

inquiry. The concreteness of quantitative research and its objective discussions are in

qualitative research addressed via the subjective perceptions of single participants.

Nevertheless, the data derived from qualitative methods are equally valid and reliable as

that derived from quantitative approaches. Confusion and debate have proceeded when

advocates of a more subjective approach misconstrue the heart of qualitative inquiry,

which aims to understand the meanings and purposes of human activity rather than

human behavior interpreted in a strict cause and effect configuration (Alexander, 2006).

The task of qualitative inquiry is to understand the meanings people have

constructed and explain the meanings of particular social phenomena with as little

disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 1998). There are five types of

qualitative research in education: basic or generic, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. A case study design is employed for this research to gain a more in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. Case studies are different from other types of qualitative research in that they are intense descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system (Merriam, 1998).

The recognition that humans are 'storytelling creatures' who narrate the existence of themselves and others has created a climate of acceptance for the role of descriptive language and the nearness of emotion engendered by narration (Bergen, 1999). It is with that in mind that elite interviews were conducted with all participants because elites "respond well to inquiries in broad areas of content and to provocative, intelligent questions that allow them freedom to use their knowledge" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 352). The teachers and administrators interviewed have an in-depth knowledge of the structure of the educational system and are comfortable making generalizations regarding the system and change. Rubin and Rubin (1995) warned that elites often limit the length of their interview because their time is too valuable to spend in long discussions. In an effort to overcome this barrier, time was spent with potential respondents at a faculty meeting where the research was explained. During this faculty meeting it was also stressed that the interviews would be a chance for the participants to reflect on their experiences with reform initiatives and draw conclusions regarding their attitudes toward change.

To improve the validity of data collection and maximize the agreement on the description of events, mechanically recorded data, participant review, and an auditor review were used. Using mechanically recorded data ensured that everything that was

said was preserved for analysis (Merriam, 1998). Participant review, or member checking, enlists the assistance of the participants and asks if the information obtained is accurate and if the results and findings are plausible (Merriam, 1998). According to Maxwell (1996), member checking is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of interviewer misinterpretation regarding what the participants are saying and their perspectives and conclusions. Participating teachers and administrators received a copy of the interview for their editing. They were given the opportunity to freely make changes, delete any part of the interview, or add ideas that were not part of the original interview. The changes were then sent back to the researcher for comprehension and clarification of the edited material. It was through this process that the participants agreed that the information gleaned from the interview was fair, accurate, and ready for publishing.

Throughout the entire process of collecting and transferring information, an outside reviewer was used. The outside reviewer, the auditor, inspected the "codes, categories, and themes used in description and interpretation" of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 329). The auditor was first apprised in detail as to how the data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. The auditor also posed questions to ensure that the information gleaned and presented was not biased or slanted toward the researcher's posture on the subject.

<u>Context for the Study</u>

Individuals selected to participate in this study were public school teachers from two middle schools in one upper East Tennessee school system. Each middle school has an enrollment of 725 - 750 students. In accordance with their enrollment, each middle

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school has 48 general education and special education teaching positions. Each middle

school serves a portion of the population described as low, middle, and upper class.

Together they have 76% of students receiving free and reduced lunch; however, neither

school is a Title I school.

Participant Selection

Twelve teachers combined from the two middle schools in the school district in

upper East Tennessee were contacted and arrangements were made for interviews. All

teachers from each middle school were originally placed in four categories: zero to 4

years experience, 5 to 9 years experience, 10 years experience and over, and retired.

Three teachers were chosen from each group to be interviewed for a total of 12 teachers.

These ranges of teaching experiences were selected to broaden the information obtained

regarding attitudes toward reform from teachers who had little to no experience with

reform initiatives all the way to the teachers who had vast experiences with educational

reform initiatives.

In addition to the 12 teachers from the two middle schools, the two previous

principals from the same middle schools were also interviewed. Both had been principal

at their particular middle school between 15 and 20 years. Their experiences with reform

initiatives were vast and their perceptions toward change for the school added another

dimension for understanding how the attitudes toward change developed within each

school.

Interview Strategy Development

Merriam (1998) stated that instead of highly structured interviews, qualitative

investigations are to be more open-ended and less structured. The semistructured

interview allowed for more flexible wording and the interview became a mix of more structured and less structured questions. To ensure the 'user-friendliness' of the questions, a pilot interview was conducted. Merriam explained that pilot interviews are crucial for trying out questions because the researcher will identify the questions that are confusing need rewording, discard the questions that are irrelevant, and add new questions that were not part of the original interview.

Once the interview questions were formulated, the participants were interviewed. The participants' attention was first directed to the four reform initiatives pertinent to this study: single gender classes, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work. With this framework of thought, the participants directed their remarks regarding change to a reduced number of reform initiatives. These questions were more specific to allow the participants to reflect on what they remembered about the reform initiatives and the impact on their classrooms.

The questions then became more general to allow the participants to tell about their experiences with change within their educational surroundings. Because of the nature of the research, questions were formulated so respondents would give their opinions regarding change initiatives through reform programs. Respondents were able to analyze the success or failure of reform initiatives, and questions were altered and revised depending upon the direction of the responses.

Data Gathering

Interviews were conducted in either the classroom or the homes of each participant. The participants were contacted by phone calls requesting their participation in the study. Once approval was received, a individual follow-up e-mail was sent to

confirm participation and determine an interview date and time. A few minutes were

spent in "small talk," as McMillan and Schumacher (2006) recommended, to establish a

proper interviewer-interviewee relationship during the interview process. The

participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form before the interview and were

apprised that participation was completely voluntary and could be stopped at any time

deemed necessary by the participant. It was also explained that the participants would

receive a copy of the transcripts to make corrections, add statements, or clarify thoughts.

It was also explained that while it was intended to use comments verbatim, names would

remain confidential. Postinterview thank you notes were sent to all participants. The

protocol for interviewing teachers was also used with the principals.

Data Analysis

Interviews were tape-recorded and reviewed in their entirety before the

transcription process began. Recurrent themes and key ideas were preliminarily noted

from the data. Tentative ideas and possible conclusions were generated and noted as

well. The recordings were transcribed by the researcher personally in order to expedite

familiarity with the transcript content. Once the transcription was complete, themes were

identified by first coding the entire transcript. A color coded coding technique was used

with a key indicating the theme and color designation. After the coding, the data were

divided into designated categories and groups as a way of identifying any

interconnectedness between themes. This process helped to uncover the common themes

and recurrent ideas expressed in the data and to formulate the direction for subsequent

conclusions.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to explore how experiences with school reform programs have impacted the attitudes of teachers and administrators regarding change. Specifically, teachers and administrators addressed the changes that had taken place in each of the educational institutions, the impact the change through the reform initiatives had on classrooms and schools, and the longevity of each of the programs. In addition, teachers and administrators were able to address the concept of change with a more global educational focus.

The four reform initiatives addressed were single-gender instruction, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Southern Regional Education Board's Making Middle Grades Work. Each teacher and administrator formulated his or her opinions regarding change and change initiatives around the familiar four reform projects.

As initially planned, data were collected by interviewing teachers and administrators in two middle schools in East Tennessee. Teachers from two middle schools were interviewed regarding their experiences with the four reform initiatives and their attitudes regarding change in light of the four reform projects. The teachers were placed in one of four categories for experience: (a) zero to 4 years, (b) 5 to 9 years, (c) 10 years and over, (d) and retired. The teachers served from 1 to 33 years and amassed 178 years of teaching experience. The different levels of experience in teaching contributed to a more complete analysis regarding the changes that had taken place and perceptions regarding change.

In addition, a previous principal from each of the middle schools was interviewed. Both of these administrators were principals at their particular middle school between 15 and 20 years. Interviewing administrators in addition to teachers was done to develop a broader perspective of the attitudes regarding change. Their years of experience in conducting change initiatives within each school in addition to their attitudes from an administrator's point of view were valuable in garnering data for analysis.

Each teacher and administrator granted the researcher an elite interview that lasted 30 minutes to 45 minutes. Interviews were held in either the classrooms or the homes of the teachers and administrators. Eight teachers stayed after hours and wanted the interviews to be held in their classrooms. Three teachers had the interviews conducted at their homes, and one interview was conducted at the researcher's home. One administrator was interviewed in an office and the other administrator was interviewed at the interviewee's home. All teachers and administrators did not reveal their names or the names of their schools in the interviews. Both the teachers and administrators read and signed an informed consent form with information regarding the study.

Confidentiality played an important role in the interview process. The researcher assured the participants of their anonymity, and the respect for the participant's need to maintain confidentiality allowed the participants to speak candidly with the researcher. In an atmosphere of mutual respect for each other, interest in the subject being addressed, and the desire to enrich the lives of children, the teachers spoke at length about the changes that had taken place in their schools in light of the four reform initiatives and revealed their perspectives regarding change. The two administrators were also able to

verbalize their own perceptions regarding change in light of being an administrator in the schools participating in the reform initiatives.

Interviews began with a summary of the purpose of the study and the primary research question: How do experiences with school reform programs impact the attitudes of teachers and administrators regarding change? The secondary research questions proceeded to address the various specific components underlying the development of the teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward change: (a) commitments to a reform initiative, (b) processes to adopt reform projects, (c) teacher training for implementation of a reform initiative, (d) and successful or unsuccessful reform initiatives. See Appendix B. Teachers were asked to reflect upon each individual reform initiative they were familiar with and address the successes, or nonsuccesses, of the reform projects. Administrators were asked to reflect upon the same successes or nonsuccesses as they focused on the school at large.

Themes were identified by the researcher using information garnered from the transcripts. The researcher transcribed her own interviews which made it possible to get a first-hand look at recurrent themes. The formal transcription was then coded to verify those recurrent themes. Themes identified in that analysis of interview material are presented below using descriptions from the interviews. The first theme presented described the teachers' and administrators' current attitudes regarding overall change in the educational setting. The teachers and administrators addressed the importance of change and how education has changed. The second theme of teacher empowerment and voice was included. Teachers and administrators described the need for teachers to have ownership of reform initiatives and the voice consistent with making reform initiatives

their own. Next, the support systems needed to make reform initiatives successful were discussed. School support included the principal's role in establishing and continuing a reform initiative through professional development, collaboration of teachers, budgeting, staffing, and scheduling. District support discussed the roles the superintendent and the district personnel play in adopting a reform initiative and maintaining school district support to individual schools. Community support discussed how the community is important in the success of a reform initiative. Finally, teacher and administrator perspectives on each one of the four reform initiatives of single-gender classes, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work were included. These four reform initiatives helped develop the current attitudes of the teachers and administrators regarding change in the educational setting.

<u>General Change in the Educational Setting</u>

All one has to do is pick up a newspaper or an educational journal to realize the extent to which education is changing. Teachers and administrators were more aware than anybody that times are changing and students are changing. They did not doubt that change is needed; however, they did question the extent change needed to take place and the goal change would accomplish. It was easy to tell someone to change, but telling someone how to change was more complex. Change in itself was uncomfortable to many people, and teachers were no exception to the rule. Teachers established routines, schedules, techniques, and procedures, and the anticipation of changing the norm was laden with anxiousness and anticipation. Through these interviews teachers voiced their concerns, frustrations, and hopes as they observed the changing educational scene.

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Both groups, teachers and administrators, agreed that education needs to change with the times. Schools that did not change became stagnate, and teachers did not want to be a part of a school that did not grow. The prevailing attitude of the participants regarding the need for change was voiced by an administrator who said:

> If you are alive you are changing, and public education is alive and always changing, otherwise it is dead. We all know schools that have not changed with the times and the students suffer, the teachers suffer, and education, in general, gets a bad name for being lost in the past.

One of the major indicators that schools were obliged to change was developed around the need for a more technological savvy institution. Half of the teachers interviewed immediately mentioned the fact that technology demanded schools change with the times. Teachers were concerned with the fact that they needed to change and embrace technology as much as bringing technology into the buildings for the students. One teacher confessed her weakness with computers yet accepted the fact that knowledge of technology would only make her a better teacher. She stated:

> I will study, I will learn, I will question, and if it helps students learn, I will embrace it. Computers have not come easy. That success of being able to use computers with ease has not come easy, but if I see it helps me spend more time with students, cuts the paper load, is more efficient, then I will learn. I want to be the best teacher I possibly can. That's a desire I've always had, that I want to be effective. I want to help students learn and I enjoy watching them learn. So change is important because you must grow with the job. I don't want to teach it thirty times the same way, I want to teach it thirty different ways, and I am still working on the best way, and I enjoy it.

Seven of the teachers interviewed had concerns that they were not staying abreast of the newest innovations in technology. Their schedules, time constraints, and lack of professional development activities kept them from being as knowledgeable as their students regarding technology. Teachers expressed the desire to add more technology to

their lessons and to rework lessons already developed so technology could be used. One

teacher stated:

> I like change and I think change is necessary. We have to change with the times.
> Look at communication. We have to jump on that bandwagon. Technology is
> only going to advance. We've got to learn everything we can to stay up because
> the kids already know more than we do, at least most of us, especially about
> computers, technology, and any kind of gadgets. We've got to stay on it. I
> change things I do year after year. I try to add a little more technology with each
> lesson. Now I do a lot of the same activities, but it is never exactly the same.

Two of the teachers interviewed looked at the need for more technology in their

classrooms as an aid for instruction, especially in gaining their students' attention. They

noticed that today's students are used to quick movements, changing scenery, action

packed storylines, immediate reinforcement, and hands-on activities through the

technology their students have in their own homes.   Teachers saw the need to implement

teaching strategies in their classrooms that reinforced what students were already used to.

One teacher explained:

> Yes, our children learn differently. I mean they are high-tech. They do not sit.
> They are more active and they don't like just sitting and being drilled, obviously,
> anymore. So yes, I think our education does need to change as time goes on.
> Even with laptops. Our kids are quite literate with computers and everything.
> Even having laptops and I know that it is a financial situation there, but where I
> came from they are already having laptops and doing a lot of their work on
> laptops and that is just what our children are used to and that is what they are
> good at. Yes, obviously, education does need to change as times change.

Four of teachers grimaced when they made the comment regarding how

technology could assist them as they entertained their students. To these few teachers,

they saw themselves as being more entertainers at times than instructors. Instead of

fighting that stigma, they decided to play upon the fact that if they got the students'

attention first with something entertaining then they might be able to slide in some

subject related information and their students would never know. One teacher remarked:

Well, everything is changing around us. We are just getting so much to do. Even when I think about when I started teaching here to this time, the differences in the technology made available to me now as compared to then are vast. The world is changing, technology is changing, and the kids are changing. They want us to be entertainers more so than before and we have to change when kids change. We have to be willing to make those changes as well.

Having more technologically savvy students was a good thing in the eyes of some of the teachers interviewed. Teachers remarked that they did not have to spend valuable class time explaining how to maneuver through a computer program before assigning a project. More students came into class computer literate knowing how to do Power Point, Excel, and Microsoft Publisher. Teachers used this established knowledge and revamped lessons and assignments accordingly. One teacher participant stated:

> The kids we have now are more technologically savvy as opposed to kids five to ten years ago, so you have to change your presentations, what they are doing, and how things are run because I wouldn't necessarily have to show these kids how to do basic Microsoft functions. They already come into class knowing it. So, I mean, eventually if I didn't change how I am doing that, I am teaching them something they already know how to do, which is wasting everyone's time.

Nine of the 12 teachers interviewed coupled the words 'teacher' and 'change' together because they said a teacher has to be willing to change. The teachers spoke at length about the changes they had made in their classrooms in the last years. Some of the changes were miniscule – changing desks every 6 weeks – to profession altering – embracing a new teaching style or strategy to meet the needs of a diverse population of students. One teacher went on to relate:

> I am always looking for a change. If I didn't think it would deter my students in any way, I would be right there to go. And I am a change person in my classroom. Sometimes things just don't work so we have to take another avenue. When I see a type of teaching isn't working, sometimes we have to get in the closet and pull out manipulatives that will make it work. Or I find a program on the Smartboard or some other kind of software that we can use that will make this work. If you aren't open to change, you can't be a teacher. You've got to be able to fly by the seat of your pants at any time and you've got to look at yourself and

really search yourself and if something isn't working, just because you've done it for years, doesn't mean you can do it again. You've got to find an alternative way to work. I'm right there.

All of the participants agreed that change was needed; however, they stipulated that there must be progress if they were to continue in that change. Timelines for observing and determining success and progress varied from months to years. Also, the teachers could not definitively address what they meant by success or progress. The majority of the teachers based progress on TCAP scores, while a couple said student success is seen daily. One teacher stated:

> I like it as long as change is going to bring about a better result in the end. I am not close-minded to try new things. I am all about change and I will continue to go with that change as long as I see progress. But it is wrong to just keep doing things just because it is coming down the pike and we already know that it is not going to work. I have to be open-minded about things after twenty years. In education, we've got to ask what else we can try. Every year I try something else…two or three things.

Two of the interviewees admitted they had a problem with readily accepting change in their classrooms because their traditional method of instructing had worked well for years. However, these same two teachers were not opposed to "trying new things" as long as they still had control of what went on in their classrooms. One teacher explained:

> I don't know everything and I have to get that out of the way. And I know that is what is wrong with some of the people. Some have the attitude of it is already a failure before it starts, and we can't do that with these kids. Not even with society and the way it is changing. I will give things a try, but I know what works best in my classroom.

Other teachers closely reiterated the viewpoint that teachers know best. Concern was voiced that reform initiatives begin "at the top" and move down to the classroom. Teachers were adamant that the top down approach did not work as well as the bottom up

approach because the classroom was the proving grounds of many reform projects. The

teachers remarked that the success or nonsuccess of a reform initiative will ultimately be

seen in the classroom. One teacher explained:

> Change should begin with the teacher and move the other direction. Yes, grass
> roots types of programs are ones that actually make change rather than ones from
> top down. Some of my best ideas came from former classroom teachers rather
> than an administrator who had not been in a classroom in the last twenty years.

The teachers who noted that reform should initiate within the classroom instead of

working its way down from administration also noted teachers did not solely look at

teachers who had good test scores to use as a model for changing their classrooms. They

admitted that test scores had to play an important role because of the No Child Left

Behind laws; however, it was more important to them to model their classroom after

teachers who taught their students to be successful and competitive. One interviewee

stated:

> Teachers are not going to model themselves after another teacher based only on
> test scores. Test scores, I think, are important. They have to be important due to
> No Child, but most teachers want to be successful and make the kids successful.
> And that is a year long process as opposed to a one day, three day standardized
> test, so when you are looking at a teacher, they want to see what is happening in
> other classrooms and what they can do to make their kids more competitive and
> more successful in their areas.

The two administrators voiced their agreement that schools needed to change with

the times. They saw first hand how technology impacted the schools and they knew that

they were responsible for making those hard decisions when it came to budgeting to get

the necessary tools in the schools. The administrators also expressed concern that

teachers had become weary of so many reform projects in so short a time. One

administrator explained:

As our society moves forward, change is inevitable. What you do with that change is probably as important as the fact that it is going to happen. Administratively, when you decide we are going to change just for change sake, that's probably not a good philosophy. There is too much involved with bringing change into a school to not think it through.

Teachers and administrators were not opposed to change; however, they saw the futility in changing for change sake. Because technology was rapidly changing, teachers admitted they need to learn more about the newest trends in technology and incorporate more technology in their classrooms. Generally, teachers were not opposed to trying new things if they were convinced it would increase student achievement. Concerns from the teachers included reforms that were short-lived with not enough data to justify their demise, reforms initiated only on data without consideration of any other variables, and mandated top-down reform initiatives without stakeholder input.

<u>Teacher Empowerment and Voice</u>

Teachers want to be in control of change. A paradox possibly, but teachers and administrators are used to controlling their environments. When their environments need to change, teachers want to be in charge of that change as well. Administrators encourage teachers to take charge of change when they give teachers a voice in various facets of the change initiative. Also, administrators can empower teachers to take ownership in change initiatives by encouraging them to devise personalized strategies and techniques for their classrooms to be assimilated within the parameters of a change initiative. Teachers can take control of change within their classrooms by making change personal.

All of the teachers interviewed related how classroom teachers must have ownership in a reform initiative for it to be successful. This ownership of and

commitment to a particular change project did not come quickly because teachers need to have time to do their own research and talk with other teachers. The consensus among the teachers interviewed was that once they felt like the reform initiative became "theirs" and not "administration's" then they would see it through. One teacher explained:

> Teachers have to buy in to the concept that it is a truly useful initiative. If you don't have the belief that what you're doing is truly in the benefit of the student then it's not going to be successful. I think, a lot of times, if you can convince someone that this is the road we need to take and this is why we need to take it, teachers will have more ownership in the concept. You have to give people a chance to warm up to the concept and buy into it. Teachers need to have time to look at it and talk about it. Because once I buy into something, I'm going do whatever it takes to make it work.

Throughout the interviews, teachers were passionate about one main belief – they knew their students better than anyone else knew them. As a whole, the teachers interviewed were quick to talk about how much time was spent trying to find innovative ideas so their students would achieve. Taking ownership of a reform initiative meant that teachers saw the usefulness and practicality of a change idea and augment it to fit in their classrooms. One participant related:

> Teachers know what works with students. We actually practice it to see if it works and see if it gives the needed results. We know if it's feasible, and we know if it's educationally sound. We know if it helps students, so we buy in if we feel it can be used. I don't buy in if I can't implement it. You have to have your teachers be behind it and buy into it.

Once again, the majority of teachers interviewed wanted administration to allow them the freedom to make decisions regarding how change would look in their individual classrooms. They were not opposed to change; however, they did not want a mandated format to follow when implementing change in their classrooms. Administration could trust that the job was getting done in the ways teachers saw best. One teacher stated:

You cannot force a teacher into change. You have to let them work inside their comfort zone. Nothing is worse than trying to throw something at someone who is not willing to take it. Teachers don't want to feel like they are lost, they don't understand something, or they are out of control. We like control. Teachers need to have time to slowly build confidence with a concept and rock that baby and tweek it to make it their own. You know if you came to me and said that this is what you are going to do, this is how you are going to do it, you are going to do it this time with these kids, and you know I will do it but I wouldn't probably have as big of a smile on my face. It means a lot in just knowing that you have the luxury of being professional and doing what you know is best.

That freedom in shaping and forming what change would look like in individual classrooms was shown when the Southern Regional Education Board's Making Middle Grades Work was established in the middle schools. The <u>what</u> of the reform initiative was consistent throughout the classrooms in both middle schools but the <u>how</u> of the manner it would be accomplished could be individualized by school and classroom. One teacher said:

We didn't have a choice when Making Middle Grades Work came in, but we did have a choice in what we are going to take from it, what we were going to put together for the students, and I got to figure out how it is going to work in my classroom.

There were consequences when reform projects did not have the ownership of the teachers. In the one middle school where single-gender was adopted, three of the teachers who worked with single-gender classes voiced their frustration with the lack of ownership in the project and their lack of preparedness. Four teachers saw the initiative as a "pet project" and once the administrator left the school, so did the initiative. One teacher explained:

Single gender – the principal left and the interest wasn't there. It was solely his interest, his pet, and not ours, and I don't think the teachers really bought into it nor did they teach the single gender class any differently than they taught the heterogeneous group. Did they look at the research? We had a book but did we discuss it? Did we take it back to the departments, did we look at it? No, that's

where I said that your best movements, your best changes come from teachers themselves.

One teacher had a unique way of looking at ownership and commitment to change initiatives. The commitment did not rise and fall in the ownership of the reform project as much as it did in the ownership of doing whatever it takes to helping students learn. If reform initiatives will help students learn, then whether one is committed to it or not is a mute issue. This particular teacher explained:

> I don't think commitment is necessary to the change project itself as to being committed to making things work for the students here and making them learn. I truly think that it is something that when you look at a teacher in general, their commitment is for helping the students learn and they don't care what you call it. We all realize that today's students are not the same as they were five years ago and we don't know what is going to happen five years from now.

The administrators agreed there needed to be ownership with the teachers in reform initiatives. They recognized that the teachers who originally were committed to a reform project were instrumental in bringing the other teachers "on board." These teachers needed more time to get information about the proposed change and time to watch the change in action. Both administrators agreed that the impetus for change would come from the ranks of the teachers, not from the principals. One administrator explained:

> You must bring your staff on board with changes. You need to find a core group that you feel is comfortable will buy into that and sit down with them and talk about that. If they are on board, let them go out and find the next few that they can bring on board, knowing that everybody's not coming on board. Those will come to a point, if you are not trying to cram it down their throat, that the change will seep into their classroom and that'll be from their cohorts, not from my office. It can't just be my reform. It really had to be theirs.

In addition to agreeing with the teachers about how important teacher ownership was in a reform project, the administrators also agreed that teachers needed to be given

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the professional freedom to fashion a reform initiative to fit them and their classrooms.

Both of the administrators voiced their responsibility in establishing an atmosphere of

support where teachers could freely experiment and try new things in their classrooms

without the fear of being reprimanded. One administrator replied:

> As an administrator, you need to make sure those teachers understand they have a right to implement certain teaching strategies or concepts and that if they don't work that you're not going to come in there and cut their throat. You are going to still need to be supportive and realize that that didn't work and decide what the next step forward is.

One administrator related an experience with a group of teachers implementing a

reform initiative. The story supported the claims by both administrators that teachers

need to be able to find freedom in forming a reform initiative to fit their personalities and

styles of teaching. The administrator recounted:

> There was a reading program where you didn't just teach reading but you taught grammar and spelling with reading, all together. For one teacher, the intermingling worked really well and she taught everything together. Another teacher wasn't totally comfortable with that concept and she would isolate some of the skills and then have them write a bit. Another teacher traditionally taught and used just parts of the program. I would like to tell you that the one who utilized the program like it should have been had scores that blew everyone else out of the water, but that wasn't the case. All three teachers had comparable scores. All three of these were good teachers but they lived in different worlds as far as instruction and they got good results. So, change is relative to the person that's engaged in there.

Coupled with the importance of teachers being committed to and having

ownership in a reform initiative was also the opportunity for teachers to be given a voice

in the decision-making process regarding reform initiatives. Teacher voice was important

if administration wanted to establish a climate of cooperation and teamwork. The

interviews revealed the level of teacher input regarding a change initiative depended upon

the reform initiative itself. Some teachers interviewed remarked they had more of a voice

in certain reforms but not in others. In addition, 10 teachers interviewed said they had no input whatsoever in whether or not some reform initiatives were integrated into the school, how they were developed, or if they continued.

In general, 10 out of 12 teachers interviewed noted their opinions were listened to by other teachers and by the administrators in their buildings. The teachers who had more experience were the first to say they felt respected and had a voice that was respected as well. One teacher remarked:

> I feel like that I am respected in this school because I have been here a long time. And I think that most people know that I care about kids. For that reason, when I have an idea or when I talk about something, people listen to me. I feel like they do listen to me because they know how much teaching means to me and how much my students mean to me.

It was apparent in some of the interviews that teachers did not have a voice in the initial discussion of at least one of the reform initiatives within the schools; but they did say they had a voice in whether or not to continue with one particular reform project. Teachers said their input was needed from the beginning to the end of a reform initiative. One teacher maintained:

> The only one I truly felt like, coming into the situation, that I had a voice before it was implemented would be the gender specific. That was something we were given a choice to go into, and whether we accepted it or not was up to us. And we could do it or not do it. We stopped doing it this year, this was our first year not doing it in three years, and that was my choice as well. I don't know why we stayed with single gender instruction, but I am glad I had the luxury of someone asking me if I wanted to be a part of it again or not. That is the key to any successful reform…letting teachers know that their voices are being heard.

All of the teachers interviewed agreed that inclusion as a reform initiative was not discussed as a potential or possible change initiative. It was introduced, established, and monitored by the administration in each middle school. The teachers maintained that the

administrators tried to offer assistance and support, but there was no forum for individual

concerns or voices to be heard. One teacher remarked:

> I was not given a voice as to whether inclusion was an option, but when I had a concern about it I did talk with the principal and he gladly came up here and talked with me. But he did say, just about, this is what we are going to do, and this is how we going to do it.

Teachers understood that being empowered to configure a reform initiative to fit

the needs of their students in their classrooms did not necessarily guarantee them a voice

in the decision-making process regarding that reform initiative. In both middle schools,

teachers spoke candidly regarding how they had been told numerous times about change

projects coming into their buildings without any prior discussion or forum for input. One

teacher remarked:

> I don't feel like we had a choice in doing the majority of the reform projects or not. It's more a choice in how we want to implement them. Like with Making Middle Grades Work, here we were basically told they are coming in, here's what they are going to be doing, and here's what is going to happen.

One teacher compared the input and voice she allowed her students to have in

class to that which the teachers should be afforded in their schools. In her class, nothing

was wrong with asking for input from the students because they were the ones

responsible for learning the material. Naturally, they didn't have input on the curriculum;

however, the teacher did solicit their input regarding the viability of the structure of the

lessons and the assignments. She said:

> I am really straightforward with the kids. I'll say that this is something I've done year after year or that it is something I have never done before. I want their help and I'll have them raise their hand and be honest with me about what worked and what didn't work. And a lot of times, what I will do, I will have an interview sheet, especially after something is new to me, and it will ask what they learned from this experience, what can I change, and how can I improve it. I really take their input because they know best and we don't give them a lot of credit usually. Now I ask you. Why wouldn't that work with teachers?

The administrators interviewed agreed it was important to gain the trust of

teachers and ask for their opinions regarding school matters, and they also admitted that

that had not always happened in their buildings. The administrators noted that they felt

teachers had a perception that their opinions are not desired or heard. Both

administrators emphatically explained how they did respect opinions of teachers and

listened with open minds. One administrator maintained:

> Teachers want you to listen to them, and, of course, if you ask their opinion and
> you never implement any of it, it won't take long for them to just say that it really
> doesn't matter because you are going to do what you want to do anyway. A good
> administrator will try not to convince but make teachers aware that most anytime
> we are looking at change, or any aspect of the program, that I really do respect
> their input.

The importance of both teacher empowerment and teacher voice in developing,

initiating, and continuing reform initiatives was revealed in the interviews of the teachers

and verified by the administrators. Teachers wanted a professional freedom in their

classrooms to do what they know is right for the students. The consensus of the teachers

was that they did not mind adopting change initiatives, but they did not want to be told

how to implement them. The interviews showed that there were more instances of

teacher empowerment within their classrooms than with the initial voices of the teachers

in regards to the inception of a reform project. Teachers raised the concerns that their

voices were not being solicited nor heard, and both administrators wanted to assuage that

perception by expressing how much they depended upon the input and opinions of the

teachers.

For reform initiatives to be successful, support systems need to be established that will allow the changes to be made, that will give assistance where and when needed, and that will oversee the initiative to its fruition. There are three main support systems that need to be functioning for a reform initiative to have a stable foundation to begin and a proper environment to thrive. School support, district support, and community support share individualized functions in the success of change initiatives. Schools, districts, and communities each share the responsibility of fostering a climate in the educational system that is conducive to change.

School Support

School support is dependent on the administration of the school. It is through the principal's desire for student achievement, knowledge of trends, and appreciation of the faculty and staff that a school can change. Building principals are responsible for establishing a culture of change in their buildings by developing professional development opportunities and encouraging teachers to take advantage of those opportunities. Principals also foster professional collaboration, allocate funds for resources, use staff positions, and devise creative scheduling approaches. Each of these responsibilities is intended to meet the needs of the faculty, staff, and students as they prepare for change.

All of the teachers interviewed placed some sort of responsibility on the principal for the success of a reform project. When talking about their principals, teachers used terms such as leader, head, guide, and chief. These terms expressed the teachers' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of a principal. One teacher remarked:

I think the principal is the key to whether a reform movement works at the school level. He is the one who brings it to the faculty. He is the key to providing opportunities for it to be looked at with his staff. He must look and evaluate effectiveness and he must also share in the successes and get those back to other teachers so it will grow.

The majority of teachers interviewed used the word 'support' when asked about

the responsibilities of the administration. Their thoughts about principal support ranged

from someone who would lend a listening ear and hear about a problem to someone who

would remove all of their problems. One teacher said:

I look to them for support. I look to them for assistance on how I can make this work better, give me some new ideas, help me with this student who is not willing to do this work. It doesn't matter what I need, I always feel supported and so appreciated. If you are supporting me, what more can I ask for?
        Consistency is another thing I expect from administration. Being consistent with a program, keeping it rolling, keeping it staffed, and the main thing is just supporting your teachers because that is what we want.

The leader of the school needed to take the lead, and that was the general

consensus of the teachers in each building. If the principal did not fully believe in the

reform initiative and the change that it can bring, then he or she will be hard pressed to

find any teachers who will. Teachers wanted their administrators to do background

checks and research the change initiative before bringing the reform project to the faculty

as a possible change agent. One participant explained:

Administration has to first of all take the lead. They have to buy into the idea that this is a good viable program. They have to present the program with here is what I would like to do, here is what we need to do, and this is something that is going to benefit us as a school, us as a city, and us as a region.

Ten of the teachers interviewed were also quick to place blame on the

administration if a change initiative was unsuccessful. One teacher defined an

unsuccessful reform initiative as, "one that didn't work, didn't produce the results said,

was too cumbersome, involved too much paperwork, and exhibited too little success." In

the teachers' eyes, administrators were responsible for making sure reform initiatives were successful and teachers were not overwhelmed with too much to do and not enough time to do it. One teacher remarked:

> Principals sometimes make us try to do too much too soon. When you introduce one concept and then three months later introduce another one, then another in two months and then another one, teachers aren't going to take any one of them seriously. Change for the sake of change is not good; however, change for the sake of going to something better is always good. If I don't have a firm grasp on one change, if I am living in a state of constant fluctuation, then I will not be comfortable with what I am doing. I don't mind the change if I see the end goal and know how to make it work. It's a principal's responsibility to make sure we are not constantly trying something different.

Both administrators interviewed took ownership of their roles in a successful reform initiative. They knew their responsibilities and the expectations the teachers had regarding those responsibilities. Both administrators accepted the role as leader and all that comes with that title. One administrator admitted:

> It was my responsibility to know what the reform was going to be and find out about it by going to national conferences, studying the literature, going to other schools, all sorts of things you have to do to be on the forefront. Then you need to develop that culture of high expectations so that the teachers want to know what the next reform is and they are investigating it themselves. They are not waiting on me to come with the information. I am to be that model of high expectations.

Professional Development. Professional development is paramount when teachers are searching for knowledge regarding change initiatives. It is just as important, if not more so, for teachers to participate in professional development activities as they focus on change projects within each of their classrooms. Professional development activities can range from teachers collectively reading a book about a certain reform initiative to a group of teachers attending a national conference with well-known speakers. The bottom line is that teachers need to be given the opportunity to learn more

about specific change projects, watch more teachers who are using reform strategies, and ask more questions so the reform initiative can be tailored to fit their particular classrooms.

The majority of teachers interviewed pointed out that it was the responsibility of the administrator to assist getting the proper professional development for the staff. Professional development was needed before an initiative was begun and as the initiative continued. Eight teachers were frustrated with the lack of sufficient preparedness and information before a reform project was adopted. One teacher remarked:

> The administrator's role, if at all possible, would be to get the in-services that we need so that teachers are informed as to what this new initiative is and what we are to be doing. We need to get our teachers sufficient in-services, sufficient information, have them adequately prepared, and I don't think we are. There hasn't been adequate time to prepare us before we start. So, I think maybe the administration should go to central office and tell them that if they want something to work we need to have more information and it needs to be in a timely manner.

Interestingly enough, half of the teachers interviewed said there had been sufficient professional development opportunities before and during reform initiatives, and the other half said they had not been prepared enough to begin or continue any of the reform initiatives. One teacher expressed support for sufficient professional development and added, "I was given a lot of instruction in the beginning so I knew what the initiative was and how to implement it." Those who agreed that the professional development opportunities were sufficient credited the number of professional development opportunities made available to teachers and staff and the fact that teachers were allowed time to visit the classrooms of other teachers. One teacher explained:

> It is not sink or swim here. Once again, we are blessed here because all I have to do is say, "Hey, I don't understand this. May I go observe a classroom?" And I did a lot of that. There were workshops after school, especially years ago, and we

had a lot to choose from. We received a lot of training…a lot of hands on. It's always an open door. I mean anything you don't understand, any one here will help you. And I was trained in the in-services I attended. They presented ideas to us as to how to do certain things. I have really attempted to incorporate more of what I have learned in in-services this year.

The other half of the teachers did not feel the professional development was sufficient to initiate the reform projects in their classrooms or to maintain a level of comfortableness with new teaching strategies and techniques. Once again, they remarked the school started something without fully preparing the teachers with the necessary tools needed for success. One teacher said:

> There has not been enough professional development to make me comfortable. With the gender specific, really and truly, there was nothing other than handing out a few papers and saying, "Hey, this is successful. Would you like to try it?" We were given a book to read if we wanted to. I think, a lot of time, through the presentation of the initiative, we say that it's good, but what does that mean? What does that change look like? Because a lot of times we are given things and we are told what we are to do and then told to go do it, as opposed to specific training that will help you.
> Successful reform projects give a lot of guidance, a lot of in-service. We need to have things explained to us because that is one thing we definitely lack. A lot of times it's here's the program, now make it work. Well, give me the program, show me how to make it work, and then let me tweek it from there. We throw out these programs and want people to do them as opposed to truly taking the time and spending the resources to train people on what they need to do, show them how to do it, and make it specific to their needs.

In preparation for single-gender instruction, the teachers who chose to participate read <u>Why Gender Matters</u>, by Leonard Sax. Two of the teachers saw reading that book as adequate preparation to teach single-gender classes and others saw it as a source of primary information about the genders, but it did not answer specific questions teachers had about instructing classrooms with all boys or all girls.   One teacher supported the book as adequate preparation and said:

> Our principal had us read that book, <u>Why Gender Matters</u>. It was a very enlightening book. The research done for that book was very thorough and I

found that boys do learn differently than girls. Place competition in front of them, like we are going to have a homework competition and whoever wins gets something simple as candy, those boys are going to knock each other down to make sure each one has his homework done. It really did enlighten me as to the differences and the ways the two genders learn. And in turn, I had to make accommodations to my teaching. For the girls, as long as you tell them they are pretty and that they look beautiful today and have a cute new haircut, they are fine with it. If you tell that to the boys it's like, well who cares. There is a distinct difference.

In contrast, other teachers needed more specific information pertaining to their needs in the classroom with single-gender. The book everyone read was a beginning, but it was not sufficient. One teacher maintained:

We were given a book to read for single gender which was very informative. I actually enjoyed reading it. Other than that, I was not given any training as in in-service with the system. The principal did give us that book and he did talk a little bit about how the separate genders did learn differently, but there could be more in-services, more something, to teach me how to approach the different genders, teaching wise.

In single-gender classes, the competitiveness of an all boys' class took some of the teachers by surprise. Having a mixed-gender class tended to soften the competitive edge, but when a class of all boys got together to compete, the atmosphere of the class changed drastically. One teacher remarked, "The girls were laid back about playing games and competing, and they did very well. The boys almost got into a slug fest. That kind of thing I wasn't trained for."

Teachers also wanted to see more professional development that was tailored to a particular age group and subject matter in relation to reform initiatives. Teachers voiced their displeasure at sitting through hours of professional development opportunities only to have a small segment of that professional development address their grade level or curricular area. One teacher remarked, "You naturally can't take an eighth grade teacher

and a first grade teacher and teach them how to teach students the same way. It's not going to work the same for both of them." A participant continued:

> I personally would like to see training that is relevant to me and my class; be more specific as opposed to sitting in an auditorium with 500 other people or even a faculty for that matter. That way I can kind of feel free to ask questions that are specific to me because I don't want to waste other people's time with my picky questions and that way there is a little more openness.

All of the teachers interviewed agreed that any amount of quality professional development positively affected them as teachers and ultimately positively affected their classrooms. Teachers were apt to try new strategies and techniques if given direction from professional development activities. One participant explained:

> I think that with these reforms and the training I had, I have seen a lot of growth in my students and also growth with me, and so I look for different ways to teach. I think one of the best things about teaching is being able to have professional development. That is what has made me grow as a teacher. I desire it, I look forward to it, I find ideas that work, and I know that's what's best for my students.

Both administrators agreed that professional development is vital; however, they differed slightly regarding the type of professional development opportunities to offer teachers. One administrator had trouble mandating system-wide professional development when he knew the teachers needed training in other, more relevant activities. He said:

> Professional development is vital to the growth of an educator. How you incorporate staff development was always and probably will always be an issue in the mind of administrators. I had more of a laissez faire type of approach to that. I don't need to make everybody take an eight hour CPR class when a teacher may want to go to a conference to find out more how to implement a new program or a new strategy. I need to make available for people to go to a conference so they can learn and bring it back.

Collaboration. In addition to providing professional development opportunities for teachers that address their needs regarding reform initiatives, building administrators

also need to foster a culture of professional collaboration between teachers. As stated earlier, teachers learn from other teachers, and collaborating with each other is significant to the success of change initiatives. Conversely so, lack of collaboration and communication between teachers can negatively alter reform outcomes. One teacher responded by stating, "Key teachers need to be involved with reform projects. They need to take information back to their departments and together all implement the project."

Continuing the theme of school support, five teachers responded that a principal was responsible for establishing a culture of collaboration in the school, and, interestingly enough, those five teachers used the reform initiative of inclusion to make their points. One teacher in the five was satisfied with the level of collaboration between her and another teacher in the inclusion setting. She remarked:

> Thank goodness my inclusion teacher that I'm with took me under her wing and taught me. My first year, I would have to say, I probably did a horrible job with them. Second year was a rough year. Those first two years of the inclusion groups were rougher, and that was quite a way to start. So now I feel like I've got it, so with training in the classroom, by trial and error, I really feel like I have a good grasp to what they need and what I should do, and again, I had a good inclusion teacher who was able to help me. She would tell me to do this or modify that, so I felt that I was okay. And if I was doing really horrible, I knew she would step in and say something.

However, the other four were frustrated with the lack of collaboration between the special education teacher and the general education teacher in the inclusion classroom. Clear cut guidelines and roles were not established before the initiative began. One teacher summarized it up by saying, "We were always going two steps forward and three steps back. We were not able to make any progress because we didn't have any rules to play by." Along the same lines, one teacher maintained:

> The big problem that I think that there is with inclusion is that there never was, still hasn't been, clear cut guidelines of the lead teachers and the others. Because

of that the classroom teacher takes it and runs with it and you don't have time to go back and decide who is going to do what. You don't know who is going to modify these tests, who is going to decide what needs modified, and if a kid needs to be pulled out, who is going to decide that. There needs to be a lot more communication and not close-mindedness in 'you are stepping in my territory.' We need to work together and I don't know if that has really successfully happened. I don't think it has. It's kind of like, "they're not my kids"…well, they're all of our kids. How can we work together to help not even the ones who are on your census but the kids who are not but who we know need to be, those who have flat lined?

And yet another teacher proposed that the reason inclusion was not a total success was because of the lack of collaboration between the classroom teacher and the special education teacher. There must be communication and a clear definition of roles otherwise there would be confusion and miscommunication. One teacher responded, "Any communication is going to be worthwhile." Another teacher added:

I think that is why inclusion hasn't been totally successful. We have had success stories but I don't think it works as well as it could. There are some teachers who do very well with inclusion in this school and their roles. But with others it does not work.

Both administrators were aware of the prevailing mindset regarding the lack of collaboration in the inclusion setting and both employed strategies for team collaboration. One strategy both principals used to combat the lack of communication was to have the general education and special education teacher plan once a week for the coming week on a common planning time. Both the general education teacher and the special education teacher were to modify all class assignments and tests together during a common planning time. Another strategy was applied by one of the administrators and not the other. That strategy was to have the special education teacher be responsible for teaching 1 day a week which meant there would have to be some communication between the classroom teacher and the special education teacher. One administrator saw how time

became the healer of initial lack of collaboration between inclusion teachers. The

administrator responded:

> From the perspective of assigning teachers to work in other teacher's classrooms,
> special education with general education, that was my biggest concern. There
> were questions of who was going to carry what load and would those teachers
> even collaborate. The relationship evolved over time and each started seeing
> what the other did. Regular education teachers started paying more attention to
> the IEP instead of leaving it up to the special education teacher, and special
> education teachers started teaching the class.

Budgeting, Staffing, and Scheduling. Administrative responsibilities with reform

initiatives also included budgeting, staffing, and scheduling. Administrators need to

support reform initiatives by placing and spending money for professional development

activities or for needed resources in the budget, by examining the way teachers were

placed and keeping teachers in positions needed for reform, and by altering schedules to

fit student and teacher needs with creative alternatives to traditional scheduling.

One teacher addressed the theme of budgeting quite succinctly when he said,

"The principal holds all the money." Whether that perception is totally accurate or not,

the principal does hold the responsibility of allocating resources to contribute to the

success of reform initiatives. Teachers didn't just see resources as money, though. They

remarked that resources can be time, assistance, or, as stated earlier, opportunities for

professional development and collaboration. One teacher explained:

> Administration has to provide resources. Here's what I am willing to do. If I
> believe in it enough, I'm going to take whatever it takes, whether it's money,
> whether it's time, whether it's every last penny we have to say we need to go for
> it. I want to make sure you are comfortable with it, and I want to make sure
> you've got the materials. It may even be time off to go see a system that's doing
> the same thing.

Making Middle Grades Work required a component of before and after school

tutoring called the Power of I. It was up to the principal to staff the tutoring with teachers

within each building. Building administrators were responsible for maintaining the staff

placements. One teacher who used the Power of I consistently throughout the year

expressed appreciation and said, "Keeping The Power of I staffed and on its feet has been

a wonderful thing. It has been consistent throughout the year."

Three teachers mentioned how it was important for the principal to schedule

students with teachers and in classes that would meet their individual needs. An across

the board schedule did not work for every student and principals needed to look at

students individually and not move them just because the group moves. One teacher

remarked, "We are responsible for individualizing instruction. Well, the principal needs

to be responsible for individualizing scheduling and make it work."

Both administrators interviewed stated it was their responsibilities to give the

teachers the appropriate tools, mental and physical, to 'get the job done.' One

administrator placed a different twist on the tools needed in a classroom by stating that

even reform initiatives in themselves could be tools that are used by teachers. One

administrator explained:

> You have to prepare teachers, and they have to have the right tools to get the job
> done. They have to have physical tools, resources, but that was not what I was
> most interested in. They have to have mental tools and part of that is technology.
> A pencil is a tool but a Smartboard is also a tool, and cooperative learning is also
> a tool. If you really want to be part of the next era in school systems, people are
> going to have to have a very broad repertoire of tools. You get those through
> professional development, through things you do in the building, the modeling,
> and the expectations. What would separate our system from the others is that our
> teachers have more tools.

One administrator related his experiences with inclusion to the responsibilities of

staffing and budgeting for reform initiatives. Within the inclusion framework, teachers

were assigned to each other and the principal took that job seriously because more was at stake than just putting down on paper one person with another. This administrator stated:

> Take inclusion. It's not just a flip of a coin on who's going to be placed where. Principals need to look at personalities, teaching styles, and assign accordingly. If it's a bad mix, then the kids are going to suffer. You need to make sure those teachers have what they need in the classroom to make the change happen. That could be more technology, a bigger classroom, classrooms that are closer in proximity, or a lab that's going to be available to them. They need the resources available. You may need to even give them some money in the budget from a line item saying you all will have $200 extra dollars or $2000 extra dollars, depending on what the needs might be.

Both administrators explained that it was their duty to assist the teachers who are implementing a reform initiative in whatever capacity they can. Before that can happen, though, a principal had to believe that he or she was making the right decisions regarding budgeting, staffing, or scheduling in light of the change initiative. One administrator said:

> So, when it's a matter of change, you've got to believe in yourself enough that you will stand with the teachers and staff and do whatever you have to do. It may be getting resources, doing something different with the schedule, or keeping programs staffed, which in itself costs money.

Teachers agreed that once a school adopts a reform initiative, administrators have responsibilities to the teachers who are implementing the initiative, accommodating the various teaching strategies and techniques pertinent to the program, and assessing the successes of the program. In more cases than not, teachers responded that they were not thoroughly trained before a reform initiative was adopted in a school. Teachers expressed their frustration with the lack of professional development and collaboration they needed to successfully implement a reform initiative. Teachers remarked they gained valuable information when they did go to professional development activities and when they were given the time to learn from each other. Teachers wanted principals to

establish the proper professional development activities and schedule a time for communication and collaboration between teachers. In addition, principals were also responsible for the tools and resources teachers needed to successfully carry out the change initiative. Principals commented they controlled how the budget was spent and admitted they could have rendered more money toward some of the projects. They also maintained the importance of proper staffing and scheduling to enhance a reform initiative. Teachers looked to their building administrators as the leaders of the reform movement and took their cues from them. One teacher said, "I will only take this reform project as seriously as my principal does."

District Support

Administrators support individual teachers during reform projects, and school district personnel, namely superintendents, need to support the individual school administrators as well. The complexity of a reform initiative justifies the reason why individual schools need not stand independently during a change movement. Schools must couple with their school districts to monitor student achievement, to devise strategies and projects for growth, and to support school personnel with needed resources. School districts are required to look 'at the big picture' as students progress through elementary school to high school. School districts also examine data to justify change within individual schools. One teacher noticed, "Test scores have a huge impact on whether we do a reform project or not. I think that is any school system, not just here. Accountability is a huge factor with any school system." Superintendents, have responsibilities to their individual schools to encourage and maintain school reform.

One teacher maintained that the ultimate goal of a school district was to produce successful students and productive citizens. Whether a student goes to college or goes straight into a job, the district had the responsibility of making sure that student got a proper education to support his or her goal after graduation. The majority of teachers interviewed agreed that the school district was interested in helping schools produce successful students. It was the district's responsibility to make sure schools were successful and students were successful. One teacher maintained:

> The district needs to be looking to make sure that these students who leave our system as a senior in high school have been prepared the very best. They need to have been given every opportunity made available to them so they can be successful learners in college and they can be good citizens when they leave. They want a well-rounded individual and they want them to be competitive in the market when they leave here and, as we know, that is getting tougher and tougher. And the way the job market is, that is going to make them much more marketable and prepare them much more for college so they are successful there. So, I don't think they are just looking at it from the standpoint of, "Let's make our system look good." I truly believe that they are really trying to do what is best for the students so they have a more positive outlook for their future.

School districts ranked individual schools and they were also ranked with other school districts. That was valuable information if districts used the information to improve student achievement. Half of the teachers interviewed viewed the district where they worked as being overly competitive to the extent that it would try something new just to break ranks to become more successful. One teacher summarized:

> I think one of the driving motivators for this system is where the system ranks in regards to other systems. They want to see what successes other school systems have, and they model this school system after that. They want to see immediate changes and aggressively go the route of what the other districts did.

All teachers remarked that the school district used data to drive any decision-making in regards to change initiatives. In the same breath, teachers acknowledged the fact that we live in a data-driven world and that districts have the right to look at the

numbers; however, teachers voiced their concerns that the driving forces for reform

should not just rest on data, but that the district should look at other variables coupled

with data. One participant explained:

> First thing, the district looks at those test scores. We reflect back on those test scores. Is that the way to do it? Well, yes and no. I think that we need to be aware of the test scores and how well we are doing and progressing, but I don't think test scores show the whole picture. We need to look at what works with students, what sparks an interest in my subject, what will make them grow and change and be able to be problem solvers and thinkers down the road. Also, I want them to love my subject so they will take more of it.

The concerns with evaluating data for reform varied with the interviews, but one

overwhelming theme emerged…teachers are teaching people, and people, sometimes, are

unpredictable. Once again, data had a place, but how was the student who decided not to

perform on the test accounted for? One teacher remarked:

> There is a place for data and I think it will give you a lot of information. However, there is a fine line when you are looking at data. But, my goodness, this is a data-driven society. If you read your newspaper, you are looking at a survey or something that is data driven. I think data is very valuable information and that 95% of the kids we are getting this data from are giving us accurate data. So, I think it is good, but I think we also need to stop and say that there is a fine line, and we can't make them perform if they are not willing to perform. But, like I said, I think the majority of them are really trying to do their best.

The importance of data-driven instruction and reform in the classroom was

accepted by the teachers. Test scores were informative; however, teachers spoke

candidly about how they were still teaching people. Instruction did not just cover what

would be on the test; but instruction covers life skills as well, and those cannot be tested.

One teacher responded:

> Even though the system's focus may be a test score, I don't think you will see a lot of teachers with the mentality of just wanting to make improvements on test scores. Test scores are great, but my goal is people. My goal is changing and helping the kids throughout the year. I want to not only develop them in a middle

school setting but they have to gain social abilities, as well. You can't necessarily gauge that.

Teachers also wanted the superintendent to thoroughly do his or her homework before initiating a reform movement either within the district or within individual schools. Just as building principals researched and learned about a reform initiative, so too the leaders in the district needed to do their own research. Data did not just drive whether or not a school was chosen for a reform initiative, but they also drove what reform project was considered. One teacher explained:

> I would hope that the system would look at the data as far as how the reform is working with other school systems, not just for that particular moment but long range as well. We are really data-driven in this system anyways, but we need to look back and see if it worked for another school system. If we are going to spend money on something, we need to do a lot more research than to pull something off of the internet and say that really looks good, let's go with that.

One interviewee commented on professional development at the district level. This teacher addressed the importance of allowing district personnel professional development opportunities. The superintendent was responsible for extending professional development opportunities to key personnel so information could be brought back and informed decisions could be made. The teacher said:

> We are really blessed here with being able to send people here and there to conferences. When the district hears about something that's really catching on they send people to go and see about it. If it works there, then we take it and roll with it. We are good about trying stuff. This district likes to try new things but they do research it first.

The most recent district initiative to the middle schools was Southern Regional Education Board's Making Middle Grades Work. Teachers, in general, were complimentary of the way this reform initiative was handled. Training was offered,

information was given, and each middle school was able to tailor the initiative to meet its

particular needs. One teacher responded:

> Like SREB, the superintendent brought it to the system and different schools were
> allowed to attend the workshops. He allowed the principals to implement
> different things within their schools. Different schools may need different things
> and I think that there was interest by need.

Eleven teachers noted they appreciated the fact they worked for a system that was

innovative and reform-based; however, those teachers did voice their concerns with the

longevity of some of the reform projects. Teachers were concerned that too many

reforms were started and ended before adequate data could be accumulated to determine

their success, and then another reform project would take its place. One teacher said:

> Unfortunately, I think our district jumps on trends too quickly. I have a problem
> with that because there were trends that were going to be wonderful if we had
> followed through with them. We jump on these trends and we don't follow
> through. And that is sad. I mean, the high school had the ninth grade academy
> then all of a sudden it was there one year and then it was gone, so they didn't
> really give it a shot to see if it would work. I think we don't give things here in
> the system a long enough shot, a chance to work, and I know that we look at
> statistics, too, like with the same gender classes. Were the statistics showing that
> is wasn't working? I don't know and all of a sudden it was gone and that is the
> one problem that I have. I think we just jump on trends and then they disappear.
> We don't follow through and they just disappear. So I think to make a new
> initiative successful, we need to put the time in and not just say, one year, now we
> are moving on to something else. We need to give it a chance to work.

Both administrators responded that the school district was responsible for

evaluating change initiatives before individual schools adopted them. Schools districts

were not to go out on a search for something new and improved, but they were to become

familiar with the needs of schools within the district and find a reform initiative that

would be best suited to meet those needs. One administrator related:

> I don't think our district goes out and says , "Okay, we are going to do a reform
> initiative" or "What reform can we do." If the superintendent is on top of things,

and he watches for signs and really uses the data and reads the culture of the times, and all that, the change initiatives needed will kind of bubble to the top.

District support looked similar to school support in that both had specific roles and responsibilities for a successful reform initiative. Teachers were mostly concerned with the emphasis their school district gave to data and the conclusions that were drawn from looking at the data only. Teachers wanted district personnel to understand that many factors come to play in the success of a student, and looking at that student's data was just one part of the whole picture. Teachers were complimentary of the fact that their district allowed individual schools the freedom to shape and mold change initiatives to fit their needs. They also wanted the superintendent to be knowledgeable about particular reform initiatives before presenting it as an option for change. In general, teachers and administrators wanted the district personnel to do their homework regarding reform projects, fitting the same requirement teachers had for principals.

<u>Community Support</u>

Schools and districts continue to find gaining community support for reform initiatives a challenge. Ultimately, the schools and the district wanted community support for any new program undertaken, especially for projects that claim to increase student achievement. Support for student achievement at school and at home broadens the scope for success. Some of the bigger reform initiatives immediately are communicated to parents in various formats as opposed to something small that is affecting a fewer number of students. The bottom line is parents want to know, parents need to know, and parents can lend much needed assistance in different ways to insure the success of a change initiative.

As a whole, teachers did not know how to respond to what roles and responsibilities the community had in regards to a reform initiative. The majority of teachers responded with classroom stories about how parents supported them when they were having discipline issues with children. A few teachers used parents as volunteers in their classroom and said they regarded that as support from the community. One teacher was complimentary of how the parents of her students supported her when she kept students after school for make-up work or to finish an assignment. One teacher described how portfolios opened up the lines of communication between class and home and students became more successful because of that. She explained:

> With portfolios, parents are able to see the work immediately. They know if their child is doing badly that I am available for tutoring. That way the parents know that is an option and the communication has opened up tremendously with parents because of this. The average for the kids that came in once a week for tutoring, their percentage increased by 6 percentage points from the first six weeks and those that come twice a week, their increase was 8 percentage points. So, because I am offering this new rigorous curriculum, I felt I had to open it up so I could help them with some alternative activities, kind of fun things, that they can come in and work on and also offer them any type of assistance with their homework or anything we are doing that six-weeks. I think it has been successful so I am going to continue on into the next year.

In general, teachers wanted support from the community for what they were doing in their classroom, and that was not far off the mark to what the community's responsibility with a change initiative should be. Teachers wanted the community, namely the parents, to take ownership of the reform initiative just as the teachers did, and, as seen too often with the Power of I, parents did not keep up their end of the bargain. One teacher commented:

> Parents should have believed in the Power of I too, and some of them didn't. They didn't get their child here. We can only do so much when they don't see the need to get their children here for tutoring.

The two administrators could not emphasize enough the importance of keeping the stakeholders abreast of what was getting ready to go on and currently going on in the school. They both used any medium at their disposal to communicate with parents, such as websites, newsletters, and meetings. As one administrator commented, even before taking an idea to his faculty, he talked to some stakeholders to just "test the waters," as he put it. He knew that if he was not going to get support from the community, the reform initiative would probably not succeed.

To the majority of the teachers, community support took the form of parents supporting the programs at school, and teachers viewed lack of participation from the parents as rejection of the program or initiative. Teachers understood the importance of keeping the community involved with the learning of their children and desired to open up those lines of communication between school and home.

<div align="center">Four Reform Initiatives</div>

The four reform initiatives of single gender instruction, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work acted as a backdrop to the prevailing attitudes teachers and administrators had about change and change initiatives. It is through these four reform initiatives that teachers and administrators were able to voice their opinions regarding what worked, what didn't work, and reasons for each. In addition, teachers were given an opportunity to look at the life-span of each of the four reform initiatives and make conclusions regarding their effectiveness.

Single-Gender Instruction

Single-gender instruction, lasting only 2 years, was short-lived as a reform initiative. One middle schools incorporated single-gender instruction while the other

middle school continued to gather information. Teachers were given a voice as to whether or not they wanted to teach single-gender classes and one teacher remarked, "It stood out as something that I saw right away would not work for me." The teachers who did participate in single-gender instruction talked passionately about their beliefs that boys did learn differently from girls and the difference needed to be addressed in the ways teachers taught. However, a few teachers who had single-gender classes ended up teaching one or both genders the same way they did their heterogeneous group, not making any differentiation for the genders.

Six out of 12 teachers had experience with single-gender instruction. That number was divided in half by teachers who really liked dividing the genders and with the teachers who did not see a difference nor did they want to continue with the program. Both sets of teachers were passionate one way or another and had interesting experiences and information to share. One teacher remarked she thoroughly enjoyed her class of all girls because the girls could discuss things that boys would probably find boring. The teacher responded:

> I loved single gender. I had girls and I love it. I could pick out girl books to read with them. I was always a big advocate for single gender instruction. The girls felt more comfortable and we could talk together. I could pick out more stories geared toward them and all of a sudden it was dropped. I don't think anyone asked if we wanted to continue it or not.

Another teacher saw a different positive side of an all girls class. He was able to tap into personalities that would had otherwise gotten stifled when mixed with both genders. He remarked, "I saw tremendous changes for the girls in particular. I mean, I didn't realize girls could be class clowns, and it was great."

While discussing this reform initiative, the data shared for single-gender instruction showed student achievement higher in certain subjects with males and higher in other subjects with females. Males were shown to achieve more in classes that were normally 'girl' classes, (English, foreign languages, and social studies) and girls were shown to achieve more in classes that were stereotypically 'boy' classes (math and science) One teacher who did not agree to have a single-gender class disagreed with the presupposition of the achievement difference. The teacher commented:

> I did not buy into single-gender classes. I looked into it early because some people said achievement for males is higher than females in my subject. The research shows that achievement is equal for females as for males. I like heterogeneous classrooms because I think that works better for me.

The teachers who participated in single-gender classes read the book by Leonard Sax, Why Gender Matters. The book detailed how each of the genders regarded teachers, assignments, and testing. All of the teachers who participated in this change initiative did find a marked difference in how each of the genders dealt with tests, homework, and organization. One teacher who noticed the difference said:

> I had an all boys and all girls class. For me I enjoyed both of them. The all boys class was more of a challenge for me. I found that the averages were the same if they had been in the mixed classes. The boys did better on the assessments that were tests and quizzes. The girls did better on assessments based on organization and on homework grades. And if you looked at their final averages, they were about the same. It was tough for the boys with their homework grades, but they did much better with their tests and quizzes.

However, even with acknowledgement and proof of the differences in the ways each of the genders learned, there was still not enough information to persuade the teachers who worked with single-gender classes that there was a distinct difference in the overall achievement of both the girls and boys. As one teacher remarked, "It all came out in the wash. Separated or not, they both made progress." Another teacher stated:

The single-gender classes, of course, we aren't doing anymore, and when I had them I really couldn't tell a difference in single-gender and mixed classes. I never could come to a conclusion that one was better than the other. I loved my classes very much. Probably the favorite class I've ever had was a single gender boys class last year, but that was just a special class with a group of special kids that I was very close to, but I don't know it improved their learning or inhibited their learning in any way. None of us could really see a big difference, but I don't think it was a negative. The girls liked it better than the boys. When I had an all girls class, they liked it better than the boys. And it worked, but I don't know that it was necessarily better.

There were drawbacks with single-gender instruction because all teachers and all students were not involved in the same project. There were instances when students needed to be moved in or out of a class, and the schedule protected the single-gender classes; therefore, other classes got larger and more diverse while the single-gender classes stayed the same. One teacher summarized:

> To me one of the biggest drawbacks for single gender was the fact of scheduling. You couldn't move kids from this room to that room that needed it or didn't need it, and it became a scheduling nightmare. If everyone was doing gender specific, I think it would be a tremendous success.

Both administrators discussed the merits of the reform initiative of single-gender instruction; however, they both remarked it was not meant for all teachers or all students. Single-gender was not a panacea for what ailed the school; nevertheless, the data that showed success with single-gender classes was intriguing enough to implement it. One administrator remarked:

> Single gender was not a silver bullet that was going to fix everybody, but I really do believe after reading Leonard Sax's book and looking at some other data, and knowing what we know about boys and girls being different, not only physiologically but intellectually, that all that impacts how they learn. I would have liked for it to have lived four or five years and then look at the data. I think there would have been some supportive data that would say, not for all kids, that there was success for the kids in that setting. If the parents wanted them there and the teacher that's in there is comfortable with the testosterone or hormones, then they can have a successful situation.

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For the most part, the teachers who volunteered to participate in single-gender instruction considered the experience worthwhile. Two of the original teachers involved in single-gender instruction did not volunteer to continue with it for the next year and two other teachers were put in their places. Teachers were honest in confessing they did not always use the gender specific strategies explained in the book Why Gender Matters, but they would make accommodations elsewhere to meet the needs of their classes. What single-gender classes did accomplish was offer more ease of communication in the classroom when all of one gender was together. The consensus between the teachers and administrators was that the initiative did not last long enough to truly gauge its success.

Inclusion

Of the four reform initiatives of single-gender instruction, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work, none of them generated the passion from teachers regarding an initiative as inclusion did. Teachers had strong viewpoints regarding inclusion and all 12 of the teachers interviewed had experiences with inclusion as a change initiative. Part of the reason for the emphatic statement of viewpoints was the fact that inclusion did not just involve a classroom teacher and one class, but it also involved a special education teacher and a group of children on census. Two instructors were placed inside one classroom with a combination of two groups of children, those with Individualized Education Plans and those in general education and both sets of teachers and students had the objective to make gains for No Child Left Behind.

The 10 out of 12 teachers who fully supported inclusion saw beyond the mandates of academic achievement and gains and focused in on what successes special education students made in particular classrooms. The fact that special education students could

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achieve with few accommodations and have their confidence levels increase was proof

positive that inclusion changed students' lives. One teacher remarked:

> What I really liked about inclusion, and I was really quite hesitant at the beginning, was that the inclusion kids were brought up to speed and I was pleasantly surprised. That has been wonderful. I had the students who were on the verge of becoming advanced in with the inclusion students. At first I didn't know how I was going to separate the inclusion kids and the proficient kids. I didn't know how I could help both groups. Now of course, I had to do a lot of modifications, but, I believe, it really helped my inclusion students raise the bar. I've given them vocabulary and one of the modifications I made was instead of giving them 20 of the vocabulary words, I just give the inclusion kids 10. The kids don't know what tests they are getting. The general kids don't know they are getting the test with all twenty words and the inclusion kids don't know they are getting the ten. So, I've really been pleasantly surprised and I think it is a great thing we are doing

One of the main concerns of inclusion was voiced by 8 of the 10 teachers

regarding what group of general education students should be placed with an inclusion

group of special education students. Do you place a heterogeneous group of students

with them with ability levels from nonproficient to advanced or place them with a below

grade level group so each can start on a comparable level? Just because the teachers

agreed with the concept of inclusion did not mean they agreed with every facet of

inclusion. One teacher maintained:

> I really think inclusion has been great. Now, with some other teachers, they have extremely low students, which I don't. Those get pulled out. If that happened I guess I would have to modify even more. But I think I can make it work since I've seen it work. I would just take a little more to make it work, you know, with modifications. The inclusion kids really did learn a lot with being with the general kids, the higher population. And behavior was better. You know how sometimes behavior is not all that great in inclusion classes, but the behavior was much better. I really think now that it is a really positive thing, as long as we don't put advanced kids in with the inclusion. High general, general, I love it.

The teachers involved with inclusion had to go through some changes themselves

before the program could work. Lessons had to be adapted to meet a wider range of

learning styles, assignments had to be revamped to take into consideration a multitude of

abilities, and assessments had to be modified to truly assess what each student knew and

was able to do. What teachers had done all along would simply not work now. One

teacher explained:

> Inclusion had lots of bugs to work out, but I truly think, now reflecting on those
> years, it's the best thing for students and it has a positive influence, but it wrecked
> havoc with my classroom instruction and I had to revamp that.

At the time of the interviews, inclusion was still active in both middle schools.

Both of the administrators interviewed were responsible for bringing inclusion into their

respective buildings. The administrators agreed that implementing inclusion was rough

at the beginning, but the rewards gained from seeing children become successful far

outweighed any challenges that were faced. One administrator revealed:

> Inclusion went from a total pullout program when I first started. Inclusion was a
> challenge. There were kids who were capable of functioning in a regular
> classroom that we had isolated in a special education classroom with a stigma of
> 'they can't cut it in the regular world'. Helping kids in that respect, I really liked.

One of the administrators recalled the story of a young man who was quite a

challenge to teach. He had been in the "dumb classes" for the majority of his middle

school experience and was bored with school. His boredom found an outlet in his

misbehavior and he was regularly in the principal's office. Once this student was placed

in an inclusion language arts class, he started to feel like he was accomplishing more than

just doing packets in his resource class. The administrator remembered him coming up to

him with a language arts paper marked with an 89%. The young student was beaming

because he had done 'regular' work with the other students and made a passing grade.

Because of this success story and many others the administrator maintained:

I still believe in inclusion to this day. I think that was a good thing. I think that making that work is an ongoing aggravation for the administration to make sure they have the right people working together and have the right kids in the right spots. It became more about the kids and not about what their label was.

The teachers interviewed supported inclusion, but they will be the first ones to say that the beginning stages were very rough, and, as one teacher said, "The waters were uncharted." The teachers voiced their frustrations with scheduling, placement of students, and collaboration with the special education teacher or assistant assigned to them. That being said, they remarked they believed the principle of placing special education students in general education classes with another instructor to modify and accommodate differences was a sound principle. Students experienced academic success and grew socially with a new peer group. Teachers noted that these successes as reason enough to continue supporting the change initiative of inclusion.

<u>Cooperative Learning</u>

As with inclusion, both middle schools began and continue to this day cooperative learning and cooperative grouping. Six teachers remembered being trained in the different methods of using cooperative groups and the teachers who came after the initiation stage more or less just picked up the concept by watching others. All 12 teachers included cooperative learning and cooperative grouping in their classes to some degree. Because teachers were able to modify the program to fit their needs was proof that teachers were empowered to take a reform initiative and tailor it to fit their classrooms.

Teachers agreed that cooperative grouping had to be done correctly to reach the degree of success that can be seen with cooperative learning. In other words, students need to know their role in the group, the parameters of the group, and the goals and

objectives of the lesson. One teacher remarked, "If you don't have a true cooperative

group, all you have is students doing an assignment with each other." Teachers knew

that spending time on the front end of a lesson explaining the cooperative learning

technique to the class would mean the process would go smoother with fewer

distractions.   However, there were teachers in both buildings who would put students in

groups of three or four, have them put their desks together, and give them an assignment

to be done all together and say that they were doing cooperative learning. One teacher

stated:

> With cooperative learning, I don't think people understand what it really is. I
> think a lot of middle school teachers see it as an extension of centers from
> elementary school. They don't understand the true choices and the differentiated
> instruction that you use in cooperative grouping.

However, for the teachers who practiced the proper techniques and strategies for

cooperative learning, the students grew academically and socially. Those teachers related

story after story of misfit students feeling like they belonged when groups became a

cohesive unit in a classroom. One teacher interviewed said, "I won't go back to straight

rows. Straight rows alienate kids from each other." One participant remarked:

> Cooperative grouping is very powerful because you take students from different
> backgrounds, with different levels of thinking, with different talents, bring them
> together and they produce a superior product to an individual project. And I see a
> lot of growth that way.

The teachers who regularly used cooperative learning in their classrooms prepared

for the initiative by gaining additional information through professional development

opportunities. The time and effort of the teachers at the beginning of the project resulted

in the efficiency and effectiveness of the cooperative learning experience. One teacher

said, "It works like clockwork. Everyone knows his responsibility. But it took a good 6

weeks to get them ready." Another teacher admitted:

> I feel like with the cooperative groups I really put a lot of time and effort into
> making it work and it continues to work for me years later. I will have to say that
> cooperative grouping was the best. The students thrive on it.

Teachers were given the opportunity to decide how to use cooperative learning in

their classrooms. Different classrooms took on different personalities, and there were

some teachers who said that they could not do cooperative groups with some classes.

One teacher responded:

> I did a lot more cooperative grouping with the girls because they craved that.
> With the boys it almost became a disciplinary issue because they couldn't handle
> the groups. They would get off task very quickly. If I had the boys and girls
> mixed, then they would offset each other and the task would get done.

As with inclusion, both administrators initially presented cooperative grouping to

their schools. They allowed teachers to attend professional development activities to

further their knowledge on cooperative learning, and one administrator remembered

buying tables for a teacher who wanted to get rid of her individual desks. Probably the

greatest compliment to any reform initiative came from one of the administrators when

she remarked:

> I kind of saw cooperative learning as a fad and there was a lot of focus on
> techniques. You rarely hear cooperative learning mentioned now but you see it
> everyday, so it's kind of like it has become part of the routine and that's a great
> compliment to that initiative. Now it's just a way of life.

Cooperative learning may have begun as a reform initiative, but now in the

classroom it is considered a norm for differentiated teaching strategies. The teachers

interviewed had experience with cooperative learning and used cooperative learning often

in their classrooms. They realized how grouping students together to reach a common

goal could produce a more superior project as opposed to individual projects. Teachers were originally trained in the principles of cooperative learning, but as experience gave way to inexperience, many teachers did not know how authentic cooperative groups were to be formed and what their goals were. Through attending professional development activities and enlisting the expertise of those still teaching, newer teachers can learn how valuable cooperative groups could be in the classroom.

<div style="text-align:center">Making Middle Grades Work</div>

Southern Regional Education Board's Making Middle Grades Work was the most recent reform initiative adopted by the two middle schools in October, 2007. All teachers interviewed had a working knowledge of Making Middle Grades Work which made for interesting data and perspectives. The initiative started out with a core group of teachers being trained on the components of the reform then they were responsible for bringing the information back to the schools. Schools held informative faculty meetings to address the reform and answer questions. Making Middle Grades Work was more of a reform process than a single program. It began in the schools with a group of peer evaluators from the different schools in the area coming into the middle schools and evaluating the schools on the level of rigor of the curriculum and assessments. From these evaluations, each middle school, with the aid of SREB, structured the reform program for their school. The MMGW reform initiative had a predetermined longevity of 5 years for the initial process to become an embraced routine within each school.

Because this was a mandated reform initiative, a few teachers voiced their skepticism regarding the program and the availability of data pertinent to the reform. Teachers wanted to see the numbers and whether or not other schools involved in

MMGW had the successes the program espoused. They were not interested in another 'fly by night' program without the proof. One teacher questioned:

> Is there any kind of data out there for Making Middle Grades Work? I'm not sure how long it has been around. But do the things that they do and the things that they say it will do make a lasting difference? Once again, has the system spent a lot of money on something that we really don't know will work or not.

Also, the MMGW reform package itself was cumbersome to some teachers. There were classroom strategies, techniques, and formulas for getting the results that MMGW wanted to see. The teachers did not disagree with the intentions; however, the way to the end result was not teacher friendly. One teacher said, "I don't see Making Middle Grades Work as a reform initiative, and I am probably in the minority with that. I don't know how to describe it other than it is something that is too rigid for me."

The peer group of evaluators to access classroom rigor spent the good part of one day going in and out of classes. With checklist in hand, they evaluated the teachers and their level of rigor in the classroom. The peer group also asked teachers for samples of classroom assessments. The majority of the teachers interviewed said this quick 5 to 10 minute appraisal of both their classroom and assessments did not truly gauge the effectiveness of rigor in their classrooms. One teacher remarked:

> With Making Middle Grades Work, we were shown the result of the school surveys and then told what we had to do with it. It kind of irritated me that I was told I didn't give my students choices and they listed other things I didn't do and I was only observed for five minutes in my classroom at the beginning of the period. Naturally kids aren't going to walk in the door and the teacher starts giving choices. There is a point where they need some instruction and then from that they are going to go to work. I, personally, didn't feel like they got a true picture of what I do in my classroom.

Five of the 12 teachers interviewed fully embraced every aspect of Making Middle Grades Work. One teacher had thoroughly revamped her classroom to

incorporate the MMGW objectives. She responded, "I think Making Middle Grades

Work is wonderful. I embraced it, I attended every conference I could go to, and I

implemented many things from it. Yes, I like it a lot." These five teachers were

supportive of adding more rigor to the curriculum and assessments in their classrooms.

They gave their students more ownership in their learning, and they all saw positive

results. One teacher said:

> We have been encouraged very highly to make our curriculum more rigorous. I have worked very hard to do that, especially in my lower classes. One thing I have tried to incorporate is group learning with word problems and solving real world problems with word problems, then going the reverse and giving a problem and having them write me a real world situation for the answer. They first have the equation then they turn it into a word problem for me. I have really taught at a higher level this year and I have seen them really come up and get it. They will work if you set your expectations. I say this is what I expect and I get what I expect.
>   I have each child keep a portfolio with his work in it for the six-weeks. They record all of their grades in it and they do a graph of all of their grades, a line graph, to show if they are getting better. One thing I want to do next year is to offer more comprehensive types of activities and tests so when we come to the benchmark that they might be a little bit more prepared.

One aspect of Making Middle Grades Work was implementing a program called

The Power of I. This program allowed students to make up work that had not been done

and turn that zero into an acceptable grade. For some students, the easy way out is to

take a zero, but this program held students accountable for doing the work. The Power of

I was held before and after school and was manned with teachers and assistants. The

Power of I was embraced by 8 of the 12 teachers. One teacher explained:

> Now the Power of I has been successful in my eyes. Power of I got off to a really rocky start, naturally, anything does. But once all the bubbles were worked out, it has been working great. And I think the kids liked it, too. We have seen success with it. I've seen kids who will show up at that time and enjoy it. Their average will go from an F to a C because they are getting the work done somewhere. That right there makes it worth it.

For the teachers who supported Making Middle Grades Work, they admitted there were parts of the reform package they questioned because it did not agree with their ideology of teaching. There were some nonnegotiable beliefs that teachers had already established regarding student accountability, student ownership, and teacher responsibility. One teacher admitted:

> The Power of I, in the beginning I thought 'no' and I had to change my mindset for what I thought for the last 20 years. Kids didn't need to be getting a second chance. I found I needed to be more open-minded. And I was and I have used it. Was it successful? Power of I was successful for some kids and for some others it wasn't. So, for the few that we did help, I would count it a success. For those it didn't help, I'm not sure what else we could have done. All we could do was put it out there.

The teachers were not the only ones who had questions about Making Middle Grades Work. The two administrators voiced their concerns about the program early in its first stages, and those questions still lingered in their minds, even though both of the administrators are now in different positions. One administrator remarked:

> I think you have to have very defined and definitive kinds of goals. I think that's what's happened with MMGW. What were we trying to accomplish with that? I never heard anyone say what we were trying to do with that, other than SREB is great. They've never done anything that I've seen that wasn't wonderful, but when we got there, did we ever get there, or how did we know. We didn't have those clear objectives on why we were doing it and I think you have to have clear objectives and you have to have a common goal and why, why are we trying to reach these objectives. Then you have to be very deliberate in how you define and recognize the accomplishment.

Making Middle Grades Work was the only mandated reform project that all teachers were to take part in and were expected to document results for its 5-year apportioned timeframe. A handful of teachers were trained and did bring information back to the faculty. However, MMGW started so quickly that some of the teachers remarked they had no time to prepare how they would incorporate different strategies and

ideas into their classrooms.   A few teachers said they had no voice in the matter of adopting, incorporating, and maintaining this reform initiative. However, those teachers who noted the valuable objectives of MMGW shaped the reform into something that was workable within their classrooms. Also, The Power of I, though rocky at first, is now an acceptable practice in both middle schools. Both middle schools are in their 3rd year with Making Middle Grades Work.

Chapter Summary and Closing

This research study explored how experiences with school reform initiatives impacted the attitudes of teachers and administrators regarding change. The themes revealed in the interviews included the general perceptions regarding change, teacher empowerment and voice, and the support systems of school, district, and community. Teachers and administrators readily voiced their opinions to and related their experiences about change and the four reform initiatives of single-gender instruction, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Southern Regional Educational Board's Making Middle Grades Work. The conclusions drawn from the interviews are listed below.

The teachers and administrators interviewed were accustomed to changing. In fact, some teachers said the words 'change' and 'teaching' were synonymous. It was not that teachers resented change, but the way that change had been introduced to them was often frustrating and convoluted. Teachers were fully aware that their students were changing because there was more available and accessible to students now than 5, 10, and definitely 20 years ago. The students coming into their classes now were computer literate from a very early age, and teachers noted their lack of knowledge in technology hindered them from being as productive as they could be and their students from

achieving as much as they could. Teachers said students could be introduced and captivated by particular subject material if only they had more technology at their disposal. The administrators desired to bring the most current technology into the buildings; however, funding for such projects was costly.

Teachers understood that change was necessary for the growth of a school. What some teachers did not understand was why reform initiatives were adopted and introduced without any input from them. After all, the reason for a change project was to increase student achievement, and who knew students better than their teachers? Teachers wanted to have a voice in the adoption, inception, continuation, and conclusion of reform initiatives. Frustration built when reform came into a school from a top-down approach without any communication with the ones who would be incorporating the reform process in the classroom.

Because teachers knew their students better than anyone and they also knew their classes better than anyone, teachers expected to be given the professional license to shape and form change initiatives to fit their students and their classrooms. The objectives and goals of the project would be adhered to; however, the manner in which the objectives and goals were met would differ from class to class. This empowerment allowed teachers the freedom to take ownership in the reform initiatives. In fact, other teachers more readily accepted change when they saw teachers having that freedom in their classrooms. The administrators acknowledged how valuable input was from teachers and admitted that they had often not solicited it as much as they should have.

School support, more specifically principal support, was instrumental in maintaining the climate for reform to thrive. The principal was the leader of the reform

movement, and teachers took their cues from the principal. Teachers wanted the leader of the school to be knowledgeable about the reform project in such a way that it could be communicated to the staff and questions would be answered. In addition, teachers expected the principal to offer support in the form of professional development activities that would increase their knowledge about the reform project itself and give them the tools to use in the classroom. Principals encouraged teachers to implement reform initiatives through budgeting more money for professional development activities, allowing teachers to visit classrooms of other teachers, and scheduling times for collaboration with teammates and coworkers. The administrators knew they were responsible for cultivating a positive climate toward a reform project and maintaining its momentum.

District support, more specifically the support from the superintendent, was addressed along with school support. Teachers voiced concerns with the method the district used to determine reform projects within schools or the district as a whole. Teachers commented that districts looked at high-stakes data only to decide whether or not a school was in need of reform and that did not give a thorough picture of the situation or the need. In addition, districts did not need to adopt reform projects just because other schools were doing them or to be competitive with other districts. The teachers spoke of how this district started too many reform projects at one time and stopped some reform projects before conclusive data could be obtained. This starting and stopping of reform initiatives was both confusing and frustrating to administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Community support was also mentioned as a needed support system for successful reform initiatives. Teachers equated the support the community gave a school to the support parents gave the teachers. Teachers wanted parents to support them in what they were teaching and how their children were learning. This support could be in the form of volunteering in the classroom or getting their children to school to participate in a reform program. Teachers appreciated the open communication with parents and acknowledged the importance of that communication. Parents wanted to know and needed to know what was going on in the schools. The commitment of the parents was needed in conjunction with the commitment of the teachers and administration. The administrators realized it was beneficial to any program in the school to keep the parents informed.

Single-gender instruction as a reform initiative had mixed reviews with the participants. Teachers said they did not have a voice in the adoption of single-gender; however, they were given a voice as to whether or not to participate in the project. Those who chose to teach single-gender classes were introduced to the concept of gender specific differences by having a group read and discussion on the book Why Gender Matters, by Leonard Sax. Half of the teachers remarked the book study was adequate preparation for the new endeavor and half said there needed to have been more professional development activities to answer specific questions about teaching strategies for males and females. Ultimately, there were no data to show that students in a single-gender class outperformed their peers in a heterogeneous classroom. Single-gender instruction lasted 2 years and teachers credited its short duration with the fact that one of the administrators who introduced single-gender instruction retired.

Inclusion as a reform initiative was still being used in the middle schools. Even though inclusion had a rough start with rough edges, the concept of inclusion was accepted by both faculties and work was done to mold inclusion to fit each middle school. The administrators had challenges to overcome with placing special education teachers and assistants into classrooms with a general education teacher. Personalities had to be considered before a placement could be made and both teachers needed to have a scheduled time to collaborate. Those teachers disillusioned by inclusion tended to blame the lack of collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. Specific roles and responsibilities were not mapped out and teachers became frustrated with each other. However, the success rate of special education students in an inclusion class justified the longevity of the program. Teachers began to fashion their inclusion classes to fit their styles and started using the special education staff in the capacity that would benefit the goal of the class.

Cooperative learning as a reform initiative was no longer thought of as a reform project but as a teaching strategy used in many classrooms in both middle schools. One of the main problems with cooperative learning was the true method of establishing cooperative groups had been lost with the next generation of teachers who had inherited classrooms from veteran teachers who knew how cooperative groups are to be formed. Now, many teachers loosely used a type of cooperative learning. For the teachers who knew the specific function of the group and the roles of each member, cooperative groups were a dynamic and forceful asset to any class. Not only were assignments and projects done to a higher quality with a group, but students within the classes felt they were a valuable member of the class with specific functions. Both administrators were

responsible for introducing cooperative learning into the middle schools and at the time of their leaving the middle schools, cooperative learning was a norm for the classroom.

Southern Regional Education Board's Making Middle Grades Work was a reform initiative adopted by the district for the two middle schools. The focus of Making Middle Grades Work was on rigor in the curriculum and in classroom assessments. Teachers were trained in the SREB Module for MMGW and then brought the information back to their respective faculties. A peer team of evaluators went to each classroom looking for evidence of rigor in the curriculum and in classroom assessments. Teachers were frustrated and annoyed that results of the middle school evaluations were drawn from only 5 minutes in a classroom because valid judgments cannot be made with only a 5-minute snapshot. MMGW had specific goals and objectives for each middle school; however, teachers were given the freedom to mold the reform initiative to fit the culture and climate of their classrooms. MMGW was to have a time span of 5 years and both middle schools are currently finishing up their 3rd years.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the perceptions of both teachers and administrators regarding reform initiatives within their schools and their impressions regarding the durability, sustainability, and longevity of four reform programs: (a) single-gender instruction, (b) inclusion, (c) cooperative learning, and (d) Southern Regional Educational Board's Making Middle Grades Work. Additionally, the study explored the reasons behind the longevity of the four reform initiatives and to conclude what makes a reform initiative successful or unsuccessful. Given the fact that schools are constantly changing to meet the demands of national, state, and city standards, it was important to understand how the teaching profession views these changes to better understand how the adoption of change initiatives could be accepted more readily by teachers and administrators.

The primary research question focused on how the teachers' and administrators' experiences with school reform programs impacted their attitudes regarding change. The secondary research questions concentrated on the commitment and voice teachers had in the creation and development of reform initiatives, the processes used to adopt reform initiatives, the training necessary to implement reform, and the elements necessary for successful reform. This qualitative research was conducted using the design component of a case study that allowed an understanding of attitudes and practices involved and facilitated informed decision-making after data collection. The elite interviews allowed participants the comfort needed for their reflection on their experiences with reform initiatives and enabled the researcher to draw conclusions regarding their attitudes toward change.

This study adds to the developmental base of change theory and gives insight to the various strategies that enhance the longevity of reform initiatives along with the shortcoming of failed initiatives. Teachers and administrators alike can glean pertinent information from this study that will assist their schools and systems in preparation for future reform projects.

<div align="center">Analysis</div>

When asked to share their experiences with school reform programs, 12 teachers and two administrators addressed the changes that had taken place, the impact of the changes, and the longevity of each of the four individual reform initiatives studied. Teachers and administrators explained how they incorporated the specific reform initiatives of single-gender instruction, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work within their classrooms and schools. In an atmosphere of confidentiality, the teachers and administrators expressed their viewpoints and concerns. Themes emerging from the interviews included change perceptions, teacher empowerment and voice, and support systems. Teachers and administrators also related their perspectives regarding change in their own environments to their perceptions of global changes that are occurring in education today.

Teachers and administrators alike likened a school that was not growing to one that was dead. Both groups agreed that education needed to change with the times and that one of the major indicators of that fact was that technology was rapidly changing. Teachers were concerned that technology was moving faster than they could keep up with, and they did not feel adequately prepared through provided professional development opportunities. In addition, their time constraints and tight schedules kept

them from becoming as knowledgeable with technology as they wanted to be. Teachers knew students needed the advancement of technology in the classroom but lack of funding kept that from happening.

For the teachers, the use of technology in the classroom was a key to gaining students' attention and interest. Students became receptive to the content and their interest level was maintained through innovative technological programs and activities. One teacher remarked that when students were tech-savvy, time was saved in the classroom because computer programs for projects or exercises did not have to be taught to students anymore. They came to class already knowing them.

Teachers spoke at length regarding how they had changed with the times and what was different in their classroom as a result of that change. However, the teachers stated that change needed to be coupled with progress and that changing just for change sake was not acceptable. Different teachers had different definitions for progress, but all agreed that students needed to be achieving and learning; however, not all teachers were comfortable with change. Some admitted they were set in their ways and needed concrete evidence to support what needed to be changed. They were not opposed to changing if it would benefit their students. They were just not comfortable with it.

As far as what mandated change, teachers spoke about how the top-down approach to reform initiatives just did not work. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) remarked that there is already a fundamental tension in a top-down approach to reform. If administrators wanted to know what needed to be changed in a building or a classroom, they needed to ask the teachers because they were the ones familiar with their students. Teachers also did not model their changes on teachers who just had good test scores.

They stated they wanted to model what needed to be changed after teachers who sought success for each of their students and taught them to be competitive.

The administrators also voiced their agreement that schools needed to change with the times. However, they agreed with Fullan (2001) that the dilemma of a leader is deciding when to act or not act when the environment around them is radically changing. They knew teachers needed the technology in their classrooms and the knowledge about that technology to enhance learning yet lack of funding and professional development activities hindered that from happening. They also related that teachers have become weary of so many reform projects in so little time. Fullan (1999) warned administrators that if they were not attuned to leading in a culture of change, they would make the mistake of seeking too many external innovations and would take on too many projects. They easily put the blame on No Child Left Behind and the mandates of Adequate Yearly Progress and Teacher Value-Added Assessment data.

As stated earlier, teachers were not opposed to change; however, they spoke of a desire to have ownership in the reform initiative. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) placed the responsibility of teacher empowerment on administration and called it a moral activity of the principal. Teachers said a reform initiative had more of a chance of succeeding if they had ownership in it, and Gable and Manning (2004) expressed the same finding when they said that teachers needed to become stakeholders in school change efforts. This ownership allowed accountability for specific outcomes and increased the likelihood of successful reform. Teachers expressed that administration needed to empower them to be part of the decision-making process and allow them the authority to tailor the reform initiative to justly fit the needs of their classes and students.

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Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) reiterated this same warning that if teachers do not adopt the change and improvements as their own and translate them into effective classroom practice, then the changes and improvements will amount to nothing.

Teachers also wanted to remind administration that they were professionals and as professionals they would get the job done, but they wanted to get it done their way. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) maintained that a teacher is apt of be recognized as having a voice when he or she is considered professional in the accumulated skill, wisdom, and expertise in the specific and variable circumstances of the classroom. Making Middle Grades Work was an example of a preset reform initiative; however, teachers were able to structure it to fit their classroom. On the other hand, single-gender instruction was a reform that teachers said they had no initial input and once the administrator left, so did the reform project. These two reform initiatives were examples of what Hargreaves (1997) warned about when he said that many initiatives in school restructuring and reform have too often been mandated without the involvement or consent of teachers.

The administrators expressed the same concern for teacher empowerment and conceded that true reform did not come from within their offices but from within the classrooms. They knew that teachers who were supportive of a reform initiative brought other teachers on board more readily than anything that administration could do. Fullan (2001) also remarked empowering teachers for school reform was a worthy goal and a catalyst for reform in classrooms. The administrators noted it was their responsibility to establish a culture of professionalism in their buildings so teachers would feel comfortable shaping and forming reform projects to meet the needs of their students. Administrators did not want to be seen only as overseers and disciplinarians. These

administrators agreed with Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) that for faculty and staff to work effectively together and experiment with various activities and partnerships, they must possess a feeling of autonomy, control, and voice in what they are doing.

Just as important as teacher empowerment within a reform initiative is also teacher voice to be heard before, during, and after a reform initiative. Teachers responded that there were few reform projects during their tenure in which they were given a voice. They wanted a climate of cooperation and teamwork, and that meant administrators respecting the teachers' viewpoints and opinions. However, teachers voiced what Short, Greet, and Michael (1991) found in that for teacher involvement in decision-making to happen, teachers must believe that their involvement is genuine and that their opinions have critical impact on decisions. Teachers who had more years' experience said their voices were heard in their schools. The fact that they had been there longer than others served as a proving grounds, as such, and they said their voices were heard and respected. Administrators used the voices of the experienced teachers because teachers with the highest levels of reform-based teaching practices also exhibited the most reform-based beliefs (Roehrig & Kruse, 2005). These teachers were the catalyst for reform initiatives within the schools.

Inclusion was one reform initiative that teachers said they did not have a voice in its adoption, but they did have authority to shape and fashion it to meet their styles of teaching and their classroom environments. The administrators recalled how many of the reform initiatives were introduced to them and they did not have a voice in the matter either. However, that was not cause to disallow teachers the professional courtesy of being able to give their opinions and voice their concerns regarding a reform project.

Both administrators admitted that many teachers already felt their views were not desired or needed and the administrators said they tried hard to establish a culture of acceptance rather than one of isolation. The administrators agreed with Keiser and Shen (2000) that the benefits of teacher empowerment and voice ultimately led to higher student motivation and achievement, and that was a result that could not be ignored.

The administrators in the buildings were responsible for developing and maintaining the support needed for a successful reform initiative. Teachers used words like leader, head, guide, and chief when referring to their administrators and placed upon them the responsibility of leading the school in a successful reform. Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) maintained that it was the direct responsibility of the school principal for improving instruction and learning, and they needed to foster the conditions necessary for sustained education reform in a complex, rapidly changing society. Teachers called upon administrators for support and wanted that support to be emotional or physical. Also, administrators were to become knowledgeable about a reform project so they could talk to the staff and be able to answer questions. If the leadership did not believe in a project, then the teachers would not either. In the eyes of the teachers, the success of a reform project would rise or fall with administration. Fullan (2001) expressed the same belief when he said that it was the principal's vision, dedication, and determination that provided the mobilizing force behind any reform effort. The administrators interviewed owned their responsibilities and said that knowing the roles and carrying them out was at times two totally different things. However, they knew they had to take into account the perceptions of the teachers and take the lead in change initiatives.

Teachers also placed the responsibility of obtaining and maintaining pertinent professional development opportunities squarely upon the shoulders of the administrators. Quellmalz et al. (1995) maintained that for a reform project to be successful, meaningful opportunities for professional growth, strategic planning, teaming and coaching, visits to classes, and pooled resources were necessary. Teachers verbalized the very same findings. For teachers to be knowledgeable and comfortable with reform, professional development opportunities needed to be offered before and during a reform initiative. As Roehrig and Kruse (2006) remarked, there can be no school renewal without teacher renewal; therefore, an important facet of administrative school support is allowing and encouraging professional development that supports the change initiative along with increasing teacher knowledge. A number of teachers voiced their frustration in their lack of preparedness as reform projects began. On the other hand, a group of teachers noted the professional development subsequent to certain reform initiatives was ample to get them started and to answer any of their questions about the reform. Also, these teachers expressed how rewarding it was to visit other teachers' classrooms and witness new strategies at work.

Specifically, when single-gender instruction was introduced and the teachers volunteered for a gender-specific class, the professional development for those teachers consisted of reading a book pertaining to the different sexes. To some of the teachers, the book was all they needed to get started with their gender specific class; however, to some it was not enough information, there was not enough discussion, and there were no opportunities to visit other schools and classes that were involved in single-gender instruction.

Teachers also voiced their desires to have more professional development geared toward particular grade levels and subjects instead of a 'one size fits all' approach. All of the teachers did agree that any amount of quality professional development did affect them and their classes positively. Blase and Blase (2004) reported that participation in workshops, seminars, and conferences positively affected a teacher's self-esteem and sense of support. In addition, Blase and Blase (2004) found teacher motivation, classroom reflection, and reflectively informed behavior were affected most dramatically increasing a teacher's innovation and variety of teaching methods. The teachers said that when they saw strategies and techniques being applied and they were engaged in a more hands-on approach, they were more apt to try some of the new strategies and techniques in their classrooms. Both administrators agreed that offering pertinent professional development was vital for the growth of the teachers, the growth of their students, and the success of any reform initiative.

Still in light of an administrator's responsibilities for a successful reform project, teachers noted that principals were responsible for establishing a culture of collaboration between teachers. Quellmalz et al. (1995) placed the responsibility of establishing this culture on the principal as well. They found the principal had to maintain a school culture that nurtured staff collaboration and participation in decision-making that reformulated the roles and authority exercised by teachers and administrators. One way principals developed a culture of collaboration was by protecting common planning time and scheduling so affected parties could come together to discuss issues and plan lessons. Hord and Boyd (1995) found that when teachers have the time and structures in place to

meet together, continuous critical inquiry and improvement will become norms that govern their behavior and these norms will both sustain and encourage innovation.

The particular reform initiative that came to the minds of the majority of teachers when collaboration was mentioned was inclusion. This group of teachers felt passionately one way or another. To some, the collaboration between them and the special education teachers were nonexistent and there were feelings of resentment and frustration in regards to lack of guidelines and clear cut roles. To another group, the special education teachers and the general education teachers did collaborate, more informally than a prescheduled time and place, but there was direct communication between the two parties.

The administrators conceded that they had not always been the leader in establishing a positive climate for collaboration, especially when it came to inclusion. As Fullan (2003) warned, it is not just about making time to collaborate but whether the people added knowledge and contributed to the development of others. This collaborative climate was not experienced within the reform initiative of inclusion, specifically. Also, there were personalities to take into consideration when another teacher was placed in a classroom with a current teacher. The administrators did say that they tried different strategies to get both teachers to communicate, but ultimately they just left it up to the teachers to work it out.

Teachers also placed the responsibility of budgeting, staffing, and scheduling on administration, as well. Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) remarked that principals can contribute to the success of change within a school through budgeting and scheduling that influence the availability of programs and resources for students. If an administrator

truly believed in the objectives and goals of a reform initiative, then that administrator will use money, people, and time to promote the initiative and ensure its success. Teachers wanted administrators to 'put their money where their mouths were' and finance the professional development opportunities, materials, and extra staff. Lipsitz, Jackson, and Austin (1997) expressed that both teachers and administrators needed the empowerment necessary to make key pedagogical, management, and budgetary decisions to ensure successful reform.

Also, teachers wanted administrators to keep reform programs staffed with competent people, as in The Power of I, and look at alternative ways of scheduling to meet specific needs of specific groups of teachers and students. The administrators also placed responsibility for budgeting, staffing, and scheduling upon their own shoulders; however, they explained how difficult it was to do and how teachers did not understand the complexity of those three. Nevertheless, they said it was their responsibilities to equip the teachers with the tools they needed to get the job done, both mentally and physically.

District support is just as important as school support to provide a stable foundation for a reform initiative. Teachers placed some responsibilities right on the superintendent and the district office. Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) also placed responsibility for successful reform upon the district level as well. To Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) district support required all central office members to share responsibility for meeting the needs of the students through the reform programs. Teachers maintained it was the district's responsibility to make sure schools were successful and students were successful. Subsequently, teachers viewed the district in which they worked as overly

competitive in order to make schools and students more successful. They claimed the

district would try something new just to break ranks with the other districts.

Teachers acknowledged the role data played in assessing performance; however,

they wanted the district to look at other variables as well when it was judging the success

of programs. The teachers were in agreement with Fullan et al. (2006) that a successful

school reform program is one that puts the child at the center and provides an education

that is tailored to that student, it uses a precise individualized assessment system centered

on data, and the faculty is engaged in focused, ongoing learning. However, one of the

reasons teachers wanted the district to look at other variables was because there were

students who were unpredictable and would not perform when needed, even though the

majority of students would produce accurate test data.

Just like the principal was to be knowledgeable of the reform initiatives, teachers

wanted the superintendent to be informed as well. In addition, teachers explained how

district personnel needed to be provided with professional development opportunities that

would engage them and, subsequently, enable them to inform the administrators. The

majority of teachers complimented the system in which they worked for being innovative

through adopting reform initiatives, but they did question the longevity of some of the

reform projects. Too many reforms were started, stopped, and then others took their

places in short spans of time that did not allow for adequate data collection or analysis.

Liebermann (1992) addressed the fact that most of the reform initiatives primarily called

for quick fixes rather than comprehensive changes in the education system, and it was

with these quick fixes that teachers were frustrated. In addition, both administrators

remarked that they wanted the district personnel to do their homework with reform

initiatives before the projects were introduced to the building administrators. They

agreed with Beyer and Ruhl-Smith (2002) that collaborative efforts at the building level

would not succeed unless supported and modeled at the district level.

Along the same venue, community support was important for the success of

reform initiatives, whether it was at the school level or the district level. Teachers in

particular wanted community support in the form of parental support. Gable and

Manning (2002) found that educational reform requires the joint efforts of families and

schools. Teachers said they used parents as volunteers and appreciated two-way

communication from parents. Teachers wanted parents to support reform initiatives and

to take ownership in them. Taking ownership meant that parents supported reform

programs, and one way was by getting their children to school to participate in those

programs such as in The Power of I. Administrators also realized the importance of

community support for an effective change initiative. Reeves (2009) said that teachers

and administrators should never underestimate the power and drive of a few committed

community members who support their school and their reform programs.

Administrators knew that stakeholders wanted to stay involved through any means of

communication, such as websites, newsletters, and meetings, and they made sure that

communication stayed open. The administrators agreed with Fullan (1988) that an astute

principal recognized that school councils are part of a systemic shift in the relationship

between school and community, and that greater interaction is essential to long-term

success. Fullan (1988) also called the establishment of school councils with parent and

community participation in advisory or decision-making roles a phenomenon of major

proportions. Teachers said that schools and districts needed to use the strength of the

community and give them the opportunity to have a voice in reform initiatives. Reeves (2009) said that having a voice in reform means the community will become an external pair of eyes for the school and also become critical friends that will provide new perspectives and constructive criticism.

Teacher perspectives and perceptions of single-gender instruction varied with the interviewees. Some teachers enjoyed splitting the genders so topics of interest for gender-specific classes could be discussed in isolation without including the opposite gender. Teachers saw different personalities emerge in classes where there was not a mixed group of students. Richmond (2005) noted that the single-gender classes allowed students to be more inquisitive and less self-conscious about reading aloud or speaking out. The teachers saw that girls became more vocal in an all girls class and even some became class clowns, and teachers felt that both of those instances would not have happened in a mixed-gender class. Teachers wanted to believe the claim that males would achieve higher in typical 'girl' classes and girls would do the same in typical 'male' classes. A few teachers did not support that claim and did not volunteer to have single-gender classes.

Teachers were prepared for single-gender instruction with a group read and discussion of Why Gender Matters by Leonard Sax. The majority of the teachers said the book gave them ample evidence and suggestions in dealing with single-gender instruction. Evidence was strong that specific genders learn differently; however, the majority of the teachers interviewed found no significant difference in achievement levels of those in single-gender classes compared to those in mixed-gender classes. Scheduling of students was difficult because the whole school was not adhering to single-gender

classes; therefore, the single-gender classes tended to remain constant whereas other

classes grew larger or had a more transient population. Both administrators were

intrigued by the data on achievement for single-gender; however, just one middle school

implemented it. Both administrators acknowledged single-gender instruction was neither

for all students nor all teachers, or was it a panacea for all that ailed the school. Flannery

(2006) maintained that for single-gender classes and instruction to work, teachers must

first be given a choice to participate then they must be given the proper professional

development for training. Teachers were given a choice to participate; however, they

voiced their concerns that the professional development did not prepare them for single-

gender classes.

Inclusion was viewed by all teachers and administrators to be a worthy reform

initiative. Special education students achieved more in a general education inclusion

class than in a pull-out program, and their self-esteem grew as they saw their own

successes. Teachers supported the inclusion concept, but there were obstacles that kept

the teachers from fully being able to implement various strategies with an inclusion class.

One concern was what group of general education students was going to be placed with

the special education students to form an inclusion class. Teachers commented that

depending on what ability level was placed with the inclusion class determined what

teaching strategies and techniques they would be able to use. Teachers of inclusion

classes now had to plan differently, teach differently, and assess differently. Kauffman

(1994) warned that schools should not focus all of their attention on merely getting the

students into the class but should concentrate attention on educating the teachers in the

effective teaching methods and strategies appropriate for children with special needs. Teachers agreed that kind of professional development did not happen.

The administrators spoke of the rough start inclusion had in both buildings before it finally became the norm. Both administrators had difficulties with placing special education teachers and assistants with general education teachers because they had to take into consideration personality differences. They also spoke of the difficulty of scheduling classes and arranging teams so particular teachers would not always have the inclusion classes. However, they both believed in inclusion as a needed reform initiative because they saw, first hand, the changes that came for the students, both special education and general education, and the growth that many of the teachers experienced working with both sets of students in one classroom. Both teachers and administrators witnessed a reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness (Peck, Carlson, & Helmstetter, 1992), growth in social cognition (Murray-Seegert, 1989), improvement in self-concept of nondisabled students (Peck et al., 1992), development of personal principles and ability to assume an advocacy role toward their peers and friends with disabilities, and warm and caring friendships (Bogdan & Taylor, 1989).

Cooperative learning, as a reform initiative, was to be done strictly within the parameters and roles of cooperative grouping otherwise the groups did not function as a true cooperative group. Teachers spoke about how some teachers said they were doing cooperative learning only to really be doing group work without any real roles or objectives. Johnson and Johnson (1989/1990) explained that simply placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not produce cooperation and high

achievement. Taking time on the front-end of a school year to describe the requirements, regulations, and roles of each member in a cooperative group saved valuable time as the school year continued. Johnson and Johnson (1989/1990) maintained that teachers needed to set parameters and specifically teach the necessary skills to ensure cooperative learning in groups. Teachers mentioned how students in a cooperative group felt accepted and part of the classroom when they were given specific roles in which to function. Manning and Lucking (1991) maintained that properly implemented cooperative learning contributed positively to academic achievement, social skills, and self-esteem.

At the beginning of the reform project, teachers began with intense training, and as those teachers retired, the new teachers to the buildings were not being trained as extensively in cooperative grouping. Getting cooperative groups to work 'like clockwork' takes time and effort from both the students and the teachers. Teachers spoke of how some of their classes just could not handle being placed in a cooperative group. They saw individuals who became competitive within their own group even though each member had a specific role to fill. Teachers remarked that boys in general had a difficult time with cooperative groups.

Both administrators were responsible for bringing the reform initiative of cooperative learning into the schools. They promoted professional development activities and encouraged the teachers to attend. Both principals tried to supply teachers with the needs of the classrooms for cooperative learning to be successful. Cooperative learning has become the norm as a differentiated teaching strategy in both middle schools now.

Making Middle Grades Work was a district initiated reform project for both middle schools. Teachers believed in the premise of MMGW that if schools created an environment that motivated children to make an effort to succeed then those students would be able to master a more rigorous academic curriculum which would lead them to academic gains and achievement (Southern Regional Education Board). However, they were skeptical of MMGW and they wanted to make sure the extensive amount of time and energy this reform initiative was going to require was going to be worth it. This reform initiative came with certain nonnegotiable beliefs that all teachers had to adhere to in their classrooms. Some teachers used words like rigid and overbearing when describing MMGW. Teachers spoke candidly on how they resented the 5 to 10 minutes peer assessments to determine the level of rigor in individual classrooms and how that assessment did not produce reliable or valid data. In addition, teachers added the assessments definitely did not give a clear picture of what went on in their classroom.

Teachers had no reservations about 'raising the bar' with a more rigorous curriculum, activities, and assessments. MMGW was a prescriptive and systematic school reform initiative, but teachers were still given the opportunity to mold and shape the project to fit their classrooms. Teachers did support one aspect of MMGW called The Power of I where students were given opportunities to change zeroes to acceptable grades. This program put the responsibility on the students to take ownership in their grades and get make-up work done, and it empowered teachers to not accept half-done work or unacceptable work. The administrators spoke of the confusion regarding MMGW when it was introduced to them. As with the teachers, they believed in the concepts but questioned how teachers were going to be supported as they added more

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rigor to their curriculum, assignments, and assessments. Both felt this reform came quickly and the objectives and end results were never fully explained.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

Teachers and administrators readily voiced their perceptions about change and shared their experiences with reform initiatives in each of the schools. The analysis of this information led me to the following conclusions.

Teachers and administrators are more apt to accept change when there are positive outcomes associated with the change. Teachers admit that change does not come easily; however, they are willing to change if they are convinced students will benefit from the change. The growth of technology has made it imperative for teachers and administrators to embrace change within their classrooms and their schools. Teachers consider the advanced technology now in their classes a positive result associated with change. However, teachers conclude that change for change sake is never good and school systems and individual schools have too often changed just to be changing.

Instrumental in the success of any reform or change initiative is the voice and empowerment given to the teachers who will be carrying out the process in their classrooms. Teachers repeatedly express that they want to have input into the change process. Administrators are to take note that their opinions and viewpoints are valuable because they are the ones who know the students better than anyone else. Teachers want to have their voices heard, and they also want to have the autonomy to shape reform projects to fit the climate and culture of their classes. Teachers believe that reform programs that solicit teacher input have a greater chance of survival and success than those that come as a top-down mandate. In accord, Blase and Blase (2001) admonish

principals to give teachers a sense that they are trusted and that their input is valued. Teachers want to be given the opportunity to influence other teachers who may be skeptical of reform initiatives and administrators need to give teachers leeway in working and convincing others. Administrators admit that the classroom teacher has more power to influence than they do and they need to enlist the assistance of their teaching staff to persuade others.

Successfully bringing a reform project to fruition depends on the commitment and support of the principal in the school, the central office personnel in the district, and the stakeholders in the community. Principals need to lead the reform projects and teachers take their cues from the interest level and commitment of the building administrator. Teachers want principals to support them as they incorporate reform projects in the classroom by providing professional development activities. Schaffer, Nesselrodt, and Stringfield (1997) also maintain that successful school improvement efforts and reform programs have been directly linked with the commitment to ongoing staff development supporting the school improvement effort. Timely and pertinent professional development opportunities positively affect classrooms. Teachers want to bring back relevant information from professional development opportunities and look forward to trying out different strategies and techniques. Principals maintain that they are the ones responsible for budgeting, staffing, and scheduling of the proper resources to be used within a classroom during reform projects.

Administrators and staff in the school district office can make important contributions in efforts to move implementation of interventions and change processes (Hall & Hord, 2006). Teachers and administrators voice their agreement with Hall and

Hord when they state that central office personnel are instrumental in the success of individual reform projects in the schools or larger district reform projects. Teachers and administrators understand that the superintendent is ultimately responsible to send the necessary resources to enable schools to change. In addition, teachers warn districts not to look solely on data from high-stakes testing to determine if a school is in need of reform. Teachers repeatedly say they are wary of reform initiatives that are district initiated because there have been numerous projects come and go in such a small amount of time, and questions still linger as to where some of them went and why. Fullan (2001) said that significant change in the form of implementing specific innovations can be expected to take a minimum of 2 to 3 years; bringing about institutional reforms can take 5 to 10 years.

Community support is needed because teachers want parents to support the efforts in the classroom by volunteering and encouraging participation in reform programs. Administrators realize the need to continue enlisting parental support and try to keep parents abreast of activities and occurrences with web-sites, mailings, and meetings. Epstein (1995) agrees that interactions between school, family, and community are instrumental in the reform process because these partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.

The four reform initiatives of single-gender instruction, inclusion, cooperative learning, and Making Middle Grades Work influence teacher perspectives and perceptions of change initiatives. Teachers express how they are positively influenced by change when the reform initiatives allow them a voice in the program and professional

freedom to shape the reform project to meet the needs of their students. On the other

hand, teachers are negatively influenced by change when the reform initiative is

mandated from a top-down approach and there are strict parameters with no clear set

goals or objectives.

<u>Recommendations for Practice</u>

Based on the interviews in this study and in accordance with the themes that

emerged from this research, the following recommendations are presented. Researching

the themes of empowerment and voice, I recommend the following to teachers:

- I suggest teachers consider learning as much as can be learned about the reform
  initiatives being adopted or considered and don't just depend on the building
  principal to be the keepers of the knowledge.

- In conjunction with learning may be professional development activities that
  teachers could consider attending and request additional informational sessions if
  needed.

- Both administrators and teachers could bring what was learned in professional
  development sessions back to the faculty to teach them.

- Consider the fact that particular reform initiatives probably have a history of
  success somewhere and tap into the positive aspect of it.

- Consider modeling a positive attitude for other teachers to see, knowing that they
  may be taking their lead from what they see instead of what they hear.

- In addition, take a leading role in establishing the reform protocol within the
  school.

- Teachers can work within the reform protocol yet exercise ownership in reform by tailoring changes to fit individual classrooms.
- Teachers who desire to be given a voice could build trust with the building principal in such a way that he or she will feel confident that opinions and ideas solicited have the best interest of the students at heart.

Based on the evidence of the research regarding the themes of empowerment and voice, I recommend the following to principals:

- Principals should consider listening to teachers and take their ideas seriously and do not give them the false impression that what they say may influence whether or not a reform initiative is adopted or continued if it truly will not be influential.
- Principals could be more honest regarding the nonnegotiables and set realistic parameters for the reform project, understanding that teachers have more power to influence other staff members than building administrators do.
- In addition, principals should consider taking the lead in the reform movement because teachers will take cues regarding commitment for the reform project from the actions and words of the principal.

The themes of school support, district support, and community support emerged from this research. I recommend the following to principals:

- Principals could consider the benefits of professional development opportunities and allow teachers the opportunity to attend those professional development activities that support the reform initiative.
- Consider giving teachers time away from their classes to visit other teachers and to visit other schools in the process of reform.

- Principals could maximize the use of the budget to set funds for the material needs of the teachers and schedule release time and common planning time so teachers can communicate and plan together.

- Considering keeping the lines of communication open with stakeholders and the community regarding what change initiative the school is adopting.

- Principals should guard against allowing reform projects to become 'pet' projects. I recommend the following to the district administrators:

- Superintendents should consider not solely relying on assessment data when determining if a school is in need of reform and understand that 'one day high stakes-testing' does not always reveal the true potential of students or the school.

- Consider allowing building principals to have a voice in the adoption of a reform project for his or her school.

- Knowing the importance of relevant staff development opportunities, superintendents should consider researching and then bringing pertinent professional development activities to the system that address specific needs of teachers.

- Consider giving reform projects more time to be successful and do not replace one reform project with another just because something else 'new and improved' has come along.

I recommend the following to the community and stakeholders:

- Realizing the importance of cooperation with the school, consider staying involved with the school, and be readily available to volunteer in classrooms, read to students, and participate in the reform projects to promote student achievement.

- Teachers value open lines of communication, so consider communicating with the teachers and becoming facilitators of the learning that is taking place in the classroom.

<u>Recommendations for Further Research</u>

I recommend the following for future researchers:

- Researchers could further this study by developing a quantitative research study that would explore the achievement gains throughout the duration of various reform initiatives.

- Gains could be tracked through the cohort groups from sixth, seventh, and eighth grades using one reform initiative that involves the whole school.

- Additionally, replication of this study with superintendents, administrators, and high school teachers may further enhance an understanding of the perceptions of change throughout the whole district.

- Developing a systematic approach to evaluating reform initiatives before their adoption, throughout their duration, and at their completion may eliminate the subjectivity often found with reform projects.

- A complete data analysis would lend itself to verifying the effectiveness of the reform initiative.

This study provides insight to building administrators and superintendents when preparing to adopt reform initiatives within individual schools or as a district. It allows principals to understand the perceptions of the teachers regarding change projects and the superintendents to better understand the building administrators' concerns. Additionally, principals become familiar with the factors that help shape teachers' perceptions about

change programs and conscientiously become aware of what teachers expect from their building administrator when a change initiative is being considered. Equally so, superintendents have a better understanding of the challenges building principals face when initiating change projects with the schools.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Auditor Certification

I served as auditor for the following study: How Four Reform Initiatives Helped

Develop Attitudes Regarding Change in Two Middle Schools in East Tennessee.

_____

Karen Reed-Wright

March 15, 2010

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

1. Think about the four reform initiatives of Single Gender classes, Inclusion, Cooperative Learning, and Making Middle Grades Work. How did you develop commitment or have a voice in the creation and development of one or all of the above mentioned reform initiatives?

2. What processes are used in the adoption of reform projects?

3. How are teachers trained to implement the reform initiatives?

4. From a teacher's perspective, what makes a reform project successful?

5. What prevents a reform project from being successful?

6. From an administrator's perspective, what makes a reform project successful?

7. What prevents a reform project from being successful?

Letter to Superintendent

Vicki A. Clevinger
4028 Lakota Place
Kingsport, Tennessee 37664
(423) 246-8436
vclevinger@k12k.com

November 23, 2009

Dr. Richard Kitzmiller
Superintendent
Kingsport City Schools
1701 East Center St.
Kingsport, Tennessee 37664

Dr. Kitzmiller,

This letter comes as a follow up to the conversation we had in February regarding my dissertation. To fulfill Institutional Review Board requirements, I must have written approval from you.

The title of my dissertation is "How Four Reform Initiatives Helped Develop Attitudes Regarding Change in Two Middle Schools in East Tennessee." I will be interviewing a total of twelve teachers combined in both Robinson Middle School and Sevier Middle School. I will also be interviewing the two principals who served at both middle schools during the time of the implementation of the four reform initiatives, Rick Everroad and Dr. Carolyn McPherson.

It is my intent to gather research regarding the implementation of the four reform initiatives of Single-Gender Classes, Cooperative Learning, Inclusion, and Making Middle Grades Work. Ultimately, I will be gaining information on how these four reform initiatives helped develop attitudes regarding change within each middle school.

Your signature below indicates your approval for me to continue with my research toward my Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis through East Tennessee State University.

Sincerely,

Vicki A. Clevinger

_____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

Correspondence by E-mail to Participants

Dear _____,

I am currently working on my dissertation to fulfill Ed.D. work through ETSU. The title of my dissertation is "How Four Reform Initiatives Helped Develop Attitudes Regarding Change in Two Middle Schools in East Tennessee."

I am interested in gathering information from teachers and administrators regarding four reform projects and their impact on assessment and instruction in the classroom. The four reform initiatives are Single Gender Classes, Cooperative Learning, Inclusion, and the Southern Regional Education Board's Making Middle Grades Work.

The word 'change' is synonymous with 'education.' Your participation in this research study will explore your ideas, perceptions, and attitudes about what changes have taken place through those four aforementioned reform initiatives and how your attitude about change in the educational forum has been shaped. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may leave at any time, refuse to answer any question, or ask to have your data removed from the research.

Please respond to this e-mail and let me know whether or not you would consider being a participant in this study. The interview should not take any longer than forty-five minutes and you will have the opportunity to read the transcript for editing purposes.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Vicki Clevinger

VITA

VICKI ANN CLEVINGER

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: February 26, 1958
	Place of Birth: Austin, Texas
	Marital Status: Married
Education:	Public Schools, Houston, Texas
	B.S. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 1985
	M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 1991
	Ed.D. Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2010
Professional Experience:	Teacher, Kingsport City Schools; Kingsport, Tennessee, 1985 – 2006
	Adjunct Teacher, Walters State Community College; Morristown, Tennessee, 1992 – 2005
	Assistant to the Principal, Kingsport City Schools; Kingsport, Tennessee 2006 - present
Honors and Awards:	Who's Who Among America's Teachers
	Delta Kappa Gamma