Common Planning and the Flexible Schedule: A Case Study of Change

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education in the School of Education (Curriculum and Instruction).

Chapel Hill
2007

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ABSTRACT

GREGORY LITTLE: Common Planning and the Flexible Schedule: A Case Study of Change
(Under the direction of Dr. Barbara Day)

The purpose of this study was to explore the participation of core middle school teachers in the change process as their schools adopted common planning structures. The study followed Oakwood Middle School and Mountain Creek Middle School throughout the initiation and implementation of required common planning times for core content area teachers. The change process was a complex and multi-faceted operation that required school leaders to build the local capacity of organizations involved.

This qualitative study focused on a low implementation and a high implementation middle school that adopted common planning structures through a flexible schedule. The primary distinction between the low implementation school and the high implementation school was the structure of the common planning time for teacher collaboration. A low implementation school failed to create at least 160 minutes of common planning time for core content area teachers per week. A high implementation school dedicated at least 160 minutes per week to collaboration. Through interviews, observations, and the study of pertinent school documents, the researcher examined how teachers participated in the move to greater collaborative structures through common planning time. The snapshot provided by the study highlighted critical elements of change, such as the importance of meaning making throughout the change process, the need for on-going staff development to equip teachers with the skills necessary to build successful collaborative relationships within the school, and
the establishment of choice and ownership when assertive leadership created the common planning structures. Embedded in the discussion on meaning making was the importance of clarifying the goals of the common planning times, allowing teachers to understand the purposes and expectations of what they were expected to do differently in these collaborative relationships. The extent to which teachers understood the change appeared to impact both their attitudes as well as their instructional practices.
To Craig and Linda for their continuous encouragement,

To Dr. Barbara Day for her unwavering support,

And to Julie and Kaylee for their unmatched patience and love
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Change is a constant reality of schools and organizations throughout the nation. Throughout my educational career, I have worked for organizations seeking to improve and lead change efforts. As an educational leader, I am constantly looking for the most effective strategies to create productive instructional environments for both students and teachers. These efforts often include changing instructional or professional approaches to teaching in order to impact student achievement and student learning. In previous years, middle school students across a large southeastern district did not meet the expected/high achievement growth goals mandated by the state on reading assessments. Implementing common planning structures is one of the district’s attempts to improve instructional practices and student performance.

The flexible schedule is a departure from the traditional six and seven period, 45-50 minute, class schedules that middle schools have implemented in the past. Teachers in the new schedules are provided larger amounts of time and given instructional discretion on how to best divide that time to meet the needs of their students. However, flexible scheduling involves much more than just changing instructional time or changing when bells ring. Flexible scheduling involves the creation of a smaller learning community that facilitates a collaborative culture and personalized instruction (Keefe & Jenkins, 2002). Along with the flexible uses of time, flexible scheduling structures provide teaming opportunities for a wide variety of purposes such as subject, interdisciplinary, as well as grade level through common
planning time. These opportunities allow the team to “address the unique learning needs of students and to create a sense of community and totality within the curriculum” (Merenbloom, 1996, p. 45). Middle schools are moving increasingly to common planning structures to create and promote developmentally appropriate practices and to support collaboration that encourages interdisciplinary teaming and increased individual attention (Kasak, 1998). It is the hope that these common planning structures create opportunities for both students and teachers to learn and develop within the confines of the school day.

The problem embedded in the use of the flexible scheduling structures is a shift in the role of the teacher. Teachers move from the isolation of their individual classrooms to a collaborative structure where they are expected to “capitalize on their collective knowledge, expertise, and effort” (Pounder, 1999, p. 319). In order to capitalize on their collective strengths, Merenbloom (1996) describes that teachers should integrate curriculum and talk about teaching strategies on a regular and on-going basis to be successful in a teaming environment. Common planning is the key element in flexible scheduling, because this provides the vehicle for teachers to address the learning needs of their students through their collective collaboration. Collaboration is a skill that must be learned and developed over time (Flowers, 2000), and teachers need ample opportunity to come together to hone the skills necessary to collaborate. Kasak (1998) suggests that teachers should come together for at least 160 minutes per week in order to witness the benefits of collaboration in student performance and classroom practice. This shift in a teacher’s role is drastically different from the traditional, isolated model where teachers work independently with little communication and collaboration with their peers. In a collaborative environment, teachers are expected to work together to plan and create dynamic curriculum that integrates skills and
concepts from all subject areas as well as to learn new instructional strategies that may make a better match between the learning needs of their students and their instruction. Teachers are challenged to work together to identify goals for their team, monitor those goals over time, assess their effectiveness, and redefine those goals in the face of an ever-changing school context (Fleming & Monda-Amaya, 2001). In order for students to gain the perceived benefits of these smaller learning communities and flexible scheduling structures, teachers must embrace these new collaborative roles and learn the skills needed to work within a team structure. Without these skills, the benefits of the collaborative time will not come to fruition, as teachers may be ill equipped to handle the anxiety and stress often associated with teaming. They must balance how to incorporate these new demands on their time with previously expected responsibilities while working with the different and complex personalities of their teammates.

The study explored teachers’ roles in the change process in order to determine how the schools moved to the smaller learning communities that incorporated the structures of common planning. Teachers’ roles in the change process were examined as the study examined how the level of implementation and use of the common planning structures was or was not influenced by the level of participation of the teacher in the change process.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, a high implementation school was defined by having longer class periods and at least 160 minutes per week of common planning. A low implementation school also consisted of longer class periods for instruction, but the staff did not have structured common planning time for at least 160 minutes per week. While both schools in the study had more than 160 minutes of teacher planning built into their
instructional week, the distinction was in how the time was encumbered and dedicated to the utilization of teachers coming together in common planning activities such as evaluating and analyzing instructional practice and adapting instructional practice to the individual needs of the students.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the involvement of middle school core teachers in the development of common planning structures through the flexible schedule at one high implementation and one low implementation school.

Research Questions:

The research questions that guided the process of inquiry were:

(1) What is the involvement of core middle school teachers at a high implementation school?
(2) What is the involvement of core middle school teachers at a low implementation school?
(3) How is teacher participation related to the level of implementation at the school?
(4) What are the structures that are in place that hindered or encouraged teacher involvement?
(5) How did the change process and teachers’ participation influence instructional practice and collegiality?
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

*Educational Change in Schools*

The purpose of educational change in schools is to “help schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs, and/or practices with better ones” (Fullan, 1991, p. 15). Fullan’s definition of change appears simple on the surface. However, educational change is a complex process that is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Innovation in an educational organization can involve the possible changes in new or revised materials, new teaching approaches, and/or change in beliefs along with changes in the structure of the organization (Fullan, 1991).

There are many challenges facing educators who attempt to change an educational organization. Educational change can be quite difficult for educators because the “human dimension of change is both intellectual and emotional” (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore & Manning, 2001 p. 118). Because change is intellectual and emotional, innovations are often marked with technical challenges as well as feelings of anxiety, frustration, and stress. Teachers may be asked to challenge their core beliefs about education as they learn new ways of teaching or incorporate new ways of thinking. Fullan (1991) indicates that altering beliefs is difficult because of the “unstated assumptions” that underlie and define their core values. The unstated assumptions are reminiscent of Senge’s (1990) notion of mental models. He notes, “Mental Models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action”
In essence, mental models shape what teachers believe is possible or impossible to accomplish within the context of the school or within their classrooms. Mental models can be difficult to change, because in order to change, a participant must alter how they view the world. To further complicate the potential influence of mental models on change, a teacher’s mental models are intricately interwoven in, directly derived from and/or greatly influenced by the culture of school. Barth (2002) defines culture as a “complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization” (p. 7). Owens (2001) explains that culture expresses the “ways of thinking that are characteristic of the people in the organization” (p. 141). A school’s culture develops over time and is transmitted and taught continuously either directly or indirectly to new members. Culture has a deep meaning for teachers, shapes the experience of its members, and is constantly reinforced by the actions and thought processes of the participants. While initiatives and structures within the school may change yearly, a school’s culture is constantly being reinforced through the interactions of the people within that culture. Barth (2002) suggests changing a school’s culture is one of the most difficult aspects of educational change, because the change is forcing teachers to examine their perceptions of the world around them. Marris (1986) indicates that our ability to “cope with life depends on making sense of what happens to us, anything which threatens to invalidate our conceptual structures of interpretation is profoundly disruptive” (p. 10). The culture of an organization helps to make sense of the world for the participants involved and is resistant to change forces because it is so deeply embedded within a teacher’s belief system. As a result, change can be difficult when participants are challenged to change their most basic perceptions of their world and question their most fundamental assumptions.
While culture may hinder change efforts, the importance of culture within the change context cannot be ignored. Kotter (1996) highlights that unless the innovation becomes embedded in the culture, the change will always be subjected to degradation as soon as the pressure to change is removed from the organization. In this way, an organization will self-correct after the initial clamor to change ceases.

Teachers and schools may be asked to change instructional approaches. Any change in teaching methods is difficult if new skills must be acquired or new instructional norms are established (Fullan, 1991). However, changes in instructional approaches can be closely tied to a participant’s core values to teaching and learning. For instance, a change in the use of cooperative learning techniques may challenge a teacher’s beliefs about how students learn, because this is directly tied to his / her core values of teaching. The more dramatic the shift or change required of teachers is; the more challenging it is for teachers to adopt and utilize. According to Fullan (1991), even if educators want the change, change can still represent a “serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty” (p. 31). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) identify technical and adaptive challenges facing teachers in change process. Technical challenges are problems that teachers’ current know-how is sufficient to overcome. Refining or readjusting techniques that already support teachers’ philosophy is an example of technical challenge. An adaptive challenge, however, is more complex and goes beyond what teachers know and often requires educators to stretch and broaden their understanding of what teaching and / or what schooling is. The researchers note that a common error of organizations is mistaking an adaptive challenge as a technical one. Unlike technical challenges, adaptive work involves difficult learning and is often marked by avoidance and disequilibrium on the part of participants. Adaptive challenges
“require experiments, new discoveres, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community” (p. 13). Adaptive challenges are generally much more difficult for participants, because new values, new attitudes, and new behaviors are adopted as a part of learning new instructional approaches. Adaptive challenges begin to re-shape the culture of the school. As noted above, changing the culture includes changing how the participants view the world. This type of change represents a moving away from the old and comfortable to something new and unknown. These “zones of uncertainty” can produce great levels of stress and anxiety for participants. Marris (1986) notes that regardless of how miserable a current state is for one in an organization, change is still a difficult and often times painful process because of the uncertainty associated with feelings of incompetence and a lack of self-efficacy surrounding shifts in practice. Instructional change can involve much more than simply learning a new skill set if the organization must re-define or re-examine core beliefs in order to implement the innovation.

To further complicate the change process, changes are difficult to transfer from one site of innovation to another. Transferability of change is difficult because each site is so unique (Fullan, 1999), even if they appear to be similar. The culture of the organization, the leadership, the participants, timing of the innovation, other innovations currently implemented, and political climate can all impact the ultimate implementation and institutionalization of a change initiative. Because one or more of these factors is unique to any given site, the context of these innovations is considerably different from one site to the next, even if the innovation is the same. Even innovations that are widely successful at one site are not guaranteed to find success in a new environment. What works in one situation may be a failure in another, because the external and internal factors involved with change
vary so greatly between and among organizations. Innovations cannot be simply packaged from one school to the next or from one classroom. The forces that surround the change and define the context in which the change occurs are much too complex for a one-size fits all mentality. Fullan (1999) states, “Innovation is not a pill, a widget, or a silver bullet” (p. 64). When an organization fails to take into account that transferability is not a given in the change process, the innovation becomes much more difficult to implement. Change agents must recognize the significance of an organization’s uniqueness in the light of educational innovation.

The day-to-day operations and responsibilities of a school can be the source of tremendous obstacles to successful implementation of an innovation. Classroom press (Fullan, 2001) relates to the daily influences and decisions that a teacher faces related to the classroom. Hubermann (1983) summarizes that classroom press is marked by the immediacy and concreteness of the classroom experience where teachers must balance a range of simultaneous operations in environments that are defined by uncertainty and unpredictability and revolve around the personal involvement with students. Rather than energize and replenish teachers, these daily influences, operations, and decisions often move teachers away from professional growth and continuous improvement. Fullan (2001) states, “The circumstances of teaching in terms of daily maintenance and student accountability . . . give back little in the time needed for planning . . . thinking and just plain . . . time for composure” (p. 118). For example, grading papers, individualized education plan meetings, and classroom management can obstruct the view of the big picture for teachers, because teachers may lack the time or energy to focus on change due to their daily responsibilities. The energy put forth towards these activities can also take away from the time, attention, and
energy needed to change because classroom pressure represents a teacher’s most immediate concerns, while change can be viewed as something that is distant and far removed from the classroom. Classroom press draws more and more attention to the short-term and what is most important now. “Teachers and other school personnel have inordinate difficulty in thinking other than in terms of covering X amount of material in X amount of time” (Sarason, 1996, p. 188). As teachers focus on the here and now, it becomes more difficult to clearly conceptualize change initiatives, because there is little time and energy left to do so. As a result, classroom press may also lead to a false sense of clarity. Teachers may believe that they have changed. In reality they have only adopted the most superficial aspects of an educational reform (Fullan, 1991), because they may lack the time or energy to fully develop the skills required of them to internalize the deepest or most adaptive challenges presented by the innovation or initiative.

Educators may face many obstacles as they approach change because any of the challenges above can derail the change process. Without proper support from leadership and the organization as a whole, change can drain teachers instead of sustaining them and helping them grow as professionals.

*Effective Change Components*

Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, and Manning (2001) define change as an intellectual process through which meaning, goals, and purposes must be clarified for the participants. For change to be successful, teachers need to be able to “see the reasons for change, grasp the point of it, and be convinced that it is feasible and will benefit their students” (Hargreaves, et al., 2001, p. 118). Fullan (1999) agrees by stating that people in all local situations must be able to construct their own “change meaning.” Fullan (2001) also states that the “crux of
change involves the development of meaning in relation to a new idea, program, reform, or a set of activities” (p. 92). Sarason (1996) calls the process “mutual adaptation, the process by which the project is adopted to the reality of its institutional setting” (p. 76). Rosenholtz (1989) highlights the importance of “goal clarity” for teachers to be successful in an educational environment. “Without common goals, teachers have little basis for deciding what to emphasize in their teaching or how to gauge their teaching success” (p. 428). All of these researchers appear to agree that effective change must begin with the participants knowing and understanding the complete reasons, rationale, and possible benefits for a change to be successfully implemented. Fullan (1991) details the importance of a “shared consensus.” When teachers have a shared consensus about the goals and organization of their work, they are more likely to use the new ideas that may affect student learning. “The presence or absence of mechanisms to address the ongoing problem of meaning –at the beginning and as people try out ideas- is crucial for success, because it is at the individual level that change does or does not occur” (Fullan, 1991, p. 45). It is important to note that meaning making is an on-going component of the change process and not relegated solely to the introductory stages of change. Again, the day-to-day operations and responsibilities of the school in many cases work against change by pulling energy and focus away from the innovation and by isolating teachers and discouraging reflective and collaborative activities. Participants need goals, purposes, and reasons constantly clarified and defined throughout in order for them to construct an effective change meaning. Fullan (2001) states, “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think- it’s as simple and as complex as that (p. 115). Hargreaves et al (2001) highlight the importance of how teachers relate to the “purposes of reform as well as to its patterns of implementation” (p. 129). The researchers describe this
relation to the purposes as a “key factor” in whether the improvement will succeed in the long-term. As stated above, change is a complex, challenging, and stressful prospect. By having a strong understanding, participants adopting the innovation may be able to overcome some of the innate challenges of the change process.

The change process also entails technical aspects that take time and energy to master. Real change is often defined by long-term approaches that ensure lasting impact on both students and teachers. Fullan (2000) states that it takes up to six years to successfully change student performance in a secondary school and that large-scale changes can take even longer to implement. Teachers may be asked to learn new instructional techniques as well as use new curricular materials, and in doing so they may struggle with the unfamiliar aspects of the innovation as they adopt these new skill sets. Fullan (2001) identifies this struggle to learn new approaches as the “implementation dip.” “Things get worse before they get better . . . as people grapple with the meaning and skills of change” (p. 92). An implementation dip provides challenges in and of itself because participants are not guaranteed to experience immediate returns on their efforts to adopt an initiative and may be tempted to move back to norms or techniques that are more comfortable and less threatening. Positive change then involves continuous learning on the part of both school leaders and teachers and takes place over time. Hargreaves et al note, “Successful implementation requires opportunities to clarify policy initiatives and understand reforms, opportunities to develop procedural knowledge associated with innovation, and opportunities to explore and modify practices” (p. 132). Teachers need opportunities to plan, reflect, and collaborate with colleagues. The researchers continue by saying that teachers need time to observe, model, train, practice, and receive feedback on instructional practices. In order for participants to successfully
implement change, social learning contexts are needed so that teachers can fully conceptualize and overcome challenges associated with both the technical and emotional aspects of the change process.

Collaboration is a critical element of how teachers can master the technical and emotional aspects of change. One of the leading strategies of school reform is the creation of a community that interacts with one another regarding issues of practice (Fullan, 2001). Hargreaves et al (2001) indicate the process of “deciphering and sense making [is] best undertaken collaboratively with other colleagues” (p. 126). The researchers state that collaboration helps to make the change process “sensible, practical, and real.” When teachers come together, they engage in problem-solving, joint planning, and begin to pool their expertise in order to work more effectively in the face of new initiatives and the challenges associated with change. Rosenholtz (1989) explains that learning to teach or teach better is possible in environments in which teachers collaborate instead of environments marked by isolation. Fullan (2001) finds that collaboration defined by the frequency of communication and degree of support is a strong indicator of the success of the implementation. It appears that collaboration creates a favorable environment for teachers to make meaning of the change being proposed, because teachers are able to pull together their collective expertise, knowledge, and experience. Fullan states, “Significant educational change consists of changes in beliefs, teaching style, and materials, which can come only through a process of personal development in a social context” (p. 124). Through collaboration and social construction of meaning and knowledge, local capacity can be created and developed. Local capacity is “essential” (Fullan, 1999) in creating a long-term perspective of change because the actions and thoughts of teachers ultimately decide the
DuFour and Eaker (1998) agree that collaboration is an essential element for learning to change. They note that learning to change is at its essence a collaborative task. “People who engage in collaborative team learning are able to learn from one another, thus creating momentum to fuel continued improvement” (p. 27). The momentum gained from the collaborative experience prepares and equips participants with the skills necessary to communicate, experiment, and seek answers to difficult questions. Collaboration is the central component in helping teachers learn to change and tackling the challenges associated with the change process.

The Change Process

Fullan (2001) highlights the complexity of the change process in an educational setting. The three phases of the change process are defined as initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. Figure 2.1 presents a general picture of how these processes interact during the change process. It is important to note the two-way relationships of interaction between initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. The process of change is not linear in nature. The decisions made at one stage can “feed back” to alter the decisions made at previous stages. DuFour and Eaker (1998) note a common misperception associated with innovations is that change will proceed smoothly if only it is managed well. The misperception derives from the idea that each stage is isolated from one another and that events of one stage exist in a vacuum. However, Fullan’s model highlights the complexity of change through the two-way relationship among the three phases. The model allows for flexibility as the problems and conflicts associated with the change process can impact previous decisions and events that directly relate to the innovation.
Initiation is the first stage of Fullan’s change process. Initiation includes the process leading up to the implementation of an initiative. Fullan (2001) indicates that initiation can happen for a large number of reasons. School leaders, community support and / or pressure, new state or federal policies, external change agents, etc. can all influence whether or not a change is initiated. Successful initiation involves processes such as the building of local capacity or assertive leadership. Fullan highlights that local capacity is the ideal because schools are able to sort through and act on a wide number of improvements when local capacity is developed, ideally through collaborative and social structures. However, assertive leadership is also effective when the idea is sound and ownership and choices are given to teachers as the process continues. The initiation process can generate “meaning or confusion, commitment or alienation, or simply ignorance on the parts of participants and other affected by the change” (Fullan, 2001, p. 67). The researcher also notes, however, that poor initiation does not doom the change, nor does successful initiation guarantee a
successful change process. It is important to restate the two-way nature of the change process and its impact on the successful integration of an innovation. The changes made later on in the process will ultimately determine whether or not change implementation is successful.

Implementation is the second stage in the change process. Implementation “consists of the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change” (Fullan, 2001, p. 69). Implementation is the means to accomplish the desired objectives of an educational change. Fullan (2001) outlines four factors that influence the implementation stage. The first factor influencing implementation is need. Do the teachers see a need for the change? Is the school’s improvement agenda overloaded? While it appears obvious, unless a leader creates a sense of urgency associated with the implementation of an innovation, teachers may feel complacent and fail to see that there is any “real” need to change. The second factor is the clarity of the features of the change. Without goal clarity, teachers may misunderstand the educational change or only implement the most superficial changes associated with the initiative. Goal clarity outlines for participants what they are expected to do differently in light of the innovation and provides a clear expression of the goals that assists teachers in aligning their own personal beliefs and values with those of the proposed change. The third factor involves the complexity of the change, because it will determine the extent to which the participants are asked to change. As the complexity increases so does the possibility that participants will encounter feelings of anxiety, frustration, or even incompetence. As a result, complex changes such as those that include adaptive challenges also require more layers of support from leaders in assisting participants through the often difficult and sometimes painful phases
of learning new skills or adopting new instructional approaches. Finally, the quality and practicality of the program influences its implementation. When greater attention is paid to front-end quality, a change is more likely to be implemented, because it allows teachers to view the change initially as something that can positively impact their professional lives. Practicality also plays an important role because structures have to be in place to provide an environment where the innovation can be successfully implemented. If a change lacks practicality for an organization, it is doomed to fail even if the change is of high quality.

Erb (2000) lists five categories of observable elements that are necessary for change to be implemented (Figure 2.2). These categories help to highlight the complexity of the change process, because they point to the communication necessary in order to fully implement a change. The features also indicate the need to help formulate meaning among the participants of change. Fullan (2001) states, “Interactive communities of practice have turned out to be one of the leading strategies for reform” (p. 85). School communities that can answer these five questions fit the description of “interactive communities,” because they “foster close communication between administrators and teachers” (Erb, 2000, p. 196). It is important to note the important role that principals play in the establishment of these five conditions. The principal is the person “most likely to shape the conditions necessary for success, such as the development of shared goals, collaborative work structures and climates, and procedures for monitoring results” (Fullan, 2001, p. 83). The principal establishes the context for the school to successfully implement a change initiative.
Wasley (1997) provides a “simple and straightforward” approach to the change process that appears to follow the patterns of both Erb (2000) and Fullan (2001). She outlines a four-step process that involves investigating, planning, acting, and investigating again. Her stages appear to highlight Fullan’s conditions necessary for successful implementation. Investigating involves thoroughly analyzing the current conditions to determine the areas of greatest need and includes the assurance of the quality and practicality. Planning includes determining “central objectives” that one wishes to accomplish and being sure that those objectives and goals are clear to all participants. Acting involves putting the change into place and ironing out any unforeseen challenges or issues. Finally, investigating again explores what the innovation has accomplished and its impact on student achievement and on other outcomes. This final stage allows for feedback and alterations to be made to the initiative to match the change initiatives to the needs of the
participants within the educational organization, which reinforces the idea that change reflects a two-way relationship between and among the stages.

Institutionalization is the third stage of the change process and very often difficult to accomplish. The change must be deeply embedded in the organization’s culture and become a part of how the organization does business. In essence, when an innovation is institutionalized it becomes part of the very fabric of the organization. As noted earlier, the school’s culture represents the shared values and beliefs within an organization that are constantly transmitted between and among its members. In order for a change to become institutionalized, successful initiation and implementation must lay the foundation for the integration into a school’s culture.

Change is a complex process that entails the development of meaning for all participants in all stages. Fullan (2001) states, “If we constantly remind ourselves that educational change is a learning experience for the adults involved as well as for children, we will be going a long way in understanding . . . change (p. 70). The learning process involves high levels of communication and collaboration for successful implementation and institutionalization to occur.

Flexible Scheduling: An Overview

A school’s schedule represents more than just the daily comings and goings of teachers and students. The creation of the schedule is one of the most important decisions that a school makes. Hackmann (2002) states, “A poorly designed schedule can single-handedly destroy the ability of a school faculty to create and sustain a school environment” (p. 22). The schedule is more than just a structural component of the school’s routine. The school’s schedule is a symbolic representation of the philosophies and goals embedded
within an educational organization (Keefe & Jenkins, 2002). The culture of the school underlies the structures that are put into place that define the organization’s values and beliefs. For instance, a daily schedule that provides time for teachers to plan together may indicate a school’s desire to have faculty working closely in a collaborative environment. A schedule may also hinder or enhance instructional decisions made in the classroom. Teachers who want to provide in-depth, hands-on activities may struggle in classes that are shorter in length, whereas these activities may be more easily accomplished in longer class periods. Wasley (1997) states, “Schedules are instruments that can be used to accomplish curricular, pedagogical, and assessment goals to derive improvements in student accomplishments” (p. 46). Often major changes in a school structure such as a schedule is mirrored by the need to change cultural elements of the school simultaneously.

The flexible schedule is a departure from the traditional six and seven periods, 45-50 minute, class schedules. Instructional days are divided into longer and fewer class periods. There is no one model that can be described as a flexible schedule. However, the flexible schedule is often used to promote a higher level of student engagement as well as to support interdisciplinary teaming in middle schools (Hackmann, 1998). Groups of teachers are often assigned a team of students and given discretion on how to divide the time according to student needs and the instructional demands of the content. The number of students and teachers per team often varies among schools. Glasgow Middle School in Virginia created teacher teams that included non-traditional core teachers such as foreign language, physical education, and chorus (Smith, Pitkin, & Rettig, 1998). While the process for scheduling was difficult for the school staff, the school finally found that putting non-core teachers on teams fit the goals of the school and the needs of the students. Teacher teams for instance can be as
small or large as the schedule can accommodate. In a flexible schedule context, teachers base the length of class periods on their instructional needs of the day or the week. For example, a science teacher may need a longer class period so that students can complete experiments and write up a lab assignment. The team of teachers can make the appropriate adjustments to the schedule to allow the science teacher this time. Most traditional schedules do not allow teachers to make these critical decisions about the amount of time they can teach. (Jenkins & Keefe, 2002). This creative use of time is what also sets a flexible schedule apart from a block schedule format. The block schedule allows for longer periods of time, but like the traditional schedule, the class lengths cannot be altered on a weekly or daily basis (Hackmann, 2002). While the flexible schedule allows for teachers to have more discretion over the use of instructional time, the core component of the flexible schedule is the use of common planning time among teachers. Common planning time provides teachers time to collaborate with one another, plan units and lessons, tap the collective expertise and knowledge of their colleagues, and deliver interdisciplinary instruction. The common planning time embeds time for collaboration within the confines of the school day instead of having teachers come together before or after school. Ideally, these times allow teachers to grow professionally as they learn from their colleagues. In the block schedule and traditional schedules, common planning is not necessarily a consideration, so teachers often work in isolation with little communication with their peers. Middle schools are moving increasingly to a flexible scheduling format to create and promote developmentally appropriate practices and to support structures that encourage interdisciplinary teaming and increased individual attention (Kasak, 1998).
Flexible Scheduling and Middle School Philosophy

A school’s schedule is a reflection of its philosophy and beliefs. It is important to elucidate the parallels between the middle school philosophy and flexible scheduling and to note how flexible scheduling supports the philosophy in a myriad of ways. However, middle school practices can only be understood within the context of the middle grades student.

Middle school philosophies and practices are a response to the unique needs of the middle school student. Students at all levels of education from the Pre-K student to the graduating senior face developmental challenges that they must overcome to be successful. However, these needs are accentuated in the middle grades student. George and Alexander (2003) note the middle grades student faces an enormous challenge because he/she must balance the “pressures of family, friends, church, community, and school, with the desire to define a value system that fits their needs” (p. 5). These young people must also define their individuality while they struggle to gain favor from their peers. Early adolescence is marked by a period a discovery where young people may confront pressure to experiment with drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and sex (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Early adolescents can experience great opportunities, but also face enormous risks because of the choices that they make. The National Middle School Association lists seven key developmental needs for the early adolescent. Among the keys are positive interaction with adults, creative expression, meaningful participation in families and schools, and opportunities for self-definition. Because rapid change and growth define the early adolescence, the early adolescent has a unique set of instructional and emotional needs (Allen, 1997). The challenge for teachers and schools lie in the fact that both the instructional and emotional needs of the student must be addressed in order to assist them in their journey through early adolescence.
As a result of the unique needs of the early adolescent, middle schools generally “emphasize overall well-being and self-esteem, stimulate and facilitate student involvement…[and] try to address young adolescents’ personal and social problems” (Manning & Bucher, 2000, p. 41). Middle schools also stress opportunities for increased student success and enhanced self-concept (Mills & Pollak, J, 1993) as students try and deal with the many changes they face. The literature on middle grades students indicates that middle schools use developmentally appropriate classrooms that use “theme-based, multi-level and integrated units” (Osuch, 1997, p. 282). Furthermore, Osuch (1997) states that developmentally appropriate classrooms foster a “student’s abilities to direct learning, while [developing] their critical thinking skills,” and activities should “reflect an experiential emphasis and begin the transition from concrete to symbolic representations” (p.283). These practices help to guide middle grades students through this tumultuous developmental period.

On the whole, effective middle school practices attempt to create a small community of learning for middle school students by organizing relationships to create a “climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p.24). A middle school’s schedule may do a great deal to enhance the smaller learning community for the middle school student. Hackmann and Valentine (1998) outline six factors that create an effective middle school schedule. They highlight that the schedule should support interdisciplinary teams, support an appropriate curriculum, support quality instruction through the expanded and flexible use of time, promote supportive relationships between students and teachers, support greater teacher collaboration, and support teacher empowerment. Jenkins and Keefe (2002) describe flexible use of time as a critical element of “personalized instruction.” In their description, flexible scheduling helps to set the stage
for a “collaborative culture” between students and faculty. The researchers highlight a school’s need for “time and opportunity for reflective dialogue” (p. 444). Teachers are then free to create learning communities that can support dynamic, hands-on instruction. Without time allotted to collaborative practices, the complexity of the middle school student may be unable to be addressed in instruction. While all teachers need collaborative time, middle grade teachers especially need this time to ensure developmentally appropriate instruction. There are strong connections between the middle grades students’ developmental needs and the effective uses of time to create an effective schedule. Flexible scheduling is used as a structure to help create, and support smaller learning communities that are reflective and responsive to the emotional, social, and developmental needs of early adolescents (Kasak, 1998). The structural support of the flexible schedule allows for other innovations such as teaming and common planning to enhance the learning environment for the middle school student.

Smaller learning communities can take the form of various teams that include interdisciplinary or integrated teams, subject area teams, and whole grade level teams. In a team environment, “teachers [work] . . . to address the unique learning needs of students and to create a sense of community and totality within the curriculum” (Merenbloom, 1996, p. 45). Interdisciplinary and integrated teaming is a move from the isolation of one teacher making curricular decisions to collaboration and integration of instruction. Teachers can also work in subject area teams to align curriculum both horizontally or vertically depending on the schedule. Jackson and Davis (2000) define teaming as a process where teachers bring together their curriculum priorities to help discover “overlaps in concepts, questions, skills, and habits of mind that undergird their disciplines” (p. 49). These teams hope to “capitaliz...
on their collective knowledge, expertise, and effort” (Pounder, 1999, p. 319). A common metaphor used in teaching is that of teaching skills described as a toolbox. The tools that teachers use can be greatly impacted through collaboration, as the collective knowledge of a team or its tools is greater than any one individual’s knowledge or tools. Teams use the flexible schedule to coordinate instruction, coordinate student assignments, and involve parents as well as other building staff (Kasak, 1998). Merenbloom (1996) defines four domains of the team process. He indicates that teams should be responsive to students’ individual needs, integrate the curriculum, talk about teaching strategies, and be able to flexibly schedule their day. It appears that flexible scheduling may play a major role across the other these domains because when teachers move to a flexible schedule, a common planning is created for teachers. They have time to integrate the curriculum, talk about teacher strategies, and plan for instruction that is responsive to students’ needs as well as coordinate how the schedule can be changed to meet instructional needs. Jackson and Davis (2000) highlight the importance of ensuring structures are provided that allow teachers to collaborate. They advise schools to pay close attention to the “quality and nature” of a team’s interactions and to provide enough time for team planning.

Common planning is essential for successful teaming and a successful flexible schedule. As stated above, common planning time provides the vehicle through which much of the curriculum integration and collaboration can take place. According to Erb (2000), common planning time is non-negotiable for successful teaming and greater student improvement. He explains that these common planning times allow opportunities for teams to interact and mentor one another to help solve bureaucratic problems, professional or instructional problems, interdisciplinary teaming challenges, and as an avenue to support one
another’s personal growth and professional development. Students directly and positively benefit from constant collaboration between and among teachers. Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (2003) present findings that show schools with high levels of common planning time make greater gains on standardized tests. However, in order for the benefits of collaboration to impact student achievement, teachers must work with their colleagues consistently over time. Kasak (1998) for instance suggests that sufficient common planning time for teams is 160 minutes per week. Integrated instruction and close collaboration can be difficult and challenging for a team, especially in the early stages of team formation. Teachers are generally moving away from environments of isolation and learning how to work with one another in an environment defined by collaboration, consensus and compromise.

The longer class periods of a flexible schedule may also contribute to the sense of a smaller learning community. Students see fewer teachers during the day on a flexible schedule and spend more time with these adults on learning tasks. Merenbloom (1996) states, “Students are more likely to be successful when they are responsible for fewer courses” (p. 47). Longer class periods can also enhance the instructional efforts of teachers, because teachers do not have to refrain from in-depth study due to time limitations. Shortt and Thayer (1997) state, “In longer class periods, teachers can increase the number of activities that require students to explore topics in-depth [and] . . . work in student teams without compromising the integrity of the instructional expectations of the school” (p. 1). The researchers examine the implementation of longer class periods in Virginia high schools and find that longer classes periods positively impact the sense of community within the school. Respondents to a survey indicate that the change creates a more relaxed environment within schools because of the decreased movement and decreased class load during the
semester. The researchers also state that discipline referrals are reduced when longer class periods are implemented. They conclude that when time is used effectively the climate of the school can enhance and improve opportunities to learn for all students. Black (1998) also notes that teaching fewer classes affords teachers with more opportunities to help all students, because teachers are able to focus on the specific needs of the few instead of trying to spread their efforts over a large number of students. Krajewski, Bonthuis, Kluznik, and Miller (1997) examine three high schools in the Minneapolis area. The three high schools implemented longer class periods as a part of their overall reform efforts. All three high schools attribute part of their improvement to the implementation of longer class periods. The schools indicate that the longer class periods help to create a better learning environment for both students and teachers. The responses from the schools seem to echo that of Shortt and Thayer (1997). One principal states, “Teachers have more time to plan, can better individualize teaching to encourage more active participation from students, and have more opportunities to team” (p. 33). The researchers also note that the schools are moving to flexible time structures as well. Again, the National Middle School Association details that positive relationships with adults is an essential developmental need for middle school students. Longer periods of time may help to facilitate this relationship by strengthening and deepening the bonds between the students and teachers within the school and creating a sense of community that is integral in the lives of the middle grades student.

**Effects of Common Planning**

The results of flexible schedule appear to be mixed (Brown, 2001). Results do not seem to directly correlate flexible scheduling specifically with increased student performance. Much of the research is grounded in and around teaming and common
planning periods, which are structures that represent by-products of the flexible schedule. Perhaps the research does not separate the practices because they are so closely intertwined. For example, a school may move to flexible scheduling so that interdisciplinary teaming and common planning take place. It also may represent that changing a structure in and of itself is not sufficient in impacting student achievement or teacher satisfaction (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), if the culture of the school does not change as well. However, when teams begin to work together in collaboration, the culture of these schools may change to reflect the positive influence of teaming and common planning. The following examines research that is related to flexible scheduling, common planning time, and teaming on both teachers and students.

Smith, Pitkin, and Retting (1998) study the impact of flexible scheduling on Glasgow Middle School in Northern Virginia. They report that Glasgow is one of the most diverse student populations in the area and many of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Glasgow is described as having a poor school climate with high rates of in-school and out-of-school suspensions. One of the reasons Glasgow chose to switch to a flexible schedule was to reduce the number of transitions that students made during the day. The administrative team implemented a flexible schedule in addition to “pure teams.” Pure teams consisted of groups of teachers with common students and common planning time. As stated earlier, Glasgow also included non-traditional core subjects such as foreign language on their teams. Teams were afforded blocks of time with which they had instructional discretion.

According to the study, the impact on student behavior has been tremendous. During the first year of implementation, in-school suspensions dropped by 20% and out-of-school suspensions dropped by 16.7%. During the first semester of the second year overall suspensions dropped 47%. The researchers also found that retention rates for students also
dropped “dramatically.” Seventh grade retentions dropped from 29 to 13, and eighth grade retention rates dropped from 21 to 9. The researchers do not include data from standardized test results. However, they do conclude that students no longer run the school because of the reduction in student disciplinary problems and that teacher morale has increased.

High schools have also incorporated a flexible schedule to help create smaller learning communities (Jenkins & Keefe, 2002). Thomas Haney Secondary Centre and Francis W. Parker Charter School implemented a flexible schedule as a part of a reform effort that included a change in the teacher’s role to coach and advisor, diagnosis of student learning styles, a collegial school culture, an interactive learning environment, and authentic assessment. At Thomas Haney, students built their schedules on a weekly basis and allowed teachers to schedule group activities when needed. At Francis W. Parker, the flexible schedule allowed for collaborative work among students and faculty. Students at Thomas Haney report that they are working harder in these individualized learning communities than they ever did in the past. In a local newspaper’s ranking of the top high schools in the district, Thomas Haney topped the list. Students at Francis Parker achieved higher than 22 of the 25 schools in its district on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. These opportunities to move flexibly appeared to allow a better match between the instructional needs of the students and the content delivered by the teachers.

Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand, and Flowers (1997) studied the longitudinal effects of a Turning Points- based comprehensive reform effort. The Turning Points recommendations have helped to define and guide middle grades instruction and practice over the last decade (Jackson & Davis, 2000). The primary focus of Turning Points is creating smaller learning communities by strengthening the relationships between students
and adults as well as the professional relationships among teachers. The researchers wanted to discover what impact these recommendations of creating smaller communities had on the schools and students. The specific practices highlighted by the research were teaming and common planning. The study categorized schools into three levels. The highest level of implementation group completed many of the structural changes at a high level. However, these schools also demonstrated significant changes in instructional practices as well. The partial group may have incorporated some structural changes but had yet to make significant instructional changes. The low implementation group had made little change on the implementation of structure or instruction.

The schools in the Felner et al (1997) study represented a diverse array of students. Researchers selected schools across the state of Illinois who are apart of the Illinois Middle Grade Network (IMGN). The results appear to favor high implementation of the Turning Points suggestions. Test scores in math, language, and reading indicated that students in the highly implemented category achieved at “much higher levels” than those in the low-implementation category and significantly better than those students in the partial-implementation category. However, the researchers also found that when the differences between 8th grade scores were compared, schools in the high-implementation category did even better and the gap was significantly greater. These structural changes in regards to teaming and common planning time also appeared to impact students’ feelings towards school. Students in high-implementation schools were less likely to feel victimized or isolated. High-implementation schools also had fewer behavioral problems in general than did the other schools. The results of the study also seem to be supported by the fact that
schools that increased their implementation from partial or low over time found that their scores improved as well.

Other studies support the implementation of common planning time and interdisciplinary teaming. Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999) and Flowers (2000) studied schools that participated in the Middle Start Initiative in Michigan. Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall found that both structures significantly impacted student achievement. Teaming in this study was associated with higher levels of student success on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. Schools that used teaming also had the greatest two-year gains in the study. The researchers also found that common planning time was an important factor to student success, because teachers were working closely together in order to address the needs of their students. Schools with high levels of common planning time, at least four meetings a week for a minimum of 120 minutes, had the highest levels of student achievement. Flowers (2000) explored the relationship between teaming and classroom practice. She found that common planning time played a significant role in the classroom practice that involved curriculum coordination and interdisciplinary instruction that took place on a team. Common planning time enabled teams to “introduce, develop, and refine team and classroom practice at a deeper level” (p. 3). Teachers were able to tap their collective knowledge and expertise and assisted each other in growing professionally.

Flexible scheduling appears to support many of the structural changes that are related to smaller learning communities. Common planning and interdisciplinary teaming are associated with greater levels of student success and students’ perceptions of the school environment. Common planning and teaming are important concepts to explore because of the close connection that these practices have with the use of flexible scheduling (Jenkins &
Keefe, 2002). Teachers that work closely together are better equipped to address the individual needs of each learner and to utilize a greater variety of instructional techniques that they learn from their peers.

**Impact of Collaboration on Teachers**

While greater student achievement is associated with greater levels of collaboration, students are not the only ones affected by the implementation of common planning times and teaming. These structures have a direct impact on how teachers view their professional work and roles within the school. The change to teaming and common planning structures is a complex shift from isolation to collaboration.

Erb and Doda (1989) state, “Team organization is far more than an instructional innovation. [Teaming] changes the professional and interpersonal dynamics of schools for everyone involved” (13). Although Pounder (1999) also states that teams have a profound, positive impact on teachers, there are challenges associated with teaming. Teaming represents a “change from the security of…isolated classrooms to a setting that requires collaboration, teamwork, and ongoing communication with other teachers” (Flowers, et al, 1999, p. 53). As teachers change to collaborative structures, they must also learn new skills in order to work effectively with their colleagues. Rottier (2002) notes that teams will often fail to reach their full potential because of the complexity interwoven in the change to teaming. This change requires teachers to “re-think” their instructional practice to fully integrate instruction and collaborate with their peers.

In a case study of five teachers who moved from subject-centered classrooms to interdisciplinary teams, Meister and Nolan (2001) described the “intense feelings of uncertainty and doubt” that was associated with the move. The respondents often described
themselves as “being out on a limb on [their] own.” Lack of administrative support and lack of professional development were major reasons for the struggle. However, there were other issues such as subject loyalty vs. team allegiance. The teachers struggled to find a balance between fulfilling content requirements and remaining true to the team’s interdisciplinary goals. The teachers struggled in their efforts to define exactly what an interdisciplinary team meant and what it should ultimately look like. The teachers needed more assistance and guidance through the process and demonstrated a unique set of needs that were much different from teachers in subject-centered classrooms. This example highlighted the challenge associated with teaming and illustrated that although teams might be constructed in name, working collaboratively is a very complex operation.

The challenges associated with the Meister and Nolan (2001) case study are indicative of the complexity surrounding the move from isolation to collaboration. When teachers move to teaming, they must learn new sets of skills associated with working so closely with their colleagues. In The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Lencioni (2002) examines the critical attributes of both highly successful and unsuccessful teams. He defines high successful teams as being comprised of individuals who trust one another, engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas, commit to decisions and take decisive action, hold one another accountable for taking action, and focus on collective achievement instead of individual results. Rottier (2002) notes that teams must learn to set goals, implement actions in order to accomplish those goals, and establish monitoring systems to assess the effectiveness of their goals. Teams must also decide collectively what is most important to their team in order to stay focused on their goals, even when pressure is applied from their day-to-day responsibilities. Teams performing at high levels of collaboration create
structures that assist them in making decisions as well as problem solving. Skills such as problem solving and decision-making can be difficult for even the most skilled individual. However, they become even more complex when the various personalities, beliefs, values, and opinions of the team are taken into account. Individuals can no longer make decisions in isolation and have to be able to work within the confines of a collaborative environment. Fleming and Monda-Amaya (2001) indicate that teachers must learn new roles in order to function on a team and allow the team to function efficiently and effectively. They highlight the importance of role clarity for the team. When roles are clearly defined for teacher teams, they exhibit a greater sense of cohesion and greater levels of effectiveness. In addition to learning new roles, teachers must also learn to effectively communicate with their colleagues and continue productive professional relationships even in the midst of disagreement and conflict. Learning these new skills is more than just a technical challenge. Teachers are faced with adaptive challenges as they learn to re-think their work and learn new roles in order to impact student learning.

Even though learning collaborative structures can be quite challenging for individuals, teachers who have successfully made the transition have reported that teaming has had a tremendous influence on their professional lives. Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999) find that teaming improves work climate. In 150 schools studied, teachers in schools where teaming was implemented described their schools are more positive, rewarding, and satisfying places to work. “Teachers from teaming schools believe that they receive recognition for their accomplishments more often, believe that staff are more committed to their work, and have a more refined sense of what is expected of the work climate” (p. 3). Teachers reported a stronger bond with their teammates and were generally more satisfied
with their working environment. Schools that did not use teaming structures reported much lower scores in terms of staff commitment, staff recognition, and clarity of expectations. Arhar and Irvin’s findings (1995) indicated that collaborative organizations had a significant effect on a teacher’s sense of efficacy, sense of autonomy, and sense of overall professionalism. “Team work has the potential to create new roles and relationships for teachers that enhance their professional stature” (Arhar & Irvin, 1995, p. 66). It appeared that collaborative work experiences allowed teachers to understand that they were not alone in their struggles and could utilize their colleagues as resources to help overcome problems.

Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999) also found that teachers that team increased the level of job satisfaction. In schools that teamed, teachers had new roles in the “governance, management, and delivery of instruction.” The new teacher roles promoted leadership for all of the teachers within the school and set norms and expectations for high performance. It is also important to note that teacher satisfaction for schools that teamed did not remain stagnant, but rather improved over time. Hackmann and Valentine (1998) reported that flexible scheduling structures, such as common planning and altering the learning day, empowered teachers. The flexible schedule helped to redefine teachers’ traditional roles from a passive observer of one’s environment to an active participant. In the flexible schedule, teachers were asked to make fundamental decisions about the most effective uses of instructional time instead of having every decision regarding instructional time made for them by a school schedule. Teachers were challenged to work together to find the best possible learning condition. The greater autonomy given to teachers increased instructional innovations, increased creativity in instructional strategies, and increased the ability to identify and address students’ needs. These factors appeared to reflect the instructional
changes brought about by teaming practices identified by Flower, Mertens, and Mulhall (1999). It appeared that teachers became more satisfied with their jobs because they were able to take responsibility for what happened to them during the school day.

DiRocco (1999) outlines a study of an alternating day schedule at Lewisburg Area Middle School in Pennsylvania. The schedule was flexible in the sense that the classes rotated and did not meet at the same time each day and that teams of teachers were allowed to make instructional decisions on how to best use the time. Time was also allotted for teachers to create integrated instructional units and work closely together to make instructional decisions about how the time was to be used. Two conclusions were made in this study. The first was that teachers were empowered by the flexible schedule used by the school, because they were in charge of making instructional decisions based on student needs and the instructional demands of the material. The teachers were making decisions that truly had an impact on students, instruction, and learning. The second was that students who used the alternating block schedule compared favorably on achievement tests to students who had received most of their instruction on the 40-minute class period. The author indicated that the longer class periods allowed for more in-depth instruction and the teaming allowed for more powerful and dynamic instruction.

Common planning is an essential structure to the flexible schedule because it provides the time for teachers to come together in collaborative efforts that take place during the school day. While the structure is only a designation of time, the culture that grows from having common planning in place can directly impact both teachers and students. Highly collaborative schools appear to impact positively the working environment for teachers and lay the foundation for greater student learning and student achievement. While collaborative
efforts may be challenging for teachers as they adopt new roles, these new roles appear to be vital for teachers to be successful in the face of ever-changing and ever-increasing challenges associated with schooling.

*Conceptual Framework*

**Collaborative Culture**

Figure 2.3. An Overview of Successful Change Processes

Fullan (2001) highlights three stages of the change process: initiation, implementation and institutionalization or continuation. The stages of the change process are not linear in nature. As indicated by the two-way arrows, these stages interact, as changes at one level may influence the decisions and structures made at previous stages or in the later stages of the change process. A decision made at the initiation phase may be significantly altered during the implementation phase when unforeseen challenges or obstacles appear. Change is
a multi-faceted and complex operation that is laden with conflicts and challenges throughout the entire process.

The inner circle represents the desired outcomes of the change. The fact that the circle is in the center highlights the importance of the outcomes, because they are the focus of the change. Organizational capacity relates to the organizations ability to work through challenges and issues that reveal themselves throughout the change process and beyond. Organizational capacity represents the cultivation of the participants to help them grow as professionals who can proactively address myriad challenges as they arise regardless of their nature. Hargreaves et al (2001) notes, “Teachers as learners are at the center of educational change” (p. 131) and successful change ultimately increases the teachers’ ability to learn in order to face the many challenges and obstacles that derive from change. DuFour and Eaker (1998) note the regularity in which conflict and pain are associated with change. As the organization develops capacity, its members are able to use the conflict as a learning experience and to embed the innovation more deeply within the culture. Student outcomes refer to the ultimate success of a change because the goal of any innovation or initiative is to improve some aspect of the learning environment whether it is academic or otherwise for students. In all cases, educational change is about fostering an environment that is more conducive to greater student learning and achievement.

One difference between this conceptual framework and Fullan’s (2001) model is the addition of “meaning” in the outside circle. Meaning permeates all stages of the change process and greatly determines the relative success or failure of the innovation in general. Developing meaning is an essential element to successful change (Fullan 2001; Hargreaves et al. 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989), because change is a learning process for all involved. Fullan
notes the importance of creating meaning in both the initiation as well as the implementation phases for an innovation to be successfully adopted by an organization. When participants lack meaning of what the change is or what they are expected to do differently then confusion is often the result. He states, “The crux of change involves the development of meaning in relation to a new idea, program, reform, or set of activities” (p. 92). As noted earlier, change often requires teachers to question and challenge their core values and beliefs. When change leaders cultivate meaning, they assist participants in bridging the gaps between the teachers’ own personal beliefs and values and the innovation. Without clarity or meaning, participants may only make the most superficial changes and avoid implementing the most critical aspects of the initiative. Hargreaves et al (2001) indicate that successful implementation “requires” opportunities to clarify the change and develop knowledge about the innovation. The construction and development of meaning throughout the change process provide a change context that sets the stage for long-term success and integration into the culture of the organization.

The inclusion of a collaborative culture is another difference between the conceptual framework and the original model. In the framework, a collaborative culture encompasses the entire change process. This highlights the important role that collaboration among participants plays in the process of successful change and demonstrates that collaboration must take place at every stage for an innovation to become institutionalized within the culture of the school. Fullan (2001) and Hargreaves et al (2001) agree that collaboration plays a powerful role and that change may ultimately depend upon the nature and frequency of collaboration in a school. First, collaboration provides a social context where meaning can be constructed and integrated into the fabric of the organization. There appears to be direct
correlation between social construction of knowledge and the building of culture. Culture is socially transmitted and reinforced through the interaction of its members. If participants are unable to come together to create meaning, then the culture of the school is unlikely to change. Secondly, collaboration may assist in building the organizational capacity of a school to cope and handle change during all phases of the change process. Hargreaves et al (2001) state, “Collaborative work cultures help teachers make sense together of the reform initiatives they [are] expected to implement” (p. 166). The ultimate success or failure of an innovation may lie in how teachers create meaning through rich collaborative efforts. Fullan states, “Within the school, collegiality among teachers, as measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, and so forth, [is] a strong indicator of implementation success” (p. 124). A collaborative culture may in and of itself be a change innovation within a school, especially considering that traditional models of education are deeply engrained in isolated structures. However, without a collaborative culture, long-term major changes may not be possible, because teachers may be unable to construct the meaning necessary to confront the adaptive and technical challenges associated with change.

The conceptual framework highlights the aspects of a successful change process and indicates how the stages of change interact with one another. It provides a lens through which the change process can be viewed.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate core middle school teachers’ (language arts, science, social studies, and math) involvement in the creation of common planning structures through the use of flexible scheduling at a high implementation and a low implementation school. The degree of implementation in the schools was defined by a review of the research that highlighted the essential elements of common planning associated with the frequency and duration of collaborative efforts within the school. While research surrounding common planning varied as to the length of time that teachers must meet to impact student learning, Kasak’s (1998) guideline of 160 minutes was the standard by which high implementation and low implementation was determined for this study. Research questions guiding the study explored the change process, the role of teachers in the process and effects that the common planning change process had on teachers as professionals. The research questions included: (1) What is the involvement of core middle school teachers at a high implementation school? (2) What is the involvement of core middle school teachers at a low implementation school? (3) What are the structures that are in place that hindered or encouraged teacher involvement? (4) How is teacher participation related to the level of implementation at the school? (5) How did the change process and teachers’ participation influence instructional practice and collegiality?

The study incorporated qualitative research methodology to gather data and information surrounding teacher participation as well as the change process in general. The
purpose of the study was to explore middle school core teachers’ involvement in the change process, in order to “make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). This study provided an in-depth examination of the participants as the incorporation of common planning structures impacted the school organization through the flexible schedule. The research painted a picture of the many ways that teachers encounter the change process in their roles at the school and how teachers made meaning or failed to make meaning of the innovation. The study also explored ways in which leaders within the school facilitated that meaning making process for the teachers involved. The focus was not on whether or not common planning or the flexible schedule was a positive change or a “good” change, but rather the degree of participation that teachers undertook in high implementation and low implementation schools. To that end, the researcher used a case study approach by following Lincoln and Guba’s (In Creswell, 1998) case study structure. The study outlines the structure of the problem: the implementation of common planning; the context: middle schools and core middle school teachers’ classrooms; and lessons learned: how the change process was initiated and implemented.

Site Selection and Participants

Two middle schools from an urban, Southeastern state were used as the research sites. These sites were chosen based on the implementation of the common planning structures at their schools. Preliminary school visits to schools determined whether the school would be defined as a high implementation school or a low implementation school. The original purpose for selecting a high implementation and a low implementation school was to compare and contrast the differences in how teachers were involved in the change process. The levels of implementation at a school were determined by the use of teams and the
amount of common planning time each day/week for the teachers to engage in collaborative activities. Mountain Creek Middle School (MCMS) served as the high implementation school. MCMS’s schedule allowed for longer instructional time in core content areas and utilized at least 160 minutes of common planning time dedicated for interdisciplinary, subject area, or grade level teams to collaborate with one another each week. Oakwood Middle School (OMS) served as the low implementation school. OMS’s schedule also increased instructional time in core content areas, but failed to utilize common planning structures so that interdisciplinary, subject area, or grade level teams could meet at least 160 minutes per week.

The study compared the two school sites as a whole as well as teams and individuals at both schools. In order to create a basis for comparison, the selected schools needed to have similar change contexts. Comparing school sites that were completely different would not have allowed comparisons between the sites because the change experience could be impacted by many outside forces that might directly influence successful implementation that was outside the control of the school. In this sense, the schools used for the study were chosen as a pair instead of as individual schools. While the contexts of change in each school were distinctly unique (Fullan, 2001), a number of similarities connected the two sites. For one, the schools examined were implementing structured common planning times for the first time. The flexible schedule at both schools allowed time during the school day for teachers to meet, but teachers failed to do so on their own in any systematic way and so faced the reality of having these common planning times defined and structured. Both schools were magnet schools, where the respective magnet themes were central driving forces for the philosophy of the school and the instructional approaches used, and these
themes were fundamental to the reasons that teachers needed the time to come together and collaborate. Each magnet theme outlined different purposes for the teachers to come together and collaborate, but those purposes drove much of the action for the teachers at both sites. According to the district’s website, the schools’ racial demographics were similar in regards to minority students as well as for students with economical disadvantages. Both schools were seeking to use the common planning times to directly impact student achievement. Student performance on state mandated assessments in reading, mathematics as well as writing for each school were among the lowest in the district at the time of the study. Student performance at each school was similar as overall performance composites for all three grades levels fell within three points of each other. Even though the schools’ change contexts were unique to their sites and culture, these similarities allow for comparisons to be drawn between the experiences at the two schools.

The study selected middle school core teachers at each of the research sites whose classrooms had been impacted by common planning through the use of the flexible schedule. This sample of teachers was used to “describe [this] particular sub-group in depth” (Patton, M. 2002, p. 235). Middle school core teachers were selected for participation because their subjects were strongly impacted by the common planning and because of the strong ties to the state mandated tests administered to all middle school students in reading and mathematics. Their experiences and instructional results played a significant role in whether a school was considered successful based on the state mandated test results. Schools implementing common planning structures did so with core subject teachers as the main focus for collaboration.
Principals of the two schools were contacted initially via telephone and the researcher read from a telephone script to inform them of the research. After gaining the consent of the principals, the researcher met with individual teams to inquire as to their level of interest in regards to participation. While it was the hope that whole teams would participate, teacher turnover and team reconfiguration at both sites did not allow for whole teams to be interviewed since only teachers who had experienced the change were included in the study. As a result, only certain members from each team were interviewed. Three teams of teachers from each school were chosen to participate. In order to participate, teachers at each site had to be employed prior to the advent of the common planning structures. This limitation reduced the number of teachers that were eligible, but also insured that teachers were experiencing the change in relation to their experiences prior to the implementation of common planning structures. Fifteen teachers from the two schools volunteered to participate in the study, nine from Mountain Creek Middle School and six from Oakwood Middle School. Subjects varied in regards to race, gender, and years of experience. Most of the teachers had less than 20 years of experience. Only three teachers had more than 20 years of experience at the time of the study. In order for the schools to be eligible to participate in the study, the current principal must have lead the implementation of the innovation at their school. Schools that had leadership changes were not eligible to participate. Interviews with the principals were conducted at each school to help gain a better understanding of the process that led to greater teacher collaboration through the use of common planning structures. Interviews with central office personnel that assisted schools in adopting flexible schedules were also conducted to understand how the change fit into the context of the district and what precipitated the large-scale change.
Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher was most completely defined as that of an observer. I observed how the common planning change impacted and influenced the teachers. In this way, I was able to examine the instructional efforts of the teachers in the context of the flexible schedule as well as how the participants utilized the common planning periods that were designed to further instructional efforts.

As a central office employee at the time of the study and proponent of middle school reform, my natural bias was to favor common planning structures as well as the flexible schedule as productive innovations. I believed that flexible scheduling could provide the structure to facilitate successful student achievement through greater frequency and duration of teacher collaboration. My teaching and leadership background also led me to believe that consensus building among teachers created meaningful change. However, by comparing my observations and interviews with the body of change research I was able to immerse my biases in the body of literature associated with successful initiation and implementation of innovations.

Data Collection

The study utilized a number of qualitative data collection techniques throughout the duration of the research. Observations of common planning time provided greater insight into how the teachers on the teams were using the time provided to help instructional efforts. Common planning was significant because of its importance to the overall success of middle school teaming (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003) and its impact on how teachers redefined or rethought their roles as professionals in the light of high levels of collaboration. A record of this time provided a rich data source to determine how teachers conceptualized
and made meaning of the innovation and moved beyond cultures of isolation. Observations were recorded for each team during various times during the school year. The observations were based on Patton’s (2002) observation themes of participation / decision-making as well as success and failure messages given during these times.

Semi-structured interviews with all participants in the study were conducted through the use of a general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). The general interview guide ensured that relevant topics about the change process were addressed, while providing room for divergent topics. Two interviews were scheduled for each teacher and each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Principals were also interviewed twice to help capture the how the school was progressing and evolving with the common planning structure. These interviews also lasted approximately 45 minutes. The gap in time allowed for more interaction and development of the innovation within the change process to occur. Only one interview with the central office personnel was given in that the purpose of the interview was to gain greater background information in regards to the initiation of the innovation and to provide a global view that is less likely to change over the course of the year.

Finally, pertinent documents from the school were used to examine the change process. The master schedule, common planning schedules, school improvement plans, and common planning minutes were studied to explore the various stages of the change process. School-wide documents provided insight as to how the change was communicated and defined to the school community. The documents constituted how the school leadership and participants conceptualized the new shift in collaboration as well as the new responsibilities and roles associated with greater collaboration.
Analysis

Transcribed interviews, observations, and documents were coded into emerging themes related to the change process. Stages of the change process, such as initiation and implementation were identified and coded in order to clarify actions done at each stage of the change process and to see how actions and decisions at one stage impacted previous or future considerations. Issues involving collaboration and the construction of meaning were central themes noted in the conceptual framework guiding the study and emerged from interviews and observations as critical components that drove how teachers viewed the innovation and their internalization of the innovation. Issues surrounding teaming in general were also noted because of its overall importance in creating a collaborative culture and the construction of meaning. Finally, teachers’ attitudes about the change and the impact of the change were identified because these attitudes were directly related to their degree of meaning making for many of the participants involved. These codes assisted in identifying the degree to which teachers conceptualized, practiced, and internalized their new collaborative roles and responsibilities.

Trustworthiness

The study utilized information rich cases. These cases, middle school core teachers, middle school principals, and central office personnel, helped to provide insight about the change process in general as well as to highlight the specific challenges associated with greater modes of collaboration. Patton (2002) described appropriate fieldwork as involving multiple perspectives because “no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective” (p. 306). Creswell (1998) also indicated the importance of multiple perspectives in a qualitative study. By using teachers, principals, and central office
personnel immersed in the change process, the study painted a clear picture of how a collaborative innovation impacts the professional environment of the school.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The District

Changing schedules and the adoption of common planning structures began with a car ride around the district as Kristin introduced herself to the middle school principals. Cedar County Public School System (CCPSS) is a large southeastern school district that serves a diverse group of students from both urban and rural areas. The district boasts a history of high student performance and is considered one of the top school districts in the Southeast. When Kristin arrived in CCPSS as the executive director of middle grades education, she found that while the school district was successful many of the practices defining middle schools for the district were not middle school practices beyond the 6 through 8 grade configurations. It alarmed her that many of the middle schools incorporated high school-like structures that appeared to be quite departmentalized with little interdisciplinary teaming and collaboration. In an attempt to become more familiar with the needs of the district, she interviewed every middle school principal in the district over a two-month span. She asked them all about issues that schools faced and issues that faced the district as a whole. What struck her about these conversations was the number of principals stating the importance of scheduling when they could have chosen any other issue or topic to discuss. She purposefully did not limit the principals’ responses yet many of them returned to the schedule as a primary concern because the schedules did not allow for teacher collaboration and shortened the amount of time students were in core content areas. It became apparent to
Kristin that while many principals identified concerns with their seven-period-a-day schedules, they were also concerned about changing schedules. They perceived that in order to change the schedule they needed to do so without the addition of personnel because of budgetary concerns. When principals had examined possible scheduling changes in the past, additional personnel had been a major roadblock in altering or revising school schedules. However, these conversations with principal initiated the beginning of schools moving to flexible scheduling and common planning.

Kristin orchestrated meetings with national scheduling experts in which principals, assistant principals, and other school staff met and worked together to devise myriad scheduling options. The schools also met with “like schools” in which the similar magnet-themed schools or traditional schools worked together to brainstorm schedules and scheduling structures that best fit their needs. At the same time individual principals began to have conversations with their staffs as they tried to incorporate the work done at the district level within their school communities. As schools worked to negotiate scheduling options that best suited their needs, Kristin purposefully stayed away from dictating what a schedule should specifically look like. Instead, she outlined to principals two major “rocks” that she felt were important for the schools to be successful. The first rock was including longer blocks of time in the core areas that could be flexibly changed in order to meet instructional demands of individual lessons or units. She believed that such a schedule would increase a student’s opportunity to learn and improve student achievement. The second was common planning so that teachers and schools could move from an isolated state of work to a deep collaborative culture. Kristin credited the schools for their hard work in creating schedules that accomplished increased and flexible time for the core content areas as
well as the creation of common planning for the teachers. As a result of the hard work of the schools, schools were able to revise their schedules without needing to add personnel.

While the schedules were beginning to spread across the district, Kristin understood that flexible scheduling and common planning structures were far from institutionalized. She described the process as “mid-course” because the change was no longer fragile, yet schools were still in the beginning stages of implementation; many schools were still in their first or second year of implementing a new schedule. Even though it was still new, she saw that many schools were beginning to value their common planning time and their work together. She noted a number of schools that were attempting to deeply embed collaboration into their culture, but many schools were still defining what collaboration meant to their community. It was her hope that over the course of the next four or five years that flexible scheduling would be engrained in the schools’ culture.

Two years passed from that first car ride to the implementation of new schedules throughout the district. The following outlines how two schools implemented common planning structures in their school through the use of the flexible schedule. While both schools implemented longer class periods and carved out large amounts of planning time, Oakwood was considered a low implementation school because the school fell below the 160 minutes of common planning required of the teachers (Kasak, 1998). Mountain Creek Middle School’s schedule reserved large amounts of planning time and required teachers to meet together for more than the 160 minutes, so they were defined in the study as a high implementation school. However, it is important to note similarities between the schools as compared to their district counterparts. Both schools were magnet schools that served diverse groups of students and both had higher percentages of free / reduced lunch students.
relative to the rest of the district. The schools also lagged behind the district averages in terms of student performance on state assessments and both schools strongly encouraged teachers to use the district’s new formative assessment program in an attempt to improve student achievement. These similarities were important because the context of change, while not identical, was consistent in both schools.

Oakwood Middle School

Oakwood Middle School was a magnet school that served approximately 850 students. The school’s population was drawn primarily from a town in the southeastern part of the district as well as surrounding rural areas. Because many of the students came from minority and/or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the school adopted AVID, a college-preparatory program, to encourage students to take high-level classes so that they would be on track to attend a four-year university. The magnet theme of the school was central to the educational experiences of the students. Students throughout the school engaged in foreign language as well as the arts and technology and teachers throughout the school attempted to integrate these subjects into their daily classroom instruction. It was the hope of the school that they could provide their students with a global awareness and help develop a sense that the students were members of a global society. Oakwood began the implementation of a new schedule when James became the principal.

The Need to Change Schedules

James arrived at Oakwood Middle School after serving as an assistant principal at one of the district’s high schools. He was assigned to Oakwood Middle during March of his first year. Over the next three months, James took the opportunity to observe the middle school and determine its areas of strengths and weaknesses. One of the first things that caught his
attention was the schedule utilized at the school. When he arrived, the schedule consisted of seven classes a day plus an eighth class during which students would receive enrichment. Planning times for teachers were not scheduled strategically and isolated many teachers who taught the same grade or subject area. The enrichment class frustrated him the most because it was inconsistent from teacher to teacher. Some teachers were utilizing the time to engage and challenge students. Other teachers were using it primarily as a study hall. There was no organization or structure as to how the enrichment was being used and he raised concerns about the practices’ overall effectiveness and impact on students. As a result of his concerns over the enrichment period, the schedule was modified slightly so that the time that was dedicated to enrichment was then distributed to the other classes. James also wanted to provide greatly flexibility so that his staff could work more collaboratively within the confines of the school day. Even after facilitating these changes, James knew that he wanted to make more dramatic changes to the schedule.

*Changing the Schedule*

The process began as James and his administrative team created focus groups that were open to any teacher who wanted to participate in discussing new schedules for the school. One goal for the new schedule was that it worked for everyone, so it was important to the leadership that the focus group was open to anyone who wished to participate. The focus group started simply with a flip chart and a magic marker. James wanted to gain insight from teachers and cement any potential schedule in the needs and wants of both students and teachers. The first focus group meeting included brainstormed ideas of what teachers wanted from their schedule. The group did not argue, critique, or discuss the merits of the specific ideas initially. They recorded ideas. Those ideas were then taken to the
leadership team, a group of school personnel voted on by the faculty, to discuss the ideas.

Even though the leadership team was not as strong as he wanted it to be, James recognized
the importance of including the leadership team in the decision making process, because they
were the school elected representatives and their buy-in would be critical to help build
momentum for new scheduling practices such as common planning. After brainstorming a
number of ideas, the leadership team and the staff as a whole began to collect schedules, visit
other schools with varying schedules, and hear guest speakers from schools that used various
forms of flexible schedules. James thought that hearing testimonials of other teachers at
different schools would be valuable to his teachers, so they tried to find a person to represent
each schedule they examined. This allowed the teachers to have a greater understanding of
what each schedule was meant to accomplish and what it accomplished in reality. Tapping
the resources of the district also gave teachers the understanding that they were not alone in
shifting to more collaborative schedules.

After collecting this data, the leadership team began to debate the pros and cons of
various schedules. Some schedules took time away from the core areas, while others took it
from the elective teachers. One primary concern for the school was the planning time for
teachers. As the school worked to achieve accreditation through their magnet theme, they
recognized that they would need more planning time to create the types of interdisciplinary
units necessary for accreditation. The magnet accreditation also played an important role in
the school’s desire to be able to flexibly use the time that was allocated to the team of core
teachers, because teachers needed the ability to alter the schedule to accommodate the
learning experiences they were expected to provide for their students. The leadership team
worked to draft different schedules based upon the feedback that they received from the
focus groups, guest speakers, teachers at the school, magnet requirements, and their own
discussions and presented these schedules to the staff during faculty meetings. It is also
important to note that throughout the whole adoption process James and his administrative
staff constantly emailed teachers to keep them updated on the progress of the leadership
team. James wanted to be sure that all teachers had the information that was necessary for
them to make an informed decision even if they were not a part of the leadership team or the
focus groups. These emails outlined the schedules that were being discussed and also noted
the pros and cons of each. Perhaps more importantly, including teachers in the process
seemed to assist in creating positive attitudes about the schedule. According to teachers who
participated in this study, all of them were thrilled with the new schedule. James also noted
that the school was very close to consensus in supporting the schedule that was ultimately
adopted. Teachers were primarily attracted to having close to 90 minutes a day to plan for
core teachers, opening the opportunity to have whole grade levels plan together, and
conducting department level meetings during the school day instead of after school. Even
though the elective teachers were hesitant with the schedule, because they lost some planning
time, they liked the fact that they would see an entire grade level at one time. James valued
the work of the staff in creating the various schedules, but he worked to direct the school to
the schedule he thought was most valuable. James pointed out that the process of including
teachers was valuable because their feedback directly contributed to the creation of the
schedule, and they owned the schedule that they adopted. He notes, “If I’d rolled in here and
said hey guys here’s the new schedule I want us to look at, it would of, you know, flown
from as far as here to the front office before it fell on its face. I think, um, absolutely the
process eliminated a lot of pit falls that could have stopped it.” Like most schools that
changed their schedule, Oakwood Middle School sought to increase time for students in core content area classes and build time for teachers to collaborate and work together to improve student learning.

The New Schedule

Oakwood’s new schedule included longer blocks of time for the core subject teachers to divide amongst themselves than they had when James arrived at the school. Core classes generally lasted about an hour, although each team had the ability to flexibly schedule how much instructional time they would use for any given day or week. No bells were rung at the school because it was each team’s responsibility to change classes when they needed to as opposed to a pre-arranged school-wide schedule. A bell-less day allowed teachers the flexibility to use the instructional time as they saw fit in an attempt to create a better match between the needs of the student and the time allotted. For instance, some teams on the same grade level staggered their class changes to reduce hallway traffic and assist in disciplinary issues that could occur when large numbers of students are in the hallway at the same time. Other teams utilized the flexible time to orchestrate special events such as guest speakers or team wide projects. The teachers were required however to be sure that students made it to lunch on time and that they arrived promptly to their elective classes. The schedule also included large blocks of planning time for the core teachers. The sixth grade teams had planning at the end of the day while the 7th grade teams had planning first thing in the morning. The 8th grade teams then used the block of time in the middle of the day for their planning.
Initial Challenges

One challenge, which arose from the creation of the longer planning times, was teachers learning how to best use these longer planning times to impact student achievement. James noted, “The original planning structure was, here’s your time, plan together, you know, and we outlined things we wanted them to do. No stipulations, no guidelines other than you have to plan together; you have to work together as a team, um, and it just didn’t happen.” The principal was disappointed in the attitude that many teachers seemed to have regarding their newly created planning period. Instead of using it to maximize student achievement, James found that members of his staff considered it “down time.” Initially there was no accountability structure in place for the common planning piece. James considered the common planning piece as fundamental to student achievement as any event that happened during the school day. He stated:

Obviously teaching is the most important, but the foundation is built with how prepared you are for a lesson. Our teams were just individuals just like high school departmentalized classes that have the same amount of minutes and the kids just rotated around from class to class, but there wasn’t a lot of continuity.

He felt there was a lack of collaboration school-wide even though the school adopted a schedule that was designed to increase collaborative efforts between and among teachers. James highlighted that the culture of the school was not where he wanted it to be. Teachers were accustomed to working in isolation and he wanted them to value working together. Another challenge that the school faced was that the staff was in a state of flux due to teacher turnover, so the staff as a whole did not know each other that well and the school consisted of many younger teachers. The high teacher turnover that the school faced left an experience gap, because many young teachers who were coping with the demands of the teaching profession replaced the veteran teachers who left. James was concerned that if his teachers
did not maximize the collaborative structures then those young teachers would continue to struggle with the diverse and challenging population that made up the school. It is also important to note that Oakwood Middle School’s performance on state tests had begun to lag behind the overall district performance and James felt that by taking full advantage of the collaborative time, then the school would also experience a rise in student achievement on these state tests.

Changes in Common Planning

In an effort to increase the efficiency of the common planning time, the administrative team adopted a very structured common planning schedule that outlined specifically when certain groups were required to meet. At the beginning of the school year, the plan was outlined to the teachers and was purposefully overloaded by the administrative staff. James felt that the culture of his school needed to be shifted so they implemented a heavy common planning schedule that included a variety of meetings five days a week. James knew that the schedule would be too cumbersome for his teachers and they would struggle with the abrupt increase in common planning meetings and responsibilities. However, the heavy schedule was used to make the normal schedule feel more palpable. After just four weeks of the heavy schedule, the administrative team cut back to the current schedule of three meetings one week and two meetings the next week. Teachers met on a rotating basis that included interdisciplinary teams, whole grade levels, grade level subject areas, as well as magnet-based meetings. Every week the interdisciplinary team would meet while the grade level and content area teams met on alternating weeks. In the beginning of the year, the school also held faculty meetings during these planning times. However, those meetings were returned to after school when teachers indicated that they never saw other
colleagues from varying grade levels. For teachers, the general rule of thumb was that half of their planning time on days they met would be used for collaboration which was roughly 45 minutes, although many meetings might go beyond the required forty-five minutes.

The administrative team also adopted a “minutes” form that was to be used as a discussion tool to guide these conversations between and among teachers. Not only was the form created to drive conversations, it was a vital part of the magnet theme accreditation process. The form varied based upon the group of teachers meeting. For instance, there were different forms used for the interdisciplinary team, the subject-area team, as well as the grade level as a whole. All the forms included the major magnet theme foci of essential questions, student approaches to learning, community service, etc. The forms also left room for agenda items and space for teams to express concerns specifically to the administration as well as guidance, or in the case of the grade level subject meetings general concerns that the team might have after meeting. The grade-level-subject form also included short-term and long-term horizontal planning templates so that teachers could create specific lessons and units. Teachers were required to send their minutes to the administrators in order to hold them accountable for their planning times, to provide feedback and offer assistance, and to document the meetings for magnet accreditation. Unlike the schedule adoption process, the minutes form and the schedule of common planning meetings were mandated with much less input from the faculty. Even though the implementation of the new schedule at Oakwood Middle School was close to staff consensus, the use of the common planning times and the minutes form were quite different for the school. The following is a portrait of how core teachers and teams from various teams adapted to the common planning times and requirements that comprised the change process.
The Shellfish Team

The Shellfish Team at Oakwood Middle School consisted of a variety of young and veteran teachers. Overall the team enjoyed the planning as well as the longer class periods offered by the current schedule. They saw many of their students struggle in the shorter class periods, especially the special education population, because it was difficult to have the students transition so many times during a single school day. By the time the students were settled down from coming into class and packing up to leave class, there was little instructional time remaining for the teachers. While there was some concern initially as to how the implementation would affect them, there was little to no negative feedback concerning the change in the schedule. Even though the teachers were excited about the possibility of working more with their peers, the team struggled with the use of the common planning times. As James noted above, some teachers felt as if this time was not utilized to maximum efficiency. Obviously there was some natural communication in the hallways, but those conversations were not structured or formalized around examining what was happening in the classroom in order to impact student achievement and student learning. However, after the first year of implementation, the team was re-shaped to consist of the current group of teachers. After the structures were implemented, the Shellfish Team began to pride itself on how well the group of teachers worked together and teachers from this team described themselves as a close-knit unit whose members are close personally and work well professionally. The teachers felt that the team created a nice balance between maintaining a friendly environment, yet one that was simultaneously professional. Members of the team
valued their time together and felt that their work created dynamic products that impacted student learning and enhanced their own professional growth.

One member in particular highlights the impact of common planning on her teaching practice and on enhancing the student’s learning experiences. Marci is a veteran teacher of 13 years, but over the last six years she has taught primarily special education. This was her first year back in a regular classroom setting and the first in this particular curriculum. Marci’s experience with the implementation of the new schedule and structures and planning expectations that come with the new structure could best be described with her experience in creating a unit involving the Titanic. She noted:

Like we’re doing a unit right now on Titanic. The humanities teacher heard I was doing it and jumped in and said, “Oh, I’ll do it with you to.” She went on and did all of this research and said, “Your kids can do this while my kids are doing this.” My special education person came in and said, “This is what we can do for our project.” My [magnet] coordinator gave us the idea for the project the kids are doing. Everybody threw in their two cents and it ended up being a wonderful unit. I could have done an OK job with it I think, but it wouldn’t have been anything like it is with all of these people offering their little bits to go with it. It turned out to be a well planned out [and] focused. It covered writing requirements. It did everything and it was planned up front, which is a lot more effective for me. I used to be a fly by the seat of my pants kind of teacher, and I felt like I was effective that way, but now that I’m working with these people and we collaborate more I feel like I plan up front more, which of course is going to lead to a more effective unit because I’m planning up front. I’ve got the time devoted to plan for things up front.

Throughout the year, the Shellfish Team maintained a positive attitude about the common planning times and focused their time on improving their teaching.

While the team upheld positive attitudes about the common planning times, they did struggle initially with the schedule. As James pointed out, he intentionally overwhelmed the teachers with a structure in order to make the “real” schedule more palpable. It was difficult for this team to handle the everyday meetings, and they burned out very quickly. The team struggled to balance the overloaded meeting schedule with the demands that were already
placed upon their time. They found it difficult to lose so much of their individual planning time while trying to learn how they were supposed to use the meeting times effectively.

When the overloaded schedule was changed in October, the team received that change very well and viewed the meeting schedule correction as a “happy medium” between not meeting at all and meeting all of the time. Most meetings were moved to once every two weeks, like the subject area meetings, while others were moved to once a month, like the magnet theme-based meetings. As noted earlier, the faculty meetings that were held during these times were dropped all together. It is important to note that groups of teachers from this team as well as the grade level continued to meet every week. Math teachers, for instance, continued to meet weekly for most of the year because they focused on planning together and they found that for them planning over a two week period was too cumbersome as compared to week-by-week planning. It was common practice for this team to meet more often than required during any given week for the majority of the year because the teachers tried to allow the issues they were discussing or the data that was presented to drive the meetings. If the issues, data, or planning required them to meet more than what was scheduled then the team did so. The common planning times for these teachers consisted of a variety of meetings for myriad purposes. Team meetings generally focused on the core teachers discussing logistical information about what the students were going to be doing for the week. Discipline and rewards were commonly discussed during those meetings. While the team meetings included some interdisciplinary planning, it was in the subject area meetings where many of the specific plans for lessons and instructional practices were created and discussed. Subject area meetings tended to utilize more formative assessment data that highlighted specific goals and objectives on which the students were working. It is also
important to note that the common planning periods allowed the teachers to examine formative data in a way that they had been unable to in the past. Not only were teachers planning together, they were using formative assessments to focus their instruction in order to re-teach and re-tool their instructional methods and practices. Formative student data became a central part of the meetings throughout the year as teachers decided on how to re-teach and re-focus instruction around goals and objectives on which students were struggling.

*The Minutes of the Meetings*

For this group of teachers, the “minutes” form was a critical structure for both frustration and the success of the group. The required form was important at the beginning of the year because it gave them a focus and helped to guide their discussions. The team noted that around Christmas the form started to become a hindrance because their discussions were no longer being guided by the form; it felt as if the form was dictating the conversation away from issues and ideas that the teachers felt were more immediate. It was a common opinion that the mandatory nature of the form restricted what teachers felt they could discuss during the common planning times. The form took on a life of its own as often the meetings lacked substance in order to meet the requirements of the form. Teachers began to leave the form out of their meetings in order to lessen the importance of the form on their interactions. As a result the team began to view the structure as a way to approach good content discussion in their meetings and not as an end unto itself. The form became a vehicle through which collaboration could take place. Teachers appeared to internalize the format of the meetings in order to guide and provide structure, while focusing on the issues and concerns that were most important to them. Because they internalized the format of the meetings, teachers indicated that their meetings together “flowed more naturally” when they
did not overly rely upon the form. Teachers felt that their meetings became increasingly
more productive as the year continued because they were more familiar with what the
meetings were supposed to be about, and they were able to get “right down to business.”

Marci noted:

    We discuss data. We discuss units. We share information and um even though
    we’re not looking at this form and going question by question. We haven’t allowed
    ourselves to get back into gripe sessions or into wasted time. It’s still really
    focused meetings that last anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour long as long as we
    want them to last or need them to last. I think they’re even better now then when
    they were at the beginning of the year.

As the team acclimated itself to the standards and expectations of working together, they
found that their time together was well spent because they were discussing ideas, examining
data, and planning lessons that directly impacted their time with students.

_Collaborative Relationships and Practice_

    As noted earlier, this was a relatively new team because team members were
rearranged after the previous year. Teachers noted that the common planning times were
instrumental in fostering the collaborative environment of the team and directly attributed the
family environment of the team to the common planning times. Gail noted that setting aside
the time in the schedule for this team was critical for the team bonding that took place
throughout the year. The schedule allowed the teachers to be on the “same page”
instructionally as well as procedurally because they were able to discuss ideas and lessons
with their colleagues as well as discipline plans, assignment of homework and other
classroom procedural issues. Even if teachers were covering different material, teachers
were confident that they knew what was happening in their colleagues’ classrooms, and they
felt both confident and comfortable in asking other teachers for assistance. Teachers
indicated that previously they felt rushed and could not afford the time to meet with their
colleagues because the school day was so hectic and they were spread so thin in their various classroom and school-level responsibilities. Now they were able to “sit down and ask a co-worker how they would teach this or listen to a great idea that they have rather than rushing and seeing them in the hall.” The teachers also noted that they were able to balance their personal lives with their professional lives because they were able to meet during school instead of meeting after hours, which was the common practice prior to the implementation of the common meeting times.

The discussions among their colleagues created a sense that their colleagues were valuable resources from whom they could learn. Gail stated:

[Common planning] has only helped me. We do our plans and it’s so much better to have someone else’s aspect of how to teach a lesson that may be totally different from mine. There’s always another teacher that’s more creative in one area where I may be the paper-pencil person, get the job done, but you know I’ve done a lot more activities and things in the classroom that I probably would not have done. I would’ve taught it just my way. I’ve opened my eyes to a lot of other things that I can teach, you know which have come from other co-workers. You know we’re all supposedly experts in the field of math, but it doesn’t mean we know everything.

The Shellfish Team as a whole felt as if they were taking more risks this year and stepping out of their comfort zone instructionally because they were utilizing the ideas of other teachers. It appeared that teachers were no longer satisfied with just teaching what they wanted to or even how they wanted to teach the subject material. They discovered that their colleagues had “cool ideas” and sought to include those new ideas into their lessons and units that they were teaching. Instead of planning their units in isolation, teachers were planning with others and found that by doing so they were planning a higher quality unit than they could have possibly created by themselves, because each teacher brought a different strength to the planning process and contributed that strength in the creation of the lesson or unit. As
noted previously, the math teachers on the team strongly aligned their subject area with one another. Two teachers, for instance, planned identical lessons and the other, while behind the pacing of the other two, was invited to use anything they had created for her lessons. The language arts teachers on the grade level also began to align their curriculum, and they found it to be extremely successful in the classroom because the planning together allowed for three people to reflect on how the lessons and units were presented instead of each individual teacher. In essence, the teachers felt that by tapping the experience and expertise of their colleagues and using each other as a resource that they had begun to “work smarter, not harder” in their classrooms.

It is important to note, however, that the planning on the team was not as consistent at the end of the year as it had been in previous months. Some teachers on the team continued to meet regularly to plan lessons, but others noted that the planning together began to become less frequent as the year progressed. In the spring, there was a greater need for class coverage because of a higher rate of teachers being out of the building for staff development as well as for sickness. There were also more Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings to attend as IEP committees met to re-write strategies and interventions for students with special needs and more suspension hearings were conducted during this time. The teachers pointed to the fact that at the end of the year so many things were thrust upon them, especially as the state accountability tests approached, that they had lost a lot of the time that was designated for them to get together and plan. As a result of a busier spring schedule, some teachers began to lose steam when it came to collaborating and meeting with their colleagues, even though their opinions of the time together did not change, and they looked forward to continuing their collaboration at the beginning of the next school year.
The Yellow Jacket Team

The Yellow Jacket Team consisted of a group of teachers that had been together as a team for the last three years. The schedule change greatly appealed to the Yellow Jacket Team when it was first initiated. The Yellow Jacket Team was extremely excited about the possibility of having longer class periods and common planning time with their colleagues. While they were not personally involved in the process, they were attracted to having the time to come together and plan instead of just rushing in the hallways and trying to discuss planning during the hustle and bustle of the school day or when teachers were trying to hurry home after school. Teachers indicated that they were unconcerned about not being directly involved in the decision-making process of adopting the schedule, because they thought it was a strong idea, and the change seemed to make sense for students. Planning times for these teachers were always extremely busy because they were checking emails, getting their in-school suspension work together, or dealing with the bevy of administrative work that was requested them on a consistent basis from various departments within the school administrative structure. They looked forward to having extended planning time so that they could fulfill the demands on their time within the confines of the school day. They were also intrigued by the opportunities that common planning would hold for them, especially in regards to the subject area planning. In the past, the schedule did not allow for the subject area teachers to plan together and often teams on the same grade level were not able to work together, so the teachers were eager to explore those new common planning opportunities. Like the Shellfish Team, the teachers were overwhelmed by the initial schedule that was created for the common planning times. They moved from meeting to meeting and were quickly burned out because they had no time to do all of the things that they had previously
done during their planning times. They tried to balance their email, prepare for classes and other administrative work with the new meeting schedule, and they discovered that they were overburdened with demands placed upon their time and frustrated because of the time constraints. Instead of the common planning time helping them focus their energy and attention, the collaboration began to drain them. Their initial struggles with the overloaded schedule did not subside. Mary noted that the initial schedule caused the change in the common planning structure to lose momentum because the teachers felt that they were spread so thin across their responsibilities. Unlike the Shellfish Team, these teachers did not maintain a positive attitude surrounding their common planning for the entire year. As the year progressed, the expectations these teachers had for the common planning times fell well short of the realities of common planning for their team. While they maintained that the interpersonal relationships with their teammates were extremely positive, they felt that the structures of the common planning times did not allow them to effectively use the planning times. Instead of helping this team to grow collaboratively through a teaming experience with multiple groups of colleagues, the teachers viewed that the times were a source of frustration that was to be endured out of a sense of duty and professional responsibility.

Successful Collaborative Experiences

While the Yellow Jacket Team’s opinion of the common planning time did not improve throughout the year, their experiences with the common planning times were not all negative, especially during the early portions of the year. As stated earlier, they were initially excited about the opportunity to meet and work with colleagues that they had not had a chance to meet with in previous years. The initial excitement led to some early successes as teams of teachers worked and planned together within the common planning structure.
Throughout the first semester, these teachers described successful collaborative opportunities with their peers and noted that they valued these experiences and the products that resulted in their work together. Samantha noted her subject area team focused on identifying their students’ multiple intelligences in an effort to better connect instructional practices and products to the strengths of her students. Her subject area team surveyed their students in order to discover their highest intelligences and tried to implement activities that reflected each of the intelligences. Her colleagues shared the lessons they were doing in regard to multiple intelligences and Samantha noted that she garnered many new and valuable ideas from her peers during the duration of the unit. While multiple intelligences were not a part of her curriculum, the data gleaned from this work with her students helped her to recognize the relative strengths and weaknesses of her students in order to create best fits of instructional practice for future units of study. It was a teaching experience that she was eager to modify and incorporate in the future because she considered the experience so successful.

Mary also highlighted that the work with her instructional team was important to her because they discussed and planned best practices in regards to writing strategies. During one meeting with her subject area colleagues, Mary found a great new way for her to guide her students in using specific details to elaborate an idea. She stated:

One of the teachers said that she was looking on [a] website and she saw this activity where you put a stick figure on the board and then you ask the kids to give details about that stick figure to make it more, to come to life more than just being a stick figure, and they keep elaborating and elaborating and so, um, I tried that and it really did work. The kids responded to it, and it made them dig deeper and think more and get more descriptive and so, um, I may not have ever done that if I hadn’t had a chance to talk to another teacher about something she was doing.

Mary enjoyed these times with her subject area peers because these meetings were the genesis for some of the best writing strategies that she experimented with throughout the
year. Early on Mary, especially, felt a greater connection to her peers because of the work they were doing around writing strategies. In the past, this time was not available to her, and she recognized the importance of the collaborative experience, because she was able to use so many useful and effective strategies with her students that she previously had not used. She valued this time to meet with her peers and looked forward to the opportunity to grow professionally.

Frustrations with Common Planning

Even with the initial successes, their opinions and experiences with common planning began to erode as the year progressed and the meetings began to fall below their expectations. The purposes for the meetings became much less clear as the semester changed for the teachers. As noted previously, the Shellfish Team began to evolve and the minutes form became less and less a focus as the team internalized the structure and adopted it to suit the administrative requirements and instructional needs of their meetings. The Yellow Jacket Team, however, did not experience such an evolution of their meeting structures. For these teachers, the meetings became about the form and not about leaving meetings with specific lessons, units and ideas. Samantha noted:

One of the most frustrating things that we have here is that we have forms for our minutes and in both the interdisciplinary, the disciplinary grade level and the department as a whole we spend the majority of the time in the meeting filling out the forms. I really wish that we could just go with what it was that was most pressing for us to talk about at the time and then we could take minutes as we went and sort of just write it down, but not specifically having to say, “Ok what area of interaction does this fit in and what area of interaction does this fit in.”

Filling out the appropriate form became the primary purpose of the meetings for Samantha and the collaborative planning times lost relevance to her. The team took minutes of the meetings, but the minutes did not assist the teachers in planning or moving forward with their
students. Once the minutes were taken they were not utilized, and they were forgotten because the teachers did not refer back to the minutes to help guide them as the year progressed. She wanted the meetings to be about planning usable lessons, but she found the teams she was associated with spending more and more time documenting the meetings instead of planning and sharing ideas with one another. “Every now and then” the teams discussed best practice. As a general rule of thumb, any planning was pushed to the end of the meetings after the minutes were completed. Her interdisciplinary team did mostly administrative and logistical planning with one another. For instance, they worked together to send potential failure letters home to parents about students. They came together to send home “Friday Folders” that included student work and informed parents of what work the students were missing. While these were important functions to the team and to the students, curricular collaboration was not necessarily discussed during this time with much regularity. However, it is important to note that Samantha expressed her early success with the multiple intelligences and with the success she had with her colleagues in developing cross-curricular and curricular lessons. Although she had some level of success in utilizing these times, her subject area team lost much of its momentum as the year progressed and other attempts at cross-curricular planning were not associated with the common planning times. For example, she explained that as she was doing a unit on the atmosphere and her students were studying how the atmosphere changed as the altitude changed. One of her teammates decided to use a story on climbing Mt. Everest in an attempt to align curriculum. The students enjoyed the cross-curricular connection and helped to highlight Samantha’s goals and objectives for the unit. However, she noted that these planning experiences were not created from the common planning times, rather they came from after school or early release days for teachers when the
students left after the morning and allowed teachers the time to come together and plan. The common planning times became a professional obligation for Samantha. She was required to go, so she went to the meetings. She found that many of the meetings were not relevant to her and was discouraged by the apparent focus on paperwork that filled much of the meeting time.

Mary was extremely positive about the change in scheduling initially. As mentioned earlier, she had some great successes with the planning times in regards to the collaboration around writing strategies. Even as the year progressed she still felt that she was getting a lot out of the common planning times with her subject area peers, because she was leaving those meetings with concrete ideas and specific lesson plans that she could use immediately with her classes. Her opinion of common planning time began to reflect a more negative view of how that time was spent as the year moved into the second semester. Mary believed that documentation for magnet accreditation was the primary purpose for the meetings with her colleagues. She stated, “Well I think the feeling that I get since we’re doing this [magnet themed] stuff now, the feeling that I get that we’re doing all of this meeting, so we can document that we plan without, you know, really doing any planning.” The common planning form adopted by the school was a central component in developing Mary’s opinion and experience in the collaborative meetings. She felt that the paperwork required of her and her team “defeated the purpose” of common planning because rarely did she feel the teachers were using their times productively. Her expectation was that teachers would come together from across the team and plan on a regular basis. She wanted her team to be able to come together and work collaboratively on issues and problems that they were facing and use each other as a resource for cross-curricular planning. Even when her team came together to plan
something across the curriculum, she did not feel invested in it because she noted that it was not a team environment; one or two individuals would bring the idea to the group instead of everyone having a say. Her frustration in having to use the form completely shifted her opinion of the common planning times in general. Like Samantha, Mary saw the common planning time as nothing more than a professional obligation. She was required to meet and attend meetings, so she did so. There was no intrinsic desire to meet in order to grow professionally. When the teachers were not required to meet or a meeting was cancelled, Mary indicated a sense of relief for both herself and her colleagues because it was one less thing that they were required to do.

During the second half of the school year, the Yellow Jacket team began to meet less frequently. Like the Shellfish team, the teachers were drawn away from their meetings because of IEP demands, increased number of parent conferences, staff development and covering classes for teachers who were absent. Because the Yellow Jacket team met mainly to discuss administrative issues, they found that by the end of the year they did not need to meet with the same frequency as they met at the beginning of the year. They had much less administrative stuff to discuss and did not utilize that time to plan lessons or work on best instructional practice. While both teachers thought the idea of collaboration and common planning were strengths of the schedule, they both noted that the team did not take full advantage of its time together. The teachers hoped that changes would be made for the following year but they were not excited about the prospect of another year of common planning and collaboration as it was defined for them during the school year.
Much like the Shellfish and Yellow Jackets teams, the Eagles Team was excited about the change to the flexible schedule. The teachers felt it made instructional sense to move to more of a middle school model that utilized team and subject area planning to impact student learning. They felt strongly that in the past that students saw too many teachers, and they could make the school experience for students much more personal with their current schedule. The team looked forward to the opportunity to work with their colleagues and enjoyed the flexibility that their schedule gave them to regroup struggling students with little disruption to individual classes and to change the daily schedule with ease. One such effort resulted in the team staggering class changes so that they would reduce hall traffic in an effort to minimize disruptive student behavior. The teachers would also flex their schedule to accommodate longer activities or lessons. One such lesson included showing *Gandhi* to their classes. Because of the length of the film, the teachers decided that it would be better to show the film over a couple of days in all classes instead of showing the film over a full week in one class. The teachers were able to rearrange their schedules so that students would not become bored with the film and so the humanities teacher did not have to spend a large amount of instructional time showing one film. Guest speakers and team-wide Paideia seminars were also explored when they restructured the time with students. The team even altered their schedule so that students could take part in community service projects such as creating care baskets for a retirement home. The flexibility of the schedule was a big selling point for the team, and they tried to take advantage of it as much as they could. James described the team as a “high-flyer” because of the successes the team had throughout the year.
Defining Team Roles

Because of the new structure in common planning, the team came together at the beginning of the year to discuss expectations for the upcoming meetings. This team was also a new team that had been rearranged from the previous year, and their team leader felt it was important that they openly communicated, so they would have a productive year working with one another. During this meeting the teachers communicated their desires for what they wanted to achieve during these meeting times and their expectations of each other. This four-hour meeting resulted in the team defining specific roles for each individual member in order to share the workload associated with being middle school teachers. Anne expressed that this meeting was critical to their success as a team. Everyone walked away from the meeting having a much better understanding of what they needed to do individually and collectively so that the team could be successful in working with students and communicating with both administrators and parents. They divided up tasks such as who was going to be in charge of lunch detention, who was going to be the parent contact person, and who was going to have the master calendar. As a result, the team’s early efforts to define roles and responsibilities helped meetings run smoothly by saving “time, energy, and effort,” because everyone knew what to expect from each other and held each other accountable for those responsibilities. Anne felt that by dividing up and clarifying responsibilities her team took a greater ownership of the meetings because they were sharing leadership instead of simply looking to the team leader to handle all of the demands. Team members were able to volunteer their strengths to the group and do tasks for the team that they did well. One member of the team seemed to thrive on this team where on previous teams she had a reputation for being a weak member. Jane was able to file papers, discipline reports, parent
contacts, etc. that the team needed to keep track of throughout the year. Because there was so much paperwork to file, her teammates saw her as an invaluable resource that allowed them to be more prepared in dealing with students and working with parents and administration. Every member of the team perceived each other to be a valued contributor to the team because each member provided a valuable service to help guarantee the success of the team as a whole.

Meeting Instead of Planning

As the year progressed, the team continued to work well together because of the foundation that was laid during the first meeting. Even though they enjoyed working with one another, their attitudes regarding the structured planning time was mixed. While they did the administrative things that a team needed to do really well, the team members noted that they did not feel as if they did a great job in planning instructional units with one another or discussing curriculum integration as a whole. Their meetings ran smoothly and the team was able to address the demands that were placed upon them from students, parents, and administration, but Anne noted:

You can call it planning, but we call it a meeting, which it should be planning, but its not always the planning that needs to happen because there’s so much informational stuff that you don’t always get to sit down and [plan]. It’s hard. I do most of my planning at home you know in my head and sit down late at night and write things down. Most of our meetings they’re driven by agendas and we do take minutes and the minutes can be cumbersome and that is one flaw I think in the system.

The school-adopted common planning form was also a hurdle for this team as well as the other two teams. For these two teachers, the form was a hindrance and restricted the conversation instead of guiding the conversation. Anne highlighted while the purpose of the form was to guide, often it became the purpose of the meeting instead of a vehicle that could
help focus the meeting. Jane felt strongly that the meetings were primarily done for magnet-themed accreditation and not for what was in the best interests of the students. Jane stated:

We meet ourselves to death. We don’t actually have, I feel like we very rarely have time to plan. I feel like our planning time is a meeting and it is not used as it should be. I feel our planning time is intended for us to be able to sit down and plan together, but we spend the majority of our time meeting and filling our paper work for [magnet-themed] accreditation. For all of our meetings we have to fill out a huge form and address all of these different topics on the form and we don’t actually get to sit down and says lets plan this unit for the kids. That’s a big disappointment. The only time we actually get together and produce stuff for the kids is for early release.

The purpose of the meetings was unclear to Jane. She questioned why they were meeting because she felt that she was not meeting for herself or for her team but to fulfill a requirement that was important to someone else and not to her. While the team felt a strong sense of ownership over their interdisciplinary team and the administrative workings therein, the teachers noted that they did not feel as if they owned their meeting times because of the external expectations they had associated with the form. Jane’s understanding was that the reason they were meeting was for magnet-themed accreditation and nothing more. Her frustration came from the disconnect between filling out a form perceived to be for reasons not her own and that the products from these meetings did not enhance her classroom or her student’s learning. As a result, the notes from these meetings were not very useful to the teachers. They rarely referred to previous minutes in their discussions and completed the form because filling out the form was a professional expectation placed upon them. The team did not feel as if that the minutes helped them grow as a team or that it enriched and deepened their collaborative efforts.

The teachers expressed that the common planning structure as it currently existed was flawed because there was a lack of curriculum focus. They wanted to create specific lessons and work together to connect the curriculum across the content area. However, they did not
realize this expectation throughout the year. They did little curricular planning that they felt
impacted their classrooms, even though they felt very successful in handling the
administrative and logistical concerns that confronted their team.

Planning for the Future

Towards the end of the year, James realized that teachers were struggling to adapt to
the new structures placed upon them and understood that there would be changes in the
common planning structure the following year. James also felt that the school had endured a
lot of changes in a short period of time as they changed the schedule, adopted common
planning structures, and moved toward magnet-themed accreditation. In an effort to further
assist his teachers, he and his administrative team planned a year-end faculty meeting to
provide a brainstorming session of what was working with the common planning and what
was not working with the collaborative planning efforts. Even though the meeting took place
after the conclusion of this study, it was his hope that this session would be the springboard
for their common planning focus and collaborative growth for the following year. A team of
teachers along with the administration would then utilize the information gained from the
brainstorming session to make appropriate changes in common planning structures for the
next year. His desire was that his teachers would continue to grow and evolve in how the
common planning times were used so that both students and teachers would reap the benefits
of collaboration.

Mountain Creek Middle School

Mountain Creek Middle School was an urban magnet school that attracted students
from across the district as well as serving students in their attendance zone. The attendance
zone for the school included high poverty housing as well as the magnet population that
included students from a variety of socio-economic levels to serve approximately 565 middle grades students. Because Mountain Creek was a relatively new school, the school building is a state of the art facility located in the heart of the urban center of the district. The building boasted both a unique floor plan and high levels of technology. The floor plan of the school was unique in that it blended into the urban surroundings instead of the sprawling nature of many schools. The school supported a number of activities for student involvement, but had limited athletic facilities. There were multiple computer labs for students as well as a number of computers in each classroom for both teacher and student use. The magnet theme of the school challenged teachers instructionally to integrate all curricula into units of study to assist students in making deep connections with the content. The close proximity to the city’s cultural center facilitated teacher use of those resources for instructional purposes on an on-going basis.

*Flexible Scheduling*

The school implemented both a flexible schedule as well as structured common planning times. Mountain Creek’s schedule was adopted with the opening of the school. The school planners, who consisted of both classroom personnel as well as district leadership, decided on the schedule because they felt the schedule was most appropriate for conducting experiential learning for students and the creation of integrated units by the teachers. As a group, the planners agreed and decided that the current schedule was a best fit for the school and highlighted the founding goal of removing classroom walls by blending the curriculum. The principal fully supported the structure of the schedule and indicated that collaboration and working together were foundational components of her core beliefs and values. She noted the school’s schedule was a direct reflection of that belief system and
valued the learning experiences for both teachers and students that the schedule helped to support. Mountain Creek allotted large blocks of time in the core classes for students as well as structured common planning times for whole grade levels, subject areas, and interdisciplinary teams to come together. During these two periods of planning, students in that grade level went to their elective classes. The 7th grade had the morning planning time, the 8th grade had the middle of the day, and the 6th grade had planning time at the end of the school day. The school adopted three ways in which to utilize their flexible schedule. First, the school’s schedule was defined as a flexible schedule because it can be “flip flopped” as grade levels exchanged schedules with one another to allow various grade levels to plan special events like going to museums or having guest speakers. For example, because museums are not open early in the morning, the 6th grade might use the 7th grade’s schedule in order to accommodate their field trip. Secondly, the teachers used the school’s flexible schedule to “flip flop” their days in order to create half day planning blocks of time called quarterly planning sessions. During these quarterly planning sessions, grade levels adopted the 6th grade schedule for two days and non-instructional staff covered the grade level’s sustained silent reading time in order to produce a much larger block of time in which to plan integrated units for the next quarter. Teachers were expected to plan together to create at least one integrated unit per quarter for the entire year. Thirdly, because the grade level teams had a large instructional block of time, the teachers were able to flexibly schedule their classes to accommodate for lessons and / or activities that would take longer to teach such as science labs. The teachers were able to work with one another to determine how long they were going to need for their instruction on any given day or week. Although this scheduling
practice was not yet fully developed, many teachers at the school asked their colleagues for more time to some degree.

The Need for Common Planning

While the school maintained a schedule that supported flexibility and common planning for the last few years, flexing the schedule and common planning were not school-wide practices. According to the principal, some teams utilized the time to plan together, but that was the exception and not the rule at the school. Common planning was not a regular work practice, so the principal implemented a required common planning structure in order to take advantage of the school’s schedule to enhance collaborative efforts during the school day. June, the principal at Mountain Creek, began the process of implementing common planning structures during her first year when she had teachers coming together once a week. However, the teachers expressed their concerns that they did not have enough time to work together, so the school began to move to a more structured approach to the common planning times. Initial conversations about the common planning time revolved around how to improve student test scores. While Mountain Creek had performed above the state average in many of the state assessments, the school lagged behind many of the other middle schools within the same district. The conversations surrounding student achievement then evolved into the other areas of the schedule that concerned teachers. The feedback she received from the teachers indicated that their needs to fulfill their magnet requirements, get ready for conferences, talk about curriculum, etc. were not being met by the planning schedule as it existed. Around the same time that teachers were discussing better ways to come together to handle their professional obligations, the district and school adopted a formative assessment program to help focus instruction and learning. While the principal acknowledged that
formative assessments were a big help to the school, the discussion of formative assessment data added another time constraint to the already crowded agenda for teachers. The leadership team at the school discussed the idea of having business meetings to discuss the logistics of all the things that needed to be planned as well as a curriculum meeting to discuss issues surrounding data, integrated units, and planning overall.

*The Move to Common Planning*

Although there was discussion about the implementation of a common planning structure at the leadership team level, the move was primarily an administrative one. The principal did not have the staff vote on the move and made the move based on the general feeling of the staff that they needed more time together. June was concerned that the common planning structures she felt the school needed were not going to emerge organically from the bottom-up, so she made the move to implement them from the top-down. She recognized that by making an administrative decision there was going to be resistance, but she also felt that common planning was going to be integral to the success of the school as a whole and for individual students and teams. She believed that these times were necessary for the school to focus on the individual success of students, so that teachers would have the time to drill down to the needs of a specific student and discover best instructional practices and create instructional units that supported the student’s learning. The teachers were informed of the move in a letter that was sent home over the summer holiday that outlined their class assignments as well as their meeting responsibilities. The letter indicated that the teachers would be convening with their entire grade level twice a week for curriculum and business meetings, once a week for their subject area meeting and have another meeting that was designed for the teachers to relax and get together socially. June also met with the whole
faculty and individual grade levels to explain her vision of the common planning times after
the staff returned from their summer break. She expressed to them that these times should be
about planning specific lessons, discussing strategies for students who are not achieving,
implementing strategies for stretching and challenging students who are ahead of their peers,
and delving into behavior issues and challenges for students. The leadership team was in
favor of the move, but there was some resistance because of the amount of time that teachers
would be spending in common planning meetings. June indicated that teachers who were
resistant did not view the time together with their colleagues as valuable time. They were
concerned about how they were going to be able to balance their workload with this new
structure that seemed like it would dominate so much of their already limited time.

Outlined below are three experiences of how three different teams adopted the new
schedule and how the new schedule impacted their professional lives. Although Mountain
Creek Middle School was considered a high implementation school, the extent to which the
teams within the school felt positively or negatively toward the implementation of a common
planning structure varied to a great extent. Teams showed various levels of successes and
frustrations as they attempted to incorporate the change into the day-to-day activities of the
school.

The Trail Blazer Team

The Trail Blazer Team was a close-knit group that refers to itself as a family. The
teachers who participated in this study were all veteran teachers with over 10 years
experience teaching in the classroom. The common planning structures and flexible
scheduling allowed this team to strengthen the bonds between and among members as they
learned to work together by using their time effectively and efficiently. At the end of the year Lydia described what common planning meant to her team:

Common planning at our school is allowing both teams to get together to find out where we are and what we’re doing, being able to function as a whole unit instead of two separate teams. We use it also as a time where the departments, the math teachers, the science teachers, the language arts teachers, and social studies get together, and we’re able to do a week’s worth of planning where we’re all on the same page, but yet putting our own unique twist to it as individual teachers. We use the common planning to plan integrated units and in the last two years I feel this . . . team has developed some really outstanding units. We also use common planning time to meet with curriculum specialists where we sit down, and we talk specifically about curriculum and we talk specifically about [formative assessments], [state assessments], and even the science and where we’re going with the science. Then another day again we get together and we talk about team problems, uh, how we can use [positive behavior support], make it work it better for our team. How we can best meet the needs of the kids and get them where we need to have be at the end of the year.

At the end of the year, it was evident that this team valued the time and opportunity to come together in order to impact student learning. Every member who was interviewed believed that their team time was vital to his or her personal and professional successes that they had experienced during the school year. Through their collaborative efforts, the team re-worked their schedule to provide remediation and acceleration time for their students as well as planning what they described as outstanding integrated units. Throughout the year, their collaboration was aimed at higher student achievement and success. Their principal lauded this team’s efforts towards deepening the collaborative culture at the school by being a model of how collaboration can impact student success as well as teacher success. The team began to use formative data in efforts to create units and lessons that were aligned with and focused on the individual needs of students. The teachers indicated that they immediately bought into the common planning structures because they looked forward to the opportunity to work and plan together. One teacher described the idea of common planning as the best thing
school had ever done. While the team supported the change, their evolution of using the common planning was not necessarily a smooth one. The teachers spent much of the year dealing with the anxiety and stress of moving to a common planning structure that greatly impacted the team’s daily experience.

*Growing Pains*

When the team first heard of the proposed changes in the common planning time, many of them could not wait for the opportunity to plan integrated units, implement coached projects, and connect their curricula to the theme-based approached upon which the school was conceived. The team needed little convincing from the administration that common planning was going to benefit their teaching and their students, because they had worked closely in the past and saw these common planning structures as an extension of those past experiences. Even with these positive expectations, the initial excitement was replaced with frustration as the changes were put into place. Phillip noted that the team experienced “growing pains” with the mandatory meeting schedule as the team struggled to redefine when and where the day-to-day activities and responsibilities they had become accustomed to performing fit into the revised school day. For example, the common planning times for the teachers were scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, so if a member of the team did not complete individual planning activities on Monday, then there was little time left in the week to complete those objectives. Checking email, a regular practice at the school in prior years, was regulated to after school or evening hours. Grading papers at school became very difficult because there was little to no time to do so within the confines of the school day and was also pushed to after school time. For many of the teachers this extra time constraint added to an already burdensome schedule that included parent conferences, individualized
education plan (IEP) meetings, as well as faculty and department meetings. The balancing act of responsibilities led to a lot of the initial frustration that this team experienced and even at the end of the year, teachers still complained about the lack of time to get anything done. Feelings of being “overwhelmed” became associated with these common planning structures because of the pressure associated with the lack of time. In response to the difficulties in balancing their daily schedule, Phillip noted:

I mean you just, like for me this is my 11th year teaching, and I was like a first year teacher this year. You know, you’re trying to figure out resources and when to grade papers and when and how to plan. Planning has been my biggest challenge. You throw in a parent meeting or a parent conference, how to maintain emails and still maintain a semblance of a normal life outside of school and not be here forever and ever. I think that’s been a challenge for a lot of people.

The change surrounding planning times created a much different experience for teachers in that collaboration was required of the teachers, and the teachers found that trying to fit the collaboration into an already busy schedule was quite difficult.

To further complicate the teachers’ conceptualization of how to incorporate collaboration into the school day was the perception that some teachers on the team were unclear as to the goals and objectives of the meeting times. Some teachers expressed that the teachers were ill informed about what the goals and many remembered little discussion about the topic to the faculty as a whole or to the individual team. Isabelle noted, “I don’t think anyone ever addressed [goals] with us. It was just kind of given to us and said this is what we’re going to do with that.” Craig also indicated that he could not remember ever being told exactly what the administrators wanted from the meetings and why they spent so much of their time meeting together. Even though every member of the team who was interviewed felt strongly about the need to collaborate and looked forward to the opportunity to work with their colleagues, frustration arose because they did not feel confident enough early on in
the year to know how to utilize this new time that was built into the school day and why it was so much more important than the administrative tasks that previously filled their planning time.

*Clarity of Purpose*

Ambiguity surrounding the meeting times increased pressure on the teachers and accentuated the fact that the teachers’ expectations of the meetings and the reality of the meetings were incongruous for a good portion of the year. Isabelle explained her initial expectations for the meetings:

My interpretation is…everyone’s sharing information and talking about what works in the classroom and everyone’s kind of giving feedback to each other maybe about those students’ papers or that sort of thing and it hasn’t been that. It’s been more a lot of taking care of business type things and I think that’s probably why I think a lot of people have been, I don’t want to say negative, but maybe not as positive, not wanting to embrace it as much as they probably would have if they were really able to use it as true curriculum planning. Let’s talk about what’s going on.

The lesson planning that the teachers expected was not initially taking place during curriculum meeting times and much of the time was used for business or administrative purposes, even meetings that were not designated for such. The teachers felt that the times that were designed for planning ended up being used for “other people’s” agendas. During these planning times many individuals from other areas of the school, administrative, magnet coordinator, instructional resource teacher, etc. attended and presented on various topics impacting the school. School and data issues tended to dominate the team discussion during this time. While these were important issues to the teachers, the teachers were unable to actually plan concrete lessons and units based upon the data that were discussed and sensed they had little control over what was going to be presented and discussed at the meetings. Teachers explained that the data were important to them, because they were able to address
student issues immediately instead of waiting until the end of the year when it was too late to 
act upon the summative data provided by the state assessments. Even though the data 
discussed were important to them, the time needed to plan was the more immediate need for 
the team. By not being able to plan during these times, the planning had to be moved to 
other times during the school week, which further complicated and added another obligation 
into an already busy schedule for the teachers. The meetings then became an added 
responsibility like a required IEP meeting or parent conference instead of a structure within 
the school designed to relieve pressure on the teachers. Isabelle noted, “Ain’t it great you 
gave us all of this time to get together, but if it’s not really been used for teachers to actually 
sit there and plan and work things out then they’re having to do that at another time, which 
creates stress.” The stress became more pronounced as the semester progressed and the 
teachers moved further away from owning the meeting times they had looked so forward to 
at the beginning of the year.

Over the first semester, these teachers felt an increasing lack of ownership of the 
meetings because it appeared that people outside of the grade level dominated those meetings 
for their own purposes and not for the purposes of the house. The teachers did not feel like 
they could give input and noticed a sense of competing agendas between what they needed to 
discuss and what others wanted to discuss with them. The teachers wanted to plan lessons 
and sit down to “hash out” instructional issues, while the people who came to these meetings 
took up so much time that the teachers had little or no time to discuss the instructional issues 
that were most important to them. Craig explained, “At first it wasn’t run effectively because 
we couldn’t get the stuff that we had on our agenda taken care of because they were coming 
in with different things and new things for us to try.” While the team of teachers understood
that the other areas of the school had responsibilities to fulfill, they found it more and more
difficult to conceptualize these times as their own. The idea that they had to assist other
people in their jobs but did not have the time to do their own began to reveal itself as a source
of frustration. Rather than looking to the times as an opportunity for professional growth
through collaboration, many teachers dreaded these meetings because they knew that they
were not going to accomplish their own goals and objectives.

*The Turning Point*

As the year progressed, the teachers grew more and more frustrated with their lack of
control over planning until emotions spilled over during one of the planning times. For
weeks the teachers had attempted to plan an integrated unit that they had scheduled.
However, each time they came together to plan, someone else was presenting during their
meetings. After the various people presented, the team was left with little time to work on
their integrated unit. As the time to execute the integrated unit came closer, tension
increased because the team had done little of the work necessary for the integrated unit to be
delivered to their students. Tension among teachers on the team also became apparent as the
team began to argue over the content of the integrated unit and teachers began to “snap” at
one another because of their frustration. The team recognized that they were unprepared to
deliver the integrated unit because they were unable to find time to create the unit.
Combined with the myriad responsibilities after school as well as during the school day, the
time to teach the unit was coming closer, and the teachers realized how much work was left
to accomplish before they could begin the new unit of study. A grade level administrator
who attended the meeting recognized the tension in the group and asked what was wrong
with them. The administrator was concerned because the teachers did not have a history of
conflict and had generally gotten along with one another very well. The team expressed their frustration over their lack of control. They explained that they were trying to do what the administration wanted them to do but could not, because they had little or no control over the agenda. The administrator responded to their concerns by telling people who were coming to the meetings to stay away, so the team could plan on their own and work on their integrated unit.

The teachers described this moment as the “turning point” for the team and their use of common planning. As Isabelle explained, “We all felt better…and actually started to look forward to it again. It wasn’t like we dreaded the meetings, we just dreaded not having any time during our meetings.” Craig echoed Isabelle, “They started respecting our planning time, and they didn’t just come in and monopolize that time.” The teachers started to do the planning that they wanted to do from the very beginning. They still worked with the administrative team and still had visitors during their common planning time, however, there was much more communication about when someone was going to attend, so the team could plan for them to be there. At the end of the year, the teachers highlighted that the team had a positive relationship with the administrative team and worked well with them because these lines of communication seemed so open. The teachers were thrilled that their concerns had been listened to and addressed and credited the administration with allowing them to maximize their collaborative efforts in the common planning times.

Even though there were bumps in the road throughout the implementation of the common planning structures, the team remained positive about the change at the end of the year. They looked forward to voicing other changes they saw as necessary to ironing out wrinkles and maintained the expectation that next year’s collaborative times would be even
more powerful and worthwhile. For example, Phillip highlighted that the team was going to create a meeting that would focus on data and drop their business meeting from the schedule. As a result, the team would be able to focus their curriculum meetings based upon the issues that arose during their data meetings. The grade level also planned to separate the meetings next year instead of having the back-to-back schedule, so there would not be so much pressure placed on the individual planning times. While the team described the year as a success, the teachers realized that they still had a long way to go in maximizing their collaborative efforts for the future. They sensed that their meetings needed to be more efficient and planned to do a better job of utilizing agendas and communicating those agendas to staff from the other areas of the school in order to keep both the teachers and other staff focused on the issues at hand. The teachers also wanted to do a better job of being able to address individual needs of the students through their use of data and planning, because they did not feel as if they were as successful at addressing those needs as they wanted to be. However, the team was looking forward to the challenge of coming together again next year and working together to meet their goals of using data and designing powerful curriculum. They were hopeful and confident that the lessons learned this year would be used next year for an even better experience.

The Forest Floor Team

In many ways the Forest Floor Team mirrored the experiences of the Trail Blazer Team. The team began the year with the same feelings of confusion and nervousness surrounding the ambiguity of the change. None of the team members really knew what to expect, and they were also concerned about how they were going to get all of their teaching responsibilities accomplished with the new meeting structures. The question of how they
were going to fit all of this meeting time in combined with the all of the newness that the
beginning of any school year brings caused the team to feel overwhelmed with the new
practice. The team, like the Trail Blazer Team, looked forward to meeting together, but there
were concerns over the amount of time that they were going to meet and how they would
possibly fit all of the meeting time in during the school day. They were unclear how coming
together so often and meeting would be beneficial when they were unsure how they were
going to fit in their other responsibilities. Along with the ambiguity surrounding the possible
benefits of the meetings, the team also had questions about meeting logistics. One of their
members coached at another school and had to leave school early in order to attend practices
and games. They were concerned as to his roles and responsibilities on the team. Because
sixth grade teachers taught multiple subjects, there were also concerns about what meetings
the teachers would attend. Should they attend their social studies meeting or their language
arts meeting? How should they divide their time? An appropriate sports metaphor that was
used was that of a football team running during two-a-day practices in August. During those
long, hot days of August practice it was difficult for the players to see the benefits of doing
all of those drills and running. The players did not see how it would benefit them in the 4th
quarter of games when they would need to be in outstanding shape, until they were able to
defeat an opponent because they were in superior condition. Likewise, the teachers did not
see how this schedule of increased meetings would benefit their professional practice in the
beginning of the year. However, once the team began to plan and utilize that time, they
started to see how powerful the planning time could be as they created integrated units and
aligned their instruction with each other. At the end of the year, this team had a positive
attitude about the opportunity to come together and plan, because they attributed their time
together with successful classroom practice that helped them grow as teachers and made their students more successful.

Collaborative Practice

The Forest Floor Team closely aligned themselves across the subject areas in curriculum and in discipline. The common planning time allowed the opportunity to come together and discuss what was happening in their classrooms and ask questions about how other people were handling specific curriculum goals and objectives. The team began to ask others for advice and began to share best practices. As a result, the team had a greater sense of what was happening in other people’s classrooms both in same subject classrooms as well as with classes in other curricular areas. As noted earlier, the school was founded on the idea of creating integrated units of study. The teachers from the Forest Floor Team indicated that the common planning time allowed them to create a higher quality of integrated unit than in previous years. Natalie explained:

The quality is better because there’s more focus on it, more emphasis on it and getting it done. We have deadlines for when it needs to be done and turned in. I think the common planning is responsible for the quality because that’s where we collaborate and put all of our heads together and come up with this is what I think we need to do and we hash it all out. Everybody gives us a little input on what the direction we need to go in or not go in and it just kind of all comes together.

It is also important to note that the team began to utilize common language in their subject areas because they were exposed to what their colleagues were doing in their classrooms. As a result of the common language, the teachers felt as if there were fewer pressures on the tested subjects because everyone was doing their part to help the students. Teachers became more willing to incorporate the math and language arts into their lessons, so students could see the concepts in various classes and draw deeper connections with the material.
Streamlined Meetings

The team did not experience one critical turning point event like the Trail Blazer Team. Their turning point event was actually a sequence of productive planning meetings that the teachers felt were beneficial where they left with a specific product that was successful. Chris explained:

I think it had to have been several a-ha moments or whatever label you want to put on it. Those were probably leaving several successful meetings, common planning meetings in a row with a oh now I don’t feel like that 30 minutes was sort of taking away from my precious time that I don’t have much of. I remember walking away with something that I felt like had been accomplished, either a better understanding of what it is we needed to tackle ahead with language arts goal or skill, um internally feeling better about our efficiency in the meeting, better communication.

Not only did the team leave meetings with specific practices and lessons, they were also inspired to seek ways to became much more efficient about using their planning time. They streamlined existing meeting structures and created new ones to be sure that their meetings ran smoothly. For example, the team used email to outline business issues that did not need a lot of discussion, so many issues that were on the agenda had already been discussed before the meeting even happened. Even though some teachers did not fully utilize the email structure most of the teachers did, so the up-front email discussion allowed topics to be covered quickly within the meetings. By using email, the team streamlined the discussion of issues in order to be able to spend their limited time on issues they found were more vital like curriculum planning. The teachers began to develop an agenda ahead of time and would send the agenda to the participants, so everyone knew the topics that would be discussed and could prepare prior to the meeting to cover those topics. They did not have to waste time for people to ask what the meeting was going to be about and could begin almost immediately.

The team also created the role of timekeeper in order to keep the members of the team in-line
with the agenda and to assist the team in keeping a steady pace, so the meetings would not become bogged down with unnecessary conversation. The creation of the timekeeper role was another way in which the team streamlined the meetings to make them more efficient so that the teachers felt like they were getting a positive return on their investment of time. Finally the team realized that although they wanted to maintain proper pacing on their agenda, they felt much less pressure to cover every topic after they streamlined the structures of the meetings. They prioritized their agenda items and felt empowered enough to know that if they were unable to accomplish something during one meeting then they would be able to finish it during the next. As a result, the team appeared to have a greater sense of ownership over their meetings because they controlled the topics and how long the discussion would take. Even when outside presenters took up their time, they knew that they would be able to make up that time by using these structures and running their meetings efficiently

The implementation of the common planning structures brought this team closer together as a professional group. Even though they acknowledge that in essence the collaboration was “forced,” the teachers considered the opportunity to come together and work together as a huge positive for them personally and professionally.

*The Riverbed Team*

The Riverbed Team was comprised of veteran teachers who had been at the school since the doors opened. Members of the team sought both graduate level degrees and National Board Certification, and they also had a variety of professional experiences beyond the district and the school. They were a close-knit group that valued the opinions and strengths of their teammates and took pride in their colleagues’ successes and expertise.
Members of the team indicated that they were a “well-oiled machine” and valued opportunities for the team to come together and create integrated units. One teacher stated, “Our team is a really cohesive team so we do a lot of planning as well as we love our time.” On many occasions, the members of the team praised the efforts and accomplishments of their peers for the awards and recognitions that each other have received over the years. The team members took pride in their efforts to connect the curriculum across content areas, and each member of the team highlighted ways they had connected their curriculums in the past. The examples ranged from using Latin prefixes and suffixes in science class to larger projects involving the integration of math and social studies to chart, measure, and graph a scatter plot of Native American arrowheads. Sandy laughed about a time when she received an email from a parent about their child studying for a science quiz on human diseases as part of a microbiology unit. When the child’s father asked if he was going to use his science textbook, the child responded that he would have to use his text because he forgot to bring home his social studies study guide. The boy’s father was confused because he did not see what the social studies guide had to do with the science quiz. The boy responded that social studies had a lot to do with human disease, because if you were studying human populations and a disease wiped out a colony then you might want to know whether it was bacterial or viral. Sandy indicated that stories like that were what it meant to have an integrated curriculum. Students were able to see the direct connections between and across multiple content areas. This team valued its planning time and looked forward to opportunities to create dynamic instruction that impacted their students.

Even though the Riverbed Team loved to collaborate and work together and had done so with some level of success, they seemed to struggle the most with the change out of all of
the teams participating from Mountain Creek Middle School. This team commented time and
time again about how stressed they felt regarding the change and its negative impact on
themselves and on their team. During initial interviews, all teachers on this team expressed
concern over the implementation of a structured common planning time and even towards the
end of the year those feelings had not improved. The general feeling about the structure
worsened as the year progressed and frustration, stress, and anxiety began to increase. Even
at the end of the year, this team had not bought into the structured planning times as they
were implemented throughout the school and felt the common planning structure was a
primary reason for their feelings of unhappiness.

Lack of Ownership

Their frustration stemmed from a perceived lack of ownership from the change in
their planning time. As mentioned earlier, the teachers felt like they had little to no
information about the change and no input into how the change would be implemented.
Linda was taken by surprise by the change, because she thought there had not been much
discussion about the change on the leadership team. Their first exposure came in the form of
a letter detailing the types of planning that would take place at the beginning of the year.
Sandy mentioned, “I guess I was just irritated by how the letter broke. It was almost as
though like I didn’t feel there was a realistic understanding of what we do in our common
planning time. It felt mandated or dictated.” Along with the feeling that the change had been
mandated from the principal, the teachers were concerned that they were also told when and
where they had to come together. Even though the school administration outlined the
planning events, it was initially left up to the teachers to schedule when those business,
curriculum, and team meetings would take place. After the team turned in the proposed
schedules, the team learned that the days had to be on either Tuesday or Wednesday, because the other days did not fit into the administrative team’s schedule. Specifying the days as well as the topics led to a greater loss of ownership for the Riverbed Team. Linda commented:

We were asked to sit down as a [team] and plan out the days we would have these certain meetings, and then once we turned it all in and they were reviewed by administration, they figured out that those days didn’t work for them, so they really hadn’t thought through what days were going to work until they got all our information. It came back [to us] with more um qualifications put on it that made it very frustrating.

Their lack of ownership in the change also extended into their opinion of how the time was used or in their opinion improperly used. The Riverbed Team viewed the change, as an encroachment on the planning and performance that in the past had been so successful. Linda expressed, “We had a team that functioned well in the past, so by putting more I don’t know parameters onto our meetings, it was definitely for somebody else.” Their expectation was that they would have time to plan and work together with other teachers on curriculum issues facing their students, yet they felt they were meeting for purposes that stretched well beyond their own. Julie indicated the team was more productive prior to the advent of the structured common planning times when they had control over what they would meet about. She stated:

In the past we did an awful lot of really good integration and like even the whole team, um themes among the whole [grade level] that type of thing because you actually did have planning time where you could interact a lot, knock around ideas, that kind of thing. And so it has had a positive benefit for students as well as for professionals, but it’s diminished at this point.”

The frustration grew and grew throughout the year as they saw themselves losing more control over the time allotted to plan. Linda stated:

I think its gotten worse because we are given the time to have common planning, but we’re not given control of how that time is spent, so [administration has] given the time for us to collaborate, but then they take control of what is going to happen
during the collaboration instead of those of us who need that time to collaborate
deciding how to prioritize.

Although they were grateful for the time, they saw the gift of time, without control over its
usage as a “slap in the face” of their professionalism. From their standpoint, they lost a lot of
control over what they wanted to and needed to discuss at the advent of these common
structures, and the team felt far removed from the goals and purposes of these meetings.

When asked how administration had taken control of their planning time, Linda indicated
that the administration came in with agenda items that were not on the teachers’ agendas. As
a result, the agenda items that the teachers wanted to discuss were left to the end of the
meeting or not covered at all. The team felt as if there were “cross purposes” at play during
the planning times: the teachers’ agenda and the administrators’. A common topic for
discussion was the use of formative assessment data to drive instruction. While the Trail
Blazer Team and Forest Floor Team looked at the data discussions as a positive for learning
more about students, the Riverbed Team viewed the increased focus on data as symptomatic
that test scores were the most important outcomes in education. They felt as if the
administration was focused solely on raising student’s scores on state assessments instead of
the how the curriculum could be enhanced to impact the students. All three shared similar
concerns about the focus on state testing as opposed to curriculum and lesson development.
The team explained that there was more to this school than trying to get kids to pass a test.

Linda explained:

If we could get everybody into the curriculum, I think the [students] would be more
engaged and if you’re excited about what you are teaching, the kids are excited, and I
think when we get away from that it escalates behavior. If you are going to focus on
testing then that takes away from the instruction if the teachers are so stressed out.
We’re going to put our [testing data] on T-shirts and wear it like the Scarlet Letter.

Sandy shared a story of one planning experience that was quite positive. She stated:
This past Wednesday a great thing happened, we didn’t have anybody come to our meeting, and we were able to identify a theme for an integrated unit for both the third and fourth quarters and start to look at what kinds of activities are going on in math and what kind of activities would be going on in Language Arts, and we really all left excited and talking about how much we had accomplished.

In their view, the common planning times became about issues outside instruction, dictated by others, such as testing and began to pull away from the curricular and integrated principles upon which the school was founded and in which they most strongly believed. Julie noted if they had been more involved in how the planning time was going to be used, then that might have overcome the issues surrounding the lack of control over the common planning times. Because they were not involved, they felt little ownership of what took place during these collaborative times.

**Differentiation and Goal Clarity**

They also felt like the structure was a “blanket mandate” that did not take into account their successful past as a team and felt resentment for the fact that there was no differentiation among teams and houses that had varying levels of success. Linda noted, “I’m sure just as students that we teach feel, we all get treated as one, so if one team has a weakness it comes down from above that we all need to do these extra things.” Sandy also felt strongly that her team was using its planning effectively and was “annoyed” by the blanket structures of common planning times. She expressed if the administration was having an issue with planning times, then they should have told the team or teams individually about their expectations and encouraged teams that were doing well instead of creating structures for everybody. She just wished that they said, “You know, we’re having an issue with people using their planning time. You guys are doing a great job. We would
like you to continue on this path, maybe change or add this thing.” Julie concurred with Sandy’s assessment saying:

If there are people who need individual guidance, then I think that needs to be one-on-one, particularly on what the topic is rather than assume, we’ll they’re not even assuming. Rather than to sing to part of the choir, I felt like people always do blanket things. All teachers should do so and so. That’s detrimental to morale.

Embedded in this team’s lack of control and ownership of the change was an apparent lack of communication about the goals and objectives of the change between the administration and the team itself. Even though the team’s feelings about the specific change around common planning structures were quite negative, their feelings about the idea of common planning in general remained positive. As mentioned above, the team viewed it’s past planning experiences as very successful and looked forward to opportunities to come together and plan as a group. All of the team members expressed how important it was for teachers to come together in order to bring down the walls and make connections across the curriculum. However, team members explained what they thought was going to happen during these times and what actually occurred during those times was incongruous. For example Sandy thought that business meetings would detail field trip logistics, discipline issues, or even positive behavior coming from the students. She also indicated that the grade level as a whole might even talk about common discipline expectations for the entire grade instead of each team having its own discipline strategies. She expected the curriculum time to be used as a collaborative time where the teachers would discuss what was being covered in their class and to try and see if they could make what was being covered come together in some way instead of “everyone kind of doing their own thing.” She explained, “That’s what was shared, but that has not happened at this point in my opinion. The curriculum especially hasn’t materialized in the way it was laid out for me.” Julie also mentioned that there was a
disconnect between what they expected and what they experienced. It was her impression that the curriculum meetings would be devoted to planning curriculum and the integrated units that she believed were essential parts of the school. However, she noted that a lot of the time has been used to talk about data, formative assessments, and other school-wide issues. The disconnect between their expectations and the reality of the meeting times caused much conflict for this team as they struggled to understand the meaning, goals, and purposes behind the common planning times.

During the course of the year, the team indicated administrators were in fact trying to listen to their needs and concerns surrounding common planning. Sandy pointed out that she felt the school administrators were responsive to the concerns of the staff. She saw the creation of the quarterly planning sessions as an example of how the administration was beginning to listen more closely to their concerns. She said:

I think the administration here is trying to hear the teachers’ concerns about the collaborative process and how the common planning time isn’t working as it was explained and that instead of it being a time when we can pull our resources together and less intrusive, it’s really adding a stress to our day. In response to that they are trying very hard to schedule…half day of planning uninterrupted.

Although Sandy was quite positive about the quarterly planning sessions, Linda and Julie viewed them as an example of why the structured planning times was not working. Linda explained:

I think it’s a reflection of how we have more collaboration time, but what came out of it was that we needed more. We needed another chunk of time before each quarter, which shows you that something is not happening on a weekly basis. I think it’s great. I’ll take any more collaborative time we can have…but I think it’s interesting that that’s what came out of that was that it was not enough time to actually get together each quarter.

The change stayed as a stressor throughout the year for this team. They indicated that they were “overwhelmed” by the large numbers of meetings and they saw that their day was
even more confined, constrained, and less productive than in the past. Linda voiced this concern by saying, “It seems like we have more on our plates to deal with and less time to deal with it.” Julie echoed, “As far as our planning, we really have no control over that. I think we’ve just made it more of a professional obligation. It’s kind of like a staff meeting, you gotta go to it and gotta contribute where you can, but other than that do your time and move on.” This team was not able to embrace the common planning structure and the structure became a stumbling block to them both professionally and personally.

First Steps

Mountain Creek Middle School continued to implement the flexible schedule and common planning periods for the entire year. June believed that the common planning structure was not fully institutionalized into the culture of the school and felt that the following year would be the true test to the structures, because she was going on a leave of absence and worried whether or not the school would continue to practice and refine their collaborative efforts with her not being there. However, she was hopeful that the first steps of a collaborative culture were taken and would be continued in the year to come.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

The change to common planning structures through the use of the flexible schedule involves much more than shifting structural elements of the school or outlining times when teachers will meet or even providing topics on which teachers will focus. As explained earlier, schedules are symbolic representations of the most cherished philosophies and goals embedded within the organization (Keefe & Jenkins, 2002). Enormous shifts in the schedule are associated with redefining the culture and challenging previously held beliefs and values. In adopting and defining common planning structures, teachers are asked to move from their past models of collaboration, often associated with isolation, to a true teaming environment where they are expected to not only work together on administrative issues, but to share ideas and bear responsibility in assisting one another to grow professionally. The experiences indicate that such a move is not just a technical challenge, for which the teachers have the skills already available to them to be successful. Teachers in the study face adaptive challenges in their adjustment to the new planning structures of the school. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) define adaptive challenges as requiring “experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization community” (p. 13) that are beyond the groups’ current state of knowledge, expertise or skill. The researchers note that without altering attitudes and beliefs while learning new behaviors people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to succeed in the newly created environment. Schlechty (1997) also illustrates the difficulty of adaptive challenges when describing that cultural and structural change
within an organization “consists of changing the nature of the work itself, reorienting its purpose, and refocusing its intent (p. 205). The study illustrates how teams of teachers from both schools had to learn new ways of thinking about their work while incorporating new skills associated with close and continuous collaboration as well as how to create lessons and units by partnering with their colleagues. Throughout chapter five, the research will examine the key research questions guiding the study, discuss recommendations and implications for future collaborative changes, as well as highlight limitations and areas for future research.

Involvement of Core Middle School Teachers at a High Implementation School

Mountain Creek Middle School was considered a high implementation school because their schedule has longer class periods in the core content areas and more than 160 minutes set aside for teachers to utilize for common planning. Their schedule was determined by the planning committee of the school and created in a collaborative fashion in an attempt to align the schedule to the magnet theme of the school. While Mountain Creek had the schedule for a number of years, teacher collaboration was not engrained into the cultural practices of the school. There was little teacher participation in the move to define the common planning structure for the staff. Like Oakwood Middle School, common planning was not a school-wide practice that was systematically used to improve student achievement even after the implementation of the schedule. The Riverbed Team utilized their common planning a great deal, but according to the principal those teachers were the exception and not the rule. When left to their devices, many of the teachers at the school did not use the planning time to collaborate with their colleagues even though time was scheduled for them to do so. June used assertive leadership (Fullan, 2001) in determining that those times needed to be put to greater use because she did not feel as if the shift to a
collaborative culture would happen organically. June listened to teachers’ discussions of needing more time to incorporate all of the demands that were placed upon them because of their magnet theme and outlined the structures for them in a letter home that also detailed their teaching responsibilities for the year. However, the teachers had no direct input in the creation of the common planning schedule, and the teachers noted their first encounters with a defined common planning structure came as a result of the letter.

Ownership and Choice

The assertive leadership demonstrated by June was directly associated with her desire to build a collaborative culture within the school. Fullan (2001) noted that assertive leadership could be effective when choices and ownership were given to participants as the change process continued. The study of Mountain Creek appeared to support Fullan’s assertion that choices and ownership were important in order for an innovation to be successfully implemented and engrained into the culture of the school when assertive leadership was used. The Riverbed Team never viewed their collaboration time as a positive because of their lack of ownership. Teachers on this team constantly explained that they felt they were meeting for others and not for themselves. It was interesting that the team had such a negative opinion of the time because they were the team that was meeting regularly prior to the common planning structure being defined for them. However, their attitude was the result of more than just the defining of the time for them. While they mentioned that they did not like how “the letter broke,” it was much more difficult for them because they were not allowed to utilize the time as they saw fit. They were frustrated with “other people” continuously coming in to take their time for purposes that they did not see as their own. The Trail Blazer Team also reflected this notion. Teachers noted that they were initially excited
about the common planning times, but were extremely disappointed when the time was used for people outside of the team to attend their meetings and present their agenda items, while leaving little time for the issues and concerns that the team felt were most important. The turning point for the Trail Blazer Team was when their grade level administrator protected their time for them and did not allow other staff members to dominate their meeting times. In essence, the team was given choices and ownership over their meetings again and then perceived the time to be beneficial and valuable to their professional growth.

**Goal Clarity**

Goal clarity was also a contributing factor to how the teams of teachers viewed the innovation at Mountain Creek. June mentioned that it was her hope that these times would be used to deepen the collaborative culture within the school as teachers worked to improve student achievement and learning. Hargreaves et al. (2001) mentioned, “Teachers motivation to change their practices…is influenced by the extent to which they think that their personal goals are consistent with the details of the reform” (p. 120). Goal clarity not only impacted if the participants understood the reason for change or the change itself, but also impacted how the teachers understood if their personal goals were aligned with the proposed change. It appeared that some teachers were unaware of the goals surrounding these common planning times. Craig indicated that there were “competing agendas” taking place in their meetings throughout much of the year as teachers tried to understand the change. Isabelle highlighted that she could not remember anyone ever addressing the goals of the meetings with her or her team and was unclear as to how the change came about. Phillip stated that there was “big confusion” surrounding their curriculum meetings, because the teachers were unable to discuss curriculum issues for much of the year as these meetings were inundated with issues
surrounding data and other aspects of the school. Phillip also perceived that the goals of the meetings were unclear and that neither he nor his team was exactly sure what they were supposed to accomplish during these times. The Riverbed Team as a whole viewed the change as a shift in focus from student learning to student achievement on state accountability measures. The lack of goal clarity surrounding the change may have hindered the implementation of the common planning times because the teachers were unsure as to what they were supposed to accomplish. It was unclear how the change aligned with their personal goals of teaching.

Involvement of Core Middle School Teachers in a Low Implementation School

Oakwood Middle School was considered a low implementation school because while they adopted longer class periods in the core content areas, the teachers were not required to meet beyond the 160 minutes. However, the teachers at Oakwood Middle School were very involved around the discussion and creation of the schedule. The principal went to great lengths to be sure that everyone was aware of the process and to utilize teacher input throughout with focus groups, leadership team meetings, and presentations. James also used email effectively in keeping teachers that were not directly participating informed as to the relative strengths and weaknesses of the schedules that were being considered. In these ways, James built the local capacity of the teachers in order to manage the change from the previous schedule, and his efforts assisted in constructing meaning for his teachers during the initiation phase of the change process (Fullan, 2001). James acknowledged the importance that including teachers had on the almost universal support of the flexible schedule as well as the common planning periods. All three teams that were studied expressed initial excitement over the schedule, because they were attracted to the longer class periods as well as the larger
blocks of time provided to plan with their colleagues. They thought the schedule made instructional sense and helped the school more closely align instructional practices with a true middle school model. The teachers seemed to understand why the school had changed the schedule, and the processes utilized by their principal appeared to be a central component of both their acceptance and excitement.

Factors Impacting Implementation

The building of local capacity in the creation of the schedule was only the beginning in this change process. Fullan (2001) noted that implementation “consists of the process of putting into practice an idea, program or set of activities and structures new to people attempting or expected to change” (p. 69). Once the schedule was implemented new obstacles arose that hindered successful implementation of the common planning periods. While the teachers were close to consensus around the schedule, the start of common planning was met with teams not utilizing their time to plan. James was disappointed in how his teachers failed to use that time to plan and indicated that many of his teachers did not grasp how the time was supposed to be used. As a result of teachers not utilizing the common planning time, James and the administrative staff outlined how and when the common planning times would be used for the staff as well as creating the form to assist in driving the discussion between and among teachers. In outlining the schedule as well as creating the minutes forms for the staff, James, like June, used assertive leadership to define his expectations for the collaborative structures. Unlike the schedule, teachers were not nearly as supportive of how the common planning time was defined for them. Members of both the Eagles Team and the Yellow Jackets Team indicated that the common planning times were too cumbersome and the source of much of their frustration. Even the Shellfish
Team, which had accomplished many teaching successes, noted by the end of the year, individuals on the team were taking less advantage of the time and that the innovation was losing some steam as the school year became more hectic. A number of teachers at Oakwood expressed concern and dismay around the lack of control over the common planning meetings and questioned the goals, purposes and reasons behind those meetings. Again, Fullan (2001) noted that assertive leadership could be very successful as long as choices and ownership were given to participants as the change continued. It appeared though that instead of offering more choices to the teachers, some teachers felt as if they had little choice in how they were going to be able to use their common planning times.

At the heart of the concern was the minutes form that was created for the teachers. Teachers noted that the form became the driving force of the meetings and in many ways was a hindrance to their planning as a whole. It was stated that teams were trying to complete the form instead of collaborating with one another. Even though the Shellfish Team was the most successful of the three teams in utilizing their common planning time for collaborative activities, they highlighted that the form was a definite challenge for them to overcome. The form did not serve as a support structure for the team. Instead of providing choices and ownership surrounding the innovation, choice and ownership was to an extent limited because of the restrictive nature of the form. Like Mountain Creek, teachers noted that such limitations negatively affected how they viewed the change in common planning times and limited the extent to which they thought the change was effective and worthwhile.

Two factors determining successful implementation are need and the quality of the program or innovation (Fullan, 2001). While it appears obvious, if participants in change see no need for an innovation or do not see the need as valuable, the change may ultimately fail
to be completely implemented. Often teachers will see the implementation of innovations that they feel they do not need or innovations that are perceived to be of low quality as change for change sake (Hargreaves, 2001). It was apparent that teachers recognized the need and the quality of incorporating collaboration as a part of the school’s culture. Teachers from Oakwood were unanimous that collaboration was a good idea and that the opportunity to plan with their colleagues was a contributing factor in supporting their current schedule. In fact, every teacher noted at least one successful collaborative experience that they had throughout the school year. Whether it was utilizing different novels, planning a Titanic interdisciplinary unit, planning in-depth lessons with their colleagues, distributing roles and responsibilities or discussing best practices around writing strategies, the teachers saw that collaboration was a potential source of professional growth and that time was needed in order to make quality collaboration a reality. The meaning making done during the initiation phase might have assisted teachers in seeing the need for the common planning structures and viewing it as a quality innovation, because teachers were so involved in the process and understood the reasons for change. It is important to note that their opinions on the need and quality of collaboration as a whole did not guarantee successful implementation during this first year of the change. Perhaps choice and ownership of the structures were more important to the teachers because they saw the potential impact that collaboration could have on their teaching and learning.

Goal Clarity

Another factor impacting successful implementation was goal clarity. Fullan (2001) noted goal clarity was extremely important for teachers to specifically understand what they were expected to do differently. Wasley (1997) also pointed out that the central elements and
objectives must be clear to participants in order to ensure successful implementation of an innovation. It appeared that the goals for the common planning structures were not as clear to participants, as was the need to participate in common planning. It is important to note that when initially left to their own devices that the teachers did not engage in school-wide, significant planning even though the structure was put into place for them to do so. Perhaps the goals of common planning were not readily apparent to them after the implementation of the schedule. Even prescribing the structures for the teachers left members of two of the teams confused as to the goals of the meetings. One teacher noted, “What is the goal? Why are we doing this? Who are we doing this for? Are we doing this for us? Are we doing this for our kids? What is the purpose?” While the principal indicated that he wanted his teachers working together and planning, teachers highlighted that they thought much of their planning was the result of being required to document for their magnet-themed accreditation and not for “real” instructional purposes. The form was a central stumbling block for the teachers. Mary explained her frustration by saying, “I get the feeling that we’re doing all of this meeting so we can document that we plan without you know really doing any planning. It almost seems like you know we’re doing it strictly for the documentation.” With meetings being driven by the form, teachers indicated that very little planning was actually done during those times. The Eagles Team who was described as the “high flyer” did very little in terms of planning and their meetings consisted of mainly information or administrative business as compared to the Shellfish Team that met regularly to plan and create instructional units. Only the Shellfish Team evolved beyond looking at the form and spent large amounts of time creating lessons and working with one another to improve instructionally. It appeared that the goals for the common planning were not consistent across teams and some
teachers struggled greatly with the structure outlined for them. During the initiation phase of
the change, teachers were constantly involved in meaning-making activities. However,
during implementation teachers began to become disconnected from the common planning
times as the goals and objectives became less clear to them, especially as their choices were
restricted.

*Teacher Participation Related to Level of Implementation*

According to the research, it was not apparent that teacher participation was related to
the school’s level of implementation of common planning through the flexible schedule.
Mountain Creek was considered a high implementation school, but teachers had little
involvement in the shift to a structured planning time. Oakwood was considered a low
implementation school and teachers were involved in creating the schedule, yet little teacher
input was used in the move to structured common planning times. Both schools moved to
common planning structures after it was apparent that such a collaborative shift would not
happen at a grass roots level. June and James were both concerned about the collaborative
culture at their school and moved to institute the collaborative time for the teachers. The
structures were put in place at both schools from an administrative level regardless of the
level of implementation. It was not apparent that the level of implementation was
determined by teacher participation at either site.

Perhaps what is apparent is that choice and ownership ultimately may determine
whether or not an innovation would be successful for the long term instead of teacher
participation in and of itself. Both sites limited choice as the change was implemented into
the schools’ schedules. Mountain Creek limited choice by defining the meeting times and
loading the meeting times with issues that some teachers did not feel were the most
important. Oakwood defined the meeting times and limited teacher choice with a minutes form that directed conversation. As a result, teacher buy-in varied from team to team or even from individual to individual on the team instead of widespread acceptance. It appeared that teams or individuals who “bought into” the change were inconsistent across grade levels or teams respectively. Teachers at both schools noted that their lack of choice or their lack of control over the times together were critical factors in determining how valuable they perceived the time. Choice as Fullan (2001) suggested played a significant role in the successful implementation as teachers began to understand and conceptualize the innovation.

Structures that Hindered or Encouraged Teacher Involvement

“Classroom press” played a central role in hindering teacher involvement at both schools. Hubermann (1983) defined classroom press as the immediacy and concreteness of the classroom experience where teachers must balance a range of simultaneous operations in environments that were defined by uncertainty and unpredictability and revolved around the personal involvement with students. For these schools, how their planning time was redefined was a central issue and source of concern. Teachers at both schools noted the difficulty in learning how to balance their new meeting schedule with all of the other issues they were confronted with on any given day. The schedule of meetings seemed to overwhelm many teachers because they had less time to handle the emails, the parent conferences, the IEP meetings, grading papers, and the myriad responsibilities they faced. Teachers struggled to learn how the tasks that were demanded of them could still be done when their week was structured by a number of new meetings, new roles, and new responsibilities. At Mountain Creek it was noted that the smaller faculty size caused many of the teachers to be spread too thin. Because of the smaller number of teachers, there were
fewer teachers to handle all of the meetings and committees required for the school to run successfully. Teachers also felt that the back-to-back meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday put more pressure on individual planning early on in the week. If a parent conference was scheduled for that day, then the responsibilities handled during individual planning were left until the end of the week. Phillip noted that while he was a veteran teacher, he felt like a first year teacher as he tried to balance his workload with the new meeting schedule. He explained that it was a challenge to do all of the work and still maintain a semblance of a life outside of school. Teachers at Oakwood highlighted that they were asked to cover classes, check email, and communicate with parents, while trying to balance the meetings they were required to attend. Trying to fit these responsibilities into their meetings constituted a main source of stress for the teachers. Fullan (2001) explained that classroom press exhausted teachers’ energy and drew teachers away from meaningful interaction with their colleagues. Combined with the lack of goal clarity faced by teachers in both schools, classroom press took on an even more important role. Because some teachers did not understand the goals of the meetings, they appeared to focus on all of the issues that they could be attending to instead of meeting with their teams. As a result, some teachers felt as if their time could be better suited and more productive doing other things instead of attending meetings.

While teachers at both schools struggled in balancing their new roles and responsibilities, they also indicated that their respective administrations were supportive and listened to the teachers’ concerns. Teachers credited their administrators as trying to listen to their complaints and praised them for doing so, even if they were unhappy with the common planning structures. Teachers at Oakwood noted that the administrative staff heard their concerns about the overloaded meeting schedule at the beginning of the year and moved
quickly in creating a schedule that was more palpable and manageable. The Trail Blazer
Team at Mountain Creek highlighted the fact that their administration saw their frustration
and anxiety over the curriculum meetings and reduced the number of staff from outside of
the team that attended their common planning meetings. At both schools, the administration
worked diligently to listen to teachers concerns as they moved throughout the process and
made changes to support their involvement in the process. Both administrators understood
that it was going to be a learning process as the cultures of the schools shifted from isolation
to collaboration and understood that the change in the culture would be an on-going process.
Listening to and responding to the concerns of their staffs assisted the Trail Blazer Team and
the Shellfish Team effectively balance the new demands placed upon them with the common
planning structures and directly impacted how the teachers on those teams viewed and
supported the common planning times. While not all teams were supportive of the common
planning structure, they did feel that their concerns for common planning were being heard
and that changes were going to be made for the next year. James noted that the
administrative team scheduled a brainstorming session for teachers at the end of the year to
provide feedback about what was working and not working during those common planning
times. June encouraged teachers to give continuous feedback, so they could also make
changes for the upcoming year as well. Teachers seemed to understand that this was a
learning process and felt confident that their leadership would continue to be supportive as
they continued integrating collaboration into the school day. While the long-term impacts of
the innovation were not examined in the study, the perception of being heard by their
leadership might assist the innovation in being institutionalized into the culture of the school.
Influence on Instructional Practice and Collegiality

While the process of assertive leadership did not impact these teachers in terms of collegiality and instructional practice, many team members noted that their teams were closer as a result of the mandated collaboration. Individuals highlighted that their instructional practice had changed dramatically since their teams began to work together. The Shellfish Team, Trail Blazer Team, and the Forest Floor Team all described their teams as close-knit units that resembled more of a family environment and indicated that collaboration had deepened their bonds professionally and personally. One teacher mentioned, “I think common planning and having to develop these integrated units has really impacted our relationships- personal and professional. We all have each other’s home phone numbers, so I mean you know its kind of we collaborate a lot.” Natalie explained, “This year is a lot different from last year, um this year I always have a blue print. There’s more collaborating between my colleagues and I.” Marci indicated that her lessons were richer this year because of her work with her teammates. Gail stated she had grown as a result of her teammates closely working together because she was able to utilize their strengths and incorporated them into her lessons. Teachers across schools noted there was a greater sense of knowing what was happening in others’ classrooms, because they shared with one another during these times. There was a “common theme and a common language” between and among teachers that the teachers themselves attributed to their efforts at collaboration. In turn, teachers on some teams perceived that the quality of instruction had greatly improved, because they were able to reflect with a number of teachers instead of handling everything on their own. Chris compared his experience with collaboration with oxen pulling a cart; it might be a heavy load, but it was much lighter with everyone pulling together. He stated, “I
think its helped me personally stay more focused on what are my particular goals and objectives, whereas before you…had them, but maybe you felt like you were towing the line a little bit by yourself.” Even the Riverbed Team, whose members did not support the change, indicated that the time with the other team on their grade level had raised awareness that the team was responsible for all of their students and not just the ones on their team. In addition to raising awareness, they were also trying harder to incorporate other content areas into their daily curricula. Even though there was frustration regarding the lack of control and in many ways the lack of ownership of the meetings, many of the teachers saw their instructional efforts and relationships with colleagues greatly and directly benefited because of their collaboration.

Recommendations

Along with goal clarity and need, Fullan (2001) indicates that the complexity of the change is an important factor in determining the successful implementation and continuation of any innovation. Asking teachers to collaborate stands in stark contrast to the traditional isolated model of teaching and learning. Collaboration requires changing mental models underlying what teachers believe is possible in the school environment while simultaneously changing the culture that is engrained within those mental models. Meister and Nolan (2001) describe teaming as being associated with intense feelings of uncertainty and doubt. Erb and Doda (1998) indicate that moving to a teaming organization is far more than an organizational shift in the structures of the organization. “[Teaming] changes the professional and interpersonal dynamics of schools for everyone involved” (p. 13). Flowers et al. (1999) highlight that teaming represents a move from the security of an isolated classroom to a setting that involves high levels of communication, teamwork, and
collaboration with colleagues. These researchers agree that teaming is a complex change that requires teachers to change how they have worked with their colleagues in the past and redefine personal and professional relationships in a collaborative context instead of an isolated one.

**Making Meaning**

In order to make such a dramatic shift in their professional roles, it appeared that teachers needed many meaning-making events to help conceptualize and understand the change (Hargreaves et al 2001 & Fullan, 2001). Teachers needed to know why they were changing in order to develop the change meaning associated with such an intellectual and emotional process. As noted earlier, many teachers questioned the purposes and goals of the common planning structures at both schools. Some viewed it merely as documentation while others took a more cynical view that the times were designed to keep tabs on what the teachers were doing. In both schools, there was a lack of meaning making around the shift to common planning times that impacted how the teachers viewed the change. While individual teachers and individual teams at both schools seemed to conceptualize the change, there was no consistency between and among those individuals and teams. Fullan (2001) pointed out that change did or did not occur on an individual level and meaning needed to be made available for all teachers and in different contexts so understanding could be achieved. Teachers at the same school and even on the same team expressed vastly different views of what was explained to them. Some teachers indicated that the goals and purposes had never been explained while others were certain as to the goals. Leaders at both schools engaged their faculties in conversations around the common planning time, but it appeared that those efforts at beginning of the year faculty meetings were not sufficient for all of the teachers.
When dealing with such an adaptive challenge as collaboration, leaders should attempt many meaning-making activities throughout the year.

One way to incorporate meaning making into the school year is to repeat consistently the goals and purposes of the innovation in many different settings. In these two schools, faculty meetings and any meetings attended by the leadership represent significant opportunities to state the purposes behind the collaborative times. Without the constant reinforcement by school leadership, the message may become distorted or transformed when teachers face the immediate, daily concerns and responsibilities that are more pressing. However, school leaders may find that simply repeating the message is not sufficient to construct the meaning necessary for the teachers to embed the innovation into their professional roles. Engaging teachers with modeling and role-playing exercises can be another powerful vehicle through which the meaning and goals are clarified and defined for the staffs. Following up these exercises with both small and large group discussions in a variety of settings may further cement the goals and purposes for teachers as they create and construct meaning in a social context. Rottier (2000) indicates a common characteristic of a high performing team is one that focuses on clear goals. If teachers are unaware of the purposes and goals for their time together with their teams, then becoming a high performing team is much more difficult. As leaders understand the adaptive challenges that teachers face with many reforms, it is important to remember that the goals and objectives of an innovation cannot be repeated enough. Kotter (1996) indicates that a common mistake made by change leaders is under communicating the vision of the innovation. Allowing teachers the opportunity to evaluate and analyze continuously the goals and purposes of the innovation
may refresh the meaning for teachers as they face the challenge of change on a daily basis and throughout the school year.

**Focusing Staff Development**

Along with constant reinforcement of the goals and objectives, focused staff development that aligned with the purposes of the innovation was another way to assist teachers in creating meaning around the change. Hargreaves et al (2001) explained that teachers needed opportunities to develop procedural knowledge associated with the change and opportunities to explore and modify these new practices. According to the researchers these times were critical for teachers to implement an innovation. Without the time, the “conceptual knowledge and intellectual challenge of deciphering the clutter of policy demands [could] be overwhelming” (132). Neither school provided time for their staffs to develop procedural knowledge around working in teams, nor did the schools provide any training or staff development associated with collaboration and teaming during the course of the study. Again it is important to note the inconsistency of the teams as they succeeded or faced challenges. The Shellfish Team and the Eagles Team at Oakwood came together at the beginning of the year to outline each individual’s expectations of how they wanted the meetings to benefit them and how they expected their colleagues to conduct themselves during these times. Team members acknowledged that those early meetings were critical in laying the foundation for their teams to work well together. The Forest Floor Team developed structures such as a timekeeper to streamline their meeting times and utilized email to make decisions on topics prior to a meeting that would otherwise clutter their agenda. As a result, they found that they were more efficient and their agendas became more manageable. While these efforts were successful, assisting all teams to engage in these types
of team building activities might have lead to a greater degree of success for more of the teams as they learned how to work with their peers. June noted that she wished that she would have spent more time in developing trust for her staff and creating more team building procedures in order to help her staff move to a more trusting culture. James also realized that his teams need more time in learning to work together and had begun a book study of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. He explained that his teachers needed more support in learning to work as a team and what it meant to leave egos and personal agendas outside of the meeting and collaborative times. Administrators at both schools recognized that the development of the team was a critical component that needed more attention.

Teaming and collaboration requires a complex set of interpersonal skills that teachers may be unprepared to use when asked to collaborate with their colleagues in an intensive manner. It is important to note that teachers at both schools did not initially take advantage of their collaborative time in any systematic way, even though the schedules supported teacher interaction. Some teams collaborated while other teams did not. Perhaps teachers failed to use this time school wide because they did not have the prerequisite skills necessary to tap into the power of collaboration. School leaders should assist in fostering and developing these collaborative skill sets before implementing teaming as well as during the process as the skills of both the individual and team begin to evolve. Doda (1997) illustrates that while many teams come together to discuss administrative issues too few teacher teams begin to unleash the potential power of teaming because teaming is such a complex operation. Rottier (2000) suggests that in order to fulfill the potential of teaming that school leaders must work to improve the foundations of the team. On-going staff development is critical in assisting teachers as they make the shift from isolation to collaborative
relationships. The researcher illustrates that teams may need help in developing, monitoring, and assessing goals as well as defining roles and responsibilities of each team member. Fleming and Monda-Amaya’s (2001) findings suggest that clear team member roles lead to increased team effectiveness and cohesion while the lack of clarity leads to misperceptions and disagreement. The researchers also point out that the identification of roles and responsibilities helps teams develop open-lines of communication as the team works towards creating common goals and holding each other accountable. Because the transition to collaboration can be difficult, teams may need decision-making skills, problem-solving techniques, and structures that assist teachers in allowing conflict to become a healthy part of the team process instead of being detrimental to the team. All of these skill sets may be beyond the current training and knowledge of a number of teachers within the schools. In this study, the teams incorporating structures such as clarifying roles and responsibilities appear to more readily adapt to the change and are able to overcome the feelings of anxiety and stress to a certain extent. Staff development that focuses on these elements of teaming facilitates the individual learning of the team members as they make the transition to collaboration. Otherwise, like teachers in this study, they are being asked to learn on the job as they struggle to incorporate the complex operation of teaming into their school day, which may increase feelings of stress, anxiety, and frustration. In order to support a collaborative culture within the school, school leaders need to cultivate skills that focus on effective teaming structures.

Preparing for the Role of Data

Along with having to learn collaborative skills in order to work efficiently and effectively with colleagues, many of the teachers in the study were using formative
assessments for the first time. Both sites utilized the district-wide formative assessment program and followed instructional calendars developed from the district level. It was apparent that formative assessment data and the discussions based upon the data further complicated the collaborative process for the teachers. Teachers noted that discussions of data fell outside their expectations for the collaborative time and struggled to incorporate formative assessment discussions into their common planning. The Riverbed Team viewed the use of formative data as the school moving away from curriculum integration and towards a focus on testing. Samantha, a science teacher, struggled to find relevance in the formative assessment conversations, because those data did not reflect her subject-area specifically. Other teams and individuals found it difficult to conceptualize formative assessment as curriculum development. Not only should leaders provide training in collaborative skills, but also they should closely examine the conversations in which they expected teachers to engage. By examining the goals of the time together, leaders could be sure of all the skills teachers needed to be successful. It was possible that the use of formative assessment data required even more meaning making activities and contributed to their frustration. Many of the teachers were learning to collaborate while using formative assessment with which they were unfamiliar for the first time. Clarifying the role of data in these collaborative times might have assisted in clarifying the goals and purposes of the common planning events.

*Developing Team Leadership*

It is apparent in the study that the collection of individuals comprising the team matters when it comes to implementing the change to common planning structures. The Eagles Team for instance has a dynamic team leader whose vision helps to include all
members of the team in decision-making and participation. However, all teams do not have such a strong leader to assist them in working together as a team. Rottier (2000) suggests that school leaders try to develop leadership among all team leaders in an effort to build the leadership capacity of the teams within the school. One way administrators can build leadership capacity is to create, along with teachers, a detailed job description of team leaders as well as providing leadership training for potential team leader candidates. A job description clearly defines their role on the team for both themselves and their colleagues and provides them with a standard to which all team leaders can aspire. Fleming and Monda-Amaya (2001) note that role clarity is essential for teachers to become a high performing team. A job description can also provides a rubric for quality team leadership that can be used by the administrator to offer feedback on how the team leader can be more effective. Like collaboration, team leadership may require many different skills from teachers that need to be cultivated and refined. Team leaders may need support in writing agendas, facilitating high quality discussion, delegating responsibilities, setting and monitoring goals, and resolving conflict among other skills. Investing time and energy into leadership development builds the organization’s capacity to handle and process change overall, and also provides greater capacity on the team level in the move towards greater collaboration. Ensuring each team has a leader that understands collaborative structures and the skills necessary to create positive collaborative teams provides each team with an important resource that they can learn from throughout the change process.

Selecting Team Members

Individual team members may be another important factor in creating high performing teams. The Shellfish Team mentions how well their personalities fit together and
that provides the springboard for successful collaboration. The Trail Blazer Team attributes their flexibility and resiliency to the fact that their personalities allow them to “go with the flow.” When moving to collaborative cultures, leaders may want to give a lot of attention to the teachers that they assign to work together. While there may be limitations because of certification and areas of expertise, leaders who try to match personalities or skill sets may provide the team with a solid foundation for successful collaboration. There are a number of ways that leaders can collect data to focus team membership selection. Collecting personality data through personality profile surveys may give greater direction for which teachers are more likely to work well together and which collection of teachers may struggle. Leaders may even want to poll the faculty to allow teachers to share their relative strengths with administrators so a better match of individual skills can be made from the genesis of team creation. Providing and incorporating teaming activities during staff development training can also assist administrators in beginning to know how individuals will be able to work with their colleagues and peers. While utilizing these strategies may not guarantee team success, school leaders can take steps to try and make “best-fits” with teachers as they work on collaborative teams.

_Taking Small Teaming Steps_

School leaders can allow their teachers to adjust slowly to collaboration by having them work on a smaller number of teams. In both schools, teachers are required to meet with a number of teachers in many different contexts for a variety of purposes. Teachers meet with whole grade levels, subject area peers, as well as interdisciplinary colleagues. This multiple and simultaneous team membership represents a number of interpersonal dynamics and relationships that may be overwhelming to teachers new to collaboration. Being a
member of one team represents a variety of skills and relationships that must be developed over a period of time (Flowers, 2000). Perhaps allowing teachers to work specifically with their subject area peers can be a good first step towards collaboration. Teachers then begin the collaborative process working in a context in which they are most familiar, their content area. Limiting the number of teams may allow teachers time to practice those collaborative skills before expanding and applying them to the various and possibly more challenging contexts that are required of the teachers in the study. As research notes (Meister & Nolan, 2001 & Erb, 2000) teaming can be a stressful and difficult shift for teachers. Exposing a teacher’s novice collaborative skill set to such a wide variety of settings may be setting the stage for frustration. Allowing them some choice as well as providing a safe context to learn the collaborative skills necessary can be two positive first steps in deepening the collaborative culture within the school, while providing a safety zone for teachers.

Changing Leadership

While not directly studied in the research, the issue of leadership turnover became apparent as principals at both schools moved to different positions within the district not long after the study concluded. Fullan (2001) states, “[The principal] most likely shapes the conditions necessary for success, such as the development of shared goals, collaborative work structures and climates, and procedures for monitoring results” (p. 83). Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, and Petzko (2004) also illustrate the importance of the principal in establishing the culture of the school and the norms by which the school functions. They note that the principal is the central figure in building relationships and fostering a school culture dedicated to continuous learning and improvement. As leadership changes so do leadership philosophies and beliefs about what is truly important in the school. Leadership
turnover can be a strong impetus for change, but when a change is yet to become institutionalized turnover may derail the change from ever becoming part of the culture of the school. Flowers (2000) notes that teaming takes time to develop and results are rarely seen immediately following its implementation. Her research highlights that teacher teams working together for four years experience significant improvement in classroom practice. Fullan (2001) points out that the change process can last as long as six years before the innovation becomes institutionalized in the organization. Changing leadership may not afford these teachers with the opportunity to continue to develop and improve upon their collaborative relationships in a teaming context. It is unclear as to how these leadership changes will support or hinder the change to collaborative cultures at these schools. It is uncertain how the principals will respond to the structures of collaboration that have been put into place. New leadership may champion the cause of collaboration and work towards deepening the collaborative culture of the school by building upon the work of the previous administrations or focus on other areas that may seem more important to the new principal. Leadership turnover is imperative for district leaders to consider because the principal will play a primary role in any school reform effort or innovation. Changing collaborative models of interaction is difficult for teachers even under the best circumstances; changing in the face of new leadership that may not support collaborative efforts would be almost impossible. District leadership can carefully balance how a new leader’s educational philosophy relates to the major reform efforts happening at any school site before making changes in leadership. If the innovations at the school are judged important enough to continue and develop, then district leadership can assist in creating an environment that more fully supports the change by making a strong match between the school leader and the
innovation. By being aware of the change processes currently at the school, district leadership can work towards supporting and validating the work teachers have been doing. If teachers invest time, energy, and effort to incorporate a change, then the change is halted because of a shift in leadership, teachers can be discouraged from participating in future change efforts. If change efforts are halted with each leadership change, change is not associated intrinsically with their personal goals and desires. Change becomes associated extrinsically with the leader. A cynical view can result from these shifts in leadership, because what motivation does a teacher have to change when he / she recognizes that any innovation they adopt will be overhauled with the next leader. This “wait and see” approach to change can strengthen the conservative impulse of the organization, reinforce the school’s culture to be resistant to change, hinder future change efforts and increase challenges of future school leaders as they work to implement reform efforts. Allowing teachers to fully institutionalize major and worthy initiatives may support and in many ways validate the strides and work teachers have made towards an innovation, while strengthening the capacity of the school to implement future innovations.

Limitations

This study highlights how two schools have moved towards collaborative cultures in the context of the flexible schedule. Even though the schools were selected to find similar change conditions, each school was unique in varied and important ways. Mountain Creek was a relatively new school while Oakwood had a much longer history of being an active member of its community. Oakwood was also much larger than Mountain Creek, which could have impacted how the teachers at the respective schools conceptualized the innovation. Even though Mountain Creek was smaller, teachers at the school were expected
to fulfill the same duties and serve on the same committees as much larger schools. These
time constraints might have directly influenced how the smaller school focused on their
reconstruction of planning time. The comparisons between schools might not take into
account the specific histories, political pressure, school climate, and cultural contexts of the
individual school sites and the individual teachers that underlie opinions and mental models
of the teachers. The scope of the research did not delve completely into these areas that could
directly impact teacher opinion and school culture. Also Mountain Creek and Oakwood were
not implementing the flexible schedule at the same time. Mountain Creek had used the
schedule over the last few years, whereas Oakwood had only implemented the schedule
during the previous year. Although both schools were implementing common planning
structures for the first time, the timing of the flexible schedule implementation might have
created a different change context then at Oakwood where the schedule was relatively new.

While these schools provided rich sources of information, every teacher in both
schools working with these changes was not interviewed or observed in the context of the
innovation. The researcher selected the schools and teams within the school in order to paint
a clear picture, but limiting the pool of participants could also limit perspectives and give
weight to an opinion or viewpoint not shared by the staff as a whole. Teachers were selected
based upon being employed at their schools prior to the implementation of the common
planning structures. Because of teacher turnover, many teachers were not able to participate
in the study. The teachers participating in the study could have been more diverse in terms of
their career cycles. None of the teachers were first year teachers and only a few teachers
were seasoned veterans. Most teachers ranged from 3 years of experience to 15 years of
experience. As Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) noted, teachers at each stage of the
career cycle have different needs than teachers in other stages. More teachers being included in the research might have deepened the perspectives on the change process garnered by the research.

As an insider of the school system during the duration of the study, my presence may have influenced both the interviews as well as the observations. The study worked under the assumption that data found in the interviews and the observations were truthful. However, my position in the school system might have biased conversations and observations in order to tell me what I wanted to hear instead of how they truly perceived the events. I worked closely with many teachers in my role with the school system and those professional and personal relationships might have skewed their perception of my study as well as my perception of the schools.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Change is not an event, but a process that develops over time and this study only provided a snap shot of the change process. This snapshot highlights aspects of change such as the importance of meaning making throughout the change process and the need for ongoing staff development to equip teachers with the skills necessary to build successful collaborative structures and relationships within the school. However, the study does not provide a longitudinal approach that traces the development of collaborative structures and cultures over a number of years, through a number of change initiatives, through teacher turnover, or through the impact of leadership change. Tracing collaborative cultures through these events in the life of a school can provide great insight into the importance of a collaborative culture and highlight how a collaborative culture assimilates new change initiatives and supports teachers in adjusting to and learning how to incorporate new
innovations, regardless of teacher turnover or leadership turnover. While research (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves et al., 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998) discusses the importance of collaboration in building communities of learning that strengthen the organization’s capacity to handle change, more study is needed in how this capacity is developed over a number of years with multiple change innovations and personnel. This longitudinal view can create a context in which the multifaceted and complex processes involved in change can be viewed in light of strong collaborative cultures.

Change appears to be a reoccurring theme among all levels of schooling and education. Gaining a greater understanding of the change process may help school leaders as they make decisions for new innovations and initiatives within their schools. Fullan (2001) notes that change occurs at the individual level and that change is as simple and as complex as how teachers understand and implement innovations. However, it has been my educational experience that school leaders vastly underestimate the role of the teacher in the change process even while many understand that buy-in from teachers is important. This apparent contradiction still causes complications in the change process that make implementation and continuation much more challenging. Understanding how teachers become involved in the change process helps to provide a clearer picture as to the power of teacher involvement and its role in successfully implementing and institutionalizing innovations. For studies such as this one that are examining teacher participation at multiple school sites, it is important to more systematically select schools that used different approaches to involving teachers throughout change process. While one school was classified as high implementation and the other defined as low implementation, both schools exhibited assertive leadership to bring about the change. By selecting schools that involved
teachers through building local capacity as well as assertive leadership, research may be more apt to highlight differences by comparing and contrasting how the teachers were involved in the process.

Change is a learning process for all of those involved: students, teachers, principals, and district leaders (Fullan, 2001). Set backs, bumps in the road, conflicts, and challenges should not be seen as evidence that the change process was managed unsuccessfully or that the change is doomed to failure. In fact they should be seen as a natural by-product of real reform (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). However, as schools move forward in the 21st century and face the challenges found in a global economy, leaders must be more adept in building the capacity of teachers in order to handle the changes of an ever-increasing complex and fast paced world.
APPENDIX A
INITIAL INTERVIEWS

Teachers

1) Define flexible scheduling at your school.

2) Why did your school go to flexible scheduling?

3) Describe the process through which your school adopted the flexible schedule?
   a. How were you involved?
   b. What conversations were held around flexible scheduling?

4) What are the benefits of moving to flexible scheduling?
   a. What are the drawbacks?

5) Describe how common planning is used at your school
   a. How often? How long?
   b. Who meets during this time?

6) How does your team use the common planning time?
   a. Administrative meeting?
   b. Best instructional practices?

7) What impact has the flexible scheduling had on your teaching?

8) What would you like to add about the flexible schedule that I haven’t asked?
Principals

1) Define flexible scheduling at your school.

2) Why did your school move to flexible scheduling?

3) Describe the process through which your school adopted flexible scheduling.
   a. How did you involve your faculty?
   b. What support did you provide for them?

4) How did you communicate the change to your school community?

5) How is common planning used at your school?
   a. Is there a school-wide schedule?
   b. What are your expectations for the common planning time?

6) Is there anything you would like to add about flexible scheduling that I haven’t asked?
Central Office Personnel

1) Why are schools moving to the flexible schedule?

2) Describe the process through which schools began to use flexible scheduling.
   a. Who was primarily involved?
   b. How were they involved?
   c. What role did you play?

3) How have you defined the change for the district?

4) What is the current state of flexible scheduling in the system?
   a. Do you expect it to change?

5) How do you expect flexible scheduling to impact the system?

6) Is there anything about flexible scheduling that you would like to add?
APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teachers

1) Last time you mentioned that you felt _____ about your flexible schedule. Has that changed?

2) Has your opinion of common planning times changed since we last talked?
   a. Do you feel more positive about the times?

3) How has your team’s use of the time changed?
   a. Do you feel as if you are more productive, less productive or the same?

4) What are the benefits of moving to flexible scheduling?
   a. What are the drawbacks?

5) What impact has the flexible scheduling (common planning) had on your teaching?

6) What would you like to add about the flexible schedule that I haven’t asked?
Principals

1) Define flexible scheduling at your school.

2) How have your teachers been using the common planning time since our last interview?
   a. Are they more productive? How do you know?
   b. What is the general attitude regarding the common planning times?

3) How have you supported the teams during this time?

4) How is common planning used at your school?
   a. Is there a school-wide schedule?
   b. What are your expectations for the common planning time?

5) Is there anything you would like to add about flexible scheduling that I haven’t asked?
APPENDIX C

OBERVATION PROTOCOL

Participation and Decision-Making

Who attends?

Who is talking?

What brainstorming is taking place?

How do the participants handle disagreement?

How much content talk is taking place?

Success/Failure Messages and Stories

How do they express competence?

How are stories used by the group?
REFERENCES


