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Central Office Leadership and Literacy Reform

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University of Connecticut, 2013

This study explored the leadership roles of a school district's, Memorial Public Schools, central office in literacy reform as related to five areas of a theoretical frame that included: (a) activities related to bringing a coherent focus on the reform effort within the instructional core; (b) activities related to developing the instructional leadership necessary to carry out the reform effort; (c) activities related to professional learning necessary to build the capacity of teachers to implement the reform; (d) activities related to ensuring that the reform initiative provided equitable educational access for students; and (e) activities related to developing and implementing the policies to support the reform effort. The study used interpretive qualitative methods (Cresswell, 2006; Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; Merriam et al, 2001) in order to describe the complex inter-relationships involved among the data sources (e.g., interview data, an equity audit, district documents, and a reflective journal). The unit of analysis for this study was the activities of the central office leaders (Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Director of Elementary Education and PK – 5 Language Arts Consultant) as they related to implementing the literacy reform effort in the five areas of the theoretical frame. Analysis revealed (a) 45% of the research-based principles were followed, and (b) 55% of the research-based principles were either somewhat followed (25%) or not followed (30%) by Memorial's central office administrators. Accordingly, the lack of follow-through on these research principles appeared to have an impact in that the school district did not fully realize the level of change it desired by implementing Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) in all elementary schools.

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Results revealed that over the six-year period following the reform, scores on the Developmental

Reading Assessment 2 had improved while the Connecticut Mastery Test results remained

mostly flat and declined in some schools. Recommendations include specific steps related to the

role of the central office in curriculum alignment reform focused on the instructional core.

Central Office Leadership and Literacy Reform

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Central Office Leadership and Literacy Reform

Many school districts have participated in numerous rounds of education reform in the past few decades, yet few have made headway on improving achievement for all students (Hightower, 2002; Honig, 2006; Anderson, 2003). In a study of reforms within the Chicago Public Schools, for example, Luppescu et al (2011) found disappointing results on measures of student achievement (e.g., average reading scores for nine to fourteen year olds were relatively flat over a twenty-year period).

In response to a growing interest on improving achievement for all students, researchers are exploring ways to improve students' achievement. One line of research focuses on the leadership roles of a school district's central office (Childress et al, 2007; Marsh et al, 2005; Elmore, 1993). Specifically, Honig et al (2010) found that when central office leaders were successful in improving teaching and learning within schools they focused their work on developing schools' capacity for high-quality teaching and expanding students' opportunities to learn.

According to this line of research, a central office can play a key leadership role in school reform by bringing a coherent focus throughout an entire school system on improving student achievement (Hightower et al, 2002; Childress et al, 2007; Cuban 1994). Childress, Elmore, and Grossman (2006), for example, found that when a central office successfully influenced gains in student achievement, the work of the central office focused on the instructional core, (i.e., the interactions in a classroom between teachers, students, and content) by, (a) increasing teachers' skills and knowledge and (b) ensuring that the curriculum challenged students academically. Although studies by Honig et al (2010), Marsh et al (2005), Elmore (1993), and Childress (2009), provide general examples of how a central office can work to support district-wide

reform efforts, according to Hightower et al (2002), a gap still exists in the literature related to the specific ways a central office can lead and support district-wide improvement efforts that are focused on the instructional core in a way that results in improved achievement for all students.

Description of Problem

At a press conference on December 8, 2010 on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, stated that the latest PISA results represented a sobering report on the performance of American students relative to their peers in other countries. The scores of 15 year old students from throughout the world on the international test of reading, math, and science showed that during a time of rising global demand for highly educated workers, (a) students in the United States were merely "average performers" and (b) the achievement levels of U.S. students had stagnated (e.g., there had been no improvement in reading scores since 2000) (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009).

Likewise, student achievement results for Connecticut students have stagnated over the last six years. Since 2006, student scores on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) have shown little growth. From grades three through eight, the percentage of students who scored at or above goal increased by only 6.1% in reading, only 2.7 % in writing and only 10.3% in mathematics. Accordingly, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) ranked Connecticut 29th among 50 states in its 2011 Report Card on American Education. Furthermore, ALEC's grade for Connecticut's education reform efforts was a "C" based on their assessment of Connecticut's levels of accountability, teacher quality, flexibility, innovation, and parent choice. In addition to an overall plateau of student achievement scores, Connecticut also has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation between African American students (e.g., average scale score of

220 out of 500 in mathematics) and White students (e.g., average scale score of 252 out of 500 in mathematics) as reported by the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The statewide results in Connecticut are replicated in local districts. For example, despite attempts at school reform within the Memorial Public School District, student achievement has shown little improvement over the past six years in grades three through five.[1] From 2006-2011, the percentage of students in grades three through five who have achieved a "goal" score on the CMT has increased by only 1% in reading and only 1.6% in writing. In many cases, the range of results varies greatly among elementary schools in the district. For example among schools in the district, 3rd grade reading achievement results range from 49% to 90% at/above goal; 4th grade reading achievement results range from 44% to 93% at/above goal; and 5th grade reading achievement results range from 46% to 92% at/above goal. During this same six-year period, Memorial Public Schools implemented a literacy reform effort in all its elementary schools. The results of this reform yielded inconsistent gains in student performance from year to year in its elementary schools with little overall growth in reading during the six-year period.[1]

The problem this study addresses relates to the stagnant achievement levels that exist among students in a district such as Memorial Public Schools. This study is designed to explore the leadership roles of a school district's central office in integrating the five frames of research outlined in Figure 1 (page 5) in its efforts to improve achievement for all students.

Theoretical Framework

As outlined in Figure 1 (page 5) the central office of a school district can play key leadership roles in improving achievement for all students by: (a) helping principals and teachers maintain a sharp focus on the instructional core throughout the district (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006; Childress et al, 2007; Hightower, 2002; Leithwood et al, 2004; Honig et al, 2010); (b)

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[1] A full description of the situation in Memorial Public Schools is provided in the methods section.

providing appropriate support to develop instructional leaders (Hightower, 2002; King & Newmann, 2001; Honig et al, 2010); (c) designing professional learning programs in line with principles of how adults learn best (Eckert & Bell, 2005; Kolb, 1984; Sheckley, Lemons, Kehrhahn & Grenier, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2000); (d) providing for equitable educational access for all students (Childress, 2009; Gerring, 2005; Payzant, 2005; Noguera & Wing, 2006); and (e) developing and implementing policies to support a district's efforts for improving student achievement (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006; Childress et al, 2007).

Instructional Core

A school district's central office can play a key role in improving achievement for all students through strong leadership that helps principals and teachers maintain a sharp focus on the instructional core (Childress et al, 2007; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Honig et al, 2010). The instructional core is the interaction between teachers and students around content (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Elmore, 2000). Elmore (2000) further indicates that the coherence of the instructional core can be strengthened and performance for all students can be improved by: (a) increasing teachers' knowledge and skills; (b) improving the content that students are taught; and (c) altering teacher-to-student, student-to-content, and teacher-to-content relationships. Related research indicates that central office administrators can increase a district-wide focus on the instructional core when they establish a common vision for improved student learning (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006), provide the conditions and incentives to focus on teaching and learning (Leithwood et al, 2004), and provide district resources for instructional priorities (Hightower, 2002).

Figure 1. Key Areas of Focus for Central Office Leaders in Improving Achievement for All

Students[2]

According to Childress, Elmore, Grossman, and King (2007) a central office can play a

strong leadership role in establishing a coherent focus on the teacher-student-content relationship

within the instructional core by (a) connecting the instructional core with a district-wide strategy

for improvement, (b) highlighting district elements that can support or hinder effective

implementation of the improvement strategy, (c) identifying interdependencies among district

elements as they relate to the strategy for improvement, and (d) recognizing forces in the

[2]Note: As an organizational frame for the discussion that follows, Figure 1 outlines key areas of focus for central office leadership. The complex inter-relationships between the factors will be discussed throughout the ensuing chapters. A full representation of the relationships will be presented in the concluding section of this document.

organization that have an impact on implementation of the improvement strategy. By following these guidelines to instill a coherent improvement strategy throughout all schools, according to the authors, a central office can maintain a strong focus on improving achievement for all students in the face of competing priorities and demands from multiple constituencies at the local, state and federal levels.

In support of this premise, Murphy and Hallinger's (1988) research on twelve school districts in California described how central office leaders worked to establish a coherent focus on the instructional core throughout each district. Specifically each district's culture emphasized a performance and improvement focus led by the superintendent of schools. For example, nine of twelve districts established a coherent focus on the instructional core by adopting a preferred approach to instruction that they expected all teachers to employ. Eight of the twelve districts established a coherent focus on the instructional core by establishing district-wide curricula that formed the basis of classroom instruction. Additionally, districts maintained a consistent focus on the instructional core through a selection of personnel procedures based on teaching and learning goals. For example, five of the districts in the study screened, tested and hired principals based primarily on their knowledge of the interactions between curriculum and instruction that occur within the instructional core. Murphy and Hallinger (1988) concluded that the instructional effectiveness of these twelve districts was due to (a) their focus on consistency within the instructional core and (b) the careful coordination of curriculum and instruction at the district, school and classroom levels.

Similarly, a study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation (Honig et al, 2010), summarized how central office administrators could enhance school improvement and increase student achievement for all by working to establish a consistent focus on the instructional core

throughout the district. The study found that districts developed a deliberate coherence of the instructional core when they reorganized and re-cultured central office units to focus on central office – principal partnerships. For example, the Human Resources Department in Atlanta Public Schools transformed from a unit that mainly specialized in the hiring process to a unit that provided principals with human resource solutions to the challenges they faced in improving teaching and enhancing learning for all students. Additionally, according to this study, school districts maintained a focus on the instructional core when central office leaders shaped their theory of action based on the feedback and needs as communicated by schools. In school districts in both New York and Atlanta, this partnership approach established the basic function of the central office as service to schools in order to improve teaching and learning. Honig, et al (2010) also found that a key role of the central office in ensuring a focus on the instructional core was to continually use evidence about the instructional core in order to support improvement of work practices and relationships with schools. This study found that central office administrators routinely used evidence obtained from principals about the district's work with schools to make decisions about future work on the instructional core. In summary, Honig, et al (2010) concluded that districts generally do not accomplish district-wide improvements in teaching and learning without a substantial engagement of their central office staff that is directed toward (a) maintaining a consistent focus on the instructional core and (b) helping schools build their capacity for improvement.

As related to this study, the research reviewed in this section highlights a key leadership role for a central office in establishing a district-wide, coherent focus on the instructional core to address the problem of improving achievement for all students. To address the issues related to stagnant achievement levels within school districts, this study extended the research reviewed in

this section by exploring how the central office leaders in Memorial Public Schools followed, or did not follow, the key findings of the research reviewed in this section (i.e., maintain a coherent focus on the instructional core) as they worked to help principals and staff implement literacy reform within the district's elementary schools.

Instructional Leadership

Among the many forms of leadership provided by a district office such as professional development leadership (Spillane & Thompson, 1997), curriculum and instruction leadership (MacIver & Farleey-Ripple, 2008), financial resources leadership (Price, Ball and Luks, 1995), and political leadership (Supovitz, 2006) a shared effort on the part of the central office to improve instructional leadership at all levels of the district can have a powerful influence in improving achievement for all students (Marsh et al, 2005; Hightower et al, 2002; Honig et al, 2010; Louis et al, 2010). This line of research indicates that a district's focus on developing school principals as instructional leaders is often related to improvements in student achievement.

In a study of three urban school districts, Marsh et al (2005) identified four key areas of central office focus that yielded instructional improvement, one of which was supporting instructional leadership. Through site visits, interviews with teachers and leaders, documents review, staff surveys, and student achievement analysis, Marsh et al (2005) identified specific actions taken by a central office to improve instructional leadership including: professional development seminars, instructionally focused principal meetings, district-based preparation programs for principals and instructionally focused supervision of principals. According to Marsh et al (2005), as a result of these activities the principals involved (a) became more knowledgeable about instruction, (b) provided support to teachers, (c) conducted classroom

observations, (d) emphasized instruction during staff meetings and (e) reviewed student work and data. In this study of three urban school districts, Marsh et al (2005) concluded that the capacity, knowledge, and skills of central office administrators greatly influenced the development of instructional leaders throughout the district. In turn, the development of building-level instructional leaders improved the districts' abilities to build coherence within the instructional core and to implement instructional improvement strategies consistently across schools.

Hightower et al (2002) described how the Superintendent of Schools of New York City District #2, Anthony Alvarado, established structures to develop principals as instructional leaders who provided support to teachers who were struggling to improve their instructional practice. Specifically, as outlined in the study, principals who became effective instructional leaders: (a) developed and maintained long-term, professional learning networks for teachers; (b) provided teachers with opportunities for continuous reflection and refinement of practice in communal settings; (c) deployed resources that teachers could use to advance a coherent reform agenda; and (d) challenged teachers to use assessment tools to diagnose student learning and, based on this assessment, adjust their instruction to help students achieve rigorous curriculum (Hightower, 2002). According to Elmore and Burney (1997), this focus on developing instructional leadership helped to transform District #2 from an average performing district to one of the highest performing elementary school districts in New York City. When Alvarado took this strategy of developing principals as strong instructional leaders from New York to San Diego, similar results occurred: SAT-9 scores increased three years in a row, 21 more schools scored at or above the state average, and the district raised expectations for all students by aspiring to test more low performing students rather than having them waive out of the test

(Hightower, 2002).

In a related line of research Louis et al (2010) found that a central office can become more effective in fostering instructional improvements and in advancing student achievement by re-culturing itself to focus less on administration and more on supporting principals to improve instruction so that achievement can improve for all students. In turn according to Louis et al (2010), as principals improved their instructional leadership a strong relationship was evident that linked improvement in building level leadership and improvements in students' achievement. Specifically in exploring the relationships between leadership, teacher capacity, motivation, work setting and student achievement they found that these four factors explained 20% of the variation in student achievement. Of particular interest was the solid relationship between leadership and teachers' reports of a positive work setting ($r = .58$), teacher's instructional capacity ($r = .36$) and motivation ($r = .25$). As these four factors increased so did student achievement ($r = .44$) (Louis et al, 2010).

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) also found a strong relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement. In a meta-analysis of studies related to principal leadership and student achievement, Marzano et al (2005) reported that a moderate relationship existed between principals' leadership and student achievement ($ES_r = .25$).

In another related study, Honig et al (2010) summarized how central office administrators could enhance school improvement and increase student achievement for all learners by working to develop instructional leaders who focused on the instructional core. The study found that when central office leaders concentrated on developing learning-focused partnerships with school principals this effort resulted in principals developing a deeper understanding of instructional leadership practices related to improving teaching and learning. This central office

focus was particularly effective when principals learned how to work intensively with their teachers in and out of the classroom to critically examine and strengthen the quality of (a) their teaching practice and (b) student work. The learning-focused practices utilized by central office leaders identified in this study included (a) differentiating support for principals, (b) modeling ways of thinking and acting that reflected desirable instructional leadership practices, (c) developing and using tools, and (d) tapping all principals in a network as resources for each other around their instructional leadership practice.

As related to this study, the research on developing strong instructional leaders suggests that a leadership strategy on the part of the central office to advance the development of instructional leaders around the instructional core throughout the district may have a strong impact on bringing about improved achievement for all students. To address the issues related to stagnant achievement levels within school districts, this study extended the research reviewed in this section by exploring how the central office leaders in Memorial Public Schools followed, or did not follow, the key findings of this research in helping principals become instructional leaders of the literacy reform efforts in their respective elementary schools.

Adult Learning

A school district's central office can play a key leadership role in improving achievement for all students by designing professional learning programs that: (a) focus on helping adults expand the mental models they use to guide their practice (Eckert & Bell, 2005); (b) involve learning from experience (Kolb, 1984); (c) engage participants in on-going cycles of learning (Sheckley, Lemons, Kehrhahn & Grenier, 2008); and (d) help adults self-regulate their learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Specifically, according to Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) professional learning initiatives are most effective when they (a) engage teachers in deliberate

practice, (b) immerse teachers in activities that allow them to build on their current knowledge, (c) provide teachers with immediate feedback on their learning, (d) involve learners in guided practice, (e) provide teachers with opportunities for independent practice, (f) allow teachers to experiment with new ideas, and (g) encourage teachers to collaborate with other teachers in reflective dialogues.

Saylor and Kehrhahn (2003) showed how these principles could be used to guide system-wide professional development efforts in a way that led to improvements in teachers' instructional practice. In their research, Saylor and Kehrhahn studied the work of a district whose goal was to have all teachers become technologically literate within a three-year period. Guided by principles of how adults learn best (Sheckley et al, 2008), the middle school in the district devised an on-going professional development plan of formal programs, informal activities, and related supports that promoted learning about, practicing with, and applying instructional technologies. Three years after the start of the project, the implementation rate at the middle school was impressive: 79% of teachers used instructional technologies on a regular basis.

Research conducted in Montgomery Public Schools (Sharratt & Fullan, 2005) compared the relationship between two approaches to professional development and increases in student achievement. In one group, teachers and administrators participated in workshop sessions, applied ideas between sessions, and built ideas covered in the sessions into everyday practice. In the comparison group, participants only attended workshop sessions. The results indicated that student achievement improved at a greater rate when educators engaged in a learning process that involved using and applying information that they learned in the workshop sessions. For example, there was a 6% gain in the number of third grade students who met the standard in

reading for those schools whose educators engaged in the learning by doing and building on knowledge process compared to a 2% gain in the number of third grade students where educators did not engage in this professional learning process.

As related to the problem this study addresses, the research on adult learning points to the leadership role of a central office in designing professional learning programs in line with principles of how adults learn best in order to bring about improved achievement for all students. To further clarify the issues related to stagnant achievement levels within school districts, this study extended the research reviewed in this section by exploring how the central office leaders in Memorial Public Schools followed, or did not follow, the key findings of this research in structuring professional learning opportunities for teachers to implement the literacy reform initiative.

Educational Access for All Students

A school district's central office can play a key leadership role in improving achievement for all students by ensuring equitable educational access for all students by: (a) establishing expectations of high levels of achievement for all learners devoid of any excuses for particular groups of students (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988); (b) developing a district-wide focused strategy to improve teaching and learning (Gerring, 2005); (c) implementing common, rigorous standards (Childress, 2009); and (d) providing coherent, systematic professional development for teachers (Payzant, 2005). This line of research suggests when central office leaders focus on providing equitable opportunities for all students – especially those groups of students with lower academic achievement – through sustained, systemic, and evidence-based interventions, then achievement improves for all students within a district.

In a study of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Childress (2009) demonstrated how a central office's focus on providing equitable educational opportunities for all students over a five year period led to steady gains within the top quartile of students and more rapid gains among students in the lowest quartile. In this project, the central office played a key leadership role. First, with a focus on the instructional core, the central office provided leadership to (a) implement a set of common, rigorous instructional standards that were higher than the state requirements, (b) support the use of differentiated instruction throughout the district and (c) provide the resources to support this reform effort. Second, the central office employed "value chain thinking" to the design of the entire K-12 continuum (i.e., they ensured that each activity within the curriculum added value in a chain of events that would culminate in college readiness for all students). Third, as a result of central office leaders blurring the lines between key stakeholders in the system (e.g., school board, leadership team, principals, teachers and parents), multiple groups felt responsible for the district's success. Fourth, the central office leadership created systems and structures within the instructional core that required all individuals to behave as if every student could master rigorous content, whether they believed it or not. Fifth, the central office leadership created an accountability system that included specific goals for students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to counter expectations about students that may have limited their achievement. Finally, the central office led for equity. The superintendent saw his leadership task as mobilizing the entire community to create excellence and equity for all students. He helped build the capacity of staff to effectively deliver a high-quality education to every child.

Kansas City Public Schools also realized gains in student achievement through a similar set of strategies adopted by the central office (Gerring, 2005). The reform journey in this district

started when the central office led an honest and open conversation among key stakeholders in the district (e.g., teachers, administrators, parents, board of education members, community groups, and elected officials) about student achievement. The superintendent then wove ideas from the conversations along with student data into a clear plan focused on the instructional core that outlined how all stakeholders were involved in the district's reform efforts. Based on the plan, central office leaders led working sessions with all staff members on the reform principles. As a result of these sessions, central office leaders developed a common language for the reform and a sense of collective responsibility for all the students in the district. The researchers also found that central office leaders worked with school principals to build their capacity in order to lead the reform effort within each school, and in the process, ensure equitable educational access for all students. At the beginning of the reform efforts in 1996, (a) fewer than 50% of students graduated from high school and (b) student achievement rates on state and national assessments were well below average. By 2001, the graduation rate in high schools climbed to 78%, reading achievement was up at all grade levels, mathematics achievement was up in elementary and middle schools, more students were engaged in school, and there were better relationships between students and teachers and among staff (Gerring, 2005).

As related to this study, the research on the leadership role of the central office on ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students indicates the important role central office leadership has in improving the academic achievement of all students within a district. To further understand the issues related to stagnant achievement levels within a district, this study extended the research reviewed in this section by focusing on how central office leaders in Memorial Public Schools followed, or did not follow, the key findings of the research reviewed above in order to ensure equitable educational access for all students as the district implemented

the literacy reform effort in its elementary schools.

Policy

A school district's central office can play a key leadership role in improving achievement for all students by developing and implementing a district's policy for improving student learning. Datnow's (2006) research on comprehensive school reform models confirms earlier work conducted by Elmore (1993), Corcoran, Fuhrman and Belcher (2001), and Hargreaves and Fink (2003). This line of research indicated that across multiple schools in different locations and different circumstances a central office had a complex and challenging role in designing and implementing policies related to reform efforts.

In his review of research studies related to the role of school districts in educational reform, Elmore (1993) found that districts typically do not use a variety of policies in a concerted way to influence teaching in schools, instead, their approach tends to be scattered, piecemeal, and, for the most part, weak in influencing teaching. Elmore found that although many districts had policies that had the potential to influence the instructional core (e.g., policies related to curriculum and instruction, testing, curriculum objectives and guides, textbook selection, allocation of time to subject matter and teacher training) these districts lacked a strategy to implement the policies in a way that led to effective reform efforts across all schools.

In a study of three large school districts, ranging in enrollment from 50,000 to 200,000, Corcoran, Furhman, and Belcher (2001) found that despite serious efforts to build a culture within the central office and schools that embraced the use of evidence to inform reform policy, the three districts did not implement these policy initiatives across all schools. Numerous factors hampered the efforts of these districts to implement policies including inadequacy of research evidence related to the policy, difficulties in accessing evidence to support the policy, and

difficulty in making sense of the research evidence if it was obtained. Most importantly, the researchers found that district and school staff members were reluctant to adopt new policies for educational reform because these policies would require them to put aside old patterns of decision making that focused on a preferred philosophy or on a belief about the goodness of an option rather than its effectiveness. The key leaders of the three districts agreed that major cultural changes in their organizations would need to occur before school policies related to educational reform efforts could be implemented within their districts.

Hargreaves and Fink (2003) studied the sustainability of school reform policies in Canada and New York State. According to their research, four factors helped to sustain policies related to educational reform: (a) the policy established improvements that focused on changes in teaching and learning; (b) the policy was supported by adequate resources; (c) the improvements contained in the policy did not impact negatively on the surrounding environment of other schools or systems; and (d) improvements advocated by the policy promoted diversity and built capacity throughout the entire educational community. From their study, Hargreaves and Fink (2003) concluded that leaders in a central office who followed these four principles could help to implement policies in a way that sustained educational reform.

Based on her work within thirteen elementary schools in a large urban area in the United States, Datnow (2005) identified four principles that were related to the implementation of policies on educational reform: (a) central office leaders supported reform policies despite increasing state demands; (b) central office leaders developed vertical alignment from the district level to the classroom level related to reform policies; (c) central office leaders provided the necessary resources to support reform policies; and (d) central office leaders built the capacity of instructional leaders and teachers to implement the policies. Datnow (2005) found that when

central office leaders used the four principles to guide reform policy that they were important midlevel policy actors in the implementation chain. Most critically, her research found that central office leaders played a strong role in the design of reform when the policy was successfully implemented consistently in all classrooms in a district.

As related to this study, the research on education policy points to the role of the central office in developing, implementing and supporting reform policies that will sustain improved learning for all students. To further clarify the issues related to stagnant achievement levels within a district, this study extended the research reviewed in this section by exploring how central office leadership in Memorial Public Schools followed, or did not follow, the key findings of this research in focusing on the principles of reform policy as related to the implementation of literacy initiatives in the district's elementary schools.

Research Questions

According to multiple sources of data, in a district where over a six-year period (a) student achievement in literacy was stagnant and (b) a district-wide literacy reform effort was implemented:

1. In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on establishing a coherent focus within the instructional core?

2. In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on working with leaders in the district to improve their effectiveness as instructional leaders?

3. In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on how adults

learn best?

4. In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform

    related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on ensuring

    equitable access to learning opportunities for all students?

5. In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform

    related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on implementing

    policies effectively?

Methods

This section explains the methods and procedures that were used to answer the research

questions that guided this study. Specifically, this section (a) describes the district, Memorial

Public Schools, where this study occurred, (b) summarizes the literacy reform process, and (c)

details the efforts of the central office leadership in implementing the reform. The section also

describes the data sources used, the data analyses, threats to credibility and trustworthiness, and a

statement of objectivity.

Setting

The town of Memorial is considered to be a bedroom community of a large metropolitan

area in the United States. According to the United States Census 2010, the town had a

population of 59,404 people with 15,095 (25%) between the ages of 0-17. The median

household income in Memorial was $83,512 with only 2.9% of the population living below the

poverty level. In 2006, Memorial was identified by a prominent, national publication as one of

the best places to live in the United States and one of the top communities in the Northeast . The

article indicated that Memorial was a draw for young families because it had good schools, city

amenities and reasonably priced homes near a large metropolitan city.

The Memorial Public School District on most academic and non-academic measures is considered a high achieving school district. The state of Connecticut categorizes its school districts into District Reference Groups (DRG) A through I with the most affluent and low-need districts grouped in DRG A and the poorest and highest need districts grouped in DRG I. There are seven data indicators used to classify similar districts into a DRG: three indicators of socioeconomic status (median family income, parental education and parental occupation), three indicators of need (percentage of children living in families with a single parent, the percentage of public school children eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals and percentage of children whose families speak a language other than English at home) and enrollment (the number of students attending schools in that district).

Memorial Public Schools is categorized as a DRG B district. Twenty-one (12%) of the 169 school districts in Connecticut are categorized as DRG B districts. On average, DRG B districts share the following characteristics: $97,210 average median family income; 59.5% of adults have earned a four-year degree; 61.2% of adults have managerial/professional occupations; 3.7% of children live in poverty; and 4.6% of children have a language other than English spoken at home.

The Memorial Public School District consists of eleven elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. The student demographics of the eleven elementary schools within the district vary greatly. The demographic profiles for nine of the elementary schools include mostly White students (86% or more of the students) with fewer than 5% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. In contrast, the demographic profiles of the other two elementary schools are markedly different. Although the majority of students are White (57% and 76% respectively) in comparison to the other nine schools, there are more students in these

two schools receiving free or reduced lunch (35% and 15%, respectively).

A central office team of eight administrators oversees the Memorial Public Schools. This team consists of the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Director of Special Education, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Director of Elementary Education, Director of Operations and Director of Finance. Seven of the positions on this team report directly to the Superintendent.

Connecticut Mastery Test Data: 2006-2011. On average, students in the Memorial elementary schools demonstrate high levels of achievement on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and local district assessments. Despite high student performance, overall achievement in reading is stagnant and in some cases is on the decline. Table 1 outlines the percentage of Memorial Public Schools' students who achieved at/above goal reading scores on the CMT in grades three through five from 2006-2011. As outlined in Table 1 the overall impact on student achievement after six years of reform resulted in: (a) third grade reading scores were about 1.8% lower in 2011 than they were five years prior in 2006; (b) fourth grade reading scores improved by only 1.5%; and (c) fifth grade reading scores improved by only 2.0%.

Table 1

Connecticut Mastery Test Scores for Memorial Public Schools 2006-2011: Percentage of Students Scoring Goal and Advanced

District – Reading	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Grade 3	78.2	69.2	75.7	73.0	76.2	76.4
Grade 4	79.1	75.7	76.6	78.5	78.7	80.6
Grade 5	77.4	76.8	80.2	82.4	77.6	79.4

Additionally, there was variation in the achievement scores within the grades (see Appendix A for individual school scores). In third grade, reading scores declined in all but one elementary school in 2007. The range of results varied greatly. For example, 3rd grade reading

achievement results ranged from 46.3% of students at/above goal (in School E in 2007) to 91.7% of students at/above goal (in School K in 2007).

Similarly, scores in grades 4 and 5 followed a roller coaster pattern over this same six-year period. There was a decline in overall fourth grade reading scores in seven of the eleven elementary schools in 2011 compared to scores in 2006. There were schools that also experienced steady decline over a period of time with no improvements (Schools E, F and H). In grade 5 in 2011, the range between the highest performing school (90% at School A) and the lowest performing school (63.8% at School E) was 26.2%. The CMT reading results also showed the varied effectiveness of the literacy reform effort started in Schools C and E (2002 and 2005 respectively) that initiated the district-wide reform. Although School C demonstrated marked improvement in fourth grade, third and fifth grades showed little overall growth. In contrast, School E was identified in 2008 as "in need of improvement" in reading under No Child Left Behind. After four years of literacy reform, 58% of students were at/above goal in reading in 2002 compared to 46.8% of students at/above goal in reading in 2006 in School E. Scores in School C also declined from 60% of students at/above goal in reading in 2004 compared to 57.4% of students at/above goal in reading in 2006.

The Central Office and Literacy Reform: 2002-2005. As outlined in Table 2 (next page), the Memorial Central Office team initiated a literacy reform in 2002. Due to a number of factors however, the literacy reform floundered over the first four years.

The process began well in 2002 with the hiring of a new K-6 Language Arts Curriculum Leader. The new K-6 Language Arts Curriculum Leader started the reform effort by implementing Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) in elementary School E. The principal of School E, a champion of the reform effort, endorsed the initiative fully.

Table 2

Timeline of Central Office Roles, Literacy Reform Efforts, and CMT Reading Scores

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*	2007*	2008*	2009*	2010*	2011*	2012
Interim Superintendent	Superintendent A									Superintendent B	
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Position became	Deputy Superintendent A (new position) →	Deputy Superintendent B						Deputy Superintendent B position becomes .45 FTE			Deputy Superintendent C (restored to 1.0 FTE)
				Director of School & Program Improvement (new position) Position became →	Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (new position)						
Director of K-8 Education (position became) →	Assistant Superintendent for Administration (new position)	*Position Vacant*						Director of Elementary Education			
K-6 Language Arts Leader	Position Vacant	New Curriculum Leader for K-6 Language Arts			Interim Curriculum Leader for K-6 Language Arts			New Curriculum Leader for PK-5 Language Arts			
		Readers Workshop in one school			Readers Workshop in two schools	Readers Workshop in eleven schools					

* The years 2006 – 2011 represent the focus of this study.

Three years passed, however, before this reform effort was expanded to a second school, elementary School C. The principal of School C, another champion of the reform effort, also gave solid endorsement to the initiative. The K-6 Language Arts Curriculum Leader worked

with Teachers' College of Columbia University to facilitate the training of teachers at the two schools and to provide support for teachers as they worked to implement the Readers' Workshop model (Calkins, 2000). As outlined earlier, despite these efforts the literacy reform resulted in little improvement in student achievement at those two schools. After four years of reform, literacy scores declined - 58% of students were at/above goal in reading in 2002 compared to 46.8% of students at/above goal in reading in 2006 in School E. Scores in School C also declined from 60% of students at/above goal in reading in 2004 to 57.4% of students at/above goal in reading in 2006.

Over these few years, many factors contributed to the ineffective results achieved by the literacy reform effort. For example, in Schools C and E, curriculum was written and shared with teachers only days before implementation was expected, school-based literacy leaders grappled with the new instructional methods, and fidelity of implementation varied across classrooms. As Schools C and E worked to implement Readers Workshop, a potpourri of literacy efforts (e.g., basal reader programs) was used at other elementary schools in the district.

During this four year period, as outlined in Table 2, many factors contributed to the spotty implementation of the literacy reform: (a) the retirement of one superintendent and the hiring of a new superintendent in 2002; (b) changes in the central office made by the new superintendent (e.g., changing the Director of K-8 Education position into the Assistant Superintendent for Administration); and (c) lack of leadership for the literacy reform from the central office.

The Central Office and Literacy Reform: 2006-2012. In 2006, the K-6 Language Arts Curriculum Leader was replaced with a two-year interim Curriculum Leader. At the same time, the literacy reform effort was rolled out to all schools in the form of large-scale professional development for approximately 250 K-5 teachers across eleven schools. The thirteen Language

Arts Consultants who were to lead the reform effort at each school were learning about the Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) alongside classroom teachers. A consultant from outside of the district was hired to provide continuous support for implementation of the Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) in all schools.

From 2006-2008 massive changes occurred in the K-5 Language Arts curriculum, instructional model and assessment practices. For example, thousands of books were purchased to add resources to classroom based libraries, the Developmental Reading Assessment-2 was given three times to all K-5 students, and scripted units of study were written and expected to be implemented in all elementary schools across the district. As will be discussed more fully in the data analysis section that follows, these efforts yielded limited improvements in students' literacy skills.

In 2008, the reform effort was revitalized with the hiring of a permanent PK-5 Language Arts Curriculum Leader. This administrative change was augmented with additional administrative changes in the form of a new Superintendent (2010), Deputy Superintendent (2011), Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (2006), and Director of Elementary Education (2008). Together these new hires brought a sharp focus to the reform effort in terms of commitments from the Superintendent (e.g., additional staffing hired to support literacy reform in each elementary school), Director of Curriculum (e.g., equitable professional development opportunities for all schools), and Director of Elementary Education (e.g., capacity building of principals around instructional core on literacy reform). To underscore his support of literacy reform efforts in 2011, during a difficult economic climate, the Superintendent budgeted for additional Language Arts staff and resources for each elementary school. These new initiatives will be discussed more fully in the data analysis section that follows.

Data Sources

The data collection process focused on the period from 2006 to 2011 because this period coincided with the implementation of the literacy reform effort in all schools, the hiring of the new Language Arts Curriculum Leader and my tenure within the district's central office. This period also represented a time of concentrated improvement efforts within the district under the leadership of a new Superintendent and reconstructed central office.

Interviews. The first source of interview data was from the four interviews conducted during my course on leadership (see Appendix C for the Interview Consent Form and Appendix D for the Interview Protocol). These interviews were conducted with a middle school principal, a high school principal, a central office administrator and an administrator in a regional administrators' association. Interviewees provided their perspectives on (a) the district's vision and goals as outlined by the district's leadership team; (b) the district leadership team's role in developing instructional leaders; (c) the district's reform policies and practices; and (d) the district leadership team's support for school improvement.

The second source of interview data was from three other interviews conducted during my coursework related to adult learning (see Appendix E for the Interview Consent Form and Appendix F for the Interview Protocol). The interviews were conducted with two district level administrators and a retired Connecticut Superintendent. Interviewees provided information related to: (a) motivating factors for professional learning; (b) key experiences that contribute to professional proficiency; (c) the social and physical environment conducive for professional learning; and (d) the use of mental models in the development of professional proficiency.

Equity audit. This study used data collected from an equity audit of the Memorial Public School District conducted during my coursework on Social Justice. The equity audit highlighted

student achievement results for those students who attend Memorial Public Schools from a neighboring urban school district through the Open Choice Program. This data helped inform the research question that focused on equitable access for all students.

Documents. Data were collected from several different public domain sources that spanned the years 2006-2011 including (a) the Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan 2008-2013, (b) monthly administrator meeting agendas from 2006-2011 (94 total agendas – 49 K-12 meetings and 45 elementary meetings – see Appendix B), (c) weekly central office meeting agendas 2006-2010 (160 total agendas – see Appendix B), (d) two district professional development needs assessment and survey results, (e) professional development offerings for 2006-2011, (f) a summary of evaluation forms completed by administrators who attended the annual summer retreat for school administrators, 2008-2010, (g) Language Arts Specialists' job description, (h) the new Superintendent's entry plan 2010, (i) Memorial Public Schools' Operational Audit 2010, (j) the new Superintendent's District Improvement Strategy 2010; (k) Memorial Public Schools Budget 2006-2011; (l) district organizational charts 2006-2011; (m) Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) Notebooks; (n) Memorial Public Schools Balanced Literacy documents; (o) Language Arts curriculum documents 1998 and 2012; (p) Memorial Public Schools curriculum revision cycle; (q) elementary school improvement plans 2007-2011 (55 plans); (r) Connecticut Mastery Meeting agendas; (s) Memorial Public Schools Scientifically Research-Based Interventions Handbook; (t) Memorial Public Schools Assessments Calendar and Benchmarks Handbook; (u) administrator and teacher evaluation plans; and (v) Curriculum Coordinating Council Guidebook.

Reflective Journal. Throughout my work with Memorial Public Schools I maintained a reflective journal. I used the journal not just to summarize meetings but, also, as a tool for me to

analyze the complex nature of the day-to-day work of the district. During meetings, I

highlighted major issues and summarized conclusions arrived at by the group. Ortlipp (2008)

identifies the use of a reflective journal as helpful with making sense of the messiness of the

research processes. Keeping the journal helped me to identify the theoretical lens most

appropriate to work through the implications of the evidence. During the analysis of my work, I

utilized this information in conjunction with other data to determine evidence for research-based

principles.

Data Analysis

The study employed an interpretive qualitative research design (Cresswell, 2006; Caelli,

Ray, & Mill, 2003; Merriam et al, 2001). The unit of analysis for this study was the activities of

the central office leaders (Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of

Human Resources, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Director of Elementary

Education and PK – 5 Language Arts Consultant) as they related to implementing the literacy

reform effort in the six areas of the theoretical frame that guided this study: (a) activities related

to bringing a coherent focus on the reform effort within the instructional core, (b) activities

related to developing the instructional leadership necessary to carry out the reform effort, (c)

activities related to professional learning necessary to build the capacity of teachers to implement

the reform, (d) activities related to ensuring that the reform initiative provided equitable

educational access for students, and (e) activities related to developing and implementing the

policies to support the reform effort. Based on the literature review, I developed a research-

based template for each research question outlining the specific activities. For example, based

on the research, I developed a template that represented the key leadership roles of the central

office that theoretically would help principals and teachers maintain a sharp focus on the

instructional core. The templates are found in the Analysis section of this study.

I first used a closed coding process as indicated by the research questions (a) to categorize the data, (b) to describe the details evident in the data, and (c) to describe the trends evident in the data (Andrade, 2009). I then used an open coding system (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) in order to consider other emerging themes from the data. Finally, I used an axial coding system to look for cross-themes. In addition to the coding system, I employed memoing methods in order to document thoughts and ideas throughout the analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

As outlined in Figure 2 (next page), I began with a closed coding system (Fisher, et al, 2006) where I categorized data into frames related to the five research questions and the research-based principles identified in this study. After the organization of the data points on the five frames of research, I then cited evidence from the documents I reviewed and the interviews I conducted to indicate the extent to which Memorial central office leaders carried out, or did not carry out those research-based principles. I coded my determinations as follows: the Memorial Public Schools central office staff followed research-based principles (coded with +), somewhat followed the research-based principles (coded with +/–), or did not follow the research-based principles (–). The determination for each research-based principle was made based on the triangulation of data points.
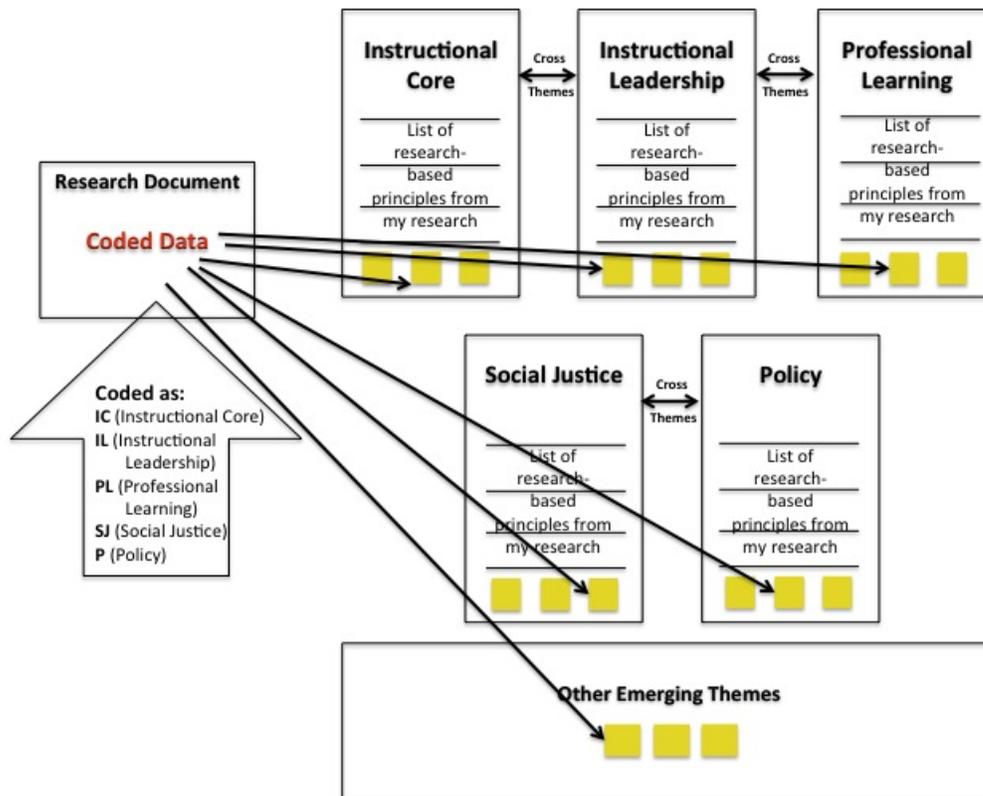
Figure 2. Data Analysis Process

Much of the data for this study were collected while I served in a leadership role with

Memorial Public Schools. While in the role I contributed to the development of the documents

used as primary district sources and participated in many of the public meetings. In addition to

the analysis of the codes evident in the public domain documents I added my perspective as an

active participant in many of the public discussions and public events described in the

documents. If the event was documented in one or more of my data sources (e.g., my reflective

journal, minutes from a meeting, school improvement plants, referred to in interviews), I was

able to triangulate my analysis. If I did not have collaborating sources I did not use my

recollection as evidence because researcher bias is a form of systemic error that can affect

studies and distort analysis and findings (Mehra, 2002). I discuss these possible biases in the

statement of subjectivity later in this manuscript.

As I gathered information for this study, I had the advantage of reflecting on the data during my EdD coursework. Because of the design of the courses, I had the opportunity to participate in structured discussions with other members of my cohort regarding my findings, preliminary analyses, and new insights into the problem I was exploring. In this manner, my classmates served as a set of peer-reviewers who helped me to be aware of and confront many of the personal biases I brought to the study.

Even with the limitations inherent in this study (see section on Threats to Credibility and Trustworthiness), interpretive qualitative research techniques allow for in depth examination of themes as related to the proposed research questions. The strength of these techniques is the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of the roles taken by the central office leaders as the district implemented a literacy reform (Patton, 2002).

Threats to Credibility and Trustworthiness

The recommendations of this study are limited by its design and context. The study focuses on one school district in Connecticut over a short period of time and therefore it would be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to a larger population or other school districts. Because of the methods used, the study is limited to the description of the trends and relationships evident in the data. Where strong relationships appear to exist, the study lists recommendations for follow-up research to explore possible causative relationships and to expand the generalizability of the results.

The study was based on the assumption that the work of central office staff members had an influence on the implementation of the literacy reform. The study was also based on the assumption that the work of the central office staff could be captured in public domain

documents. The interpretations and data analysis are limited by the degree to which these assumptions may not have been accurate.

In this study, administrators were asked to comment on the work of the central office, thus creating a problem in hierarchy of credibility (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). That is, credibility and the right to be heard are differently distributed through the ranks of the system particularly when individuals were asked to comment on the effectiveness of literacy reform that was determined by central office and then implemented by schools. A hierarchy of credibility may have existed as a limitation to the study.

In my work as an administrator in the district I participated in many informal conversations and many informal interactions regarding the literacy reform. To the best of my ability, I used only information from public sessions and public documents in my analysis. Any and all references to these public domain activities were framed to protect the anonymity of the individuals involved.

As the researcher, I am also a central office staff member within the school district that was studied. My familiarity of the school district and associated biases (see subjectivity statement) may have served as a limitation to acquisition of accurate responses and may have existed as an internal bias to the interpretation of information. My role as a researcher, as outlined in the statement of subjectivity, is also accepted as a limit to this study.

Subjectivity Statement

In qualitative research, transparency of the role of the researcher is critical. Patton (2002) writes: "Any given design inevitably reflects some imperfect interplay of resources, capabilities, purposes, possibilities, creativity, and personal judgments by the people involved (page 12)." For this reason, because I am an employee of Memorial Public Schools, I examined whether this

role may have contributed a level of research bias into this study.

In 2008, I joined the Memorial Public Schools central office staff as the Director of Elementary Education. As part of the Superintendent's leadership team, I had access to information about the districts operations that many others did not. The leadership team engaged in decision making for all areas of the district including those central to this study: instructional core, leadership development, adult learning, social justice issues and policy. Since joining the district, I have maintained a reflective journal that contains most of the meetings that I attended, individuals in attendance, ideas shared, decisions made, plans for next steps, as well as my thoughts and reflections on the information. I worked closely with many stakeholders in the school community on reform efforts some of which include: development of school improvement plans, elementary leadership development, professional development planning for teachers, racial balance efforts and district policy development and implementation. As an administrator in the district, my role included observing teachers and engaging in conversations about district goals.

In my previous roles as teacher, principal and consultant, I had extensive experience with the use of Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000). Based on previous successes as evidenced through improved student achievement, I believe in the effectiveness of Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000), the literacy reform initiative at the center of this research study. This belief could potentially have influenced the level of research bias.

As a central office leader, I regularly contemplate my theory of action as related to my role in bringing about district-wide improvement. Below are five statements that represent my theory of action. Components of this theory of action may have unintentionally influenced my role as a researcher in this study.

1. If we develop the instructional leadership capacity of elementary school leaders then they will establish school-wide expectations for and support effective teaching practices that will improve student learning.

2. If the elementary leadership team shares best instructional leadership practices and effective teaching practices within their schools, and if they work collaboratively together to come to common agreement on district-wide elementary initiatives and issues then principals will be better equipped to develop school-wide strategies that will improve student learning.

3. If elementary schools implement district curriculum, instruction and assessment practices with consistency and with horizontal and vertical alignment then students can be ensured common learning experiences aligned with state standards and assessment which will result in improvement student achievement.

4. If we build the capacity of teachers to utilize research-based effective teaching strategies then teachers will be equipped with the tools to differentiate instruction to meet individual students needs will improve student learning.

5. If we use common formative assessments then we will be able to ensure implementation of common curriculum and instructional practices and be able to determine effective practice that best meets individual student needs, accelerates learning in order to close the achievement gap and improves student learning over all.

During the initial data collection and analysis for my research, including the seven semi-structured interviews referenced above, I served as the district's Director of Elementary Education. None of the interviewees were my direct reports. As such, there was minimal possibility of coercion.

Results

This research study, conducted in Memorial Public Schools, used the theoretical framework (Figure 1, page 11) as a lens to explore the role of central office leaders in implementing a district-wide literacy reform effort as described in the methods section.

The analysis of these results is organized by the five research questions that guided the study. The first section analyzes the results in terms of the first research question related to the instructional core. The second section analyzes the results in terms of the second research question related to instructional leadership. The third section analyzes the results in terms of the research question related to professional learning. The fourth section analyzes the results in terms of the research question related to providing equitable learning access to all students. The fifth section analyzes the results in terms of the research question related to the implementation of literacy reform policies.

Research Question 1: *In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on establishing a coherent focus within the instructional core?*

As outlined in Table 3 (next page) there was a mixed relationship between the activities of the central office and the research-based principles outlined in the theoretical framework section related to the instructional core. There were seven areas where the central office followed the principles closely, three areas where the central office somewhat followed the principles, and seven areas where the central office did not address the principles.

Table 3

Central Office's Use of Research Principles on Maintaining a Focus on the Instructional Core

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
1-1. Establish a common vision for improved student learning	–	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • professional development offerings (2006-2010)
1-2. Provide the conditions and incentives to focus on teaching and learning	–	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary)
1-3. Provide district resources for instructional priorities	+	• Memorial Board of Education budgets (2006-2011) • Operation Audit of Memorial Public Schools
1-4. Connect the instructional core with a district-wide strategy for improvement	+/–	• interviews (2008-2009) • Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan • summaries of evaluation forms completed by administrators who attended the annual summer retreat (2008-2010) • District Improvement Strategy (2010) • Operation Audit of Memorial Public Schools
1-5. Highlight district elements that can support or hinder effective implementation of the improvement strategy	–	• no evidence available
1-6. Identify interdependencies among district elements as they relate to the strategy for improvement	+/–	• Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan • District Improvement Strategy (2010)

(continued)

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
1-7. Recognize forces in the organization that have an impact on implementation of the improvement strategy	–	• no evidence available
1-8. Emphasize a performance and improvement focus led by the superintendent of schools	+	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • District Improvement Strategy (2010)
1-9. Adopt a preferred approach to instruction that they expected all teachers to emphasize	+	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • Readers' Workshop Notebooks • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • professional development needs assessment and survey results (2008-2009)
1-10. Develop district-wide curricula that forms the basis of classroom instruction	+	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • Readers' Workshop Notebooks • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010)
1-11. Focus on consistency within the instructional core	–	• school improvement plans (2007-2011) • elementary meeting agendas (2006-2011) • Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan • professional development needs assessment and survey results (2008-2009)

(continued)

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
1-12. Coordinate curriculum and instruction at the district, school and classroom levels	+	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • Readers' Workshop Notebooks • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • professional development needs assessment and survey results (2008-2009)
1-13. Reorganize and re-culture central office units to focus on central office – principal partnerships	+	• district organizational charts (2006-2011) • central office meeting agendas (2007-2010) • Operation Audit of Memorial Public Schools
1-14. Shape central office leaders' theory of action based on the feedback and needs as communicated by schools	–	• mutual commitments process
1-15. Service to schools in order to improve teaching and learning	+/–	• interviews (2008-2009) • summaries of evaluation forms completed by administrators who attended the annual summer retreat (2008-2010)
1-16. Use feedback to continually support improvement of work practices and relationships with schools	–	• no evidence available
1-17. Engaged central office leaders in helping schools build their capacity for improvement	+	• elementary meeting agendas (2006-2010) • Memorial Board of Education budget (2006-2011) • professional development needs assessment and survey results (2008-2009) • Language Arts Consultant job descriptions

Areas where the central office followed the research-based principles. According to research-based principle #1-3 the responsibility of the school district to provide resources for instructional priorities is a key element to successful school reform. This element was evidenced in policy #6213 of the Memorial Board of Education that required equitable distribution of resources among schools to support the literacy reform. Adherence to this policy was evidenced through the budgetary support provided by the central office in terms of the resources provided to all schools to procure materials for classroom libraries and appropriate intervention. As evidenced in the budgets approved by the Board of Education, there was a steady increase for literacy materials and program implementation during the years 2006-2011. For example, the budget allocated to literacy materials increased from $22,000 in 2006 to $90,350 in 2011 and program implementation (curriculum and professional development) increased from $22,000 in 2006 to $49,000 in 2011.

As literacy reform efforts continued, elementary school leaders identified further needs that challenged the central office to weigh budget priorities. As evidenced by administrator meeting agendas and minutes and my reflective journal, elementary principals, reported that there was insufficient staffing to provide literacy intervention for students and that there was insufficient funding to provide professional development support for teachers. Hence, the Superintendent made a proposal to the Board of Education for the 2011-2012 budget to add Language Arts Specialists in all elementary schools (a total of 9.5 full-time equivalents in staffing or approximately $570,000). With an offer to reduce non-certified staff support in order to increase highly skilled literacy certified support, the Board of Education approved the proposal. Despite proposed cuts in June 2011, the additional literacy support was not eliminated from the budget and was rolled out in the 2011-2012 school year.

As stated in research-principle #1-8, in districts whose reform initiatives are effective the central office leaders emphasize a performance improvement focus led by the Superintendent of schools. For the years 2006-2009, the Superintendent of Memorial Public Schools led an improvement focus for each year as evidenced by administrator meeting agendas. In respective years the focus was on: (a) the development of the Strategic Plan (2006-2007); (b) strategies to improve achievement on the CMT and CAPT (2007-2008); and (c) differentiated instruction and improving student learning (2008-2009). Additionally, the Superintendent led the central office administrators on discussions related to improvement as identified in the central office meeting agendas from 2007-2010 to focus on (a) leading administrator meetings (2007-2008), (b) differentiating instruction (2008-2009), and (c) improving student achievement (2009-2010). When the new Superintendent for Memorial Public Schools began his tenure, he developed the District Improvement Strategy (2010) based on a single goal for the district, "ensure that all students acquire the skills and knowledge outlined in our comprehensive, rigorous instructional program." As evidenced by administrator meeting agendas in 2010-2011, the new Superintendent supported the instructional core through activities that focused on improving teaching and learning with an emphasis on topics such as data teams, problem of practice, theory of action, instructional rounds, task analysis and school improvement plans.

My analysis of curriculum documents, administrator meeting agendas, and professional development needs assessment and survey results, indicated that the administrators of Memorial Public Schools adopted a preferred approach to instruction that they expected all teachers to emphasize (research-principle #1-9), provided a district-wide curricula that formed the basis of classroom instruction (research-principle #1-10) and coordinated these curriculum and instructional efforts at the district, school and classroom levels (research-principle #1-12). A

district-wide effort was made for literacy reform in 2006 in order to align curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in Kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms in all eleven elementary schools. The coordination of these components was evidenced by three key actions of central office administrators: (a) the development of a district-wide curriculum that included common units of study (Memorial Public Schools Readers' Workshop Notebooks, 2006-2011; Memorial Public Schools Language Arts Curriculum); (b) the adoption of a preferred approach to instruction, Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000); and (c) the provision of district resources for the reform (materials and staffing). The three components of curriculum, instruction and resources were very specifically designed to provide clear expectations for teachers and students. Specifically, the units of study in the district-wide curriculum spelled out common standards for student proficiency, a scope and sequence for implementation, appropriate resources and a common set of assessments for each unit. The instructional model provided teachers with common tools for delivery of instruction and strategies of intervention as demonstrated by Teachers College and Lit Life (outside consultants hired for the launch of the instructional model in the district) and by the Language Arts Specialists (a position that was increased at each building to support the reform effort). This sharp focus on the instructional core – the interaction between curriculum, students, and teachers – was a first for Memorial elementary schools.

According to research-based principle #1-13, districts are most successful in implementing reform when they re-organize and re-culture the central office units to focus on central office and principal partnerships. In Memorial Public Schools, this was evidenced when in 2008, the Superintendent chose to change key central office positions to help better support elementary school reform efforts by developing a new position, the Director of Elementary Education. At the same time, a new Curriculum Leader for PK-5 Language Arts was hired. Both of these

changes occurred at the height of the literacy reform rollout to all elementary schools. The elementary administrator meeting agendas provided evidence of a closer focus on literacy reform starting in the year of 2009—a new focus compared to previous years without these central office positions filled.

Another research-based element of the central office's focus on the instructional core was the substantial engagement to help schools build their capacity for improvement (research-principle #1-17). My analysis suggested that the central office provided opportunities for capacity building on the new curriculum and instructional model as evidenced by professional development calendars and literacy meeting agendas. In partnership with Teachers College and Lit Life, Memorial Public Schools administrators provided one-day and multi-day training for teachers, modeled lessons, and provided side-by-side coaching on the new instructional model.

As evidenced by professional development offerings, the central office leaders provided training for the Language Arts Consultants in each elementary school on the new instructional model with an emphasis on implementation of curriculum, the role of the teacher, and the expectations for students. The Language Arts Consultants became familiar with the more rigorous expectations in the curriculum for students on aspects such as reading levels and strategies, the use of various texts, and responding to reading. Additionally, the Language Arts Consultants were trained in the role of the teacher and student in the classroom with regards to the various components of the instructional model—read aloud, book shopping, independent sustained reading, partner reading, response to reading, small group instruction, and whole group share. In total, the training opportunities focused on building the capacity of Language Arts Consultants of the key components of the instructional core as related to literacy – the interaction between the teacher, student and Language Arts Curriculum.

Areas where the central office somewhat followed the research-based principles.

According to research principle #1-15, districts are more successful when central office leaders develop a service orientation for schools with the purpose to improve teaching and learning. The interviews of some of Memorial's administrators gave a sense of the service by the central office. When interviewed, one building administrator commented, "The district supports my leadership. They are there for me to consult with and to share ideas. They help me feel like we are in this together." Another building administrator explained that the district provided him with training focused on leading reform efforts. He also stated, "The district left the work up to me, though. They are interested in what is happening, want me on the same page as them but they leave it up to me to do." A central office administrator described her support of principals in the form of "listening and giving advice." She viewed her role best as a proactive supporter and resource for principals to help them stay focused on a leadership path to help them reach their goals and deliver results.

Based on my analysis of meeting agendas and notes, I found information that seemed to contradict the support expressed by administrators above. As identified by the elementary administrator meeting agendas, and my reflective journal, administrators shared concerns that the central office did not understand the challenges at the elementary level and was not doing enough to help teachers with common planning time so that they could acquire the knowledge and skills needed to implement the literacy reform. During an interview, one district administrator talked about the struggle with relating to the needs of the schools, "I test my ability to remain connected and try to prevent the ivory tower syndrome as I can easily lose site of the needs of the schools…I try to stay connected through the work of the curriculum leaders…The environment in which I work is essentially removed from the life of a school."

According to research on school reform reviewed for this study, two main priorities for a central office that focuses on the instructional core are (a) to connect reform efforts with a district-wide strategy for improvement (research-principle #1-4) and (b) to identify interdependencies among district elements as they relate to the strategy for improvement (research-principle #1-6). Information from summer retreat agendas and summaries of summer retreat evaluation forms suggested that the central office leaders did not make connections between district reform efforts and the strategy for improvement during the years 2006 - 2009. The central office leaders did not appear to connect the agenda items covered during the Memorial Public Schools' annual summer retreat for administrators – an event held each summer to kick off the academic year – with the activities that occurred during the year. The retreat topics differed by year: (a) 2006 – Strategic Plan and 21st Century Skills, (b) 2007 – Resilience While Leading Change, (c) 2008 – Using Data, (d) 2009 – Differentiated Instruction, (e) 2010 – Data Analysis, (f) 2011 – Problem of Practice, Task Analysis, School Improvement Planning, and Instructional Rounds, and (g) 2012 – Observation Protocol, School Improvement Planning, and Data Analysis. My analysis of summer retreat agendas and monthly administrator meeting agendas from 2006-2009, indicated that central office leaders in Memorial (a) revisited summer retreat topics only once or twice throughout the years and (b) made only one connection between the summer retreat and priorities in the Strategic Plan over the course of four years. Evaluations from the administrators who attended the summer retreat indicated the administrators' desire for more focus on a district-wide strategy and action planning regarding the focus:

> Would like it if district provided and established a focus and structured
> goal on the final day of retreat. (August, 2007)

> A structured follow-up session is needed that includes
> data/results from information learned/shared in retreat. (August, 2007)

>Need more strategies and implementation of our action plan
>on the Strategic Plan for the district. (August, 2008)

>Want to know what the district vision for the upcoming year is and how it
>relates to, directly, these opening days. (August, 2008)

A shift occurred in administrator summer retreats and monthly administrator meetings starting in 2010. The shift started with the new Superintendent's District Improvement Strategy (2010) which identified four key, interdependent areas as a focus for improving instruction: (a) strengthen skills of teachers and staff; (b) strengthen skills of school leaders; (c) strengthen alignment of the school district horizontally and vertically; and (d) provide sufficient and well-utilized resources. These four areas served as the foundation of improvement efforts in the district in areas such as: (a) a change of focus for administrator professional development and (b) a strengthening of the skills of school leaders to lead change around school improvement planning. My analysis of summer retreat and monthly administrator meeting agendas for 2010-2011 indicated that there was a solid alignment between summer retreat topics and monthly administrator agenda topics. Those topics included: (a) school improvement planning, (b) data teams, (c) instructional rounds, and (d) student tasks. The feedback from administrators on the evaluation forms for the 2011 summer retreat suggested that school leaders had a solid understanding of the district-wide strategy for improvement (research-principle #1-4) and were able to identify interdependencies among district elements as they relate to the strategy for improvement (research-principle #1-6):

>Terrific focus – sets us up well for the year. Gives a direction for the schools and the district as a whole as to where we need to be. In my opinion, one of the difficulties for [Memorial] district is merging "systems thinking" and "site-based management" in purposeful ways. In the past, this hasn't worked at all. Schools did their own

things, and there was no collective vision. These three days offer a way to change
that. (August, 2011)

The topics were relevant and will move our work as a district and individual schools
forward. (August, 2011)

What went well with this summer retreat was organizing the work with opportunities
to discuss and get feedback concerning targets, goals and plans. It was helpful to
goal set together. (August, 2011)

Another key research-principle related to a focus on the instructional core is the central
office leaders' shaping of theory of action based on the feedback and needs as communicated by
schools (research principle #1-14). The work on a theory of action came into focus with a new
Superintendent at Memorial in 2010 when a revised system of accountability was put in place for
central office leaders that involved the development of mutual commitments in key areas of each
department. The system of mutual commitments required each leader to identify annual
commitments for which they would be held accountable. The mutual commitments were to be
supported by the central office leader's theory of action. These two items – mutual commitments
and theory of action – were reviewed three times a year during professional goals meetings with
the Superintendent. As an example of the mutual commitments developed by central office
members, here is a sample of my list: (a) to provide professional learning opportunities to
develop principals' ability to monitor, observe, and provide feedback on elementary instructional
models; (b) to ensure that curriculum leaders provide training and support to schools and
teachers based on identified need; (c) support the transition of four new building principals; (d)
to support all elementary principals and curriculum leaders with implementing district initiatives
(e.g., observe school-wide data teams in each building/department, observe observation post-
conference in each building with a new administrator, assist with the development of school

improvement plans in each building/department, and provide instructional rounds support as needed); and (e) to provide professional development to develop principals' ability to monitor, observe, and provide feedback on elementary instructional models. Annually, members of the central office share their list of mutual commitments with the administrators for feedback. An example of how this process worked, when I asked the elementary administrators for feedback they helped me to refine my mutual commitments so they included: (a) team determined initiatives, (b) appropriate student achievement targets, and (c) necessary supports to ensure attainment of school and district goals. In turn, the Superintendent held me accountable for the list of mutual commitments I developed and refined using feedback from the elementary administrators.

Areas where the central office did not follow the research-based principles. In line with the research on effective school reform, establishing a common vision for improved student learning is a key responsibility of the central office (research-principle #1-1). My analysis indicated that although there was a Strategic Plan (2008-2013), the plan did not include a vision for literacy reform in Memorial Public Schools. Rather, the Strategic Plan's focus on program improvement included reform areas in special education, differentiated instruction, response to intervention, staffing, scheduling, professional development, gifted education, summer school, and wellness. There was no evidence in the Strategic Plan that the actions of Memorial's central office focused on the instructional core as related to literacy reform by connecting it to a district-wide strategy for improvement.

Providing the conditions and incentives to focus on teaching and learning is research-principle #1-2 related to the central office's focus on the instructional core. The central office leaders did not appear to use strategies that would help teachers and staff members maintain a

sharp focus on teaching and learning – especially teaching and learning related to the literacy

reform initiative, Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000). An analysis of K-12 administrator

meeting agendas from 2006-2011 indicated that school and central office leaders did not focus

on Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000). Rather, the agendas included items such as the United

Way, school calendar, school gardens, document retention practices, wellness policy, attendance

policy, administrator vacations, and new staff orientation. K-12 administrator meetings did not

focus on the strategies that would help teachers focus on the teaching and learning but rather

required them to deal with various competing priorities.

Research reviewed for this study on successful school reform suggests that the central

office has a primary role to focus on consistency within the instructional core (research-based

principle #1-11). Despite efforts to provide teachers and Language Arts Consultants specialized

training in literacy reform, consistency within the instructional core was not realized in Memorial

Public Schools during the time period covered in this study. When reviewing school

improvement plans, administrator meeting agendas and summaries of classroom walk-throughs,

evidence pointed to inconsistent implementation of Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) six years

into the reform effort. As cited in the examples below, school improvement plans – years after

the literacy reform effort was implemented - were still addressing goals focused on building

teacher understanding of the literacy reform and ensuring implementation in all classrooms.

> To motivate and be a driving force in focusing reading instruction in areas of need,
> based upon current assessments, and develop differentiation of instruction based on
> these assessments. (School G, 2008)

> Improve the planning and conducting of small group lessons in reading with a
> specific focus of instruction based on student needs/data. (School I, 2011)

Three to four years into the literacy reform, administrators' meeting agendas still included

items such as Literacy curriculum updates and roles and responsibilities of Language Arts

Consultants. Summaries of district-wide classroom walk-throughs and elementary administrator

meeting agendas indicated that components of the reform effort were being implemented with

great discrepancies across the eleven elementary schools. Examples of discrepancies in the

Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) included: (a) whole class novel studies were still being used

in grade four at School G; (b) small group reading instruction included round robin read aloud

with worksheets for completion at School I; (c) whole class mini-lessons extended beyond the

allotted time of 10 minutes to 20 minutes in classrooms at School F; and (d) small group

instruction was inconsistently being implemented in School E.

Finally, in my review of the public domain documents, interviews, and my own reflective

journal, I did not find any evidence that the district addressed three important research-based

principles of reform: (a) highlight district elements that can support or hinder effective

implementation of the improvement strategy (research-based principle #1-5); (b) recognize

forces in the organization that have an impact on implementation of the improvement strategy

(research-based principle #1-7); and (c) continually use evidence to support improvement of

work practices and relationships with schools (research-based principle #1-16). This lack of

evidence suggested that the central office did not explicitly address these three issues within the

events covered by the public domain documents, the experiences reported by the interviewees, or

the events covered in my reflective journal.

Summary

In summary, as outlined above, the central office adhered to seven research-based

principles in instituting literacy reform. Specifically there appeared to be a strong emphasis on

adopting a district-wide curriculum and preferred approach to literacy instruction. For example,

common units of study were developed and Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) was adopted. The central office demonstrated a mixed emphasis on three research-based principles related to reform. For example the principle related to the central office defining their roles in service to schools was an emerging theme but did not appear to embrace the principle fully. Finally, as summarized above, the central office did not appear to address seven of the research-based principles related the instructional core. For example, there was evidence that the central office did not develop a common vision for literacy reform.

In the final section of this manuscript I will review the implications of this analysis of the central office's adherence to research-based principles of reform. In the final section I will also outline suggestions for improving practice related to focusing on the instructional core based on this analysis.

Research Question 2: *In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on working with leaders in the district to improve their effectiveness as instructional leaders?*

As outlined in Table 4 (next page) there was a mixed relationship between the activities of the central office and the research-based principles outlined in the theoretical framework section related to instructional leadership. There was one area where the central office followed the principles closely, three areas where the central office somewhat followed the principles, and four areas where the central office did not address the principles.

Table 4

Central Office's Use of Research Principles on Instructional Leadership

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
2-1. Use of instructionally focused principal meetings	+/–	• 2006-2011administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • reflective journal • administrator summer retreat agendas (2006-2011)
2-2. Organize district-based preparation programs for principals and instructionally focused Supervision of principals	–	• administrator and teacher evaluation plans • District Improvement Strategy (2010) • organizational charts
2-3. Re-culture central office to focus less on administration and more on supporting principals to improve instruction	+/–	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • reflective journal • administrator summer retreat agendas (2006-2011) • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • District Improvement Strategy (2010)
2-4. Develop instructional leaders who focus on the instructional core	+/–	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • reflective journal • administrator summer retreat agendas (2006-2011) • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • District Improvement Strategy (2010)

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
2-5. Develop learning-focused partnerships with school principals resulting in principals developing a deeper understanding of instructional leadership practices related to improving teaching and learning	–	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • reflective journal • summer retreat agendas (2006-2011) • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • District Improvement Strategy (2010)
2-6. Differentiate support for principals	+	• administrator evaluation plan • District Improvement Strategy (2010)
2-7. Model ways of thinking and acting that reflected desirable instructional leadership practices	–	• no evidence available
2-8. Tap all principals in a network as resources for each other around their instructional leadership practice	–	• 2006-2011 administrator meeting agendas (K-12 and elementary) • summer retreat agendas (2006-2011) • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010)

Areas where the central office followed the research-based principles. According to research-based principle #2-6, districts are most successful in implementing reform when central office leaders provide differentiated support for principals. Support for school principals in Memorial was primarily outlined in the Memorial Public Schools Administrators Evaluation Plan (2002). The plan identified three levels of support for administrators, (1) induction, (2) professional, and (3) structured support. The tiers of support allowed central office leaders to work with administrators in a differentiated approach related to goal setting, reflective practice, and professional growth. Central office leaders were required to meet with building

administrators a minimum of three times formally throughout the year. The purpose of these

meetings was to provide one-on-one support related to individual leadership goals and school

improvement goals, such as leading the literacy reform effort.

In addition to the support provided through the formal supervision and evaluation process,

the Superintendent highlighted the development of school leaders' capacity as a priority in a

document he put together in his first year with Memorial Public Schools - The District

Improvement Strategy, 2010. The document outlined the development of school leader skills as

one of the four key priorities of improving student achievement in the district. Since the

publication of the District Improvement Strategy (2010), central office leaders emphasized the

development of school principals throughout the school year rather than three times a year at

formal meetings. Central office leaders focused on the following leadership skills when working

with principals as outlined by the Superintendent:

> Principals need a skill set in analyzing and taking action based on student performance data. They need to be able to develop school improvement plans based on student data and work with teams of teachers to enable them to work collaboratively in developing new strategies for improved learning. They also need to be able to articulate a shared vision of what good instruction looks like in the classroom and they need to be able to give feedback to teachers, collectively and individually, that will encourage teachers to continue effective practices and change ineffective ones. They also need to know how to support teams of teachers as they struggle through this new process; collaboration is a learned skill. (District Improvement Strategy, 2010, p. 5)

Areas where the central office somewhat followed the research-based principles. As

stated in research-based principle #2-1, districts experience more success with reform when

central office leaders facilitate instructionally focused principal meetings. My analysis indicated

that central office leaders somewhat followed this research principle when developing the focus

for professional development and for district-wide and by-level meetings. According to

meetings agendas I reviewed, Memorial Public Schools had two formal opportunities to provide

professional development for administrators, (a) summer administrator retreats; and (b) monthly administrator meetings (both by level and as a whole team). Summer administrator retreats focused on instructional topics (e.g., incorporating 21st Century Skills in classrooms and using data in order to differentiate instruction). On the other hand, monthly administrator meetings throughout the school year were used for other business matters, such as, United Way support activities, travel procedures, budget planning, field trips, parent conferences, and document retention plans. Instructionally focused topics like response to intervention, gifted education, math interventions, professional learning communities and using data were minimally represented on monthly meeting agendas.

In 2010, the start of the new Superintendent's tenure in Memorial marked a significant change in practice as related to research-based principles #2-1 – instructionally focused principal meetings, #2-3 – re-culture central office to focus less on administration and more on supporting principals to improve instruction, and #2-4 – develop instructional leaders who focus on the instructional core. The Superintendent utilized the Administrators' Professional Development Committee to map out the year's topics for the monthly administrator meetings. For the years, 2010-2012, the format for these monthly meetings remained relatively constant: Principals were required to (a) develop a problem of practice to explore in depth; (b) develop a theory of action to guide the work; (c) focus on one key strategy to address the problem of practice; (d) establish goals and targets to measure growth; (e) monitor adult actions to ensure alignment with the key strategy; (f) identify measures of student growth to monitor progress; and (g) observe instruction and provide feedback to build capacity. The Superintendent developed the foundation for these monthly discussions by setting a tight focus on the instructional core – the relationship among teacher, student and content. The topics for the administrator meetings remained focused on

items (a) to (g) for the years 2010-2012. Additionally, the format of the monthly meetings changed. Rather than sitting around a large square of tables, the administrators sat at tables of four where all participants collaborated on approaches to address specific topics and issues. The Superintendent facilitated all the meetings and provided opportunities for small group work and by-level work. The meetings typically ran 2 ¼ hours with two hours devoted to professional development and fifteen minutes to discuss other business matters (such as a budget update).

Areas where the central office did not follow the research-based principles.

According to research-based principle #2-2, districts are most successful in implementing reform when they utilize district-based preparation programs for principals and emphasize instructionally focused supervision of principals. My analysis of the organizational chart, administrator and teacher evaluation plans, and the District Improvement Strategy (2010) indicated that Memorial lacked a system to identify and cultivate aspiring administrators. The pipeline for the elementary principal position in Memorial typically ran through the school building's designated lead teacher. At the time of this study, two of the eleven principals held the position of lead teacher prior to becoming a principal. The lead teacher position provided the individual with limited instructional leadership experiences because most often their work in these positions focused on schedules, behavior issues, ordering materials, substitute coverage and organizing intervention services to students. Although some of the work in these positions included management of the early intervention process and providing direct intervention service to students, there was no effort on the part of the central office to develop aspiring principals' skills in areas outlined in the District Improvement Strategy (2010) such as data teams, school improvement planning or literacy reform. Although the lead teacher was second in charge, I found no evidence that Memorial had a system in place for developing or maximizing the

potential of future instructional leaders.

Based on research reviewed for this study, districts whose reform efforts are effective (a) tap all principals in a network as resources for other principals around their respective instructional leadership practices (research-based principle #2-8) and (b) develop learning-focused partnerships with school principals that result in principals developing a deeper understanding of instructional leadership practices related to improving teaching and learning (research-based principle #2-5). Based on my analysis of administrator meeting and retreat agendas, central office meeting agendas, the Superintendent's entry plan, the District Improvement Strategy (2010), and my reflective journal there was evidence that central office leaders did not apply the research principles related to (a) learning-focused partnerships with principals and (b) tapping principals as resources for one another. Instead, a divide existed among the elementary principals. From 2006 – 2010, elementary administrators attended monthly elementary meetings that included central office staff. All elementary administrators contributed to the development of the agenda for elementary meetings with central office and building leaders. The topics varied between instructionally focused items to operational agenda items. Decisions about shared practice made at these meetings were at times not followed through by all members as evidenced by one school not holding evening parent conferences when all other schools agreed to this practice and some schools not implementing a social behavior curriculum when other schools did. In contrast to the intention for the meetings to develop common practices, the elementary principals did not usually come to common understandings related to leadership practice nor did they use one another as a resource for improvement. For example, (a) School H chose a new word study program without informing central office or the other schools; (b) Schools E and G did not collaborate over common school

improvement goals on Readers' Workshop; and (c) School D acquired training on data teams without sharing the practice with other schools.

Instead of having learning-focused partnerships for the purpose of developing instructional leadership practices (research-principle #2-5) the divide among elementary principals was also evidenced between elementary principals and central office staff. In addition to the one monthly meeting with central office leaders, elementary principals met once a month without any of the elementary-based central office leaders. The principals received special permission from the Superintendent to conduct these meetings without central office leaders present in order to lend one another support with building issues particularly since the elementary schools only had one administrator at each site. The agenda for these meetings were not shared with the central office but instead a principal was designated to contact the appropriate central office member after the meeting with a list of issues that needed to be addressed. In 2010, the elementary principals and central office staff worked together to come to consensus to include central office leaders at all meetings to create a unified group focused on instructional leadership issues.

Finally, in my review of the public domain documents, interviews, and my own reflective journal, I did not find evidence that the district addressed one important research-based principle – model ways of thinking and acting that reflected desirable instructional leadership practices (#2-7). The lack of evidence suggested that the central office did not explicitly address this issue within the events covered by the public domain documents, the experiences reported by the interviewees, or the events covered in my reflective journal.

Summary

In summary, as outlined above, the central office adhered to one research-based principle

related to instructional leadership in instituting literacy reform. Specifically there appeared to be

a strong emphasis on differentiating support for principals. The central office demonstrated a

mixed emphasis on three research-based principles related to reform. For example, the research-

based principle related to the use of instructionally focused principal meetings was an emerging

theme in the analysis. Finally, as summarized above, the central office did not adhere to four of

the research-based principles related to successful school reform. For example, there was no

evidence that the central office fostered a network for principals to use one another as resources

around their instructional leadership practice.

In the final section of this manuscript I will review the implications of this analysis of the

central office's adherence to research-based principles of reform. In the final section I will also

outline suggestions for improving practice related to focusing on instructional leadership based

on this analysis.

Research Question 3: *In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the*

literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on how

adults learn best?

As outlined in Table 5 (next page) there was a mixed relationship between the activities of

the central office and the research-based principles outlined in the theoretical framework section

related to adult learning. There were nine areas where the central office followed the principles

closely and one area where the central office somewhat followed the principles.

Table 5

Central Office's Use of Research Principles on Adult Learning

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
3-1. Focus on helping adults expand the mental models they use to guide their practice	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009)
3-2. Involve learning from experience	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009)
3-3. Engage participants in on-going cycles of learning	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009) • summaries of classroom observations and reflective journal
3-4. Help adults self-regulate their learning	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009)
3-5. Develop professional development plan of formal programs, informal activities, and related supports that promoted learning about, practicing with, and applying strategies	+/–	• professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009) • reflective journal • administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011)

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
3-6. Engage teachers in deliberate independent practice	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009) • summaries of classroom observations and reflective journal
3-7. Immerse teachers in activities that allow them to build on their current knowledge	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009) • summaries of classroom observations and reflective journal
3-8. Provide teachers with immediate feedback on their learning	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009)
3-9. Involve learners in guided practice	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009)
3-10. Encourage teachers to collaborate with other teachers in reflective dialogues	+	• interviews (2008-2009) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009) • summaries of classroom observations and reflective journal

Areas where the central office followed the research-based principles. As the research

reviewed for this study indicates, a central office can advance school reform by: (a) focusing on

helping teachers expand the mental models they use to guide their practice (principle #3-1); (b)

helping teachers self-regular their learning (principle #3-4); (c) immersing teachers in activities that allow them to build on their current knowledge (principle #3-7); and (d) encouraging teachers to collaborate with other teachers in reflective dialogues (principle #3-10). With a focus on expanding mental models, allowing for self-regulation of learning, building on current knowledge of reading instruction and reflective dialogues amongst colleagues, a central office administrator involved with the reading curriculum for Memorial Public Schools engaged in a partnership with Lit Life to provide training from 2007 – 2009 that included the following elements: (1) teachers received direct instruction on the various elements of the Readers' Workshop; (2) teachers observed lessons of the units of study as taught to their own students and then had opportunities to debrief; (3) teachers were expected to go back to their own classrooms and teach the lessons with a debrief with colleagues; and (4) Language Arts Consultants at each school provided daily coaching to teachers to help them implement the new instructional strategies in the units of study.

A leader directly involved with implementing reading curriculum interviewed as part of this study described what was important throughout the professional development offered to teachers with Lit Life – the importance of modeling, allowing teachers to grapple with new knowledge while talking with their colleagues about making sense of the Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000), and accepting teachers wherever they may be in their own learning with the new content:

> We need to expose individuals to new ideas and different ways of thinking. People need to see what is out there. They need to explore various theories of action and find a place comfortable enough to formulate their own. We cannot just change people's behavior overnight but rather day by day, people need time to generate ideas and try them out and then have time to debrief on it. Change goes much deeper than professional development. It has to touch people's emotions and they have to want to do it.

Based on evidence in administrator meeting agendas, summaries of district-wide walk throughs and my reflective journal, three key changes in teachers' mental models and understanding about Readers' Workshop were evident: (a) a shift from whole group to small group instruction; (b) frequent use of data to inform small group instruction; and (c) the use of various instructional strategies to best meet individual student needs.

According to research reviewed for this study, districts are most effective when central office leaders ensure that teachers are involved in learning through guided practice (research-based principle #3-9) and provide teachers with immediate feedback on their performance (research-based principle #3-8). A feature of the Lit Life training included observing teachers conduct a small group lesson followed up by a debrief with colleagues. The lesson debrief was structured to help all participants gain understanding from what was observed. When asked about the design of teacher learning, an individual involved with the organization of the training program interviewed as part of this study described the key experiences which she felt were necessary to help individuals truly change their practice:

> It is very important for me in my role to be able to model for teachers what it is we are asking them to do. For me it is important that teachers watch it being done, then they do it themselves and they start to understand it. During a district-wide presentation, I modeled a lesson for the audience. As I taught the lesson, I thought aloud somewhat like a metacognition. I can tell when teachers get it and when they are at the resisting point. That is when I invite them to join me wherever they may be in their understanding.

In addition to research-based principles on guided practices, evidence was found in the research reviewed for this study that suggested the strong link between teachers' learning and opportunities for them to: (a) learn from experience (principle #3-2); (b) engage participants in on-going cycles of learning (principle # 3-3); and (c) engage teachers in deliberate independent

practice (principle # 3-6). To ensure support for independent practice, Lit Life conducted

training for Language Arts Consultants. The role of the Language Arts Consultant was focused

on providing on-going support for teachers as they implemented the Readers' Workshop

(Calkins, 2000). Teachers utilized the units of study to guide their daily lessons and

implemented lessons while Language Arts Consultants provided feedback. This approach

provided for an on-going cycle of learning in which teachers practiced the instructional model

and strategies in the Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) and received direct feedback on their

efforts. As evidenced through administrator meeting agendas, summaries of classroom

observations and notes in my reflective journal, teachers became more consistent with (a) use of

student performance data to plan instruction, (b) identification of a focus of instruction for each

student, (c) use of instructional strategies in alignment with the focus, (d) fluidity of small groups

based on student progress, and (e) implementation of the new units of study.

Areas where the central office somewhat followed the research-based principles. My

analysis indicated that Memorial's central office somewhat followed research-based principle

#3-5 related to the professional development plan of formal programs, information activities, and

related supports to promote learning about, practicing with, and applying specific literacy

strategies. A key component to the professional development plan with Lit Life was to work

with Language Arts Consultants (LAC) to develop them as leaders of literacy in each building.

As indicated by the professional development calendar, LACs were learning about the new

curriculum and instructional model alongside teachers. This approach to helping LACs develop

their own skills was not ideal. As documented in the administrator meeting agendas and my

reflective journal, the feedback from principals was that often times, the LACs were unable to

lead the initiative due to their own lack of proficiency and comfort with the instructional

strategies. Additionally, principals expressed frustration about not enough time for teachers to understand the expectations, to watch others model instructional practices, and to share their thinking on the new curriculum as limitations to the successful rollout of the new model. Specifically, the rollout of the units of study, according to the professional development calendar, included a training session with teachers one to two weeks before the unit was to be implemented. Principals shared that there wasn't enough time for professional development, or time for teachers to collaborate, plan and implement the new instructional strategies effectively. The principals indicated that their frustration grew, as these issues became limitations to the successful rollout of the new model.

Additionally, according to the professional development calendars and administrator meeting agendas, principals themselves received little or no training about Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000). This lack of evidence that principals received training, however, ran counter to an interview with a central office administrator who outlined her job responsibilities regarding the development of staff. When discussing the role of developing administrators, she shared the following:

> It is our role as a central office to focus on teaching and learning. We need to ensure that 95% of the time we are spending our time discussing teaching and learning at our cabinet meetings. We need to make sure that we are working with the curriculum administrators to make this happen. We also need to learn and understand what each individual's strengths and challenges are as one size does not fit all. Our job is to be there for principals, to listen to them, and to think out of the box.

According to the evidence I reviewed, at times monthly administrator meetings focused on some instructional items such as response to intervention, differentiated instruction, using data and curriculum updates but none specifically on Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000). Although there were agenda items regarding the role of the LAC, scheduling professional development and

Language Arts curriculum updates there were no agenda items about elementary principals developing their knowledge and expertise on Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000). Therefore, although a central office administrator highlighted her role as focusing on teaching and learning, there was no evidence in the professional development calendar or administrator meeting agendas of activities that helped principals develop their knowledge and ability to lead the effort.

Summary

In summary, as outlined above, the central office adhered to nine research-based principles related to professional learning in instituting literacy reform. Specifically there appeared to be a strong emphasis on engaging teachers in on-going cycles of learning. The central office demonstrated a mixed emphasis on one research-based principle related to reform. For example, the research-based principle related to the organization of professional development as to promote learning about, practicing with, and applying strategies was an emerging theme.

In the final section of this manuscript I will review the implications of this analysis of the central office's adherence to research-based principles of reform. In the final section, I will also outline suggestions for improving practice related to focusing on professional learning based on this analysis.

Research Question 4: *In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities for all students?*

As outlined in Table 6 (next page) there was a mixed relationship between the activities of the central office and the research-based principles outlined in the theoretical framework section related to equitable access. There were four areas where the central office followed the principles closely, three areas where the central office somewhat followed the principles, and

three areas where the central office did not follow the principles.

Table 6

Central Office's Use of Research Principles on Equitable Access

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
4-1. Establish expectations of high levels of achievement for all devoid of excuses for particular groups of students	+	• central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • Connecticut Mastery Test administrator meetings • reflective journal • administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011)
4-2. Develop a district-wide focused strategy to improve teaching and learning	+/-	• District Improvement Strategy • reflective journal • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011) • school improvement plans (2007-2011)
4-3. Use sustained, systemic, and evidence-based interventions	+	• Memorial Public Schools Scientifically Research Based Intervention Handbook • Memorial Public Schools Assessments Calendar and Benchmarks Handbook • professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009)
4-4. Implement a set of common, rigorous instructional standards higher than the state requirements	+/-	• curriculum documents • curriculum revision cycle

(continued)

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
4-5. Support the use of differentiated instruction throughout the district	+/-	• professional development survey and needs assessment (2008-2009) • reflective journal • curriculum documents • Readers' Workshop Notebook
4-6. Provide the resources to support this reform effort	+	• 2006-2011 Memorial Board of Education budget • reflective journal
4-7. Use "value chain thinking" to the design of the entire K-12 continuum (i.e., they ensured that each activity within the curriculum added value in a chain of events that would culminate in college readiness for all students)	-	• curriculum documents • curriculum revision cycle • Curriculum Coordinating Council Guidebook
4-8. Build a sense of shared responsibility of district's success felt by multiple groups	-	• no evidence available
4-9. Create systems and structures within the instructional core that required all individuals to behave as if every student could master rigorous content, whether they believed it or not	+	• administrator meetings agendas (2006-2011) • central office agendas (2006-2010) • school improvement plans (2007-2011) • District Improvement Strategy • Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan • Memorial Public Schools Operational Audit (2010) • interviews (2008-2009)

(continued)

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
4-10. Create an accountability system that included specific goals for students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to counter expectations about students that may have limited achievement	-	- administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011) - central office agendas (2006-2010) - school improvement plans (07-11) - District Improvement Strategy - Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan - Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan - Memorial Public Schools Operational Audit (2010) - Interviews (2008-2009)

Areas where the central office followed the research-based principles. As outlined in

the research reviewed for this study, districts are most successful when central office leaders (a)

establish expectations of high levels of achievement for all students that are devoid of excuses

for particular groups of students (research-based principle # 4-1) and (b) create systems and

structures within the instructional core that require all professionals in the district to behave as if

every student could master rigorous content, whether they believe it or not (research-based

principle #4-9). The Superintendent was the face of high expectations for all at Memorial Public

Schools in her persistent call for improved teaching and learning as evidenced through topics on

central office and administrator meeting agendas, Connecticut Master Test (CMT) meetings with

school leaders, and notes in my reflective journal. For three years, the Superintendent urged

central office leaders to focus on three keys questions related to teaching and learning, (a) what

is working to improve student achievement on the CMT (2007-2008); (b) how to implement

differentiated instruction (2008-2009); and (c) how to improve student learning (2009-2010).

The three topics were listed on every K-12 administrator meeting agenda (ten per year) for the respective year. The three topics were clearly apparent in CMT meetings with school leaders. Annually, principals made a presentation to the central office leadership team on CMT results. The presentations were (a) broken down by subgroup, (b) listed successes and challenges throughout the school year and (c) outlined a plan of action for improving student achievement for all. Notes in my reflective journal about the CMT meetings from the fall of 2008 suggested that Memorial elementary principals found the special education subgroup the most challenging to improve. The Superintendent offered support for students in the special education subgroup but would not allow principals to exclude or make excuses for them.

For a central office to ensure equitable access, the research reviewed for this study suggested that the central office use sustained, systemic, and evidence-based interventions (research-based principle #4-3) and provide the resources to support the reform effort (research-based principle #4-6). In response to the Connecticut State Department's requirement to establish a system of Response to Intervention, Memorial's elementary central office leaders developed a structure of reading intervention that included common assessments, intervention materials and strategies. The systemic structure for intervention was outlined in two documents, (a) Memorial Public Schools Scientifically Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) Handbook (2009); and (b) Memorial Public Schools Assessment Calendar and Benchmarks Handbook (2009, 2010, 2011). All eleven schools used the same assessments and had the same benchmarks including the two elementary schools in Memorial with higher concentrations of free/reduced lunch populations, a subgroup that historically underperformed in Memorial (Schools C and E). Teachers were trained on two intervention kits provided for all schools, (a) Leveled Literacy Intervention, and (b) Literacy Wings. The SRBI Handbook clearly delineated the benchmark for

reading for all students for each trimester by grade. To ensure high expectations for all students, principals and central office leaders identified common student achievement targets for assessments such as the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 and the CMT to be included in each school improvement plan.

Areas where the central office somewhat followed the research-based principles. Critical to successful school reform is the role of the central office in developing a district-wide focused strategy to improve teaching and learning (research-based principle #4-2). Despite consistent efforts by the Superintendent to establish high expectations for all students, a clear district-wide focused strategy to improve teaching and learning to achieve equitable access was not evident until 2010. Prior to 2010, central office leaders, principals, and teachers utilized various strategies for closing the achievement gap as evidenced in professional development agendas and in school improvement plans. From 2006-2010 professional development topics for administrators and teachers included: 21st Century Skills (2006), leading change (2007), using student achievement data (2008), and differentiated instruction (2009). In a survey administered in April 2008 to gather feedback on professional development opportunities in Memorial, 33.9% of teachers did not find the content of professional development received to align with the learning needs of their students. A disconnect existed between the variety of professional development provided and the building-based needs to help all children improve and close the achievement gap. Similarly, school improvement plans emulated a smattering of improvement strategies none of which were connected with the district-wide improvement efforts emphasized during administrator and teacher professional development:

> Develop district-wide curriculum "maps" or understandings in all subject areas. (School E)

Special Education students will be included in the EIP process and have their progress monitored carefully. (School F)

Set grade level meeting schedules to develop student plans. (School G)

A shift occurred in 2010 when the new Superintendent developed the District Improvement Strategy, which outlined a district-wide focused strategy to improve teaching and learning for all students. The strategy focused on four areas: (a) strengthen skills of teachers and staff; (b) strengthen skills of school leaders; (c) strengthen alignment of the district horizontally and vertically; and (d) provide sufficient and well-utilized resources. Two themes permeated all four areas: (a) the improved use of student performance data to drive decision-making; and (b) better instruction of the rigorous program. Consistently, since 2010, the eleven elementary schools had common goals in school improvement plans that focused on data drive decision-making and rigorous instruction in order to achieve equitable access for all students:

Monitoring student learning and adjusting teaching during instruction in response to student performance and engagement in learning across the hierarchy of cognitive skills (Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills) using rigorous tasks (School A)

Based on achievement data in all K-5 core areas, we need to ensure a consistency of the core components of the instructional model, inclusive of data driven small group instruction (School F)

Independent student work needs to be monitored and revised for rigor and connectedness to what is taught (School J)

Districts are most successful with providing equitable access for all students when central office leaders use a set of common, rigorous instructional standards higher than the state requirements (research-based principle #4-4). Although Memorial worked toward establishing classroom instructional standards that were more rigorous than the state standards and previous practices, an important facet was missing - an updated approved Language Arts Curriculum. Although student learning expectations and instructional strategies changed in 2006 as evidenced

with the implementation of Readers Workshop (Calkins, 2000) the last Board of Education

approved curriculum dated back to 1998 – creating a discrepancy between the 2006 expectations

for learning and the 1998 curriculum standards. The district's efforts to move forward beyond

the state's expectations were not realized until 2012 when the revised curriculum was finally

approved by the Board of Education. The newly approved curriculum included specific areas

where Memorial schools would be held to higher standards than those outlined by the

Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE):

> Memorial grade 1 Language Arts standard, *Independently analyze texts that are right for learning and thinking*, is at a higher level than the Common Core State Standards which requires the student to achieve this standard with prompting and support.

> Memorial grade 5 Language Arts standard, *Examine and compare/contrast multiple points of view about a topic as well the author's,* requires the student to consider multiple points of view rather than just the author's bias which is the expectation in the Common Core State Standards.

> The Developmental Reading Assessment 2 is administered in Kindergarten twice a year (once more than required by the CSDE) and in grades four and five (not required in these grades by the CSDE).

As indicated by research-based principle #4-5, central office leaders supporting the use of

differentiated instruction throughout the district is a key component of bringing about successful

school reform that also provides equitable access. The Superintendent identified the

instructional improvement theme for the 2008-2009 school year as differentiated instruction with

a focus on closing the achievement gap. The topic was on every K-12 administrator meeting

agenda for 2008-2009 for discussion. As a follow-up to this series of discussions, a nationally

renowned speaker on differentiated instruction provided professional development to teams of

teachers and administrators from all schools to provide them with strategies on how to meet the

needs of all learners. Despite these efforts, teachers still asked for more clarity on the use of

differentiated instruction as evidenced in a differentiated instruction professional development

needs assessment administered in 2009. One elementary teacher cited "the need for examples of

curricula that modeled differentiation for us and differentiated lessons within the units." On the

survey, teachers asked for support in order to ensure equitable access: (a) 48.3% of teachers

identified the need for more support on how to develop differentiated units for instruction; (b)

46.8% identified the need for help to develop differentiated assessments; and (c) 44% responded

that they needed assistant with identifying various learning styles in order to differentiate

instruction.

Areas where the central office did not follow the research-based principles.

According to research-based principle #4-7, districts are more effective when central office

leaders use value chain thinking to design the entire K-12 continuum (i.e., they ensure that each

activity within the curriculum added value in a chain of events that would culminate in college

readiness for all students) to attain successful school reform and equitable access. With the goal

of aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment practices across the K-12 continuum,

Memorial central office leaders established the Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC) in 2009.

Members from all curricular areas at the elementary, middle and high school levels were

represented. The CCC Guidebook outlined structures for horizontal and vertical alignment

activities that would ensure a connected K-12 continuum of learning expectations. Based on

evidence in meeting agendas and notes in my reflective journal, this structure was not realized.

Instead, agenda items included previews and feedback to various Board of Education curriculum

presentations and discussion on professional development issues. At a meeting in 2010,

participants expressed frustration with the lack of vertical alignment. Members of the CCC were

not on the same page for the vision of this committee and therefore, the meetings continued to be

limited to the review of Board of Education curriculum presentations.

According to research-based principle #4-10 it is incumbent of central office leaders to create an accountability system that includes specific goals for students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to counter expectations about students that may have limited achievement. Although the Superintendent of schools had high expectations for all students, there was no evidence of specific goals for students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds particularly in the two schools with higher percentages of diverse students (Schools C and E). In 2010, a private organization conducted an operational audit of the district. The audit identified the performance of students in School E to be unacceptable. The audit concluded:

> The district is not concertedly focusing on developing strategies for those students who are largely in one elementary school, [School E]. This school has a more diverse student population, higher proportion of English Language Learners, and higher rate of free and reduced lunch eligibility than other elementary schools in the district. Despite the improvement efforts, the achievement gap remains at [School E]. For the past five years, [School E] students have not been given equitable educational opportunities. Without the will to re-structure the current elementary school configuration to provide more equity for the [School E] students or a plan to better focus district attention on [School E], [School E] students' achievement will continue to languish.

Finally, in my review of the public domain documents, interviews, and my own reflective journal, I did not find any evidence that the district addressed one important research-based principles of reform: Multiple groups felt responsible for the district's success (research-based principle #4-8). This lack of evidence suggested that the central office did not address this issue within the events covered by the public domain documents, the experiences reported by the interviewees, or the events covered in my reflective journal.

Summary

In summary, as outlined above, the central office adhered to four research-based principles

related to instructional leadership in instituting literacy reform. Specifically there appeared to be

a strong emphasis on establishing expectations of high levels of achievement for all students

devoid any excuses. The central office demonstrated a mixed emphasis on three research-based

principles related to reform. For example, there was evidence of some signs of improvement on

the research-based principle related to the development of a district-wide focused strategy to

improve teaching and learning for all students. Finally, as summarized above, the central office

did not adhere to three of the research principles related to successful school reform. For

example, there was no evidence that the central office created an accountability system that

included specific goals for students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In the final section of this manuscript I will review the implications of this analysis of the

central office's adherence to research-based principles of reform. In the final section I will also

outline suggestions for improving practice related to focusing on equitable access based on this

analysis.

Research Question 5: *In what ways were the efforts of the central office in implementing the*

literacy reform related to – or not related to – the principles identified by prior research on

implementing policies effectively?

As outlined in Table 7 (next page) there was a mixed relationship between the activities of

the central office and the research-based principles outlined in the theoretical framework section

related to policy. There were four areas where the central office followed the principles closely,

two areas where the central office somewhat followed the principles, and two areas where the

central office did not follow the principles.

Table 7

Central Office's Use of Research Principles on Policy

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
5-1. Use a variety of policies in a concerted way to influence teaching in schools	+	- curriculum documents - curriculum revision cycle - Memorial Balanced Literacy document (2002) - professional development offerings (2006-2010) - District Improvement Strategy (2010)
5-2. Adopt new policies for educational reform that would require them to put aside old patterns of decision making that focused on a preferred philosophy or on a belief about the goodness of an option rather than its effectiveness	+	- curriculum documents - curriculum revision cycle - District Improvement Strategy (2010) - professional development offerings (2006-2010) - reflective journal - administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011) - central office agendas (2006-2010)
5-3. Develop policies that establish improvements focused on changes in teaching and learning	+	- curriculum documents - curriculum revision cycle - District Improvement Strategy (2010) - professional development offerings (2006-2010)
5-4. Ensure that improvements contained in the policy did not impact negatively on the surrounding environment of other schools or systems	-	no evidence available

(continued)

Research-Based Principle: Focus on the Instructional Core	Degree Central Office Addressed Principle	Evidence Used in Analysis
5-5. Ensure that improvements advocated by the policy promoted diversity and built capacity throughout the entire educational community	−	• no evidence available
5-6. Support reform policies despite increasing state demands	+	• administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011) • central office meeting agendas (2006-2010) • Memorial Board of Education budgets (2006-2011)
5-7. Develop vertical alignment from the district to the classroom related to reform policies	+/-	• administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011) • central office agendas (2006-2010) • school improvement plans (2007-2011) • District Improvement Strategy (2010) • Memorial Public Schools Strategic Plan (2008-2013) • Memorial Public Schools Operational Audit (2010) • interviews (2008-2009)
5-8. Build the capacity of instructional leaders and teachers to implement the policies	+/-	• administrator meeting agendas (2006-2011) • central office agendas (2006-2010) • professional development offerings (2006-2010) • summaries of evaluation forms completed by administrators who attended the annual summer retreat (2008-2010) • professional development survey and needs assessments (2008-2009)

Areas where the central office followed the research-based principles. According to

the research conducted for this study, districts are most successful with policy implementation

when central office leaders (a) use a variety of policies in a concerted way to influence teaching in schools (research-based principle #5-1), (b) establish policies that are focused on changes in teaching and learning (research-principle #5-3) and (c) adopt new policies for educational reform that would require educators to put aside old patterns of decision making that focused on a preferred philosophy or on a belief about the goodness of an option rather than its effectiveness (research-based principle #5-2). One of the district's approaches to influencing practice in the classrooms was through the implementation of the Memorial Public Schools Board of Education Policy #6200, which stated that the Board of Education has the responsibility for establishing curricula for the school district and therefore, requiring teachers to follow all approved curricula. In the spring of 2012, the Memorial BOE approved the PK-5 Language Arts Curriculum which was the foundation of the Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) instructional model.

There is limited evidence that consistent instructional practices existed when Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) was introduced in Memorial in 2006. The Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) was first implemented in two elementary schools (Schools E and G). The Superintendent and the K-5 Language Arts Curriculum Leader decided to move Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) into all eleven elementary schools. In my analysis, I found information contained in the professional development offerings, documents that detailed the development of common units of study, and Board of Education budgets that suggested teachers were trained, given common instructional units and provided with classroom resources to implement a common instructional model. With the district-wide implementation of Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000), principals and teachers began to give up their long-held autonomy of determining instructional practices in each building.

In 2010, the Superintendent's District Improvement Strategy outlined the expectation of

horizontal and vertical alignment of instructional practices and the use of data teams to ensure

fidelity of curriculum and the monitoring of student growth. This is another example of how the

central office utilized policies to influence teaching in schools. According to my reflective

journal and summaries of classroom observations conducted by the principals, central office

leaders responsible for the implementation of literacy reform focused on the fidelity to the

Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) in classrooms across the district. Consistent practices (e.g.,

use of mini-lessons, implementation of small group instruction) were encouraged and areas for

improvement were identified in each school. Additionally, as evidenced in administrator

meeting agendas and in my reflective journal, schools utilized data teams to monitor (a) the

implementation of the curriculum, (b) the use of instructional practices within Readers'

Workshop (Calkins, 2000) and (c) the related advances in student achievement.

According to research-principle #5-6, central office leaders supporting reform policies –

despite increasing state demands – is a critical component to ensuring successful policy

implementation. This support was exemplified in Memorial Public Schools particularly during

the years 2008-2009 when the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) required all

school districts to put in place a system of scientifically-research based interventions (SRBI).

SRBI required schools to ensure three tiers of intervention. According to the Memorial Public

Schools SRBI Handbook, each elementary school was to implement a program that met the

needs of 80% of students in Tier I, 15% of students in Tier II and 5% of students in Tier III. As

identified in the handbook, all students were exposed to grade level curriculum through the

Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000). Those students not meeting grade level expectations were

then provided with instruction above and beyond that provided through Readers' Workshop

(Calkins, 2000). Additionally, according to administrator meeting agendas and notes in my

reflective journal, at the time of the state's requirement for a system of SRBI, elementary

principals discussed supplementing Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) with two skill-based

reading intervention programs. As evidenced by the Memorial SRBI Handbook, administrator

meeting agendas, and my reflective journal, despite the increasing demands by the CSDE and

pressure from elementary principals to make a change in literacy instruction, central office

leaders remained committed to Readers' Workshop rather than making a literacy reform policy

change.

Areas where the central office somewhat followed the research-based principles.

According to research-based principle #5-7, in order to ensure successful policy implementation,

central office leaders would develop vertical alignment from the district level to the classroom

level related to reform policies. As evidenced in professional development offerings,

administrator meeting agendas, and school improvement plans there was a concerted effort to

roll out Readers' Workshop starting in 2006 across eleven elementary school with the goal of

alignment between district and school. A central office administrator involved with the reading

curriculum and building Language Arts Consultants worked together to ensure alignment by

writing units of study and providing professional development for teachers. Despite these

efforts, according to administrator meeting agendas, my reflective journal, summaries of walk-

throughs that occurred between 2008-2011, the implementation of practices in most schools

related to Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) was inconsistent. Specifically, this evidence

indicated that teachers were inconsistently implementing, with fidelity, key elements of the

Readers' Workshop: mini-lessons, small group instruction, planning and recording sheets, and

post-reading activities. An analysis of school improvement goals provided evidence that even

six years after its initial roll out, schools were still focusing on foundational elements of the

Readers' Workshop:

> To understand the principles and techniques, along with advantages and limitations, associated with the Readers' Workshop as an instructional strategy in preparation of implementing it with teachers as a part of the language arts program. (School A, 2008)

> Through grade level goal setting, individual goal setting, staff interviews, twenty-seven classroom observations, consultation with the [central office administrator involved with the reading curriculum], and a review of all assessment data, we have determined that our area of focus will be to consistently implement all of the components of Readers' Workshop with fidelity. (School I, 2012)

According to research-based principle #5-8, districts are most successful with policy implementation when central office leaders build the capacity of instructional leaders and teachers to implement reform policies. The somewhat effective research-based principle focused on building capacity of principals and teachers is discussed in this manuscript on pages 63 and 64 as reviewed through the lens of research-based principles on professional learning. Despite efforts to train Language Arts Consultants (LAC) to develop them as leaders of literacy in each building, there was evidence that LACs were unable to lead the school reform due to their own lack of proficiency and comfort with the instructional strategies. There was also a lack of evidence of training specifically designed for principals to lead reform efforts in Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000).

Areas where the central office did not follow the research-based principles. In my review of the public domain documents, interviews, and my own reflective journal, I did not find any evidence that the district addressed two important research-based principles of policy implementation: (a) improvements contained in the policy did not impact negatively on the surrounding environment of other schools or systems (research-based principle #5-4) and (b) improvements advocated by the policy promoted diversity and built capacity throughout the entire educational community (research-based principle #5-5). This lack of evidence suggested

that the central office did not address this issue within the events covered by the public domain

documents, the experiences reported by the interviewees, or the events covered in my reflective

journal.

Summary

In summary, as outlined above, the central office adhered to four research-based

principles related to instructional leadership in instituting literacy reform. Specifically there

appeared to be a strong emphasis on establishing policies that focused on changes in teaching

and learning. The central office demonstrated a mixed emphasis on two research-based

principles related to reform. For example, there was evidence of some signs of improvement on

the research-based principle related to the development of vertical alignment from the district to

the classroom related to reform policies. Finally, as summarized above, the central office did not

adhere to two of the research principles related to successful school reform. For example, there

was no evidence that the central office ensured that improvements advocated by the policy

promoted diversity and built capacity throughout the entire educational community.

In the final section of this manuscript I will review the implications of this analysis of the

central office's adherence to research-based principles of reform. In the final section I will also

outline suggestions for improving practice related to focusing on policy implementation based on

this analysis.

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Discussion

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In summary, of the 53 research-based principles identified through the research

conducted for this study on the role of central office leaders in successful school reform, the

Memorial Public Schools staff followed 24 research-based principles, somewhat followed 13

research-based principles, and did not follow 16 research-based principles. The breakdown of

the research-based principles by each lens of the theoretical framework represented in Figure 1

(page 5) is found in Table 8. Although evidence suggested that central office staff followed 45%

of the research-based principles regarding its literacy reform efforts, analysis conducted for this

study indicated that 55% of the research-based principles were either somewhat followed (25%)

or not followed (30%). Accordingly, the lack of follow-through on these research principles

appeared to have an impact in that the school district did not fully realize the level of change it

desired by implementing Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) in all eleven elementary schools.

Table 8

Number of Research-Based Principles Followed, Somewhat Followed and Not Followed by Memorial Public Schools Central Office Leaders

	Followed Research-Based Principle	Somewhat Followed Research-Based Principle	Did Not Follow Research-Based Principle
Instructional Core	7 (41%)	3 (18%)	7 (41%)
Instructional Leadership	1 (13%)	3 (37%)	4 (50%)
Professional Learning	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)
Social Justice	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)
Policy	4 (50%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)
Totals	24 (45%)	13 (25%)	16 (30%)

The use of research-based principles as related to the five areas of the framework could,

in some measures, be considered a success. The implementation of Readers' Workshop

(Calkins, 2000) had positive impacts on the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2)

results. Between 2008-2011, after a new central office administrator involved with literacy

curriculum was hired, there was a rise in the number of students meeting reading benchmarks as

measured by the DRA2 (Table 9). All schools in grades Kindergarten through second grades

experienced an increase in the number of students at/above benchmark in June of 2008 as

compared to June 2011. In some cases, there was double digit growth, such as in Kindergarten

in Schools A (16.8%), C (11.9%), D (31.8%), E (23.9%), F (50.2%), H (24%), I (23.1%), J

(13.1%), and K (22.6%).

Table 9

DRA2 Results for Memorial Elementary Schools Grades K-2 Percentage of Students At/Above Benchmark in June 2008 and June 2011

	Kindergarten 2008	Kindergarten 2011	1st Grade 2008	1st Grade 2011	2nd Grade 2008	2nd Grade 2011
A	71.4	88.2	82.5	98.3	86.9	94.2
B	91.7	93.2	57.4	97.7	93.0	97.7
C	65.5	77.4	61.4	96.2	88.2	94.8
D	59.1	90.9	71.2	98.2	74.6	100
E	46.6	70.5	63.4	84.9	67.4	68.1
F	35.9	86.1	56.9	95.5	81.5	86.8
G	79.1	86.2	74.3	97.0	81.4	86.8
H	59.3	83.3	74.7	94.3	89.9	96.9
I	62.2	85.3	68.3	95.4	76.9	94.5
J	80.6	93.7	79.6	96.7	77.8	96.8
K	73.2	95.8	73.6	96.6	86.8	98.1

Additionally, following 45% of the research-based principles as related to Readers'

Workshop could be considered successful in the progress made in narrowing the achievement

gap. In the two elementary schools with the highest percentage of minority students and students

who qualify for free/reduced lunch, Schools C and E, there is evidence of a narrowing

achievement gap as measured by the number of students at/above benchmark on the DRA2 in

grades Kindergarten and first grade in 2008 and 2011. The kindergarten achievement gap

between the schools with low minority and low poverty and those schools with higher minority

and poverty rates (Schools C and E) was 26.2% and 45.1% respectively in June 2008. After

three years of implementation of Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000), the gap shrank to 18.4%

and 25.3% respectively in June 2011. The first grade achievement gap for Schools C and E was

21.1% and 19.1% respectively in June 2008 and 2.1% and 13.4% respectively in June 2011.

Although there was significant improvement in reading levels as measured by DRA2 scores, CMT scores indicated that a great deal of work still remains. As discussed in the Problem Statement section of this paper (page 2), student achievement in Memorial Public Schools has shown little improvement over the past six years in grades three through five. For example, from 2006-2011, the percentage of students in grades three through five who have achieved a "goal" score on the CMT has increased by only 1% in reading and only 1.6% in writing. The analyses conducted in this study suggested that the central office leaders' failure to address fully the research-based principles related to successful school reform may have contributed to this outcome.

Memorial Public Schools adhered to some high leverage research-based principles identified in the literature review conducted for this study. For example, central office leaders adopted the Readers' Workshop approach to literacy instruction – an approach to instruction that all teachers were expected to utilize (research-based principle #1-9). Implementing Readers' Workshop required teachers to put aside the old patterns of instruction that they may have preferred in favor of an approach that had proved effectiveness (research-based principle #5-2). Adhering to these two research-based principles had a direct impact on bringing a high level of coherence to the instructional core – the interaction between teachers and students around content (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Elmore, 2000). Hightower (2002) found that when school districts focused on improving instructional practices, student learning would also improve. Memorial central office leaders focused on improving teachers' instructional skills through the implementation of Readers' Workshop in an attempt to improve student achievement.

Memorial's central office leaders may have undermined the efforts to bring coherence to the instructional core however, by not following other critical research-based principles

identified in research reviewed for this study. Although the district adopted a preferred approach to instruction, there was no focus on consistency in the instructional core across all elementary schools (research-based principle #1-11). The district's lack of instructionally focused principal meetings (research-based principle #2-1) and opportunities for the development of principal networks (research-based principle #2-8) may have contributed to the lack of consistent implementation of the literacy reform. Marsh, et al (2005) emphasizes the important role of the central office in building the capacity of school principals to lead, support, and hold teachers accountable for implementation of standards, curriculum reforms, and other instructional initiatives. The Memorial Public Schools central office faltered in its support of school leaders by not providing sufficient opportunities for elementary principals (a) to improve their capacity as instructional leaders, and (b) to develop their knowledge about the instructional approaches used in the literacy reform.

Although Memorial's central office leaders provided professional development that immersed teachers in learning that allowed them to build on their knowledge (research-based principle #3-4) and encouraged them to collaborate in reflect dialogues (research-based principle #3-9), feedback from teachers revealed that the activities did not help them improve their skills in a way that helped them to address the needs of their students. Although my analysis indicated that the central office followed the research-based principles for professional learning included in the literature review for this study, the feedback from teachers (i.e., their assessment of the professional development workshops) indicates that here may be a gap in the research literature.

While still struggling to achieve consistent implementation of Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000), Memorial central office leaders chose to utilize an evidence-based intervention system (research-based principle #4-3) and to engage teachers in on-going cycles of learning

(research-based principle #3-3). The effectiveness of these two research-based principles may have been diminished due to the lack of implementation of Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) in all classrooms. Central office leaders did not address the interdependency between Readers' Workshop (Calkins, 2000) and the SRBI reading intervention system (e.g., Leveled Literacy Intervention and Literacy Wings) – both related elements to Memorial's literacy reform effort (research-based principle #1-6) therefore potentially limiting the impact of the literacy reform efforts.

Related research suggests that addressing the identified research-based principles listed in this study will require Memorial Public Schools central office leaders to grapple with complex issues related to the instructional core, instructional leadership, professional learning, social justice and policy. With support from the Wallace Foundation, a team or researchers from the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington undertook an investigation of leadership in school and districts (Honig, et al, 2010). The study explored the question, "What does it take for leaders to promote and support powerful, equitable learning in a school and in the district and state system that serves the school?" Honig, et al (2010) found that in districts experiencing successful school reform, central office administrators played a critical role in exercising essential leadership, in partnering with school leaders, and in building capacity for teaching and learning improvements. Honig, et al (2010) summarize their findings in this way, "Central office transformation is hardly a rehash of old efforts at 'restructuring' the district organizational chart. Nor is it a top-down or a bottom-up approach to change. Rather, central office transformation goes right to the heart of practice—what people in central offices actually do day in and day out—to help improve teaching and learning for all students" (page iv).

The Memorial Public Schools central office leaders addressed some of the research-based principles identified in this study and the elementary schools experienced a modest rise in DRA2 scores and a narrowing of the achievement gap. In the section that follows I outline suggestions that districts similar to Memorial – ones that have addressed some of the research-based principles related to the role of the central office in successful school reform—might follow to prompt and advance reforms that improve teachers' instructional practice and students' achievement.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Practice**</div>

The following recommendations suggest steps that other districts similar to Memorial— those that seek to ensure school reform with a focus on the role of central office leaders.

Maintain a Coherent Focus on the Instructional Core

A strategy districts could pursue in order to maintain a coherent focus on the instructional core is to establish a common district-wide strategy for improvement (Childress et al, 2007). Central office leaders can engage administrators and teachers in a process to develop a district-wide strategy that will serve as the overarching approach to improving teaching and learning. For example, after exploring various research-based improvement strategies, administrators and teachers may select the use of data teams. As the district-wide strategy for improvement, the use of student performance data to drive decisions can be used at all levels and in all departments of the school system. It is critical, however, to make explicit connections between data teams and the instructional core because such connections can help to establish a district-wide focus for instructional practices (Childress et al, 2007). In turn, a shared district-wide understanding of the districts' approach to instruction (a) can be used to inform decisions about classroom practices

and (b) can enable central office leaders to actively assist schools in implementing the reform effort (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006).

A second strategy districts could utilize is to ensure that central office leaders focus on consistency within the instructional core. Consistency within the instructional core can be defined as a set of interrelated programs for students and teachers that are guided by a common framework for curriculum, instruction, assessments and the classroom learning environment (Newmann et al, 2001). In order to achieve coherence within the instructional core, central office administrators involved in improving teaching and learning could work with school principals and teachers to focus on a common instructional framework that (a) guides teachers' classroom practices, (b) coordinates supports provided to teachers, and (c) provides teachers with regular opportunities to receive continual feedback on their work. The process of feedback and follow-up is a key mechanism for ensuring consistency within the instructional core. Two examples of feedback and follow-up in a school could be (a) the integration of the monitoring efforts of a school data team with the development of a school's improvement plan or (b) a school team conducting instructional rounds – a professional learning process through which educators develop a shared practice of observing, discussing, and analyzing learning and teaching (City et al, 2009).

A third strategy for districts to maintain a focus on the instructional core is for central office leaders (a) to articulate explicitly the detailed theory of action about teaching and learning that they use to guide their work and (b) to examine and re-examine their practice in line with this theory of action. Honig et al (2010) concluded that district-wide transformation occurred when central office leaders changed their office structures, work practices, and relationships based on how each of these components can be used to improve instruction. Central office

leaders could develop a theory of action focused on teaching and learning by first identifying

what they intend to do (e.g., goals, strategies, solutions) and then identifying why those are the

right strategies to pursue. Honig et al (2010) found that district leaders who focused on the

instructional core considered the current state of the relationship between central office and

schools, and asked how central office staff assessed what kinds of supports schools could benefit

from, what supports they actually received, and how those supports addressed expressed needs at

the school level.

As suggested from the Memorial case, the steps outlined above require a lengthy

timeframe. To implement this set of recommendations districts would need to invest time in (a)

exploring various research-based strategies to identify a common district-wide improvement

strategy, (b) developing consistency within the instructional core, and (c) formulating central

office theories of action related to teaching and learning.

Provide Appropriate Supports to Develop Instructional Leaders

School reform is more successful when district leaders invest in building principals'

capacity as instructional leaders (March et al, 2005). Districts can capitalize on three

opportunities to further grow principals as instructional leaders, (a) on-going professional

development opportunities with embedded practice and feedback (Sheckley et at, 2008), (b)

instructionally-focused principal meetings (Marsh et al, 2005), and (c) instructionally-focused

supervision of principals (Marsh et al, 2005). Central office leaders can capitalize on these three

opportunities as ways to help principals, as instructional leaders, support and hold teachers

accountable for school reform efforts.

Districts whose central office leaders helped to develop, support, and engage principals in

networks that supported and advanced their work as instructional leaders had more success with

school reforms than districts who did not engage principals in such networks (Honig et al, 2010).

Central office leaders can be instrumental in facilitating an environment where all school

principals participate in a professional community regardless of their level of knowledge or skill

– as a way for principals (a) to improve their skills as instructional leaders and, in turn, (b) to

contribute actively to effective reform initiatives. In order to become a resource for one another

around instructional leadership practice, principals within a network can use strategies such as

(a) modeling and practicing instructional leadership behaviors, (b) developing and using tools,

and (c) providing feedback to one another. Developing an environment of trust and

collaboration may take some time in order for this type of support to influence principals'

practices and contribute positively to reform initiatives.

As suggested from the Memorial case, the steps outlined above require a lengthy time

frame to (a) develop trust and collaboration amongst a team of school leaders, (b) maximize

professional development opportunities, and (c) establish instructionally focused principal

meetings and supervision of principals.

Design Professional Learning in Line with How Adults Learn Best

Individuals approach learning tasks with a set of values, beliefs, perceptions and

understanding that make up their mental model – the way in which the mind represents,

organizes and restructures knowledge (Eckert, & Bell, 2005). One strategy central office leaders

can utilize to build capacity is to ensure that professional growth opportunities allow principals

and teachers to expand the mental models they use to guide their practice. A district can

facilitate this by (a) allowing principals and teachers to identify areas for growth as informed by

student achievement data, peer observations, school improvement plans or instructional rounds,

(b) providing time for principals and teachers to explore their current conceptual understandings

of the identified growth area, (c) introducing new ideas for teachers to consider, (d) allowing principals and teachers to self-regulate and reflect on their conceptual understanding as they interact with the new learning so they can monitor and evaluate their actions, and (e) collaborating with principals and teachers to develop a plan for next steps to close the gap between current conceptual understandings and new learning.

As suggested from the Memorial case, the steps outlined above require a lengthy time frame to accomplish key actions such as (a) providing principals and teachers time and opportunities to refine the mental models they use to guide their practice, (b), engaging principals and teachers in the exploration of new ideas, and (c) allowing principals and teachers to self-regulate their learning as they work to align the mental models they use to guide their practice with ideas and learning they can acquire from new experiences.

Ensure Equitable Access for All Students

One strategy that districts can utilize to ensure equitable access for all students is to create an accountability system that includes specific goals for students with different backgrounds in order to counter expectations about students that may have limited achievement (Childress, 2009). Districts can use the school improvement development and data team processes to facilitate the development of specific goals for various groups of students represented in the district. Based on an analysis of district-wide data, targeted areas of need can be identified and specific goals for these groups of students can be established. Each school's improvement plan then can include specific measured targets, strategies and means for monitoring to ensure that all students meet the identified goals. School teams can use the data team process to monitor the progress of these students throughout the year and adjust instructional practices as needed to ensure attainment of student achievement goals.

A second strategy that central office leaders can use to ensure equitable access for all students is to provide professional development opportunities that would particularly help teachers develop their skills in the area of providing differentiated instruction. A district could begin by working to develop clear examples of differentiated instruction as related to meeting the learning needs of all students (e.g., develop a wide range of exemplary units of study). Teachers could then review this material – either alone or in collaboration with other members of their instructional team – and use the examples to guide them in developing units of study in the curriculum that are (a) differentiated and (b) address the goal of achieving growth for all students.

As suggested from the Memorial case, the steps outlined above require a moderate scope of change – (a) setting and monitoring achievement goals through the school improvement planning and data team process to ensure equitable access for all students, (b) providing professional development opportunities that adhere to the research-based principles in this study, and (c) engaging teachers in the work of differentiating instruction.

Develop and Implement Policies that Support Improved Student Achievement

Datnow (2006) concluded that policy implementation is a system-wide activity even when the desired change is mainly at the school level. The central office's role in policy implementation is critical to ensure alignment of the reform effort from the district level to the classroom level. Some steps central office leaders can take in order to align reform policies include: (a) articulating the reform policy to all stakeholders, (b) allowing for feedback on the reform policy, (c) supporting principals and teachers as they implement the policy, (d) allowing adequate time for implementation, (e) ensuring that the instructional leadership provided throughout the district is focused on the reform effort, (f) providing resources that are sufficient

to support the reform effort, and (g) developing school leaders' capacity to initiate and sustain change (Datnow, 2006). Supporting school leaders and teachers and allowing time during the implementation of reform policies can result in a smaller gap between the intended and actual policy impact.

Central office leaders can use a variety of policies in a concerted way to influence teaching in schools. Elmore (1993) found that although districts had policies that had the potential to influence the instructional core (e.g., policies related to curriculum and instruction, testing, curriculum objectives and guides, textbook selection, allocation of time to subject matter and teacher training) these districts lacked a strategy to implement the policies in away that led to effective reform efforts across all schools. Districts can use policies to implement reforms successfully by first developing a comprehensive district-wide framework for reform. The framework could represent the aspects of the reform policies (e.g., supports, resources, goals, timelines, and requirements) as they relate to improved student achievement. This formulation would allow administrators and teachers to understand the connections between and among the various policies and potentially increase consistency of implementation across the district.

Hargreaves and Fink (2003) suggest that building capacity throughout the entire educational community is a means of sustaining school reform policies. Central office administrators can build capacity district-wide by developing systems of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership means creating a culture of initiative and opportunity, where teachers at all levels propose new directions and start innovations (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Districts can move away from models of advisory committees where teachers provide suggestions to school and district level leaders and toward instituting structures where teachers themselves are empowered to develop and lead initiatives at the district level. Working together with district

and school leaders, teachers, as primary implementers of improvement initiatives, can ensure that school reform policies are sustainable.

   As suggested from the Memorial case, the steps outlined above require a lengthy time frame to initiate actions such as (a) establishing an alignment of school reform policies from the district level to the classroom level, (b) using a variety of policies in a concerted way to influence instructional practice, and (c) building district-wide capacity to develop practices that contribute to the effective implementation of reform policies.

Final Comment

Analysis of the central office roles during literacy reform in Memorial Public Schools has allowed me to reflect on the challenges confronting educational systems in their goal to improve teaching and learning. As indicated by Honig et al (2010), transforming the role of the central office represents a promising approach to reform initiatives that focus on improving teaching and learning within a district. As outlined in this study, a long-term time frame may be required for changes in the role of a Central Office to translate into improvements in teaching practices and advances in students' achievement. Over the years covered by this study the Central Office's attempts at transforming teaching and learning yielded mixed results as evidenced by DRA2 scores that improved and CMT scores that plateaued in some cases and declined in others.

   As a member of the Memorial Public Schools central office team, I have observed research-based changes take place in the last two years (immediately following the time frame of this study). Changes in instructional leadership development, central office organization, and a focused district-improvement strategy appear to be moving the district in a direction of improved teaching and learning. Although it is too soon to understand the impact of this shift in practice, I am hopeful that Memorial will continue on this path of central office transformation for the

purpose of supporting schools to improve teaching and learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Reading CMT Scores

Grade 3	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
A	85.5	67.4	75.7	87.0	86.0	90.9
B	85.5	86.5	93.5	76.4	82.4	88.1
C	77.4	59.3	79.7	76.9	83.6	79.3
D	71.7	69.0	71.7	68.7	71.9	78.9
E	56.8	46.3	48.6	58.7	52.9	68.3
F	85.1	80.9	79.7	73.9	80.8	74.3
G	76.4	68.0	71.4	73.4	71.4	73.8
H	85.3	80.7	78.7	66.3	78.5	71.4
I	82.1	76.3	71.1	62.6	75.9	65.6
J	79.7	70.1	86.7	71.7	76.5	83.3
K	82.6	59.8	75.3	89.5	88.9	70.6

Grade 4	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
A	84.1	89.0	73.2	85.3	84.7	81.4
B	85.7	85.7	87.5	90.2	92.9	85.2
C	57.4	71.4	70.2	82.1	67.9	84.5
D	87.3	70.4	68.3	76.0	82.4	78.5
E	46.8	65.1	57.8	46.3	60.0	63.1
F	90.0	70.1	89.0	80.3	79.1	79.2
G	80.6	71.4	76.5	73.4	81.8	73.7
H	89.2	75.0	84.3	81.5	76.4	81.1
I	85.1	78.3	78.8	81.8	71.3	83.8
J	82.6	73.8	78.4	91.4	86.9	90.9
K	75.3	91.7	76.5	79.5	85.4	91.3

Grade 5	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
A	80.9	84.5	88.0	83.5	85.3	90.0
B	87.2	84.3	80.4	85.5	86.4	89.3
C	64.9	58.6	71.2	80.7	76.3	66.7
D	79.6	79.6	73.2	77.2	75.5	73.9
E	65.7	52.8	73.2	72.3	45.5	63.8
F	83.6	92.3	81.7	84.5	84.5	81.0
G	66.7	80.8	82.4	82.3	74.0	79.2
H	83.8	81.6	83.8	87.2	82.9	84.1
I	79.7	79.7	74.3	87.3	80.0	74.0
J	75.0	78.5	87.5	80.8	87.2	88.9
K	85.5	69.6	91.8	83.0	80.8	84.3

Appendix B

Administrator and Central Office Meeting Agendas

2006-2007		2007-2008	
K-12 Meetings	Elementary Meetings	K-12 Meetings	Elementary Meetings
September 7, 2006	September 20, 2006	September 20, 2007	September 26, 2007
October 5, 2006	October 25, 2006	October 11, 2007	October 24, 2007
November 2, 2006	November 15, 2006	November 8, 2007	November 28, 2007
December 7, 2006	December 20, 2006	December 5, 2007	December 29, 2007
January 7, 2007	January 17, 2007	January 10, 2008	January 23, 2008
February 1, 2007	February 14, 2007	February 14, 2008	February 27, 2008
March 1, 2007	March 14, 2007	March 13, 2008	March 26, 2008
April 5, 2007	April 25, 2007	April 10, 2008	April 23, 2008
May 3, 2007	May 16, 2007	May 8, 2008	May 21, 2008
June 6, 2007		June 12, 2007	

2008-2009		2009-2010	
K-12 Meetings	Elementary Meetings	K-12 Meetings	Elementary Meetings
September 11, 2008	September 25, 2008	September 10, 2009	September 24, 2009
October 8, 2008	October 23, 2008	October 8, 2009	October 22, 2009
November 3, 2008	November 20, 2008	November 12, 2009	November 19, 2009
December 11, 2008	December 18, 2008		December 10, 2009
January 8, 2009	January 22, 2009	January 14, 2010	January 28, 2010
February 12, 2009	February 26, 2009	February 11, 2010	February 25, 2010
March 12, 2009	March 26, 2009	March 11, 2010	March 25, 2010
April 9, 2009	April 20, 2009	April 8, 2010	April 29, 2010
May 12, 2009	May 28, 2009	May 13, 2010	May 27, 2009
June 11, 2009		June 10, 2009	

2010-2011	
K-12 Meetings	Elementary Meetings
September 16, 2010	September 30, 2010
October 7, 2010	October 14, 2010
November 11, 2010	November 18, 2010
December 2, 2010	December 9, 2010
January 13, 2011	January 27, 2011
February 10, 2011	February 24, 2011
March 10, 2011	March 24, 2011
April 7, 2011	April 28, 2011
May 12, 2011	May 28, 2001
June 9, 2011	

Central Office Meetings	
2006-2007	2007-2008
August 22 & 28, 2006	August 27, 2007
September 5, 11, 18 & 25, 2006	September 4, 10, 17 & 24, 2007
October 29, 16, 23, & 30, 2006	October 1, 8, 15 22, & 29, 2007
November 6, 13, 20 & 27, 2006	November 5, 12, 19 & 26, 2007
December 4, 11 & 18, 2006	December 3, 10 & 17, 2007
January 2, 8, 16, 22 & 29, 2007	January 7, 14 & 28, 2008
February 5, 12 & 26, 2007	February 4, 11 & 25, 2008
March 5, 12, 19 & 26, 2007	March 3, 10, 17, 24 & 31, 2008
April 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30, 2007	April 7, 21 & 28, 2008
May 7, 14, 21 & 29, 2007	May 5, 12 & 19, 2008
June 4, 11, 18 & 25, 2007	June 2, 9 & 16, 2008

Central Office Meetings	
2008-2009	2009-2010
August 11 & 18, 2008	August 27, 2009
September 2, 8, 15, 22 & 29, 2008	September 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29, 2009
October 6, 13, 20 & 27, 2008	October 6, 13, 20 & 27, 2009
November 3, 10, 17 & 24, 2008	November 3, 10, 17 & 24, 2009
December 8, 15 & 22, 2008	December 1, 8, 15 & 22, 2009
January 5, 20 & 26, 2009	January 5, 12, 19& 26, 2010
February 2, 9 & 23, 2009	February 2, 9 & 23, 2010
March 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30, 2009	March 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30, 2010
April 6, 20 & 27, 2009	April 6, 20 & 27, 2010
May 4, 11, 18 & 26, 2009	May 4, 11, 18 & 26, 2010
June 8, 15 & 23, 2009	June 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29, 2010

Appendix C

Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study
University of Connecticut

Principal Investigator: Richard W. Lemons
Student Researcher: Anna Cutaia-Leonard
Study Title: Leadership and Instructional Practice

Introduction
You are invited to participate in an interview research study to investigate the relationship between leadership and instructional practice. You are being asked to participate because of your role and/or position in a school that is trying to improve student achievement and instructional practice.

Why is this study being done?
I am a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, and I am conducting this interview as part of my course work. I am interested in finding out about your experiences in efforts to improve student achievement and instructional practice. In particular, I am interested in understanding the recent improvement efforts of this school, who leads these efforts, and how these efforts impact the work of teachers and students in classrooms.

What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a face-to-face interview. The interview will be semi-structured-you will be asked to answer specific questions, but there will be opportunity for you to add additional information you think may be related to any of the questions. These questions will involve the context of your district/school, the improvement efforts underway, the individuals who have taken particular leadership with these efforts, and the impact these efforts are having upon student achievement and instructional practice. You may choose to not answer any question in the interview protocol.
With your consent, the interview will be audiotape or digitally recorded so that I may review the tape at a later date. I may transcribe sections of the audiotape to facilitate my review of the information you provide. You may tum off the recorder at any time during the interview if you do not want to have something you say recorded.

What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?
We believe participation in this interview does not involve any risk to you. Your participation will require about approximately 60-90 minutes of your time.

What are the benefits of the study?
Although you may find it interesting to participate in this interview, you will not benefit directly from participation.

Will I receives payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?
You will not receive payment for participation. There are no costs, other than your time, of participating in this study.

How will my personal information be protected?
The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your data. I will keep confidential your identity in all reporting of information from the interview. I will use pseudonyms to describe your organization and your name. Your identity will be known only to me. I will keep the audiotape of the interview in a secured location and at the end of the course I will erase the recording and destroy any transcriptions. You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Research Compliance may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Can I stop being in the study and what are my rights?
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the study?
Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Richard W.   Lemons (860-486-4284) or the student researcher (insert name and phone number). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802.

Documentation of Consent:
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature:
Print Name:
Date:

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:
Print Name:
Date:

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

EDLR 6092 Inquiry Project: Leadership and Instructional Practice
Interview Protocol

AFTER Interviewees have signed the informed consent form:

OK? Ready to begin?

Now that the tape-recorder is on, please state your name, the date, and that you consent to have your response tape-recorded.

A.   Context
   1.   Please tell me about this district/school

        a.   Potential Probes: Have you worked at other districts/schools? How does this school compare to your past experience in other settings?
   2.   How would you describe the students who attend your district/school?
        a.   Probes: race, ethnicity, language, family background, prior academic records. What will most students do when they leave your school?
   3.   How would you describe the adults who work in your district/school?

B.   *School Focus/Instructional Improvement Efforts*
   1.   What are the vision/goals your school/district has been working on in the past year or two?
   2.   What are you currently doing around these goals/vision?
   3.   What particular responsibilities have you assumed in relationship to the vision/goals?

C.   *Job Responsibilities & Leadership Tasks*
   1.   What does your position as [   ] entail? What are your daily responsibilities?
   2.   What are the goals/vision that you are focusing on in your own work this year?
   3.   How did you come to focus on these?
        Probes: circumstances
                       events

If district leader, ask:
   1.   What are the major strategies your district is using to improve teaching and learning:
        a.   Tell me a little about each
        •   How are human and financial resources allocated to support your vision?
        •   Professional development (district leadership and school leadership)
        •   Communications within district
        •   Collaboration
   2.   How are you developing people to carry out this vision or reach the goals?
   3.   How does the district build principals' capacity to carry out the work?

4. Give examples of how the district provides support to principals.
5. Do you provide models of best practice for principals? How?
6. How do you know whether instruction is changing in schools?
7. Do you provide incentives for change and school improvement? What are they?
8. How is policy informed by practice?
9. How do you see your role as an instructional leader in this district

If building level leader, ask:
1. What are your district's expectations for your school?
2. How does the district communicate these expectations?
3. How does the district build your capacity to carry out your work as a leader? Does this include being instructionally skilled?
4. How does the district support you as a leader?
5. Does the district provide you with models of best practice?
6. Does the district consider you to be a change agent? How do you know that? How are you supported to be a change agent?
7. How do you see your role as an instructional leader in the district?
8. How does the district support the improvement of instruction in classrooms?
9. Are there incentives for you to change and improve your school?
10. Do you believe that what you do in practice informs policy?

If outside provider, ask:
1. What are the major strategies that districts that you work with use to improve teaching and learning:
    a. Tell me a little about each
    •   How are human and financial resources allocated to support your vision?
    •   Professional development (district leadership and school leadership)
    •   Communications within district
    •   Collaboration
2. How are districts that you are working with developing people to carry out this vision or reach the goals?
3. How does the district build principals' capacity to carry out the work?
4. Give examples of how the district provides support to principals.
5. Do districts provide models of best practice for principals? How?
6. How do you know whether instruction is changing in schools?
7. What incentives do districts provide for change and school improvement?
8. How is policy informed by practice?
9. In the districts with which you work, is the development and support of principals aligned with the other structures in the district?

F.   Situational Context
1. Are there particular structures in this district that are organized to help support your work? If so, what? In what ways?
2. Are these structures aligned?
3. Are there any other factors you haven't yet mentioned that help develop or support the way you go about this work?

G.   Perceived Effectiveness
G1.   How effective have you been in these areas? Explain? Why or why not?
G2.   How do you know how effective you have been? What are your measures?
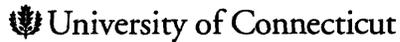G3.   What is the biggest challenge you are facing in doing this work?

J.   Wrap-up
J1.   This is a project on leadership and instructional improvement? If there were one lesson, one message, that we should take back from this study—what would it be?

Appendix E

Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Project
🌱 University of Connecticut

Course Instructor: Professor Barry G. Sheckley, PhD.
Student Researcher:
Study Title: EDLR 337 Professional Learning Interview

1. Invitation to Participate
   Good afternoon/evening. My name is _____. Before we begin, I would like
   to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

   I am working on a research project for a course offered in the Adult Learning Program at
   the University of Connecticut.

2. Purpose
   We are interested in knowing more about adults' professional learning experiences.

3. Description of Procedures
   During the next hour or so, I will ask you some questions about professional learning
   with an emphasis on your proficiency and how you developed it. I'd also like your
   consent to tape-record your response so that I may review your words at a later time.

4. Risks and Inconveniences
   We believe this interview does not involve any risk to you. This should take
   approximately 45 minutes of your time.

5. Benefits
   Although you may find it interesting to participate in this study, there will be no direct
   benefit to you from your participation.

6. Confidentiality
   All of your responses will be anonymous. Only I will know your name. Your answers
   will be combined with those from other people we interview to get an overall picture of
   about how adults develop proficiency.

   You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of
   Research Compliance may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these
   reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your responses or involvement. The
   IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of
   research participants.

10. Voluntary Participation
    You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but
    later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or
    consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

UCONN IRB
Approved On 5/21/08
Approved Until 5/21/09
Approved By _____

1

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Course Instructor: Professor Barry G. Sheckley, PhD.
Student Researcher: Anna Cutaia-Leonard
Study Title: EDLR 337 Professional Learning Interview

OK? Ready to begin?
  Now that the tape-recorder is on, please state your name, the date, and that you consent to have your response tape-recorded.
Part 2: Background Information.
To begin, would you tell me about your prior work experience? _____
[NOTE: During the discussion probe to get an estimate of number of years of experience. If necessary, ask "Do you have fewer than 3 years of experience? 3-5? 5-10? 10-15? 15-20? More than 20?]
In this interview, I'm particularly interested in discussing your work and experience **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**. Would you tell me in general about your prior experiences **[related to resolving this problem of practice].** [2] *[NOTE: As above, probe for information on the nature and extent of the interviewee's experience related to resolving this problem of practice]*

Part 3: Individual Components of Professional Learning

OK. Tell me about your specific proficiency in addressing or **[resolving this problem of practice]** ….

1. …by "proficiency," I mean an area in which you both have knowledge about **[resolving this problem of practice]** and can apply it skillfully to solve problems related to **[resolving this problem of practice]**. Can you identify an area or topic in which you have proficiency as it relates to resolving [this problem of practice]._____

   NOTE: The person may have trouble identifying – or admitting to having – an area of proficiency related to resolving the problem of practice. If necessary, expand the discussion with examples such as: "Often times it's an area in which people consult you or ask your advice because they view you as having well developed skills in addressing or resolving this problem of practice." In any event keep probing to help an understanding of the person's proficiency as it relates to addressing the problem of practice. At a minimum you need a statement that completes the phrase "This is what I can do well related to resolving [this problem of practice….]"

2. In general, what prompted you to develop this proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]?** ……[pause and wait for response—then keep probing].
   _____

   If the person does not mention this issue, ask: Any way that an external reward (e.g.,

---

[2] As appropriate, you can omit this phrase "…as it relates to resolving the problem of practice." Occasionally insert the phrase just to keep your interviewee focused on the problem of practice.

Recognition? Notoriety? Money?) was involved in the development of your proficiency **[as it relates to resolving this problem of practice]**? _____

On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, how important was this sense of external reward?

      1=not important _____10 very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

If the person does not mention this issue, ask: "Any way that a sense of "internal satisfaction" was involved in the development of your proficiency as it relates **[to resolving this problem of practice]**? _____

3. On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, how important was this sense of internal satisfaction in the development of your proficiency related [**to resolving this problem of practice]**?

      1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   [3] _____

4. Let's talk about a few other factors that may have been involved in the development of your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**.

Any way that feeling "*competent*" as a professional was involved in the development of your proficiency [**as it relates to resolving this problem of practice.]** _____

On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, how important was this sense of competence?

      1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.
_____

How about a desire to be *autonomous* in your work? Any way that a desire to feel "autonomous" as a professional may have been involved in the development of your proficiency [**as it relates to resolving this problem of practice]**?" _____

On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, how important was this sense of autonomy?

      1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

---

[3] The 1st and 3rd questions in this sequence may appear redundant.   They are not.   If you find that your interviewee rates any factor on the high end of the scale, in your analysis you'll want to explain "why" they gave this rating.   The answer to this third question will help you.

5. Finally, how about "relatedness?" Any way that a desire to feel "related" – a part of a team, connected with others – may have been involved in the development of your proficiency [**as it relates to resolving this problem of practice**]? _____

    On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, how important was this sense of relatedness?
        1=not important _____10=very important

    Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

6. Now, let's talk about how you use your proficiency.   Would you give me an example or an instance in which you used your proficiency - when you used information skillfully – to address **[this problem of practice]?** _____

    Continuing with this example, would you discuss briefly how you planned, monitored, and evaluated your actions while addressing this situation *[Note: Clarify the 3 steps—planning step where you figured out what you were going to do, monitoring step where you literally "watched yourself" and kept track of whether things were going according to plan, evaluating step where you were taking stock, assessing whether this was the best course of action. Use the ideas in the Ertner and Newby article to explain this process]*

        …planning_____
        …monitoring_____
        …evaluating_____

7. Researchers tell us that professionals will use a "mental model" – or "storyline" – about a situation when addressing a problem of practice. For many professionals these mental models represent a composite of their prior experiences with this situation. *[Note: Help to clarify that when you say "mental models" you're referring to complex frameworks individuals develop of "how the world works." Use the ideas in the Seel article to explain the idea of mental models].* Did you have any sense of using an overarching mental model of this problem of practice in this situation? _____

    If so, would you describe briefly how you used your mental model to guide your professional work in this example [where you addressed this problem of practice]?_____

8. OK if we talk about how you developed this mental model? Think back to a time, say 10 years ago, when you had not yet developed your current mental model of practice relative to **[resolving this problem of practice].** What are 5 or 6 ways you would differentiate between then (when you had little or no proficiency/experience) and now (when you have more proficiency/ experience) **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?

THEN	NOW

[Note: At the end of this section you should have enough information to discuss the individual component of the Professional Learning Model. Specifically, you should have information about innate psychological needs, self-regulation, and mental models. You should also have information on how these factors work to influence professional learning as it relates to proficiency in resolving a problem of practice.   If you do not have this information, revisit the questions. Ask probing questions—tell me more, would you expand on that—to generate the information you need]

Part 4: Key Experiences

9. In your own words, how did you develop your current level of professional proficiency **[relative to resolving this problem of practice].**   _____

10. Briefly, what were 4 or 5 key activities, events, or occurrences that enhanced the development of your proficiency **[in resolving this problem of practice]**? For each activity, would you also describe how it helped you to develop your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?

Activity/ Event	How it helped

Of these activities, which one was the most influential? Please explain why.   _____

I'm also interested in your experiences with formal "professional development" programs (e.g., workshops, conferences, academic classes) related to **[resolving this problem of practice].** In general, what were your experiences with such formal professional learning programs?
_____
…..   How frequently did you participate in such programs? Monthly? Quarterly? Yearly? Once every few years?
_____
…..what were their strengths **[in helping you gain proficiency in resolving this problem of practice]?** _____

… limitations **[in helping you gain proficiency in resolving this problem of practice]?**_____

…..On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, how important were formal professional learning programs **[in helping you gain proficiency in resolving this problem of practice]?**?

      1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

11. Here's a "heads up." As the last question in this interview, I'm going to ask you to draw a map of your professional learning process – a map that may include how the answers to these last few questions fit together.

[Note: At the end of this section you should have enough information to discuss the Key Experiences component of the Professional Learning Model. Specifically, you should have information about key experiences (also known as the multifaceted, experience-based process) that provides the foundation for professionals' learning. If you do not have this information, revisit the questions. Ask probing questions—tell me more, would you expand on that—to generate the information you will need]

Part 5: Environment

12. Let's talk briefly about the environment in which you work. By "environment" I don't mean the desk and chairs in your workspace. Instead, I mean the broad milieu – the social and physical setting – in which you work. Can you give me a specific example of how your work environment helped you to develop your proficiency **[in addressing this problem of practice]**? _____

Let's talk more about the general work environment that encased this example. Did your work environment have a climate (or culture) that actively supported and encouraged you to develop your professional skills related **[to resolving this problem of practice]**? _____ If so, briefly describe examples of the supports you received. _____

If not, briefly describe examples of how the environment discouraged or impeded the development of your proficiency [**related to resolving this problem of practice**]. _____

….what about challenges? What examples do you have of your work environment challenging you to develop, refine, or improve your proficiency **[in resolving this problem of practice]**? _____

…..On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, overall, how important was your work environment in helping you to develop your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?

      1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

13. What about feedback you received in your work environment? Did feedback from people within your environment - students, colleagues, supervisors – help you to develop your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?
_____

Explain more how this feedback helped to develop your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**_____

…..On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, overall, how important was the feedback you received within your work environment in helping you to develop your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?
       1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

14. Can you describe any examples within your work environment when you had opportunities to engage in "inquiry," – in a process where you and others questioned current practices and explored ways to improve? _____

…..On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, overall, how important was participation in inquiry activities within your work environment in helping you to develop your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?
       1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

15. One more question. Can you give me an example of an occasion where you worked collaboratively with your colleagues on resolving a problem of practice?_____

…..On a scale where 1=*not at all important* to 10=*very important*, overall, how important was working together with colleagues within your work environment in helping you to develop your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?
       1=not important _____10=very important

Briefly explain why you gave this rating.   _____

16. …anything more about your work environment? _____

   [Note: At the end of this section you should have enough information to discuss the environment component of the Professional Learning Model. Specifically, you should have information about how a work environment enhances professional learning. If you do not have this information, revisit the questions. Ask probing questions to generate the information you will need]

Part 6: Map

17. Over the last hour or so we've talked about many issues related to how you developed your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**. Let's try to pull all the ideas together. Using this blank piece of paper, would you briefly outline the process that was involved as you developed your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**. How do the items you talked about in this interview fit together?

Part 6: Conclusion

18. Any more ideas you'd like to add about your proficiency **[related to resolving this problem of practice]** or how you developed it? Any more thoughts on professional development **[related to resolving this problem of practice]**?_____

    Any closing thoughts on your professional learning experiences in general? _____

Again, I want to explain that this interview is anonymous. If you have any misgivings about your interview during the next day or so, give me a call. If you want to know about the results of the project, I will gladly talk with you again at the end of August when I have finished analyzing the data.
Thank you again for your time. Your responses have been very helpful.