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**THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON ATTITUDES
AND BELIEFS AND ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOR: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY
IN AN URBAN DISTRICT**

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Abstract

Only a few studies link characteristics of professional development with teachers' instruction and student achievement; however, over the past decade, considerable literature has emerged which provides guidance about the characteristics for high-quality professional development. Expert professional development without its acceptance and transfer into instructional practice is not sufficient. The question of why some schools flourish and others do not when presented with the same professional development begs to be asked and answered. This study sought to clear the cloud of uncertainty around what factors are present when professional development is efficacious and what factors interfere.

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of the participants directly involved in these professional development efforts, including teachers, principals, instructional facilitators, external consultants, and district personnel who were involved on-site of the efficacy of the professional development used to bring about changes in (1) beliefs and attitudes, and (2) actions and behavior in support of a Balanced Literacy initiative in an urban district. Two schools in the district were studied in this case study for the years 2003-2005. Data collected included contemporary key informant interviews of the principals, the instructional facilitators, and two teachers from each building. Documents included Balanced Literacy Implementation Team minutes, reports from consultants who worked in the district, PSSA results, staff surveys, and participant-observer recollections and field notes.

Before undertaking a large-scale professional development initiative in Balanced Literacy, it is important for districts to realize that professional development is context specific, internal capacity is necessary to sustain the initiative, and the professional culture of the school is an

important consideration in an initiative's success. An overarching theme which impacts the success of each of these areas is leadership – both at the central office level and at the building level.

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Chapter 1

Recent efforts to improve education through reforms such as schoolwide restructuring and the introduction of academic standards have focused renewed attention on professional development (Steiner, 2002). Never before in the history of education has greater significance been linked to the professional development of educators; in fact, a consistent finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in its absence (Guskey, 2000). Professional development plays a vital role in successful education reform, closing the gap between where educators are now and where they will need to be to meet the challenge of guiding all students toward academic success. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1994), high-quality professional development refers to rigorous and relevant content, strategies, and organizational supports that ensure the preparation and career-long development of educators whose competence, expectations and actions influence the teaching and learning environment for students. Guskey (1998) identifies the impact of professional development on teaching practice and student achievement as the ultimate measure of its overall effectiveness.

The link between professional development and student achievement has caught the eye of struggling school districts as they strive to meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is not the first government initiative to create a focus on student achievement. Since publication of the highly publicized A

Nation at Risk (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983), national attention has been focused on educators and education and increased accountability for student achievement has increased the pressure for schools and school districts. (Bliss, Firestone, & Richards, 1991).

When Harrisburg School District found itself at the bottom of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts based on 2001 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data, there was no doubt that the current instructional program needed to be changed. At that time school based curricular decisions were the norm and the literacy curriculum was tied to the basal reading program most recently purchased. As is the case in many urban districts, there was a collection and collision of multiple innovations (Hatch, 2002) as improvement programs changed as often as building and district administrators. This "spinning of wheels" approach, the continual and chaotic introduction of new teaching methods, led to a lack of school-level stability, focus, consistency, enthusiasm, trust, and commitment – the keys to effective schooling (Hess, 1999). With each new administration it seemed that some professional practices would be abandoned, only to be subsequently reinstated with the pendulum swing gaining momentum across time. "This too shall pass" became a common mantra, led by veteran teachers who closed their doors and rode out the waves of reform. This policy churn likely had the most negative effect on the high-energy, motivated teachers who had embraced the latest reform only to see a new administration drop it and introduce a replacement program, creating an energy-draining and soul-depleting situation (Hess, 1999). These teachers, too, learned to shut their doors.

In 2002, under the leadership of its new superintendent, the district made a significant curricular and financial decision to undertake a Balanced Literacy initiative. More than three million dollars were expended from 2003-2005 to enhance teacher learning about how to teach literacy (reading and writing) in the absence of a published basal program. What were the payoffs? Was it worth the money? At least on the surface, the results appeared to be mixed. In some schools student achievement rose, and teachers formed professional learning communities within the school. However, in other schools the administration was frustrated at the lack of evident gain, and student achievement was stagnant even with all the resources present. Why did some schools improve and achieve Adequate Yearly Progress status, as measured by the PSSA results, while the others, privy to the same resources and serving similar student populations, did not?

The Context for this Study

While NCLB reform efforts require school districts to reach the same achievement benchmarks regardless of a district's size or its economic status, the research states that district context plays a major role in determining the success of reform efforts. According to Spillane & Thompson (1997), the number of students in a district and the poverty level of students in the district are especially important influences on the capacity of a district to respond to reforms.

Harrisburg is the capital city of Pennsylvania, spanning eight square miles of land along the Susquehanna River. The population of 48,950 comprises 20,561 households of which 28.5% have children under the age of 18. It is reported that 24.4% of these households are headed by females. The racial make-up of the city is 32% White, 55%

Black, 12% Latino, and 1% from other ethnic minorities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Contrasting its 1981 status as the second most distressed city in the nation, Harrisburg has undergone a dramatic economic resurgence, causing property values to increase ten-fold. While the economy is improving, the population is at its lowest point since 1890 and the per capita income for the city is a meager \$15,787, with 35% of those under the age of 18 and 17% of those over age 65 living below the poverty line. The median income for a household in the city is \$26,920; for a family that amount is \$29,556 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). It is not surprising then, that a large percentage of Harrisburg School District students (93%) qualify for free and reduced lunch due to their level of poverty.

District Context

Located within the city of Harrisburg, the Harrisburg School District is a relatively small urban district in central Pennsylvania, with just over 9,000 students. The district is comprised of 11 elementary schools that serve K-8 student populations, one of which serves K-3, and one of which serves grades 4-8. Six of these buildings also serve three- and four-year old preschoolers. Two alternative schools, one for students in grades 4-7 and one for those in grades 8-12, provide educational and behavioral sites for students who need more structure and smaller class sizes. Another building, which houses grades 1-12, serves a population of students formerly placed in an out-of-district setting. These students have more severe emotional needs than can be accommodated in traditional school settings. A grade 9-12 vocational school, a grade 9-12 Science and Technology high school and a grade 9-12 traditional high school complete the district. The district population consists primarily of African American students (80%), with another 4%

being listed as Caucasian, and 16% as other ethnic minorities. Special education services are provided for 20% of the student population and 13% of the student population receives English as a Second Language (ESL) support. A district student poverty level of 93% qualifies the district for school-wide federal Title I status, meaning that funds reach all students, not just those achieving below grade level.

By the 1990s Harrisburg School District was stressed educationally and fiscally and by 2000 was the lowest ranked school academically based on PSSA results. As Harrisburg's schools were at their nadir, state officials were becoming increasingly troubled by the quality of public education across Pennsylvania. In 2000, then-Governor Tom Ridge crafted an Education Empowerment Act, a large-scale legislative effort to improve low-performing school districts across the state. Under the plan, school districts identified as empowerment districts by the state would receive extra funds to increase student achievement in a short period of time. If they did not, they would be taken over by the state. In the Pennsylvania State Senate, the legislation introduced the "Reed Amendment" in the Empowerment Act to address the specific needs of Harrisburg, named after Harrisburg's mayor, Stephen Reed. Unlike other distressed school districts, Harrisburg was authorized for takeover immediately for a five-year period. In this case, the mayor, not the state, would administer control. Under this plan, the elected school board would be stripped of its powers and replaced with a Board of Control appointed by the mayor. More significantly, the mayor would be responsible for the selection of the district's superintendent.

City takeover of public school systems has gained prominence as a school reform strategy since a growing number of cities have turned to mayors for leadership and

reform (Henig & Rich, 2004). In fact, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) identifies takeover as a strategy to turn around schools with years of low performance (Wong & Shen, 2001). In the past 15 years, mayors in cities such as Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and New York City have allowed influence from the state, transferring the responsibility for public education from their school boards to city hall. While mayoral takeovers of public schools are not new, Harrisburg's experience is unique in that it is the only smaller city in America where the mayor has been involved in such an endeavor.

In December, 2000, Harrisburg's mayor, Stephen Reed, began his leadership role in Harrisburg School District by appointing a five-member control board made up of civic leaders and experienced government officials with backgrounds in education. After a nation-wide search, Dr. Gerald Kohn, a Harvard-trained educator credited with turning around low-performing school districts in New Jersey, became superintendent in 2001.

Focus on Literacy

Dr. Kohn began his tenure by examining the troubling lack of reading achievement among Harrisburg students. His first step was to form a Balanced Literacy Implementation Team (BLIT) to begin district discussions around literacy. The superintendent elicited the advice from well-respected educational professionals and investigated New York City's Community District #2, where Superintendent Anthony Alvarado reportedly had well-publicized success with student and adult learning through the use of a Balanced Literacy approach (Stein & D'Amico, 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1996; 1998).

District #2's philosophy is that, through active participation in a Balanced Literacy constructivist classroom community, children become lifelong readers and this distinction provides them with academic and societal benefits. Similarly, teachers learn to embrace good teaching practices and to value the process of becoming an effective teacher by participating in a community of adult professionals who hold teaching in high esteem (Stein & D'Amico, 2002). Professional development is not a series of one-shot workshops in this type of learning environment; rather, continual opportunities for teachers to share best practice are made available. Professional learning communities exemplified by teacher study groups and classroom inter-visitations promote the culture of learning that permeates the schools and classrooms. Extensive professional learning lays the groundwork for a constructivist Balanced Literacy approach but this professional development is not the typical stand-and-deliver model used by many school districts. It is also not typical of most urban districts, especially where federal funding is involved because it is not directly linked to Scientifically-Based Reading Research" (SBRR), one of the catchphrases of NCLB and Reading First, a federally-funded reading initiative which is an outgrowth of NCLB. Districts typically must provide evidence that professional development resources and materials purchased with these federal funds are scientifically research-based.

Research-based professional development is a relatively new concept in education. Historically, state policymakers have paid little notice to the form, content or quality of professional development, leaving such matters to the discretion of district administrators and local boards of education. Often, professional development decisions at the district level are made after a program of instruction is chosen. For example, if a district chooses

to use a basal reading program, the professional development that teachers receive is a service provided by the basal publisher and revolves around the best way to teach that particular program. In these times of accountability, standards, and NCLB, it is unusual (and some might say risky) for a school district that is failing to undertake a large scale professional development initiative in literacy without a published core program.

Most urban districts tend toward a “quick fix” – a state accepted basal program with scripted lessons and a steady pace. While expert teachers produce readers regardless of the reading series they are required to use, it is the absence of expertise that leads teachers and administrators to rely on a new “proven program” (Pressley et al., 2001). (Pogrow, 2002) posits that districts often take the easy way out by hiring a vendor to take over the curriculum and professional development, providing a one-size-fits-all model, which is much easier than struggling to implement improvement strategies. While this may be characteristic, it is not always what is recommended. He adds that “true leadership occurs when a school or district gets its own act together instead of looking for an outside savior to take control of its basic professional functions and provide a quick fix. A quick fix does not exist” (p.82-83). Correspondingly, Fullan (2001) cautioned that if today's teachers are to be adequately prepared to meet the new challenges they face, this laissez-faire approach to professional development must end. The needs are too urgent and the resources too scarce to simply expand or continue today's ineffectual and inefficient arrangements. He adds that professional development that is planned and deliberate, based on the learning needs of the teachers and, ultimately, the students, is necessary.

Studies conducted on characteristics of professional development programs that are effective reflect the current vision for professional development. This model includes job-embedded learning which links learning to the immediate and real life problems faced by teachers (North Central Regional Education Laboratory, 2000). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) concurs, emphasizing the value and importance of professional development that arises from the real work going on in classrooms or schools, that is focused on what is happening with learners, and that is collaborative - where learning communities are the norm (National Staff Development Council, 2004). This type of professional development can be costly and requires much forward planning, but the benefits are great. Creating a profession of teaching in which teachers have the opportunity for continual learning is the likeliest way to inspire greater achievement for children, especially those for whom education is the only pathway to survival and success (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The role of the teacher and his/her professional development in the process of increasing student learning is undisputed (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Smylie, Miretzky, & Knonkol, 2004; Huberman, 1995). According to an Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Research Brief on support for new teachers in schools, teacher quality is one of the most powerful influences on student achievement, especially in urban schools (ASCD, 2004). Sarason (1990) concurs, noting that is difficult to create and sustain conditions for productive learning for students when they do not exist for teachers.

One of the challenges urban districts face is how to reconcile the goal of high academic performance for *all* children with the reality of variability in the conditions that

schools face in promoting student learning (Elmore & Burney, 1998). While NCLB holds schools and districts accountable to the same standards for all students, regardless of race, income, or ethnicity, the research reveals that the charge is more arduous for teachers in urban populations. Most would agree that it is the school's responsibility to ensure children's access to the mainstream (Delpit, 1995). The complexity of this lies in the fact that most newly graduated teachers have no experience with students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are learning challenging material. A pervasive myth is that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are not capable of managing academic rigor. Thus, urban districts have an additional hurdle - to show teachers how their students can achieve to high levels (Elmore, Abelman, & Furhman, 1996).

The immensity of the task of raising the literacy scores of a high poverty school district with a predominately minority population is well-documented in the literature. Poverty is not the only factor that determines if a child is at risk for reading difficulties but it is the most pervasive one. In addition to poverty, A National Research Council (NRC) report states that reading problems are more likely to occur among children who are minorities (National Research Council, 1999). Thompson (2004) agrees, reporting that African American students' reading scores generally trail those of their white and Asian (and often Latino) peers. Especially in urban settings where reading levels are critically deficient, there is urgency surrounding the task of increasing literacy for children. The achievement gap between disadvantaged and more affluent students is widely acknowledged; in fact, educational achievement correlates more strongly with economic status than with any other single variable (Singham, 1998). Additionally, students at highest risk for retention tend to be Black or Hispanic, live in poverty, live in

a single-parent household, have parents with low educational attainment, or have changed schools frequently (National Association of School Psychologists, 1998). All of these factors could be used to describe Harrisburg students.

The importance of professional development is noted and the presentation of quality professional development begins the process; however, the follow-up to the professional development is critical on the part of the administrator. How does instructional leadership play a part? How does the school culture impact the efficacy of the professional development? These are questions this study seeks to explore.

The Statement of the Research Problem and Questions

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of the participants directly involved in these professional development efforts, including teachers, principals, instructional facilitators, external consultants, and district personnel who were involved on-site of the efficacy of the professional development used to bring about changes in (1) beliefs and attitudes, and (2) actions and behavior in support of a Balanced Literacy initiative in an urban district. This study examined two K-8 schools in the same urban district which had similar professional development opportunities but with much different results as evidenced by local and standardized testing data.

Specifically, this study examined the following questions:

1. In what ways, if any, did professional development appear to change teacher and principal beliefs and attitudes toward Balanced Literacy?
2. In what ways, if any, did professional development appear to change teacher and principal actions and behavior in support of Balanced Literacy?

3. What factors appeared to account for variability of response to the professional development across these schools?

This explanatory and exploratory case study sought to discover why one school did well with the professional development and a similar school in the same district, with a similar student population, did not. Using the models of adult learning theory, constructivist learning theory, and social cognitive theory as lenses from which to view the data, this study sought to find out the critical factors that success or failure appeared to hinge upon.

Conceptual Framework

Guskey's framework for evaluating professional learning and development (2000) provided a functional structure from which to view the impact of professional development on teacher and principal practice. The Guskey framework is illustrated by five levels of evaluation, specifically: *teacher reaction*, *teacher learning*, *organizational support*, *classroom implementation*, and *student learning outcomes*. Corresponding professional development outcomes include participation in professional development activities, acquisition of new knowledge and skills, support in the use of new knowledge and skills, implementation of what has been learned, and student benefit from improved instruction.

Using Guskey's framework as a lens from which to view the professional development process, this study first looked at new content knowledge and constructivist learning theory as they relate to teacher understanding of Balanced Literacy. The professional development content, design, and method of delivery to staff were discussed. Next, the framework examined the theories of adult learning theory and social cognitive

theory, specifically how they impacted teacher and principal beliefs and attitudes toward Balanced Literacy and resultant changes in teacher actions and behaviors. The study then examined improvements in student learning. Finally, the factors which accounted for variability of response to the professional development across these schools were discussed.

Guskey's Five Levels of Evaluating Professional Development

Teacher reaction is Guskey's basic level of evaluation which focuses on whether participants had a positive response to the event and found it useful and worthwhile (2000). When evaluating teacher reaction, participants can be asked to assess their reactions to the content, process, and context of the professional development.

The content of a professional development activity refers to the topic that is addressed in the professional development and whether or not it was perceived to be relevant to classroom practice and teachers' professional learning goals. Additionally, content explores the appropriateness of what was taught to the teachers' level of prior knowledge on the topic.

The process of professional development relates to the presentation format of the information. The presence or absence of opportunities for active participation and peer discussion and the knowledge and organization of the presenter are factors which are investigated. The pace of the presentation and the preparation of the teachers beforehand in the form of background reading are investigated when looking at process.

The context of the professional development relates to the background of the event, and the sufficiency of the equipment and facilities. Attendance of teachers at the professional development is explored as well as possible reasons for lack of attendance.

Teacher learning assesses whether the participants have gained the knowledge and skills to improve their teaching through the professional development. According to Guskey (2000), it is useful to assess teacher knowledge, teacher skills, and teacher attitudes and beliefs.

Teacher knowledge includes both content knowledge and rationale for the skills being learned through the professional development. Included in the context of Balanced Literacy, teacher knowledge would include the proper use of classroom assessment to inform instruction.

Teacher skills are the classroom methods and techniques that define the initiative being studied, such as procedures for using guided reading or strategies for teaching comprehension. Additionally, teacher skills must be at a sufficient level to implement this learning in the classroom.

Teacher attitudes and beliefs regarding pedagogical practice are a critical factor in whether or not there will be a change in teaching practice. In alignment with Guskey's theory (2000), if a teacher does not believe in the value of Balanced Literacy instruction, he or she will likely continue to teach in the traditional methods used before the professional development.

Organizational support refers to the availability of needed resources, time, verbal encouragement, and organizational policies which aid the teacher in implementation of the initiative. Without proper resources, execution of the mission may suffer.

Classroom implementation is the gauge by which to identify which components of the initiative teachers may still need additional professional development on and how well teachers understand and can apply their new knowledge and skills. Success of

implementation can be measured by how frequently and how appropriately new strategies are used and how the classroom environment supports the change in practice.

Student learning outcomes are the ultimate measure of an initiative's success. According to Guskey (2000), evaluating student learning begins with identifying the answers to these questions: (1) What are the criteria for success of the program? (2) What evidence will demonstrate these criteria? and, (3) How often should these criteria be evaluated?

Significance of the Study

This study examined the factors that impacted the effectiveness of extensive professional development within the context of a Balanced Literacy initiative. Policymakers, principals, teachers, and central office administrators who make curricular decisions which involve the professional development of teachers and its impact on student achievement will find the study useful. Evaluation of the effectiveness of professional development has been identified as an important stage in ensuring the ultimate goal of student learning (Huberman, 1995; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). While this stage may be important, most educators would agree that it is usually omitted in an effort to get to more concrete and visual results such as evaluation of students through assessments.

It is known that teachers are a critical factor in student literacy learning and need to understand how children develop into successful readers and writers. In fact, for many children, classroom teachers are their last and best hope for school success (Cunningham & Allington, 2003). Unfortunately, this revelation comes late for many educators. In other professions, individuals are responsible for their own learning and are largely willing to share their learning in order to enhance the profession and society as a whole.

In education, however, teacher professional development has historically been viewed as a means for organizational development or school improvement (Elmore, 2002; Randi & Zeichner, 2004a), rather than as a vehicle for enhancing the educational profession.

Furthermore, teachers have typically not been responsible for their own learning. Contrary to accepted thought, effective instructional practice is not simply a matter of individual preference or style; it is a matter of deep, complex, and earned understandings of how to construct teaching that is consistent with one's views of how children ought to learn (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996). Elmore et al. makes the distinction between effective and ineffective teachers noting that "deep, systematic knowledge of practice – in both abstract and concrete terms – is what distinguishes teachers who do ambitious teaching from those who are struggling to do it" (Elmore et al., 1996, p. 229). School districts want to entrust the education of their most disadvantaged students to teachers who are doing "ambitious teaching" rather than to those teachers who are struggling. Professional development is often perceived to be the key, but the quandary faced by administrators is how to best facilitate its execution so that it results in effective instruction for students.

The stakes are high in improving the literacy achievement of students in urban schools. Putting NCLB and state sanctions aside, what is truly at stake are children whose quality of life and the quality of life of their children will be enhanced by having the literacy skills to succeed. How do we improve schools so that all children are literate? Ernest Boyer (in Sparks, 1984, p.35) stated that "the only way we're going to get from where we are to where we want to be is through staff development. When you

talk about school improvement, you're talking about people improvement. That's the only way to improve schools."

Only a few studies link characteristics of professional development with teachers' instruction and student achievement; however, over the past decade, considerable literature has emerged which provides guidance about the characteristics for high-quality professional development. Expert professional development without its acceptance and transfer into instructional practice is not sufficient. The question of why some schools flourish and others do not when presented with the same professional development begs to be asked. Why do students achieve at higher levels in some schools within a district than in others? Why do some teachers embrace new learning while others resist? In this study I sought to unveil the cloud of uncertainty around what factors are present when professional development is efficacious and what factors interfere. The study attempted to inform current knowledge of how large-scale professional development can impact teachers' instruction and student achievement and what additional criteria contributes to the success or failure of the initiative. Additionally, the literature regarding variability of response to school and teacher needs was examined.

At the time of this study, Harrisburg School District was in its fourth year of implementing an intensive professional development model in the context of Balanced Literacy. Local and standardized test scores exposed differences in individual school results, causing speculation on the part of those footing the bill. Why didn't students in school A achieve to the same levels as students in school B? In part, this study sought to address these kinds of questions.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

The intent of this chapter is to develop a synthesis of the literature that will provide an improved understanding of the issues surrounding the topic of what impacts the success or failure of professional development in a Balanced Literacy initiative. What do we know about what appears to be effective professional development and what factors seem to support its success? What factors seem to mitigate it? The purpose of this research is to examine and analyze the findings of this explanatory and exploratory case study to discover why one school achieved No Child Left Behind's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status and a similar school in the same district, with a similar student population, and the same extensive professional development initiative in Balanced Literacy, did not. What are the critical factors that success or failure appear to hinge upon? What impact does school variability have on student academic achievement?

Using Guskey's (2000) framework for evaluating professional development, the literature focuses on three major areas of review. The first area is the history of the "reading wars" surrounding phonics and whole language. The second section describes the Balanced Literacy approach to teaching literacy, including how it was developed, its claims, its intent, and its role in mediating the reading wars. The final section uses the literature to depict the significance of professional development in classroom instruction. Within this context, the impact of racial and economic factors on children's literacy levels in urban schools is addressed.

The Reading Wars

Few issues in education evoke a more ruthless debate as the process used to teach children to read and write (Sherman, 1998; Johnson, 1999). The battles have grown from ideological differences to personal, politically charged attacks in which teachers, and more importantly children, have been caught in the crossfire (Wren, 2003). While some argue that one of the most effective methods of teaching literacy involves direct instruction of simplified phonetic systems, others argue that a more holistic method modeled after the way children acquire language is more effectual. This disagreement has been dubbed The Reading Wars and is most evident in the pressures placed on schools to use commercial pre-packaged basal and literacy programs. Arguably, this *Great Debate* has been one of the most destructive forces in reading education.

For years, the works of skills-based and meaning-based researchers were pitted against each other in a media war over the best way to teach reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Wren (2003) claims that current reading research is revealing approaches to thinking about reading that neither camp was able to provide. In 1998 the National Academy of Sciences released an analysis of research in reading instruction, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In the preface to this book, the authoring committee expressed hope that the research-based information provided in their report would "mark the end of the reading wars"...noting that work in the field of reading had advanced sufficiently to allow consensus which would breach the differences among the "warring parties" (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Their alleged intent was to provide information about research-based reading instruction without regard to ideologies or sides in the reading wars. While their intention may have been to simply

promote the latest information available about reading and reading instruction, and to ignore which "party" had promoted it in the past, reviews of the report summarized the content with overly simplistic statements such as "researchers call for a balanced approach to end the reading wars" (National Research Council, 1998; Adams, 1990).

Although the report may call for an end to the reading wars, a consensus on the most effective approach for teaching literacy to all children does not exist (Sherman, 1998; Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Adams, 1990). The two perspectives of reading instruction represented in this polemic debate, phonics (a skills based approach) and whole language (an approach which emphasizes reading comprehension and enrichment), have divided educators for decades.

Historical Perspective

Considered the essential proficiency young children must achieve to ensure academic success, literacy has been the cornerstone of education for more than a century. Research on accepted reading strategies, approaches, and philosophies in literacy instruction was first published in 1879 (Samuels & Kamil, 1984). According to the research (Wren, 2003), the ancient Greeks began reading instruction by teaching the letters and the letter-sound relationships; children did not attempt to decode any real words until they had mastered these basics. In the middle of the 19th century, education reformer Horace Mann criticized the phonics-like approach to reading instruction that was prevalent at the time, describing alphabet letters as "bloodless, ghostly apparitions" while advocating more of a *whole word* approach to reading instruction (Wren, 2003). Late in the 19th century and early in the 20th century, the pendulum swung back towards *skill and drill*- based instruction, such as the McGuffey readers and the Beacon readers.

Before the second World War, the pendulum moved yet again with the publication of the Scott Foresman's *Dick and Jane* reading books that were more repetitive, emphasized simple words that were supposed to be in the child's "sight vocabulary," and which were highly predictable. Thus, the *look-say* approach to reading instruction became the principal approach to reading instruction. In the midst of the Cold-War era, Rudolf Flesch (1955) published *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which suggested that the look-say approach was a threat to democracy and educationally inappropriate, adding political overtones to what was already becoming a very heated debate. The pendulum once again swung back toward phonics.

In the 1980s, educators rebelled against the contrived drills and worksheets that were common in the phonics curricula; the pendulum swung back towards whole language and more "authentic" reading lessons, and the volatile nature of what has come to be known as the "Great Debate" became even more politically charged. While social and political conservatives embraced phonics as a traditionalist, back-to-basics approach to reading instruction, liberals embraced whole language, describing the whole language approach as more democratic and even using terms like *elitist* and *racist* to describe the phonics philosophy (Wren, 2003).

Overview of the Phonics and Whole Language Debate

More than 20 years worth of books, articles, and professional studies have sought to declare a truce in the reading wars between various instructional techniques, most notably phonics (which teaches word decoding skills before textual meaning) and whole language or literacy-based methods (which emphasize textual meaning with a minor emphasis on phonics as an embedded skill). These approaches to reading instruction

reflect dissimilar underlying philosophies and stress different skills. The fundamental philosophy of the whole language approach is that reading is a natural process, much like learning to speak, and that children exposed to a plethora of authentic, connected text will naturally become literate without an emphasis on explicit instruction in the rules and conventions of printed text. The primary philosophy of the phonics approach is quite different. Phonics advocates argue that in order to learn to read, most children require an extensive amount of explicit instruction in the rules of printed text. Isolated skills and phonics patterns are taught prior to reading whole texts, characterized as *part-to-whole*. Whole language is deemed *whole- to-part*, in that children are taught to read entire texts and skills are taught in context of the text (Strickland, 1989).

The fundamental difference between these two philosophies has been characterized as a debate between whether reading is *top-down* or *bottom-up*. The whole language advocates state that reading is top-down in that the meaning and ease of understanding the text is dependent upon the prior knowledge and experiences that the reader brings. The reader forms hypotheses and makes predictions, and only returns to the text occasionally to confirm those predictions. On the other hand, the phonics approach could be described as bottom-up. Phonics advocates argue that if a person is able to correctly decode text, meaning and understanding will follow. The text contains the message, and through the act of decoding the text, the reader discovers what that message is.

Phonics

Until recently, no feature of reading instruction was more thrashed about, more hotly debated, and less understood than phonics and its role in learning to read

(Strickland, 1998). At several points in American educational history, experts peddled phonics instruction as the most effective method of teaching children to read (Cunningham & Allington, 2003). Phonics instruction has been found to be the most important priority of primary teachers (Paterson, 2002). Popularized by the works of Jeanne S. Chall in the 1960s and 1970s (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Johnson, 1999), this skills-based approach teaches letter-sound relationships by using stories with high frequency words and controlled vocabulary (Johnson, 1999). The highly sequenced regimen emphasizes instruction of letter sounds, consonant blends, and long and short vowels. Similarly, a skills-based writing program instructs children to write words they mastered or copy sentences modeled by teachers. Educators expect that once children internalize phonemes, meaning will emerge.

In a phonics classroom, a great emphasis is placed on reading precision, and children are encouraged to read the words exactly as they appear on the page. Children are explicitly taught rules about the way words are written and spelled along with spelling-sound relationships. Following an explicit lesson on a particular phonics rule (e.g. if the last letter of a word is an *e*, then the first vowel is usually long), the child is presented with a passage of text that contains many words consistent with that rule, which is called decodable text. Decodable text books provide the child with the opportunity to apply each phonics rule on a variety of words in the context of a passage. The goal of the phonics teacher, then, is to instill in children the phonics rules and the common spelling-sound relationships and to teach children to apply this knowledge in sounding-out each word they encounter, making the assumption that comprehension will be a natural consequence of accuracy.

The movement for a return to phonics simmered for many years among those philosophically opposed to what they perceived as the lack of discipline in whole language pedagogy. Some academics began to grow skeptical of whole language claims of reading outcomes and achievement even as the back-to-basics movement gained momentum in mainstream America, especially among parents. In California, whole language was widely perceived by the public to have been responsible for a sharp downturn in reading scores even among middle-class, suburban, native English-speaking students. A causal relationship between whole language and reading score declines was insisted on by some researchers and sharply disputed by others, but by the late 1990s, legislators had responded in California and many other states with mandates to teach or emphasize phonics.

Critics assert sole use of this approach fails to adequately support the development of a broad array of reading strategies responsible for comprehension such as predicting, making inferences, and drawing conclusions (Strickland, 1998). While research provides overwhelming evidence that teachers implement elements of phonics instruction in virtually all primary grade classes whether characterized as whole language or not, it fails to converge on “what types of phonics instruction, of what intensity, over what duration” will produce the largest number of children who read well and willingly (Cunningham & Allington, 2003). In fact, no conclusive evidence supports exclusive use of a phonics approach (Cunningham and Allington, 2003).

Whole Language

The whole language approach alleges that literacy is not merely a cognitive skill to be learned, but a complex socio-psycholinguistic activity (Strickland, 1989). Theorists

such as Don Holdaway, Brian Cambourne, Kenneth Goodman, and Jeanette Veatch, who substantially contributed to the whole language movement, noted that the acquisition of literacy, like that of oral language, is a developmental process (Routman, 1994; Samuels and Kamil, 1984; Johnson, 1999). These theorists see developmental literacy learning as highly individualized, non-competitive, and student self-regulated. They believe reading and writing should be authentically enjoyable and should emulate the behavior of people who model these skills in ordinary life.

A young child in a whole language classroom is provided with simple, predictable and repetitive text. Frequently the text is already familiar to the child, making it easier to understand. Emphasis in a whole language classroom is not placed on reading precision and accuracy, but rather on comprehension and appreciation. Children are not expected to read the text verbatim; they are allowed to insert and substitute words as long as the story still makes sense, and as long as the child understands the essence of the story. The primary goal of the whole language teacher is to foster desire and motivation for the act of reading authentic text for meaning and understanding.

The emphasis on making connections with prior knowledge and experiences defines whole language as constructivist in nature. According to constructivists, “people create new knowledge as a result of the interaction of their existing knowledge, beliefs, and values with new ideas problems, or experiences” (Glickman, C., Gordon, S., & Ross-Gordon, J., 2004). Given the social nature of literacy, optimal learning environments promote risk taking with an emphasis on seeking meaning in a purposeful manner (Routman, 1994). Children who are actively engaged in their learning metacognitively adapt and interact with their environments as they construct meaning. They execute

learning tasks out of innate curiosity and a genuine interest in obtaining knowledge. Whole language educators facilitate learning and motivate children to become fluent readers by creating language rich environments that offer opportunities to optimize learning through reading and writing choices. Students are given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate to teachers the skills in which they need additional instruction (Sherman, 1998; Routman, 1996).

Unlike in phonics, letter-sound relationships are not systematically taught in whole language. Word recognition skills are developed within the context of authentic reading and writing. Goodman (1998) noted that when asked to read a complete story, children could read words in context that they could not read out of context. Their reading strategies also suggested that they expected print to make sense (Routman, 1994). Therefore, proponents of this approach asserted that when learning to read, student rely more on the meaning of language (comprehension) rather than on the graphic information (decoding) of the text. The whole language philosophy is designed to provide students with sufficient opportunities to practice this skill.

Balanced Literacy

Very few educators today would describe themselves as strict advocates of either a phonics approach or a whole language approach - most would describe their teaching as balanced, which, on the surface, has a great deal of appeal. Educators nationwide are promoting a balanced approach to reading instruction in an effort to bring an end to the reading wars. However, while an end to the reading wars could not be more pleasing, it is important to remember that a compromise between these two approaches to reading instruction will not necessarily result in the single, best approach. If either phonics or

whole language was even close to being the magic potion of reading education, then there would not be a Great Debate. The fact is, there is not much evidence that either the whole language approach or the phonics approach is particularly effective (Wren, 2003).

Some have seen Balanced Literacy as the middle of the road truce between the two camps (i.e. phonics and whole language). Balanced Literacy employs the use of decoding skills alongside textual meaning, but is often perceived as closer to the whole language side rather than the phonics side of the debate (Anderson, 2000). A common misconception in the debate over literacy is that phonics and whole language are dichotomous. Many educators erroneously interpreted whole language's emphasis on a literacy-rich environment as completely excluding phonics (Sherman, 1988; Routman, 1996; Johnson, 1999). On the contrary, an extensive study conducted by the federal government concluded that a combination of various models of literacy worked better than any single approach (Cunningham & Allington, 2003).

Given that any group of students requires varied instruction to meet its diverse learning needs and the fact that students come to school with different levels of exposure to and experiences with literature, teachers must be prepared to adapt the classroom to the children (Cunningham & Allington, 2003). Thus, literacy experts promote a balanced use of whole language and phonics in an effort to teach all students to read and write (Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Routman, 1996; Routman, 1994; Strickland, 1998).

Educators look to the experts of the times to guided districts in making sound decisions which will improve student literacy achievement. Unfortunately even the "experts" cannot agree on the best method. In fact, a position statement by the International Reading Association (IRA), "Using Multiple Methods of Beginning

Reading Instruction” (1999), states that, “There is no ‘one’ single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read.” Even phonics proponents such as Marilyn Adams have admitted that there is no one definitive process for teaching children to read. She said, "We have known for 30 years that phonics did a better job at teaching reading than...whole language ...but, you know, it never was that much better” (cited in Wren, 2003). Neither approach has been sufficiently effective, so why is it assumed that a compromise between these two approaches will provide educators with the most effective approach possible?

In the political arena, it would be fair to say that phonics is winning the reading war. The No Child Left Behind Legislation of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) is clear in its support of phonics and will fund Reading First programs that teach an approved phonics-based program, based on “Scientifically-Based Reading Research”, or *SBRR* as it is known in Reading First circles. Many of those who favor phonics on the basis of its effectiveness as a teaching tool – especially some research scientists – are relatively indifferent to the larger political issues and may have no sympathy with traditional education at all. Nor do they necessarily have any desire to be associated with the religious conservatives who strongly supported the back-to-phonics movement more than a decade ago.

Those who favor traditional values in education tend to favor phonics instruction, and those who favor progressive, or child-centered, values in education tend to favor whole language. Implementation, however, is a different story. Much of the educational establishment has fought, and continues to fight, a rear-guard action to preserve whole language pedagogy, mostly by changing the names of programs without changing their

substance and partly out of a commitment to the ideal of progressive education (Anderson, 2000). Anderson (2000) contends that nowhere is the anxiety over reading pedagogy more evident, despite an attempt to bury it beneath the surface, than in the long-awaited report of the National Reading Panel, "Teaching Children to Read," released in 2000 (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

An essential tenet of Balanced Literacy instruction is the belief that children learn to read by reading and learn to write by writing (Newman, 1985). The elements of a Balanced Literacy program have been well defined for over two decades by literacy scholars and practitioners working in New Zealand and Australia (Holdaway, 1979; Mooney, 1990). These elements ensure that children will receive a well-rounded and comprehensive experience with reading and writing. Typifying constructivism which encourages collaboration, risk-taking, responsibility, and reflection, children make meaning of information through opportunities for speaking, listening, sharing, and evaluating (Routman, 1996; Sherman, 1998).

A strong Balanced Literacy program includes reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading and writing aloud, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing. Teachers incessantly monitor students, with running records and miscue analysis, to ascertain their progress and plan future instruction (Strickland, 1998; Routman, 1996; Pressley, 1998).

Recent research, such as that published in the book *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), appears to support a balanced approach to literacy instruction. This research substantiates that the teaching of reading requires solid skill instruction, including phonics and phonemic awareness

(awareness of the separate sounds in words), embedded in enjoyable reading and writing experiences with whole texts which facilitate the construction of meaning. A successful Balanced Literacy approach combines the best of phonics and whole language instruction to teach both skills and comprehension, while attempting to meet the individual literacy needs of students. In this combined approach, notes Diegmueller (1996), "children are explicitly taught the relationship between letters and sounds in a systematic fashion, but they are being read to and reading interesting stories and writing at the same time" (p. 4).

Many researchers share a deep concern that without a unified theory to guide instruction, teachers will throw in a little phonics here, a touch of whole language there – an approach that has been disparaged as the “instructional Cuisinart” or “tossed salad” style of literacy instruction (Sherman, 1998). The skill set required of teachers is different than what they may have received in their teacher preparation classes. Teachers are now being asked to look beyond traditional approaches to reading instruction and use research evidence to make more purposeful instructional decisions. Rather than pick the best elements of either phonics or whole language, it has been suggested that the teacher focus on the educational needs of the child and choose instruction accordingly (Wren, 2003). This diagnostic and prescriptive approach requires a much more sophisticated skill set than that required in following a scripted basal reader lesson.

Professional Development

Today's schools face immense challenges. In response to an increasingly complex society and a swiftly changing technology-based economy, schools are being asked to educate the most diverse student body in our history to higher academic standards than ever before (Darling-Hammond, 1997). According to a study done by

Linda Darling-Hammond (2006), the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative analyses suggest that policy investments in the quality of teachers may be related to improvements in student performance. Stronger evidence has been cited by other researchers which has shown that teacher quality is the single most important factor affecting student learning (Routman, 2002); however, only a few studies link characteristics of professional development with teachers' instruction and student achievement (e.g. Cohen & Hill, 2000; Garet, et al., 2001; Porter, et al., 2000).

Historical Context of Professional Development

Historically, approaches to professional development have had an assembly-line resemblance. Instruction for teacher training has been direct, and information has been presented by "experts". Teacher learning has been viewed as a technical skill, and curriculum has been teacher-proofed to avoid error. Teachers' involvement in their personal learning has been limited and assessment of teacher learning as it relates to student learning has typically been disregarded.

In his 1967 testimony on professional development before a Senate subcommittee Guskey (1986) characterized teacher training as the "slum of American education" (p.6). He added that teachers perceived training as an isolated event followed by a series of promises which were not kept. Guskey's characterization of teacher training experiences does not offer any indication of major change. He reported that professional development efforts were fragmented, did not result in any major significant attitude change or commitment and was rarely assessed in terms of teacher learning or student learning. Finally, Guskey (1986) claimed that teachers felt that training workshops were

unproductive unless they were able to come away with a practical idea or product for their classroom.

Joyce & Showers are primary chroniclers of professional development in the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century, with their meta-analysis spanning over two decades. In their 1988 meta-analysis of professional development initiatives, Joyce & Showers state that efforts to improve professional development in the 1970s were characterized by under-funded training initiatives (Joyce & Showers, 1988). Therefore, such efforts achieved low levels of implementation and were met with great difficulty. At the close of the 1970s and into the 1980s teacher training experiences began to be defined in terms of student achievement, and teachers were beginning to become involved in the planning of these experiences. A need to include time for collaborative study, planning, and assessment was identified (Joyce & Showers, 1998). In their 2002 analysis, Joyce & Showers refer to the irony of the inability of professional development providers to change. Even though teachers are weary of one-shot workshops, the workshops persist (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Current Research

According to a study done by Randi & Zeichner (2004b), teachers reported that professional development grounded in the student curriculum made a difference in their classroom practices, while teachers who participated in issue-specific workshops such as cooperative learning, reported few resultant changes in classroom practice. When the staff development focuses on the implementation of a specific instructional program rather than broader teaching concepts, the workshop model of training persists, despite efforts to design teacher development programs that *facilitate* rather than *direct* learning.

The problem in trying to identify the critical elements of successful professional development programs is that most efforts focus on a search for one right answer. What is neglected is the powerful impact of context, meaning that what works in one setting will not work in another. Reforms based upon assumptions of uniformity in the educational setting repeatedly fail (Guskey, 1986).

The current vision for professional development based on the work of researchers such as DuFour & Eaker, Fountas & Pinnell, Guskey, Joyce & Showers, and Liebermann & Miller, includes job-embedded learning which links learning to the immediate and real-life problems faced by teachers (North Central Regional Education Laboratory, 2000). Hawley & Valli (1999) note an unprecedented consensus in the past decade around several important features that characterize the effectiveness of staff development. There is agreement in the literature that teacher professional learning should focus on instruction and student learning outcomes, be sustained and continuous rather than short term, and provide teachers with opportunities for reflection on practice (Elmore, 2002; Sparks, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006).

In seeming contrast to professional development practices which are reported in the literature as being most effective, Sparks & Hirsh state that the dominant form of professional development in most school districts has traditionally been either training or large-group awareness sessions (1997). Researchers who conducted a descriptive study of staff development in five early reading intervention programs found that the content of the program being used determined, in part, its structure, even when the staff development was specifically designed to be facilitative (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2002). Teachers and administrators leave their jobs to attend workshops that may range from an

hour or two to several days spread over a number of months. Critics have long argued that this “sit and get” form of staff development, in which educators are passive recipients of perceived wisdom from an “expert,” has produced little lasting change in the classroom and has been largely ineffective in supporting teachers’ growth (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) posit that professional development strategies that succeed in improving teaching share several features. They tend to be: (1) experiential, engaging teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, and observation that illuminate the processes of learning and development; (2) grounded in participants' questions, inquiry, and experimentation as well as profession-wide research; (3) collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators; (4) connected to, and derived from, teachers' work with their students as well as to examinations of subject matter and teaching methods; (5) sustained and intensive, supported by modeling, coaching, and problem solving around specific problems of practice; and, (6) connected to other aspects of school change.

According to research reported in NCLB and the NSDC Standards, teacher learning in a professional development setting is affected by elements embedded in the purpose of professional development as the improvement of instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2004). Staff developers need to attend to philosophical acceptance, self-efficacy, and the importance of the suggested practice (Sparks, 2002). Lieberman (1995) adds that lack of knowledge about how teachers learn has limited the impact of teachers’ professional development. Creating a profession of teaching in which teachers have the opportunity for continual learning is the

likeliest way to inspire greater achievement for children, especially those for whom education is the only pathway to survival and success. Growing evidence suggests that this kind of professional development not only makes teachers feel better about their practice, but it also reaps learning gains for students, especially in the kinds of more challenging learning that new standards demand (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Effective professional development design is addressed by Joyce & Showers (2002) in their report of research for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). Joyce & Showers indicate that the coaching model of professional development employing strategies of demonstration, practice, and feedback points to design elements critical to effective professional development. These elements include interactive planning, collaborative settings, and classroom-based strategy development directly related to practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997; Glickman et al., 2004). Further recommended as effective are significant instructional content, support over time through modeling and the support provided through the professional community (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lieberman, 1995).

Also considered integral to an effective professional development design are the elements of problem solving related to school improvement, learning community research efforts, and assessment (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Guskey, 1998).

Sparks & Hirsh (1997) describe three powerful ideas altering the shape of the professional development in schools as results-driven education, systems thinking, and constructivism. The shift in professional development as a result of these ideas has been movement from individual development to individual and organizational development; from fragmented professional development to professional development driven by a

clear, coherent plan; from teacher satisfaction to student learning outcomes; from training outside the job to job-embedded learning; and from professional development as a *frill* to professional development as a *requirement*.

Schools, districts, and teachers are accountable for the academic progress of their students and must take responsibility for their learning as well as their own personal learning. Purposeful teaching is important according to Ravitch (2000), who purports that to meet new expectations teachers need to deepen their content knowledge teaching and make sure that the tests reflect what was taught. Alvarado (1995) contends that professional development has to be focused on putting new knowledge into the classroom as quickly as possible. It is not enough to provide training; the implementation is what impacts learning (Joyce, 2002).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The most recent authorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by the United States Department of Education was The No Child Left Behind ACT (NCLB) of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). NCLB has sweeping ramifications for teacher learning and professional development. Title II of NCLB sets guidelines for comprehensive, standards-based professional development, providing grant funds to encourage districts to establish high standards for professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Historically, NCLB has its roots in initiatives designed to improve student learning through teacher training and professional development. Effective professional development design for teacher training and application to classroom practice is deeply affected by the myriad of policy statements, requirements, and guidelines governing professional practice. Those factors exert

tremendous pressure for change upon the learning community. The federal government has not only *suggested*, but has *mandated*, that districts set aside a portion of federal Title I funds for professional development for its most struggling school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

National Staff Development Council Standards

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has published guidelines about effective professional development that “arises from and returns to the world of teaching and learning” (2004, p.2). This type of professional development begins with what will help students learn, engages those involved in helping them learn, and has an effect on schools where those students and teachers learn (National Staff Development Council, 2004).

In 2001 the NSDC developed standards for staff development that have been widely disseminated and provide educators with guides to the development of high-quality programs. These standards were updated in 2004, following the passage of NCLB. The 2004 NSDC content standards for quality teaching state that, “Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators’ content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies, and prepares them to use assessments appropriately” (p. 41).

When the National Staff Development Council began revising standards for staff development, the group had three over arching questions to guide them in the process: (1) What are all students expected to know and be able to do?; (2) What must teachers know and do in order to ensure student success?; and, (3) Where must staff development focus to meet both of these goals? (Joyce & Showers, 2003). These questions help to

emphasize that the goal of any type of professional development is to increase the skills of teachers so that they may ultimately aid in increasing student knowledge.

According to Joyce & Showers (2003) the NSDC standards fall into the three categories of context, process, and product and should be viewed as evolutionary rather formulaic; as a guide to be adapted with an analytic eye.

Professional Learning Communities

Studies of teaching and learning theory state the importance of collaboration in establishment of new practices (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Professional learning communities are characterized by mutual collaboration, emotional support, personal growth, and a synergy of efforts (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) state research that suggests that a more collaborative environment reduces teachers' sense of powerlessness and increases their sense of efficacy. Hord (1997) articulates that effective professional learning communities include: (1) the facilitative participation of the principal with intentional shared leadership; (2) a shared vision toward a goal of student learning, which is continuously articulated and referenced; (3) shared learning among staff with application toward improvement of student learning; (4) peer review and visitation of classrooms with supportive feedback; and (5) human and capital resources to support the endeavor.

According to Sykes (1990), schools will not function effectively as professional learning communities until they introduce structures of professional accountability, strengthen relations between teachers through the construction of the curriculum, enhance teachers' access to external sources of knowledge, create opportunities for informal

leadership among teachers, broaden the range of legitimate activities in which teachers can engage, and decrease the pressure of external mandates on teachers.

Professional collaboration is especially important for beginning teachers in urban settings who face numerous challenges that their college education did not prepare them for. Crosby (1999) argues that “teaching, as it is now practiced in urban schools, is the most isolated of the professions” (p. 302). He recommends collaborative efforts between and among educators to help reduce this isolation.

Lieberman (1995) considers it critical to view teachers as learners. Concurring with Joyce & Showers (2002), she advocates that professional development be a long-term, continuous learning experience in the context of school and classroom with the support of colleagues. Lieberman (1995) included that teachers need to have the same opportunities as students to problem solve in collaborative learning experiences.

Adult Learning Theory

Research on the best way to provide professional development to teachers that goes beyond a superficial level to a deeper level requires an examination of adult learning theory. Knowles (1973) maintained that adults learn best when they are self-directed, when they use past experiences to process new information, when the learning is relevant to their life role, and when they are able to apply the new learning to their current role. Lieberman (1995) adds that lack of knowledge about how teachers learn has limited the impact of teacher’s professional development.

A criticism of professional development efforts is that while we teach teachers how to teach, we fail to teach teachers how to learn (Palmer, 2003). If implementation of change in instructional practice is to go forward, the critical elements of adult learning

and efficacy for learning must be considered (Palmer, 2003). Learning experiences must allow for teacher construction of meaning in the context of their own efficacy for learning and their own practice. Teacher learning in a professional development setting is affected by elements embedded in the purpose of professional development as the improvement of instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2001).

Current research states that what is known about student learning needs to be translated into how we teach adults (Guskey, 2002; Lieberman, 1995; Routman, 2002). Adults need a wide range of opportunities to experience, create, and solve real problems using their own experiences (Lieberman, 1995). Lieberman stated:

People learn best through active involvement and through thinking about and becoming articulate about what they have learned. Processes, practices, and policies built on this view of learning are at the heart of a more expanded view of teacher development that encourages teachers to involve themselves as learners – in much the same way as they wish their students would (1995, p. 592).

Individuals learn best when the content is meaningful to them, when they have opportunities for social interaction and the environment supports learning (Lieberman, 1995). Another key component of adult learning is collegial discussions and conversations about teaching (Bambino, 2002; Lieberman & Wood, 2002). Successful professional development must provide occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practices and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and

learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The success of professional development ultimately hinges on teachers' ability to unlearn past practices which do not fit with new learning and assimilate new knowledge into their teaching.

Professional Culture of School

The culture of a school can influence the way people think, feel, and act about change in instructional practices and requirements. Fullan (2001) found that when a school has a positive professional culture the staff development becomes more meaningful and application into teaching practice is more likely. When relationships improved within a school culture, positive changes occurred and when relationships did not improve, positive changes did not occur. A school with a negative culture does not value professional learning and resists change (Fullan, 2001). Successful schools display common features in their professional learning community such as a widely shared sense of purpose, norms of continuous learning and improvement, a commitment to and sense of responsibility for student learning, collaborative, collegial relationships, and opportunities for staff reflection, collective inquiry, and sharing of personal practice (Peterson, 2002). These characteristics contribute to commitment, motivation and staff and student learning. Deal & Peterson (1999) added that, "In schools that embrace norms of performance, change, and efficacy, staff gladly experiment with new approaches, seek innovative practices to solve enduring problems, and reinforce a learning-focused vision for the school. A school's culture encourages learning and progress by fostering a climate of purposeful change, support for risk taking and experimentation, and a community spirit valuing purposeful progress" (p. 8). A positive culture can make school reforms work while toxic cultures can be harmful to their success (Deal & Peterson,

1999). Fullan (2003) states that moral purpose falls second to relationships in terms of power and passion. Effective principals have learned that empowering teachers to be leaders encourages strong instructional teams which foster student achievement (Lieberman, 1995).

Consultant Model

District #2 in New York City invests heavily in professional development consultants who work directly with teachers individually and in groups at the school site. Overall the District #2 professional development consultant model stresses work by external consultants and district staff developers with individual teachers on concrete problems related to instruction in a given content area; work with grade level teams of teachers on common problems across their classrooms; consultation with individual teachers who are developing new approaches to teaching in their classrooms that other teachers might use; and work with larger groups of teachers to familiarize them with the basic ideas behind instructional improvement in a given content area. According to Elmore (2002), change in instructional practice through the consultant model is labor intensive, and involves working through problems of practice with peers and experts, observation of practice, and steady accumulation over time of new practices anchored in one's own classroom setting.

Connecting professional development with teaching practice in this direct way requires a decision at the district level to invest resources intensively for a focused purpose rather than using them to provide low-impact activities spread across a larger number of teachers. The approach also implies a long-term commitment to instructional improvement in a given content area since district and school priorities for professional

development have to stay focused on a particular content area, such as literacy, over several years (Elmore & Burney, 1996).

Teacher Self-efficacy

The importance of teacher and student efficacy in achievement cannot be overstated. Elmore (2004) stresses the resultant efficacy when teacher and student are in concert around their mutual engagement in the content. In order to meet performance expectations in a given content domain, teachers have to reach a certain level of mastery of that content themselves, they have to know how to engage students from a variety of starting points in that content, and they need access to materials and formative assessments that support their teaching (Furhman & Elmore, 2004). According to Furhman & Elmore (2004), the competence that the teacher and student bring to their work is a factor that is not always taken into account. Teachers who are well prepared are better able to use strategies that respond to students' needs and learning styles (Skipper & Quantz, 1987). Thus, when a new innovation in instruction is implemented, professional development efforts need to be monitored and supported to ensure teacher practices are consistent with the elements of the innovation. Probably one of the most obvious knowns about teaching and learning is their great complexity (Elmore, 2000).

Job-embedded Professional Development/Workplace Development

Job-embedded learning links learning to immediate and real-life problems faced by teachers and administrators. It is based on the assumption that the most powerful learning is that which occurs in response to challenges currently being faced by the learner and that allows for immediate application, experimentation, and adaptation on the job. It is predicted that in the future the amount of time devoted to training will diminish,

and teachers and administrators will spend much of their learning time in various forms of job-embedded activities (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997).

A focus on workplace development draws attention to the fact that teachers are diverse and dynamic and that, as a result, their development is complex and demanding. A school principal must consider development of a faculty that consists of beginning teachers as well as seasoned veterans; teachers of various races, ethnicities, and cultures; and effective teachers who are at risk of leaving along with ineffective teachers who have every intention of staying. Teachers need time to work with colleagues, to critically examine the new standards being proposed, and to revise curriculum. They need opportunities to develop, master and reflect on new approaches to working with children. All of these activities fall under the general heading of professional development (Fullan, 1991; Elmore & Burney, 1996).

Chapter 3

Design and Method of the Study

Inside the milieu of a struggling urban school district, mayoral takeover, No Child Left Behind, and millions of state and federal dollars spent on professional development this study examined school variability of response to one district's professional development efforts. The purpose of the study was to examine and analyze the effects of the professional development in two demographically similar schools within the same district; specifically why one of the buildings appeared to experience at least some degree of success with the professional development as evidenced by cumulative gains in student achievement over a three year period while the other building's achievement remained stagnant.

The conceptual framework used in this study looked first at new content knowledge relevant to teacher understanding of Balanced Literacy. Next, the framework examined teacher beliefs and attitudes toward Balanced Literacy and changes in teacher actions and behaviors. Finally, the study examined improvements in student learning.

Specifically, this research addressed the following questions in the study:

1. In what ways, if any, did professional development appear to change teacher and principal beliefs and attitudes toward Balanced Literacy?
2. In what ways, if any, did professional development appear to change teacher and principal actions and behavior in support of Balanced Literacy?
3. What factors appeared to account for variability of response to the professional development across these schools?

Using participant perceptions, this explanatory and exploratory case study sought to discover why one elementary school appeared to do better than a similar school with the same professional development. This study sought to identify what might have been the critical factor that influenced the variability of response.

Rationale for Qualitative Approach

The research problem that was addressed in this study plainly required a method that was holistic, descriptive, and explanatory. The questions derived from the problem were stated as *how* and *why* questions. The intent of the researcher was to develop a thick, rich description of the context of the professional development efforts surrounding Balanced Literacy in Harrisburg School District and the environmental and contextual conditions surrounding two of its schools which may have contributed to significant variability in student achievement.

The choice of qualitative research for this project drew upon an understanding of the differences between quantitative and qualitative research practices. The story of two schools in Harrisburg School District required a thorough explanation rather than a surface understanding of the purpose of the initiative, a personal role for the researcher rather than an impersonal role, and the discovery of knowledge rather than the construction of knowledge (Stake, 2005). The intent was for the result of this study to be elucidative – one that would lead to an elevated understanding of the dynamics of successful professional development in present-day schools in an urban environment. A qualitative approach was an appropriate means to achieve these ends.

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research suggests a direct connection with experiences as they are lived or felt or undergone and can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole. In qualitative research, meaning is embedded in people's experiences and this meaning is reconciled through investigator's perceptions. While the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, the key concern is being able to understand the phenomenon of interest from participants' perspectives, not researchers'. In the examination of the successes and admitted failures of the Balanced Literacy professional development in Harrisburg School District, the teachers and administrators told their story. This field work is a feature of qualitative research, whose end product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998). Cresswell (1998) emphasizes the holistic nature of the research practice: "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). The qualitative approach was a logical way to tell the story of the Balanced Literacy professional development initiative in Harrisburg School District.

Qualitative research centers on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that the reader has a solid grasp of what "real life" is like. In a bounded case study, such as the one considered here, the confidence was strengthened by local groundedness, the fact that the data were collected in close proximity to a specific situation, rather than through the mail or over the phone. The emphasis was on a specific case, a focused and bounded phenomenon embedded in its context (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

According to R. Weiss (1994), qualitative study is the preferred method when the objectives are the development of detailed descriptions, the integration of multiple perspectives, the describing process, the development of holistic description, the learning of *how* events are interpreted, a “you were there” vividness in the description, and the identification of variables for future research. These criteria distinguish this study as one that is qualitative in nature.

According to Owens (1982), “The qualitative nature of the resulting description enables the investigator to see the ‘real’ world as those who are under study see it” (p. 7). In order to arrive at meaningful answers to the questions, the perspectives of Harrisburg School District teachers and school and central office administrators will be included in data collection and analysis. Looking at multiple perspectives will aid in the development of a holistic description of professional development in the context of a Balanced Literacy initiative in a struggling urban school district.

Finally, it was the intent of this research to identify variables in each urban school environment that contributed to any possible inconsistencies between the two buildings in terms of student achievement. These variables may become a focus of future research on this central issue in the present-day push for higher student achievement and accountability.

Justification for Research Design

The examination of the variability of response to the professional development initiative in Harrisburg School District was a logical match for the qualitative case study, the preferred research strategy for gaining understandings into the ways in which programs, organizations, and practices are both similar and unique in their adaptation to

local conditions, needs, and interests (Patton, 1990). Cresswell (2003) adds that a case study is a research strategy in which the researcher explores in depth a program or process, which characterizes the intent of this study, noting that “the cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (p.15). Additionally the in-depth data collection involves multiple sources of information rich in context (Cresswell, 1998).

Case study research relies on analytic, rather than universal, generalization where the researcher’s purpose is to generalize the study’s results to a broader theory (Yin, 1994). Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) address the case as “a phenomenon occurring in a bounded context – the unit of analysis, in effect” (p.440). They add that the focus and boundaries may be specifically or more loosely defined by social unit size, such as an individual, a role, a small group, an organization, community, nation, or by location or timeline (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). In this study, the researcher examined the implementation of the Balanced Literacy professional development initiative in Harrisburg School District in two elementary schools over the course of two school years, 2003-2005.

In looking at the two schools, the questions focused on the perceptions of the participants as to how the two schools progressed in their implementation efforts and the perceived results of these efforts. Yin (1994) states that the case study is an appropriate strategy when the research questions are in the form of *how* and *why* and the focus is on contemporary events over which the researcher has no control. *How* and *why* questions relate to two distinct levels of analysis: answering how with descriptions of individuals,

events and settings, possibly through a type of narrative or storytelling, and answering why with explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yin (1994) adds that explanatory case studies can be complemented by exploratory studies as the boundaries between the two are not well defined. Case studies are apt for exploring the *what* of poorly understood subjects and explaining *how* and *why* things occur (Yin, 1994).

According to Merriam (1998), case study is a particularly suitable design if you are interested in process. The process of the delivery of professional development followed in each of the two schools under study was, on the surface, very similar. Process as a focus for case study research can be viewed in two ways. The first meaning of process is monitoring: describing the context and population of the study, discovering the extent to which the treatment or program has been implemented, providing immediate feedback of a formative type, and the like. The second meaning is confirming the process by which the treatment had the effect that it did. Case studies help us to understand processes of events, projects and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object. Marshall and Rossman (1994), add that a case study might be selected for its very uniqueness for what it can reveal about a phenomenon -- knowledge we would not otherwise have access to.

Site Description and Sample Selection

The Harrisburg School District is a relatively small urban district in central Pennsylvania, with just over 9,000 students. Geographically, the district spans just 8 miles, with many of the schools within walking distance of each other. The district is comprised of 11 schools that serve a K-8 student population, one of which serves K-3, and one of which serves grades 4-8. All of the schools

in the district have reading specialists who provide intervention to students and instructional facilitators who serve as literacy coaches.

Multiple sources of evidence such as multiple forms of archival records, interviews and participant-observation field notes were used in conducting this study. The use of multiple sources of evidence is critical for developing “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 1994, p. 92) and serves to enhance the credibility and accuracy of any case study finding. Other data sources included demographic and assessment data from each of the two schools, and survey data collected by the school district and individual schools during school years 2003-2005.

This study used contemporary key informant interviews of selected respondents in addition to archival records and documents, and participant-observation recollections and notes. Interview respondents included each school’s principal, instructional facilitator, and teachers from both the primary and intermediate grades. The researcher in this case was employed by the Harrisburg School District during the school years 2003-2005 as the Coordinator of Reading and Federal Programs. From August, 2005 until August, 2006 the researcher was the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the District and since that time has done professional development consulting work with the District’s reading specialists.

Procedures

In this explanatory and exploratory case study of two schools within the same urban district, pseudonyms for both schools as well as the respondents were used. The focused interview protocol (script and instructions) is found in Appendix A. Approval from the human subjects’ school review panel at the Pennsylvania State University and

district consent to participate were secured. Interview participants were recruited on a completely voluntary basis utilizing the technique of convenience sampling and mutually agreed upon consent. Signed consent forms assuring anonymity and confidentiality were elicited. The researcher's previous role as participant in the events covered by this research was useful in establishing a trusting relationship with the respondents who, along with the researcher, share a strong sense of identity and camaraderie as current or former district employees.

Data Collection Techniques

According to Yin (1994), researchers can use six major sources of evidence in conducting case study research. The six sources include documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. Rist (1982) claims that the three data collection techniques central to qualitative research are observation, interviewing, and document analysis, which he notes are "the pivots of good qualitative research practice" (p.444). Because this study was bounded in the time period of the school years covering 2003-2005, much of the data collected resided in documents and archival records that were amassed during this period of time as well as the contemporary interviews with some of the key participants and recollections and the field notes of this researcher in her role as a participant-observer.

Document analysis was one of the key data collection techniques employed in this study. This included school and District survey data collected by the school district during 2003-2005. The documents analyzed included agendas and minutes from the monthly Balanced Literacy Implementation Team meetings, curriculum documents, school and district professional development agendas and minutes, reports from

consultants who worked in the district, i.e. the AUSSIE coaches, surveys from professional development sessions, assessment results from the Pennsylvania State System of School Assessment (PSSA), and district-wide surveys conducted by grant-funded initiatives within the District. Merriam (2001) points out that “one of the greatest advantages of using documentary information is its stability. Unlike interviewing and observation, the presence of the investigator does not alter what is being studied” (p. 126). Merriam does warn, however, that there are concerns connected with using documents as a source of data: “Because documents are not produced for research purposes, the information they offer may not be in a form that is useful (or understandable) to the investigator” (p. 124).

Contemporary data collection in real-time involved interviews, considered one of the most important data sources in case study research (Yin, 1994). According to Rist, “To conduct a good interview is to hold an interesting conversation” (1982, p.443). This study used interview questions of an open-ended nature with no predetermined answer choices. Building principals, instructional facilitators, and selected primary and intermediate grade teachers were interviewed to discuss their roles and perspectives during the 2003-2005 professional development initiative surrounding the implementation of Balanced Literacy. An interview script was developed (Appendix A) for use in individual, focused interviews of those administrators and teachers using the same set of open-ended questions in conducting each interview over a short period of time (Yin, 1994).

The use of open-ended interview questions allowed teacher interviewees to express their opinions more freely than if predetermined answers were provided (Fowler,

1993). Probes were used as necessary to encourage teachers to provide more information in the case of unclear or sparse interview item responses (Yin, 1994).

Participant-observation is a source of evidence in which the researcher or data collector observes and experiences an event, process, or social interaction as an actual participant. In this case, since I was employed by the Harrisburg School District as Coordinator of Reading and Federal Programs during the years under examination, data from my direct experiences became a relevant source of information. As noted by Yin (1994) in this instance the researcher observes and experiences the event or situation as an actual participant. As a form of naturalistic observation Yin (1994) notes that participant-observation is a special mode of observation in which the investigator is not merely a passive observer, but may take a variety of roles within a study including that of participant in the events being studied (Yin, 1994). In my position as reading coordinator at Harrisburg School District, I was immersed in the Balanced Literacy initiative and the professional development that surrounded it. As someone intimately involved in the initiative during the time period being studied, I was involved in district meetings and took personal field notes that were data for this study. While this extensive involvement was a benefit to me in beginning this investigation with a deep understanding of the context, it also created some drawbacks. Being “close” to the initiative being studied gave me insights that I might otherwise not have had, but it also was a limitation that I will discuss to a greater extent in the “role of the researcher” section.

Data Analysis Strategies

Case study researchers who are experienced in data analysis often describe the process as mysterious. The mystery is due to the need for intuitiveness on the part of the researcher, the iterative nature of qualitative research, and the tension that exists as the analyst takes into account discrepant data. This tension is a unique condition in the field of qualitative data analysis due to the contemporaneous nature of data collection and data analysis as well as the iterative nature of the research process.

Rist (1982) names two important considerations in the analysis of qualitative data: 1) Analysis occurs simultaneous with, and subsequent to, data collection, and 2) There are a variety of ways in which the analysis can be conducted and a variety of frameworks within which the data can be organized. The framework that was utilized in this study was the “thematic analysis” framework which is the clustering and presentation of material by key themes found in the study (Firestone, 1980; Metz, 1979; Smith & Geoffrey, 1969, cited in Rist, 1982). According to Yin (1994) at least four principles appear to underlie all good social science (p.123). He asserts that high quality analysis is characterized by relying on all the relevant evidence, including all major rival interpretations, and addressing the most significant aspects of the case study. Finally, he tells researchers, “you should bring your own prior, expert knowledge to your case study... if you know your subject matter as a result of previous investigations and publications, so much the better” (p.124). As the Harrisburg School District’s reading coordinator I brought to the study an extensive background in Balanced Literacy and an intimate, firsthand knowledge of the professional development initiative in the district.

In order to maximize quality data analysis, the following strategies were employed: rival interpretations that emerge from the data were included in the final report, all data collected through various instruments were included in the data analysis, and the research questions directed the analysis of the data. According to Weiss (1994), producing a case study begins with sorting. Miles (1979) cautioned that it is essential to address the issue of data reduction in qualitative analyses. Excessive data may result in a somewhat vague and pointless analysis. One needs to effectively reduce the overabundance of extraneous data while keeping important information. Miles stated, “Data reduction is a form of preliminary analysis, which refines, iterates, and revises frameworks, suggests new leads for further data collection, and makes data more available for final assembly into case studies” (p. 593).

To establish coherence, data analysis must be driven by the research questions (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). Miles and Huberman (1984) recommended focusing and bounding the collection of data. Yin (1994) names the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence as a major strength of case study data collection. As themes emerged, triangulation of data was employed in examining evidence from interviews, external consultant documents, my own field notes, and numerous school and district documents to look for consistent themes.

Reliability and Validity Concerns

Owens (1982) posited that investigators are called upon to make sense of the data while demonstrating that the steps they have taken yield credible explanations. Owens (1982) names six techniques he considers essential in qualitative design that will

maximize credibility: 1) prolonged data-gathering on site; 2) triangulation; 3) member checks; 4) collection of referential adequacy materials; 5) development of a thick description; and, 6) engagement in peer consultation. To achieve credibility, this study incorporated each of these techniques as described in the paragraphs that follow.

According to Owens (1982), time immersed in a situation permits the researcher to become relatively unnoticed while attempting to find a deeper level of understanding of a situation. The researcher in this case, as a participant-observer, spent the two years of the study as the Coordinator of Reading and Federal Programs and thus was deeply immersed in the situation involving the district's plan for the professional development plan surrounding Balanced Literacy. While working in the district I had access to meeting agendas and notes, reports, and other documents. During the data collection phase, I spent extensive time in the district, interviewing respondents who were actively involved in the Balanced Literacy professional development during the time of the study, whether as a principal, an IF, or a classroom teacher.

Good qualitative or naturalistic research requires the researcher to triangulate (Mathison, 1988). Triangulation is the act of cross checking with other data sources in order to verify things or check their accuracy. Owens (1982) notes that triangulation can involve examining a number of sources of information about the same topic. In the Harrisburg study, the researcher looked for themes, and then cross-checked with other data sources. For example, in my interviews with teachers and IFs at the two schools studied, a recurring theme was the importance of accountability in ensuring the success Balanced Literacy implementation as a result of professional development. To cross-check, I examined AUSSIE building reports for data about the numbers of teachers

worked with an AUSSIE, either through choice or because their principal assigned the AUSSIE to them. Mathison (in Merriam, 2001) urges consideration of triangulation as having not only a procedural dimension, but as a contribution to a holistic perception of the case.

Triangulation produces three potential outcomes: convergence, inconsistency, or contradiction. When convergence occurs, the different sources and methods will result in a single proposition with regard to the research questions. Inconsistency from the various sources and methods forces the researcher to consider alternative propositions that contain the ambiguity. Contradiction points to opposing views on the phenomenon under investigation. In my triangulation of the data, I found convergence of the data – consistent themes surfaced from all the data sources and in each of the two buildings studied.

Member checks were conducted by authenticating data when the interviews of key respondents in Harrisburg School District took place. Not only did teachers and IFs identify specific areas which emerged as themes (organizational support, accountability, culture, and leadership), the AUSSIE consultants also identified those same areas in their monthly reports. Owens (1982) asserts that member checks are perhaps the single most important means available for establishing credibility. By confirming responses across roles, the researcher was able to verify that the information gleaned from the interviews and the reports was consistent and accurate.

Referential adequacy materials are materials from the site that relate to findings and interpretations. The examination of archival data and documents collected in Harrisburg School District further informed the study. Data collected included

contemporary key informant interviews, BLIT minutes, AUSSIE reports, PSSA results, staff surveys, and participant-observer recollections and field notes. The process of this type of document collection is recommended as a way to relate to findings and interpretations (Owens, 1982).

Creating a thick description was done through triangulation of data, conducting member checks, corroborating information and gathering referential adequacy materials. The synthesis of data was done with the intent of taking the reader there – of being in the midst of the action (Owens, 1982). Because the respondents and the researcher *lived* the story, *telling* the story was a natural response.

Peer consultation provides opportunities for researchers to discuss the progress of the data collection with peers who are interested (Owens, 1982). In the Harrisburg study, the story had enough facets to interest a wide range of educators, who have been interested in the fabric of the Harrisburg story. The dissertation advisor in this study has been a sounding board since the researcher began working in the district in 2003 and thus knows intimate details about the history and contemporary events of the district. This has made peer consultation a key component in this work.

Reliability is the demonstration that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures can be repeated, with the same results (Yin, 1994). To address the issue of reliability a case study database was developed. The database included notes, transcriptions, documents, and tabular materials. The organization of the database provides a chain of evidence that would enable another investigator to link the contents of the database with data collection, data analysis, and with conclusions drawn by the researcher in the final report.

Limitations of Research Design

Kennedy asserted, “Clearly a study of a single case with no replications limits both the strength and the range of generalization arguments considerably” (1979, p. 671). Kennedy (1979) notes that a grave drawback in the single-case study methodology that has prevented it from being extensively applied is the lack of generally accepted rules for drawing causation and generalization inferences for the data. A growing body of theory and methodology is developing for drawing causal inferences from single cases – however similar methodological progress has not been made in the area of inferences of generalizability. Thus, even though studies of group averages do not allow the kind of deep understanding of a treatment that is possible in case studies, the group comparison methodology is still preferred by many evaluators because generalization is desirable, and because statistical techniques associated with group studies permit the evaluator to estimate the generalizability of the findings.

Stake (2005) noted that a researcher is forced to make role choices. The role of choice in this study was the constructivist role. According to Stake (2005), constructivist viewpoint promotes providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing. He adds that the focus is on description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particularly places, events, and people, not only commonplace description but also the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case (thick description). By systematically following the interview protocols established for this focused case study, the researcher was able to develop a constructivist analysis with minimal bias.

Limitations and Potential Bias

My direct experience with and responsibilities for the Balanced Literacy initiative was a potential bias. As the district's reading coordinator, and member of the Balanced Literacy Implementation Team, I was intimately involved in the planning and delivery of the professional development surrounding the Balanced Literacy initiative in the district. I provided training and coaching to the District reading specialists and instructional facilitators so that they could, in turn, train their building staffs. As a district employee at the time of the study, I had an insider's role and perspective. As a researcher, I did my best to guard against any tainting of the evidence due to my prior role and association with the initiative now under study. As Cuban (2001) aptly noted, our perceptions are always shaped by "the previous personal and work experiences that we have had, our beliefs and values, and the position we have in an organization (and the roles we are expected to play in that position) (p.4). Through triangulation of the data, I relied on the data analysis procedures to let the data speak for itself while suspending my own judgments and beliefs and interpretations.

While admittedly a potential bias, this close involvement with the professional development experience nonetheless allowed me to have a deeper understanding and awareness of important "contextual variables," including the political as well as the cultural forces related to my study (Merriam, 2001, p. 194). Merriam (2001) describes the process of researcher involvement with the case study as allowing a heuristic approach to data analysis, in which the researcher's own experience adds a richness to the data but do not overwhelm it. Merriam (2001) does caution, however, that the researcher must "suspend judgment" in order to "see the experience for itself" (p.158).

Chapter 4

Context of Balanced Literacy in Harrisburg School District

In January, 2003, the first of many monthly meetings was held in the Harrisburg School District to discuss the direction of literacy instruction in the district. Under the direction of the superintendent, Dr. Gerald Kohn, a team of educators, who came to be known as the Balanced Literacy Implementation Team (BLIT), was assembled. A university professor who was a former superintendent was hired as a district strategy consultant and facilitated each monthly meeting. As recorded in BLIT meeting minutes, Dr. Kohn established the group's purpose "to advise him on matters related to literacy" and to investigate best practices regarding literacy instruction to assist them in making informed decisions.

Membership in the BLIT was by invitation only and, in addition to the superintendent, grew to include membership by central office administrators including the Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Assistant Superintendent for Human Relations and Public Information, Assistant Superintendent of Student, Family, and Community Support, Assistant Superintendent for Business Services, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Early Childhood Education, Director of Alternative Education, Director of Grants and Federal Funding, Coordinator of Reading and Federal Programs, and the Coordinator of Social and Emotional Learning. In addition, each of the district's eleven K-8 building administrators, sixteen instructional facilitators ("IFs", who served in a role similar to other districts' literacy coaches), the president of the teacher's union (a strong presence

in the district), and four appointed teacher and reading specialist representatives attended each monthly meeting.

When the BLIT was first formed, the educator members discussed various options for literacy programming for the district and were involved in numerous discussions about the frameworks teachers needed in order to deliver the best possible instruction to their students. The guiding question for the initial and subsequent meetings was, “What resources and supports do our students need to be proficient readers?” As the name of the group implies, the superintendent had determined that the district would follow a Balanced Literacy approach to literacy instruction. The instructional approach to the delivery of the program was where the consensus dissolved.

Perhaps in part due to the lack of knowledge concerning the ins and outs of the Balanced Literacy philosophy, there appeared to be a great deal of confusion in the district, even amid district leadership. It seemed evident to me as a newcomer to the group as the district reading coordinator, that there was a lack of knowledge of what Balanced Literacy was all about and that this lack of knowledge contributed to, at times, muddled and chaotic discussions and subsequent decision-making. This lack of clarity led to tangled discussions at BLIT meetings, centering on whether to select a program that featured a highly-scripted basal reader or whether to select a more student centered, traditional Balanced Literacy approach with leveled readers (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003).

Opinions varied widely, ranging from those who believed teachers needed the structure a basal program offered to those who believed that students and teachers would benefit most from a constructivist Balanced Literacy approach in which students and

teachers learned how to articulate the components of the reading process and the purpose for each through a model of “gradual release of responsibility” (Routman, 1994). In this scaffolded approach, a teacher is provided with professional development on individual components of the reading process and then is supported as they take risks in their teaching practice. In this step-by-step process, teachers are expected to teach each component after they have had explicit training on it, rather than implement everything at once after a general overview of all components. Following the same scaffolding approach, the teacher provides supports for students as they are learning specific elements, and gradually removes the supports as the student becomes proficient and independent in their use.

It is fair to say that many of the top administrative decision-makers wavered back and forth, depending on who was making a particular argument at the time.

Vendor Solutions

While these discussions were proceeding, the district, awash in monies from state and federal grants including a large Title I allocation and a pending Reading First award, found itself bombarded with a constant barrage of contacts from numerous sales representatives, all pushing their particular reading program as the program of choice to fix Harrisburg School District’s woes. Title I allocations were based on the district’s poverty level and Reading First monies were calculated based on low academic achievement scores in kindergarten through grade three. Sales representatives from literacy vendors used the state’s allocated funds list for state and federal grant monies to identify Harrisburg School District as a target for potential sales. Understandably, each vendor representative was inwardly hoping, while outwardly boasting, that their product

was the “silver bullet” Harrisburg School District had been waiting for and the key to opening the door of literacy achievement for its students, along with the bonus of a really big sale with an attached commission.

In addition to the clamor from the vendors, the district also faced growing clamor from the community voicing their dissatisfaction that students in the schools did not have books in their classrooms and teachers did not have teaching materials. Caught between a rock and a hard place, it is not hard to imagine how less than rational decisions might have been made. With vendors promising to solve all the district’s problems with the purchase of their research-based materials, each the product of a well-known and widely respected publisher, the purchase of a basal program appeared to some district administrators to be the logical solution.

One of the most persistent vendors was the *100 Book Challenge*, now called *American Reading Company*, who placed thousands of books in the district’s schools in kindergarten through grade twelve. Their reading program involved providing each classroom in the district, kindergarten through grade twelve, with several plastic baskets of leveled reading materials for students to select, with an ultimate goal of students reading at least one hundred books, thus the company’s name. This program was designed to supplement a core reading program, such as a basal program. The involvement of 100 Book Challenge in the district was already heavily entrenched when I became the district’s reading coordinator in April, 2003. They had an extensive system in place in the district, involving replacement cycles of damaged and lost books, professional development coaches that visited the district periodically to check on implementation (with their daily professional development rate and all travel expenses

paid for by the district), and a highly-commercialized program with large amounts of incentives and publicity. According to the American Reading Company website, “In October 2004, the company was named one of the top 100 fastest-growing private firms in the Philadelphia area” (<http://www.americanreading.com/about-us/our-history>). In fiscal years 2003 and 2004 the Harrisburg School District contributed well over a million dollars to that growth.

While the *100 Book Challenge* provided at least a cosmetic solution to the problem of not having reading materials in the classrooms for students, the discussions about the selection of a core reading program for the district continued. From my perspective, it appeared that in the winter and spring of 2003, the reading wars were alive and well in Harrisburg School District. At first, many members of the Balanced Literacy Implementation Team (BLIT) appeared to be championing for a basal series (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003). As if on cue, a major basal reader company sales representative contacted the district and offered to provide materials free of charge for two district buildings to pilot. The district initially agreed to this and the books were sent to two elementary buildings (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003). Because the teachers in these buildings had not had reading texts for such a long time, the teachers noted that they felt they “had died and gone to heaven” (personal notes, April 8, 2003). The teachers loved the new books and, based on teacher pressure, the district made the decision to use this series in all buildings. With hundreds of thousands of dollars of federal Title I money at their disposal, a purchase order was cut to this vendor.

Concurrent with this ordering of the basal readers, the self-proclaimed “virtual director of reading” weighed into the discussion, strongly advocating for a more balanced approach to the teaching of reading – one that would not include the use of a basal. The virtual director of reading was a consultant who worked via computer from her home in Rhode Island and who was physically in the district for approximately one week per month, including the day of the monthly BLIT meeting. She advocated for a more traditional Balanced Literacy approach that was student-centered. Her arguments were that a basal approach would “dumb down” the literacy curriculum for teachers by assuming they could not teach without a script, and that it would be too difficult for students (BLIT meeting minutes, February 10, 2003). These arguments caught the superintendent’s ear and led him to change his mind about the purchase of the basal reading series – a move that frustrated some district-level administrators and many teachers. The basal reader sales representative was contacted and told that the district decision-makers had changed their minds, and would not be purchasing the basal materials. Needless to say he was not pleased with the change of events. As he later related to me, he had been led to believe that it was a done deal (personal notes, April 29, 2003).

When I came to the district in April, 2003 as the reading coordinator, one of my first assignments was retrieving the basal materials from the teachers in the pilot building. The sales representative had not been successful in getting the pilot materials back from the teachers because, as the teachers told me, they had no materials to replace them, and how were they going to teach (personal notes, April 8, 2003)? The sales representative,

already unhappy with the district's decision to first submit an order and then renege on it, struggled to get his piloted materials back with little assistance from the district.

A few months later I heard from two other vendors that the district had purchased materials from them as well, and then returned them after they were shipped to the district. These incidents and other similar ones seemed to me to point out a breakdown in internal decision-making processes. To many observers, both within and outside the district, it appeared that the district was floundering about aimlessly and did not have any kind of vision or plan guiding its decision making (personal notes from conversation with BLIT facilitator and AUSSIE consultant, February 10, 2003).

As my discussions with various vendors regarding prior purchases and returns progressed, the BLIT continued to meet and discuss the best approach to literacy instruction for Harrisburg School District students. Because of the differing viewpoints, many "heated" conversations occurred in early BLIT meetings. (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003).

Basal Advocates

Many of the teachers and principals on the BLIT were proponents of a basal approach, claiming that a basal was "easier for our teachers" to implement as it was scripted and there was less chance of teacher error (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003). Among those BLIT members who supported the purchase of a basal program, another common reason given for its use instead of a Balanced Literacy approach was that some believed teachers were not yet knowledgeable enough about Balanced Literacy to be effective in using that approach in their instruction (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003). While some might argue that

that would be the purpose of professional development, I sensed a not always articulated, but inferred, belief held by a few members of the BLIT was that some Harrisburg School District teachers were not as capable as some of their counterparts in other districts that had successfully implemented Balanced Literacy. Coupled with a student population that already struggled academically, these members argued that any scripted lesson would be preferable to what the teacher could design. This topic became the source of several impassioned discussions at monthly BLIT meetings.

Another related argument introduced by the basal supporters was that teachers in Harrisburg School District were already stretched thin. They argued that because many of their students faced such issues as poverty and parental substance abuse and addiction the students' educational needs sometimes came second to their social and emotional needs. They believed that the teachers' day was demanding enough and that any supports that could be provided to ease the teachers' burden would increase the chance of student success.

Basal reader fans pointed out that all students are held to high standards by the state of Pennsylvania and are measured by their proficiency on the state assessment, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). It would then make sense, they claimed, for students to be taught using the same types of standard materials they would be tested on (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003).

Additionally, they argued, these materials were scripted and provided heavy support for new and marginal (in terms of teaching performance) teachers.

Balanced Literacy Advocates

Promoters of a Balanced Literacy approach claimed that the individualization this method provided was much more student-centered than a typically whole-group basal model. They argued that the targeted interventions and assessment-based instruction of a constructivist Balanced Literacy philosophy allowed students of all literacy levels to achieve. Several of the debates between Balanced Literacy advocates and basal advocates involved claims of discrimination against students from high-poverty households (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003). Balanced Literacy backers alleged that there was a belief among their opponents that urban students could only learn via a model of structured, isolated phonics and repeated drills because they lacked these prerequisite skills and could only be successful if the skill deficit was filled before “real reading” could occur. The problem with this philosophy, they argued, was that these students had limited time reading authentic texts which led to lack of motivation and enjoyment of reading, key factors in future success (BLIT meeting minutes, January 27, 2003; February 10, 2003).

With the virtual director of reading leading the charge, the Balanced Literacy advocates pointed to the district’s current PSSA scores which identified Harrisburg students as performing significantly below grade level, earning 500th in the ranking of the 501 school districts in the state of Pennsylvania. A grade level basal, they pointed out, might necessitate teacher instruction anywhere from one to three years above the students’ current reading levels. They argued that reading research showed students need to be instructed on their instructional reading level, the level at which they read with at least 90% accuracy. The Balanced Literacy proponents stated that leveled readers would

allow teachers to meet the instructional needs of all the students in their classroom by providing them with texts at the appropriate reading level, thus increasing the students' likelihood of making significant progress. They felt that students' reading instructional needs could be addressed through Balanced Literacy instructional methods such as shared reading, reading aloud to students, and independent reading.

After consultation with the virtual director of reading, the superintendent made the decision in April, 2003, to continue pursuit of Balanced Literacy without basal reader support as the district's approach to literacy instruction (personal notes from superintendent meeting, April 14, 2003; BLIT minutes, April 24, 2003). While some BLIT members remained skeptical, others were cautiously optimistic and the group began to show enthusiasm for the Balanced Literacy approach.

As the superintendent would later explain to the BLIT in a 2005 meeting, the district philosophy was a belief in a constructivist approach to learning, noting that "learning is social and we are continually learning how to learn" (BLIT minutes, January 25, 2005). Consistent with this philosophy, he affirmed during this meeting that the day-to-day decision-making of teachers is what counted most. Balanced Literacy implementation would not be linear and a good deal of risk would be involved with bumps along the way. The superintendent asserted that Harrisburg School District students can learn and so can teachers and administrators; that, as a district, we were a "community of learners" (BLIT minutes, January 25, 2005).

Professional Development and Balanced Literacy Implementation

Professional development for teachers is a major component of any successful Balanced Literacy initiative. In April, 2003, the district re-structured and appointed a special education teacher to be director of professional development.

Harrisburg School District used a three-pronged approach to implement Balanced Literacy. The first prong was the selection and training of the instructional facilitators or IFs who were the district's reading coaches and professional developers. The title of "instructional facilitator" was borrowed from Lancaster City School District. Following the example of New York City's District #2 and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the district took steps to institute in-class modeling and coaching of the Balanced Literacy methods and techniques. The district set out to hire IFs for each of the elementary and secondary buildings. The director of professional development, along with the superintendent and other district administrators, began to solicit interested individuals from within the district and outside the district, eventually hiring several IFs from Lancaster as well as several exemplary classroom teachers from within the district. These individuals would be housed in each of Harrisburg's district schools to assume the coaching roles for the Balanced Literacy model.

Throughout the spring months of 2003, a series of professional development sessions was held during weekly full-day meetings, held off-campus at a local university. In attendance were the district's K-8 and high school IFs and reading specialists and the director of professional development. Presenters were outside consultants from organizations such as the Penn Literacy Network (through the University of Pennsylvania) and Ed Trust. Although IFs and reading specialists found the sessions

valuable, they later said weekly sessions were disconnected from one another and it was difficult to make the trainings relevant to the job they were doing (IF meeting minutes, October 23, 2003). At this time, literacy coaching was still a relatively new phenomenon and there were not many resources available or models to follow. After several months, the teachers' union and some district administrators began to complain about the extravagance of catered lunches at off-campus sites. While the meetings continued throughout that school year, the venue changed to the district schools and the menu changed to brown-bag lunches.

Interestingly a second prong in professional development efforts for Balanced Literacy began while the district BLIT was still discussing whether or not the district should follow a basal reading approach. The superintendent began chaperoning teams of educators on overnight visits to New York City's Community District #2, where authentic Balanced Literacy (without a basal) was alive and well.

The superintendent was well aware that the Balanced Literacy approach had reportedly been successful in New York City's District #2 and was also being implemented at that time in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Vickie Phillips, who later served as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education, was superintendent. He made contact with both districts and decided that the success that these two urban districts were having might be replicable in Harrisburg. While it could be argued that a 40 minute trip to Lancaster would have been more cost-effective than an overnight stay in Manhattan that was not to be the plan. A contributing factor was that the BLIT facilitator was a professor at Columbia University in Manhattan and had contacts at PS 126 in District #2. After a few telephone calls, the trip itinerary was planned.

During the months of February through April, 2003, the superintendent chartered three separate bus trips to visit PS 126, a New York City District #2 school. Several administrators, IFs, reading specialists, and classroom teachers were invited to make the trek to New York City and observe Balanced Literacy in action in a PS 126. As a participant on one of those trips on April 28 and 29, 2003, I felt honored to have been invited, and hoped that the teachers and other administrators who were invited felt the same way. The superintendent accompanied each group and his enthusiasm for the school and the teachers we were observing was contagious. On our first morning of the visit, the principal of the school invited us to attend her daily staff meeting which provided us an opportunity to ask questions of the teachers regarding their planning and instruction. My extensive personal notes from that meeting reflect the passion of the principal of PS 126, Daria Rigney. Below are excerpts from those notes, including direct quotes from Principal Rigney:

What do we value? Bedrock values - no rhetoric; teach to the student, not to the class; discipline is handled by handling school culture; encourage active learners, not passive learners; "I don't want them doing test prep during the day - they should do that in extended day. You want the best teachers teaching after school;" teachers teaching after school go into their afterschool students' classrooms during their (teachers') prep period to get to know the needs of the students; pay incentives to attract the best teachers in afterschool; regarding professional development - "if they're a math teacher, send them to every institute - don't take the wind out of their sails and make them a social studies teacher"; "all change happens with two teachers having lunch together"; regarding

hiring new staff and the interview process – “you’re not trying to get at what they know, you’re trying to get at who they are – would you want to have dinner with them?”; “I never plant anything without pulling a weed” (personal notes, April 29, 2003).

When we visited the classrooms, the Harrisburg School District teachers voiced amazement at the level of student engagement and the high-level student discussions. Although the school, like those in Harrisburg, was a high-poverty, urban school, I sensed that there was still some cynicism among Harrisburg teachers that the same level of student learning was possible in our district. This skepticism seemed centered on two issues – that while the District #2 students were minorities, most of them were Asian and not African American as in Harrisburg and that their parents had selected this school deliberately because of its reputation unlike Harrisburg students for whom choice was not an option.

In the spring of 2003, at Harrisburg’s expense, the principal of PS 126, along with six of her teachers, spent their spring break in the Harrisburg School District. On the first day of that week, they participated in an administrative retreat at the Civil War Museum in the city. While the principal, Daria Rigney, and several of her teachers shared their challenges and successes, Harrisburg School District administrators enthusiastically took notes and asked questions. I remember that meeting as a “mile high moment” in the district. There was a lot of district uncertainty and unease about Balanced Literacy and it felt good to hear that this approach was working in a real urban district with real teachers and real kids. During the meeting the principals “signed up” to have a NYC District #2 teacher in their building the following day, to teach lessons to several of their student

classes. The next day, the District #2 teachers disbursed into several Harrisburg classrooms, armed with lesson plans they brought with them. Groups of Harrisburg teachers, including the classroom teacher, observed the District #2 teacher teach the lesson. Harrisburg teachers were astounded at the level of attentiveness, focus, and engagement that their students exhibited. Teachers commented that they were amazed that their students were able to grasp the concepts taught, and some were embarrassed and ashamed that their expectations had been so low. I believe that this experience was critical in raising teacher expectations for Balanced Literacy. I know that it was recounted by teachers several times as a turning point for them in their belief in value of the Balanced Literacy approach.

The third prong of the professional development in support of Balanced Literacy initiative involved engaging AUSSIE coaches for the schools. In June, 2003, the virtual director of reading was successful in securing a contract with Australian and United States Services in Education (AUSSIE) professional development and literacy coaches, based in New York City. These coaches, who originally hailed from Australia and New Zealand, were also serving as coaches in New York City's District #2 schools. In June, 2003, district IFs and reading specialists were paid to attend a mandatory 2-week summer training provided by AUSSIE coaches on literacy-related topics. In July and August of 2003, the district required all summer school teachers to work with an AUSSIE coach. The AUSSIE coaches got to know the district buildings and staff while they assisted summer school teachers in learning foundational Balanced Literacy practices. These summer school teachers, along with the IFs and reading specialists, became the early

adopters of the district's Balanced Literacy initiative and many of them would become resources for other teachers.

As a side note, in August of 2003, the district's contract with the virtual director of reading ended, and I became the district's sole reading administrator. In my role as the supervisor of the district's reading specialists I began to meet with them monthly, providing professional development on Balanced Literacy, specifically related to interventions.

In addition to the summer trainings mentioned above, the AUSSIE contract with the district provided for approximately 20 of their coaches to travel to Harrisburg for a total of 20 days scattered throughout the 2003-2004 school year. At least one coach was assigned to each district building. Approximately 8-10 days of coaching support per month were allocated to each building. The district IFs were to shadow the AUSSIE coaches when they were in the district and the AUSSIE coaches would mentor the district IFs in addition to coaching district teachers and administrators. Many teachers and IFs would later say that this experience was the high-water mark of their teaching career (IF minutes, January 22, 2004). The AUSSIE coaches, while not generally warm and fuzzy, provided the kind of objective, honest feedback to teachers and administrators that, in my opinion, was generally lacking in the district. Due to a strong union presence, and a tangle of political connections reinforced by the mayor's role in the district, there were some teachers who appeared to be "off limits." The AUSSIE coaches could ignore these distinctions with impunity.

In October, 2003, I was assigned to be the supervisor of the IFs and began to meet with them monthly, providing training and support for their in-building coaching and

professional development presentations. I also began to meet with the AUSSIE coaches monthly to review the types of successes and challenges they were seeing in our buildings as the teachers began to implement Balanced Literacy strategies in their classrooms. The AUSSIE coaches provided me with monthly reports regarding the teachers they worked with and the types of professional development they were providing. In general, the AUSSIE coaches worked with the IFs in the building and assigned follow-up coaching and professional development activities for the interim weeks before their next visit.

In this same month, the district was awarded a \$980,000 Reading First grant, based on low academic proficiency scores on standardized assessments. The grant provided for half of the IFs' salaries (with the remainder paid out of Title I funds), leveled readers for guided reading, and other supplementary reading materials in support of the Balanced Literacy initiative.

From November, 2003, through June, 2004, the AUSSIE coaches provided coaching and professional development to staff members in each of our district K-8 schools and two district high schools. Over this period of time I continued to meet with the entire group of AUSSIE coaches one day per month to receive feedback regarding what they were seeing as strengths and areas in which teachers and administrators were struggling. I also received a monthly written report for each building from the AUSSIE coach who worked there. IFs and reading specialists continued to meet with me one full day each month (separately) to share their challenges and successes, to receive additional professional development as appropriate, and to discuss upcoming trainings and initiatives that they should share with their staffs.

During the 2004-2005 school year the AUSSIE coaches again worked in district buildings. The consensus of the AUSSIE coaches was that while the district IFs had gained a considerable amount of knowledge about literacy (content knowledge), additional professional development was needed to build their coaching skills. At this same time, additional requirements were added to the Reading First grant. These specified that district IFs, who were also designated as our Reading First coaches, would attend state-developed training sessions. Harrisburg IFs reported that one of the most beneficial trainings for our coaches was the Cognitive Coaching training provided by Pennsylvania Reading First organizers.

The IFs met weekly with grade level teams in their buildings for the purpose of collaboration and to examine student achievement data. AUSSIE coaches provided monthly full-day trainings for reading specialists and IFs to provide the specialized training that they needed. At the end of the school year, the contract with AUSSIE was not renewed – not because their services were not valued, but because our coaches – the IFs – were becoming much more independent and proficient in their coaching role. The district decided that the million dollar contract with AUSSIE could be redistributed to provide other district training and resources.

Over these early years, the vital role of the IF slowly developed into that of the “go-to” person regarding Balanced Literacy. The principal of each building relied heavily on their IF to provide the teaching staff with the necessary instructional tools to deliver the curriculum that they had helped to develop. The professional development that the IFs received and then passed on to their colleagues provided teachers with the at-

the-elbow support they needed as they learned about the components of Balanced Literacy and how to teach them.

Postscript of the Harrisburg School District's Literacy Program – 2009

The Harrisburg School District, still under the leadership of the same superintendent, continues to implement a Balanced Literacy model of literacy instruction without the use of a basal series. The district has survived two federal audits of their Reading First funded literacy program and continue to receive funds. They have had extensive scrutiny from the PDE and the Secretary of Education as well as several legislators but the superintendent has remained steadfast in his belief that the district literacy program is successful even though PSSA scores do not fully reflect that success. District assessment data from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) do show gains in student achievement. Unfortunately, many Harrisburg School District students enter school far behind their peers in communication and literacy abilities. A 2002 Rutgers study (Barnett & Robin, 2002), determined that, compared to a national sample, Harrisburg School District kindergarteners are entering kindergarten ready and able to learn, but behind their age-peers from more advantaged environments in terms of developed communication and cognitive abilities. Because the PSSA is administered on a student's grade level instead of their current instructional level, the assessment is too difficult for many students and, because of that, does not accurately reflect true growth. While students may make tremendous gains based on district data, these gains are not sufficient to close the gap.

The district continues to use IFs to provide building-based professional development and support teachers through modeling and coaching. Some of the original IFs remain in the district as IFs, while many have moved on to new roles in the district with new responsibilities. Many have used the quasi-administrative experience of being an IF as a stepping stone toward earning administrative certification. Two of the former IFs have become Harrisburg School District building principals, including Brooke Black (pseudonym), the former IF at Hale School, one of the schools under study. Some have continued as IFs in Harrisburg and are using their administrative knowledge in their coaching role. Two former IFs, including Simone Kennedy (pseudonym), the former IF at Piedmont School, the other school under study, have decided to apply the professional development they received as an IF back in the classroom, close to the students.

Former IFs who are now classroom teachers, such as Ms. Kennedy, appear to have come full circle as educators, remarking that their days as IFs have made them better teachers because of the depth in which they have examined teacher instruction and student learning:

Looking at where I am now, I can't imagine having to use a basal. The fourteen students I have are on fourteen levels and the children wouldn't be where they are if I didn't have the knowledge and the background I have in [Balanced Literacy]. It really works with kids in a first grade classroom (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

Those like Ms. Black who have become administrators have a “balcony-level view” of instruction that classroom teachers are seldom privy to. Being an instructional leader is not the stretch for them that it is for some of their colleagues.

Those who continue as IFs have gained extensive experience and training and continue to do the important work of supporting teachers in their daily work.

The two principals in the study, Sandra Adams and Leslie Peterson (pseudonyms), have both left the district since the time of the study. Ms. Adams was counseled into retirement by the superintendent. Ms. Peterson is now Assistant to the Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction in another school district.

While many things in the district have changed, the literacy program, especially in kindergarten through grade three, has remained somewhat stable, from the influence of the IFs in the buildings to the Balanced Literacy model of literacy instruction.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

This explanatory and exploratory case study sought to discover why it appeared that one school did well as indicated by measures of student achievement and participant perceptions with the professional development offered in support of the Balanced Literacy initiative and a similar school in the same district, with a similar student population and the same professional development opportunities, did not.

The intent was to develop a thick, rich description of the context of the Balanced Literacy initiative in the Harrisburg School District in order to understand the variable results between the two schools.

A Demographic Portrait of the Two Schools

This section examines two schools through a wide, comparative lens, looking at school-wide teacher data and student data in order to see how they stack up for the two schools on a side-by-side comparison/analysis. The following section presents demographic portraits of the teaching staffs and students, achievement scores, and the roles of two key players in each school – the building principal and the Instructional Facilitator (IF) at each building.

Teaching Staffs at Piedmont and Hale

Years of teaching experience are shown in Table 1. While this does not account for years of service outside the district, it is not common for Harrisburg School District to hire a teacher with experience elsewhere. Typically, successful teachers tend to remain in one district unless they look to further their careers. Harrisburg School District does

not ordinarily attract teachers who are looking to further their careers but does sometimes attract teachers who seek a challenge.

Piedmont School

At the time of this study about one third of the teaching staff at Piedmont School had been teaching less than 5 years while another third had been teaching between 6 and 20 years. The Piedmont Elementary School staff was comprised of 7 male teachers and 25 female teachers. The mostly Caucasian staff, while not mirroring the ethnicities of the school's students, included 8 African American teachers, 1 Asian teacher, and 23 Caucasian teachers.

Hale School

Compared to the Piedmont teaching staff, the teaching staff at Hale was relatively inexperienced - nearly 50% of Hale's teachers had tenures in the district of no more than 5 years (see Table 1).

Hale Elementary School employed a teaching staff of 4 male teachers and 29 female teachers. Like Piedmont, the racial composition of the teaching staff was not representative of the students it served, with 4 African American teachers and 29 Caucasian teachers.

Table 1

Teaching Staff - Years of Teaching Experience

<i>Years</i>	<i>Piedmont</i>	<i>Hale</i>
0-5	31%	49%
6-20	38%	2%
21-30	19%	6%
31+	12%	18%

Students at Piedmont and Hale

Piedmont School

According to the PDE website, in 2004 Piedmont's student enrollment was reported to be 516, with 97% of those students reported to be from low-income families, based on free and reduced lunch figures. Consistent with other Harrisburg School District elementary buildings, the majority of students at Piedmont School were ethnic minorities (see Table 2).

Hale School

According to the PDE website, in 2004 Hale's student enrollment was 554, with 91% of those students reported to be from low-income families, based on free and reduced lunch figures. Like Piedmont, a preponderance of students at Hale were ethnic minorities (see Table 2).

Table 2

Students - Ethnicity

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Piedmont</u>	<u>Hale</u>
African American	82.7%	70.2%
Asian	0.0%	2.3%
Caucasian	7.2%	6.5%
Hispanic	10.1%	20.7%
Indian	0.0%	0.3%

Piedmont School

Academically, students at Piedmont School were struggling, as measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) – the student achievement data used by the state when evaluating school districts and schools. The data taken from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) website show the percentages of students at the proficient and advanced levels for grade five math and reading on the PSSA for the years 2003-2005. Grade five data were used because they were the only constant data during the years under study. In 2002-2003 all district grade eight students were housed in one building. In 2003-2005 they were housed in neighborhood schools with PreK-grade seven. In 2004-2005 data became available for grade three students who had begun to take the PSSA in math and reading; however, there were not scores available for 2003-2004.

While state testing data did not show the growth of individual students, especially if they were below proficiency targets, Piedmont’s PSSA data show that students’ proficiency in math decreased in the first year under study, when the focus on literacy began, but experienced a modest increase the next year (see Table 3).

Hale School

Academically, students at Hale School were also struggling, as measured by the PSSA. The data from Hale show that students’ proficiency in math increased in the first year of the study, when the focus on literacy began; however, the next year showed a modest decrease in math proficiency (see Table 3).

In year one of the Balanced Literacy initiative, PSSA reading data at Hale showed a significant increase in the number of students scoring at the proficient or advanced levels. Unfortunately, this growth was not maintained as the second year of the initiative showed that the percentage of students scoring at the proficient and advanced levels on the PSSA decreased (see Table 4).

Table 3

PSSA data: % Advanced/Proficient Math

<u>Year</u>	<u>Piedmont grade 5</u>	<u>Hale grade 5</u>
2002-2003	9.4%	3.6%
2003-2004	7.7%	33.3%
2004-2005	10.8%	32.0%

In year one of the Balanced Literacy initiative, PSSA reading data at Piedmont showed an increase from the previous year in the number of proficient and advanced students, while the following year showed a slight decrease in this number (see Table 4).

Table 4

PSSA data: % Advanced/Proficient Reading

Year	Piedmont grade 5	Hale grade 5
2002-2003	15.9%	23.2
2003-2004	23.0%	40.0
2004-2005	18.9	26.0

The Principal at Piedmont School

Sandra Adams, principal of Piedmont School, had been in the Harrisburg School District for thirty-two years – her entire educational career. Across those years she worked under more than ten superintendents, a myriad of central office administrators, and held several positions in the district, including reading supervisor. Her early years included stints as an elementary teacher and reading specialist before beginning her tenure as a building administrator.

At the time of this study, Ms. Adams had been the principal at Piedmont for thirteen years and was known in the district as an advocate for families and children. Having worked at Piedmont School for many years, she knew the families in her neighborhood well, and she was familiar with the issues that the children at her school faced outside the school day. Ms. Adams got along well with her staff, even those who had reputations in the district for their ineffective teaching. As the district coordinator of

reading, I was called upon to conduct a formal observation of one of the teachers at Piedmont, per the deputy superintendent's request. The observation was prompted by an incident involving a seventh grade student who had asked a classroom visitor to "teach us." During my scheduled observation, I found the "teaching" in that classroom glaringly inept and obviously not just an instance of the teacher merely having a bad day. The teacher had never received an unsatisfactory rating from Ms. Adams although she did acknowledge that the teaching in that classroom had been unsatisfactory for several years (personal notes, March 16, 2005). Through the efforts of the central office, the teacher was terminated by the end of that school year but the incident cast doubt on Ms. Adams' classroom supervisory and evaluative skills (personal notes, July 6, 2005).

From my own recollections, I recall that Ms. Adams was known in the district as a pleasant, happy-go-lucky principal who followed orders but rarely gave them, who did not rock the boat and who appeared uncomfortable when someone else did.

The Principal at Hale School

The principal of Hale Elementary School, Leslie Peterson, was also a Caucasian female who had three years of experience in a rural school district as an elementary principal prior to coming to Harrisburg. Ms. Peterson recalled her first days on the job as challenging, but positive (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009). There was a bumpy and troubled history to staff/building principal relationships at Hale School. The previous building administrator had been terminated because of an inappropriate relationship with a staff member (who was now working in another building) and alcoholism – factors that inevitably bled over into the operation of the school. The time

period leading up to his eventual firing fostered the staff's sense of independence and what might be characterized as a lack of respect for leadership. As Ms. Peterson recalled:

My building was ready for a change; timing could not have been better - a 'Perfect Storm', so to speak. I became principal after a very ineffective principal. So, I immediately had the teachers' support ... they were part of the interview process as well (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009).

Leslie Peterson came to Hale School in early 2003 with the challenge of uniting a staff that had learned to work in isolation. Some were desperate for leadership; others preferred that things be left as they were. Ms. Peterson found herself the subject of several grievances during the first years of her tenure at Harrisburg because she rated some teachers as unsatisfactory. As the district's coordinator of reading, I was involved in some of the classroom observations that led to the unsatisfactory ratings and also found that the teaching was indeed unsatisfactory. Although the union grieved, Ms. Peterson did not lose her cases and she was gradually able to replace some ineffective teachers, including one whose alcoholism affected his teaching. The teachers who remained appeared to become instant followers of their new principal who they saw as supporting them and their students (R. Wise, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

The Instructional Facilitator (IF) at Piedmont School

The IF at Piedmont School, Simone Kennedy, had come to this position with sixteen years of experience as an elementary teacher (eight years in grade one and eight years in grade five) in Harrisburg School District. She was a Caucasian female whose exemplary teaching record in the district earned her an interview for the IF position. The superintendent selected her to be an IF after a series of interviews conducted by a large

district team. I would characterize Ms. Kennedy's temperament as calm, introspective, and punctilious. Archetypical of her personality, after my interview with her, she left a telephone message for me to say that, upon reflection, she wanted to elaborate on one of her responses. She followed up that telephone message with an e-mail to reiterate her thoughts. While very thorough and always on time with paperwork, as a district supervisor I found Ms. Kennedy was not very assertive and certainly not confrontational in dealing with others. In my estimation she was not match for the boisterous and even belligerent personalities of some of her building colleagues with whom she was charged with coaching (personal notes, end of year conference, May 25, 2005). She had the most success with younger, newer teachers who sought assistance in meeting the demands of teaching in an environment that was much more challenging than the one in which they had student taught (personal notes, end of year conference, May 25, 2005). Many of those teachers left the district within 3-5 years, armed with a great deal of knowledge about Balanced Literacy, and an arsenal of classroom management strategies.

The Instructional Facilitator (IF) at Hale School

The IF at Hale School, Brooke Black, was a Caucasian female with two years experience as an elementary teacher and four years experience as an IF in a Balanced Literacy setting in Lancaster City School District prior to coming to Harrisburg School District as an IF. Brooke was one of a handful of teachers from Lancaster that were hired by the superintendent and his district team. Ms. Black referred to herself as Caucasian but appeared to be of mixed race. She and her African American husband were the parents of 4 children. She relayed to me that she connected with the African American population more so than most of her colleagues, perhaps because of the family photos she

had displayed in her office. Her personality could be described as exuberant, although somewhat rough around the edges, and passionate. She had a no-nonsense approach and often did not filter her comments, much to the chagrin of some administrators. Her sincerity and dedication were evident and usually overcame any negativism brought about by her words.

Balanced Literacy Professional Development in Harrisburg School District

Following the decision to implement Balanced Literacy, there was a period of intense planning for resource acquisition and professional development. From the onset, the members of the BLIT had an advantage over the rest of the district teachers in that they had been part of the decision making process concerning Balanced Literacy. They had attended several presentations and discussions about Balanced Literacy and why it was beneficial to students. On the other hand, most district teachers learned about the Balanced Literacy initiative through required district professional development sessions and did not have the luxury of time to sift through the tenets of Balanced Literacy; nor were they given an option of deciding whether or not they thought it was a good instructional approach for their students. Most teachers were simply told that this would be the district's approach to literacy and that they would be trained on each component and then expected to implement it in their instruction. The related issues of choice and ownership were largely ignored in the presentation of Balanced Literacy to the teaching staff.

Professional development for the IFs, classroom teachers, and principals had many facets. In the years under study, the IFs received monthly training from the district's coordinator of reading, monthly training on specific coaching strategies from Australia

and United States Services in Education (AUSSIE) consultants, monthly trainings through the PDE Reading First initiative, and several in-house training sessions arranged through the district. Because of the number of IFs in the district, district administrators decided it was more cost-effective to bring presenters into the district to first train IFs and then to have the IFs provide turn-around training to the staff in their buildings.

In addition to monthly BLIT meetings in which the IFs, reading specialists, and administrators received updates and clarifications on Balanced Literacy initiatives, monthly administrative team meetings and retreat days were built around the principals' role in these initiatives and at times were led by an AUSSIE consultant or other outside consultants. While the concept behind these training sessions was noble, in retrospect there appeared to be little cohesion or coherence between the various training sessions. For example, the focus of early trainings with AUSSIE and PS 126 staff was specifically on Balanced Literacy. However, when a district team went to Harvard to participate in the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), this focus was lost as the next several months were spent sharing case studies and discussing what the team learned about the importance of having a district strategy. As a participant on the PELP team, I recognized that this was valuable knowledge but it also shifted the focus of the BLIT meetings and Balanced Literacy professional development sessions away from Balanced Literacy implementation and supervision (BLIT meeting minutes, September 2, 2004; October 14, 2004; November 11, 2004; December 17, 2004).

Building-level professional development, generally led by the IF or AUSSIE consultant, addressed explicit instructional needs of teachers. This professional development occurred through targeted training in weekly grade level meetings,

facilitated by the building's IF and often attended by the building principal. Monthly half-day early dismissals for students allowed for specific building level training sessions led by the IF. Often these monthly training sessions were the basis for follow-up discussion in weekly grade level meetings. The IF often provided in-class modeling of the learned strategies as another follow-up. Attendance at these sessions by the building principal added accountability and lent importance to the topic. The principal could then look for evidence of the learned teaching practices when he or she visited teachers' classrooms.

In my monthly meetings with the IFs, it became apparent to me that principal participation in these meetings was highly variable. Some building principals attended and participated in the grade level meetings faithfully, others attended as long as there were no other pressing building issues at hand, and still others stopped by the meetings on occasion but did not participate. Attendance patterns appeared to be a fair barometer of the principal's commitment to the initiative. IFs reported that when principals attended the grade level meetings that teachers were more attentive and less negative and the principal's presence lent credibility to the IF's training message (personal notes from IF meeting, November 9, 2004). When the principal did not attend, the opposite was often true.

Discussion of the Findings

Changes in Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Balanced Literacy

As classroom assessments slowly began to show that students were learning, teachers' confidence in and belief that Balanced Literacy instruction was effective increased. The IF at Hale School, Brooke Black, noted, "This was monumental in

changing teacher beliefs and attitudes.” A district reading specialist commented on the change in beliefs as a result of professional development:

Because of the professional development ... we took the basal and put it aside and tried to learn ourselves about children and how they learn – I think that’s phenomenal. It used to be just put a basal in [teachers’] hands. I saw someone just the other day in our lunchroom copying some kind of basal and I thought ‘Oh my gosh! That’s all [teachers] used to do. They copy the directions onto a lesson plan – they’ve never really had to think about the child.’ And I think that’s the difference now, we’re starting to think more (interview reported in Pitcher, 2006).

Having the IF in the building on a daily basis provided an important support network for teachers. However, trust was a critical factor in whether or not the teacher sought out the services of the IF. Many of the IFs had previously been district teachers, which in some cases was helpful in developing loyalty and credibility, depending on their previous relationship with teachers. In other cases, there were district teachers who had applied to be an IF and had not been selected – and this did not always pave the way for a favorable reception of the IFs into their classrooms. More than once I heard a statement like, “I know more than they do – why would I need them to help me?” from teachers who did not want to use the services of an IF. A related issue was that the friends and allies of the teacher who did not get selected often shared the same antipathy toward the IF, in support of their friend. This made the job of an IF much more of a challenge than just teaching their colleagues about Balanced Literacy – they had to combat resentment and even hostility based largely upon decisions they had no control over.

The district could not overlook the teachers' union, a strong presence in Harrisburg School District. The group's president was part of many strategy and decision-making groups in the district, including BLIT and the Harvard PELP group. His support of the Balanced Literacy initiative was critical and deemed significant to its success. As recorded in the minutes from the October 27, 2003 BLIT meeting, the president of the teachers' union reported on an informal survey he conducted of teachers. He told the BLIT, "In general, teachers like the Balanced Literacy approach and the AUSSIE coaching." He did note, however, that "they [teachers] would like more consistency and support from the district in implementing it." While the union president (who was a music teacher) supported the Balanced Literacy initiative, some of the other officers (who were classroom teachers and thus had more direct literacy instruction responsibilities) were not as amenable to the expectations from administration. The comment made by the union president regarding the perceived lack of consistency and support was likely fair and valid. I interpreted it as a symptom of district leadership's lack of clear and robust communication from central office to principals to teachers.

At the May 14, 2004 BLIT meeting, meeting minutes note that a decision was made to survey all K-8 staff "to determine their opinions on various aspects of the Balanced Literacy initiative." The surveys were administered to staff during faculty meetings in late May or early June. Buildings and staff results were kept anonymous and all data were collected by the teachers' union. The data were analyzed by the Pennsylvania State University.

Findings from this BLIT survey indicated that, in general, teachers felt the Balanced Literacy initiative was appropriate for their students and that their students had

the potential to be proficient readers. An additional analysis (also completed by the Pennsylvania State University but reported by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction) of the BLIT survey was done per the direction of the central office administration. While building-level analyses were not done, the Assistant Superintendent was interested in differences in the responses as they related to grade level taught and years of experience. Below is an excerpt of that report, which identified four factors which emerged from the survey data that may have impacted Balanced Literacy implementation:

Exploratory Factor Analysis: The final analysis was an attempt to develop a factor analysis of the survey. This approach attempted to find several concepts under which certain items cluster. This very preliminary analysis tentatively identified four factors: comfort level with Balanced Literacy, Balanced Literacy effectiveness, the need for support in implementing Balanced Literacy, and the decision to use Balanced Literacy. It should be noted that the factor analysis was only exploratory.

Comfort level with Balanced Literacy

Teachers in grades 6-8 agreed significantly more with the statement “I need more direction if I am to use Balanced Literacy effectively” than teachers in grades 1-3. The response to this statement indicates that more training is needed for teachers in grades 6-8. Teachers in the primary level may, in general, be more comfortable teaching reading.

Effectiveness in using Balanced Literacy

Teachers with more experience believe Balanced Literacy to be more effective compared to teachers with less experience. This tentative result is in conflict with the significant difference outlined in Item 22, “Balanced Literacy does not provide me with enough structure in order for me to be successful.” Balanced Literacy was seen more favorably by teachers with less experience.

Decision to use Balanced Literacy

Classroom teachers with less experience believed it was a good decision to implement the Balanced Literacy program. These teacher responses may indicate that we need to encourage experienced teachers to take advantage of AUSSIE coaches and instructional facilitators.

Need for support

Classroom teachers with more years of experience believed that they need less support to implement the Balanced Literacy program. Coupling this result with the results outlined under the “Decision to use Balanced Literacy sub-scale” would lend support to the premise that we need to encourage teachers with experience to utilize the expertise of the AUSSIE coaches and the instructional facilitators.

This survey provided an interesting insight into teachers’ beliefs and attitudes as they related to the Balanced Literacy initiative. Not surprisingly, the less-experienced and early elementary teachers were more favorably disposed toward the Balanced Literacy initiative and upper level and more experienced teachers were the least supportive.

These findings led to closer examination of teaching practices at the intermediate grades as well as principals being charged with prompting and encouraging teachers to utilize AUSSIE coaches and IFs for support.

Piedmont School: Changes in Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Balanced Literacy

The beliefs and attitudes of teachers at Piedmont School were varied. Some teachers appeared to ignore the effort, with a “this too shall pass” attitude. Without accountability structures set in place by the building administrator, the response to the professional development surrounding Balanced Literacy was variable. Resistant teachers stayed resistant. Strong teachers did not want to change their teaching methods – nor did they see a need to. The impact of the professional development on beliefs and attitudes was most evident with those I would assess as being average and above average teachers. For example, a primary level teacher, Judy Armstrong, acknowledged the support she received from her IF was a positive factor in her experience with Balanced Literacy:

[It was good] having Simone in my room to show me things ... she came in a lot and did lessons. I learned a lot from watching her - that helped me to see the benefits of Balanced Literacy because my kids were learning from it (J. Armstrong, personal interview, June 3, 2008).

The in-class modeling and demonstration lessons appeared to be effective in building the confidence of teachers. Unfortunately, a lack of clear expectations and direction from the principal gave tacit permission to teachers to pick and choose the components of Balanced Literacy that they wanted to bring into their classrooms and ignore others (personal notes, January 11, 2005). The initiative was watered down from

the start because the bar was set so low for what counted as acceptable practice. It appeared that basic compliance was rewarded and celebrated because it was more than expected. From my perspective, only two teachers in this school actually utilized the AUSSIE and IF support to the fullest extent (personal notes, January 11, 2005). That means that 30 teachers did not. Several of those 30 were selective implementers – choosing parts of the initiative to implement (personal notes from conversation with AUSSIE consultant, January 11, 2005). At its worst – teachers simply chose what to teach, or if to teach, for that matter.

Simone Kennedy, the IF at Piedmont, said she became a believer in Balanced Literacy approach after seeing what it did for student and teacher learning: “[Balanced Literacy] really works with kids ... I can’t imagine having to use a basal. [My beliefs] changed. I just became more confident in my understanding of everything.” (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

This comment, while innocent and sincere, gave me pause as someone who was part of the Balanced Literacy effort in the district. If the Balanced Literacy coach, the person the district entrusted as the cheerleader and advocate for the approach, did not become a believer in Balanced Literacy until after the initiative was well underway, it was not surprising that teachers in her building were not convinced either.

Hale School: Changes in Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Balanced Literacy

At Hale School both the IF and the principal came to the district with a fair understanding of and experience with the Balanced Literacy approach. Although that did not necessarily guarantee that the teachers shared their beliefs or fully embraced Balanced Literacy and immediately began to employ its components, the turn-around

from professional development to expectation of implementation was faster than in other schools (personal notes from AUSSIE consultants' monthly meeting, May 19, 2005).

This past experience and familiarity with Balanced Literacy meant that both the principal and the IF knew what to look for in the implementation process and knew how to assist teachers who were struggling with a particular aspect. Thus, the question of whether to implement or not to implement never arose as an issue. Anna White, an intermediate grade teacher at Hale School, remembers the lack of choice as an issue for some of her colleagues:

I personally was thrilled that the district was finally providing materials and a curriculum for us to follow but some teachers complained about having to attend trainings and use Balanced Literacy. I don't know what they were using to teach reading ... I don't know why they weren't glad for the help (A. White, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

The building principal made it clear to her staff that whether to implement or not to implement the Balanced Literacy instructional strategies was simply not an option (personal notes, February 9, 2005). Although some teachers struggled with carrying out the strategies, the IF and the AUSSIE coaches were available as resources and the principal made it clear that their use was not optional (personal notes, February 9, 2005). All teachers, no matter how proficient, were assigned times to work with the AUSSIE consultant with follow up by the IF when the AUSSIE was in New York. Hale School was the only building that fully utilized the support of the AUSSIE consultant (personal notes from AUSSIE consultants' monthly meeting, May 19, 2005). The consultant at Hale knew all the teachers in that building well and knew what their instructional goals

were. Teachers at Hale told me they corresponded with their AUSSIE via e-mail when he was in New York and his consultation services were always available. This accountability and follow through to someone - the AUSSIE, the IF, and/or the building principal – was instrumental in changing the beliefs and attitudes at Hale.

Brooke Black, the IF at Hale School, had been part of a Balanced Literacy initiative at Lancaster School District so she had witnessed the power of the approach in student learning. She noted the excited attitudes of Harrisburg School District staff with respect to Balanced Literacy:

I know all the IFs were excited about the Balanced Literacy initiative... I think the teachers were excited; I think they were overwhelmed at first... there were pieces coming together and [yet] they were expected to [use Balanced Literacy methods] (B. Black, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

However, I believe that the beginning of this change process was first initiated on the trips to PS 126 in New York City's District #2 when we could actually see Balanced Literacy being successfully applied in the urban setting. When the PS 126 teachers came to Harrisburg and were successful with Harrisburg students, I believed a corner was turned as teacher and administrator attitudes began to change.

Changes in Actions and Behavior Toward Balanced Literacy

During 2003-2004, AUSSIE consultants were in the buildings, providing support to the principals and the teachers, including the IFs. Each month, they met with the reading coordinator and shared their challenges and successes. At the end of each school year, the district was provided with a more formal report. The September 25, 2003 BLIT meeting minutes reflected this update from the AUSSIE representative present:

Please congratulate all teachers on their work, encourage them to relax and keep up the good work. They are very vulnerable right now as they ask for guidance and learn new skills. Please support them any way you can. Teachers are developing confidence in making their own professional judgments based on data about each child, rather than having a program make those judgments for them (BLIT meeting minutes, September 25, 2003).

As the teachers learned more about Balanced Literacy through the mandatory weekly grade level meetings and monthly professional development sessions, they began experimenting with the new teaching strategies in their own classrooms (personal notes from IF meeting, December 4, 2003). With AUSSIE and IF coaches housed in each building, there was an available and viable support network in place. The professional development in the district occurred in the classroom through the IF and the AUSSIE demonstrating and modeling lessons, at grade level meetings where teaching methods were discussed, and at the building level during monthly early dismissal days for students. In addition, district level training sessions were scheduled for fall, winter, and spring in-service days.

Piedmont School had significantly greater numbers of teachers who were experienced, as compared to Hale School which had many more relatively inexperienced teachers. On the surface, it would appear that a veteran teaching staff would bring experience and maturity that would be helpful when undertaking a new initiative such as Balanced Literacy. However, results from the BLIT survey revealed that less-experienced teachers were more favorably disposed toward the Balanced Literacy initiative and upper level, more experienced teachers were the least.

Piedmont School: Changes in Actions and Behavior Toward Balanced Literacy

At Piedmont School, as in all district schools, the teachers were contractually required to attend weekly grade level meetings where the focus was generally on the examination of student work as related to a concentration on a particular Balanced Literacy strategy or skill. Being able to sit in on these grade level meetings was useful to me in observing teachers' understanding of, and acceptance of, Balanced Literacy. While these meetings were part of teachers' professional development, they also provided an important means for an informal assessment of teacher understanding and acceptance of the initiative.

An essential component of Balanced Literacy is the use of student assessment data to guide instructional decision making on a daily basis. Knowing students' instructional needs and guiding instruction to meet them is one of the chief benefits to a constructivist Balanced Literacy model. A teachers' use of instructional data should lead to changes in their instructional actions and behaviors.

I attended several grade level meetings at Piedmont in which the teachers were asked to bring their assessment data that would be examined during the meeting (personal notes, February 15, 2005; February 17, 2005). One particular meeting well characterizes the general tone and content of the others. This meeting of fourth and fifth grade teachers was led by the IF although the principal was in attendance as well. Two teachers did not bring any data with them. The IF hesitated and the principal and I asked the teachers to return to their classrooms and get their data. In one case a teacher returned with blank assessments that had never been completed (personal notes, February 15, 2005). With three of the teachers it was evident that, while the required assessments had been

completed, there was no evidence that they had considered the results or were using them to inform their instruction. There were two Piedmont teachers, however, who had worked with the AUSSIE consultant and had internalized the power of looking at the data to understand students' instructional needs (personal notes, February 15, 2005). These two teachers were able to articulate to the rest of us at the meeting the instructional strengths and needs of their students. In a conversation with the AUSSIE consultant who worked closely with the two teachers, I learned that these two teachers had begun to use assessment data to inform and direct their daily instruction (personal notes from conversation with AUSSIE consultant, February 18, 2005).

Having the AUSSIE coach and IF use the data to plan and implement model lessons with the teacher's own students was profitable when it came to teacher buy-in. Some teachers began to change their teaching practices as they saw evidence through the data that students were learning. Though some teachers began to change teaching practices, Piedmont intermediate-level teacher Lisa Jackson acknowledged that moving to Balanced Literacy was not a smooth transition for everyone:

Not all my colleagues came on board quickly ... and some complained a lot and I'm not sure ever really got it ... for me the key was understanding what Balanced Literacy was and then getting more confidence teaching it... Simone [IF] was able to help with that. (L. Jackson, personal interview, June 3, 2008).

In hindsight, teachers were learning about Balanced Literacy from IFs like Simone Kennedy who were about five steps ahead of them in their learning. For the first several months, IFs spent a great deal of time working on the visible pieces of Balanced Literacy – what the bookroom should look like; where the reading rug should be placed

in the room; what the classroom library should look like; where student work should be displayed. It would be a while before the pedagogical underpinnings of Balanced Literacy would be tackled and, for some teachers, by that time their mind was irrevocably made up.

Hale School: Changes in Actions and Behavior Toward Balanced Literacy

In Hale School, the principal made the decision early on that her IF and AUSSIE coaches would be expected to work with every teacher and not just those who requested assistance. This decision greatly affected actions and behaviors. There was an immediate urgency on the part of teachers concerning what their focus with the AUSSIE would be and what steps they would take to show improvements in their teaching practice before the AUSSIE returned the next time (personal notes from conversation with A. White, February 16, 2005).

I also attended grade level meetings at Hale School. From my perspective, the difference between Piedmont grade level meetings and Hale grade level meetings was striking. While the focus at both meetings was student assessment data, at Hale School the level of conversation indicated that the teachers had a deep knowledge of their students and their literacy levels. For example, the IF and principal, though in attendance at the meeting, did not lead the meeting. Each week, a different teacher had responsibility for sharing her students' data and how she was using that data instructionally. On one occasion, first grade teacher Rose Wise led the discussion. She discussed the reading levels of four of her struggling students. She shared their recent DIBELS and DRA scores and presented running records from that week's guided reading groups. From my perspective, there was a flow to the meeting that could only occur

when teachers took ownership of the process and realized how the information was useful in improving student learning. It was also obvious to me as a visitor that this was not a staged demonstration (such as I had witnessed in some other schools within the district); it was a genuine sharing of student data.

This demonstration of teachers' translating the core belief of the importance of assessment in the Balanced Literacy process into instructional action was remarkable. While not all teachers were thrilled to have the opportunity to meet with their colleagues and talk about their students' work, they knew that it was a requirement. Having a scheduled time and a structure forced teachers to examine and analyze the data, with the support of their building administrator and IF to assist in the procedure. Without this prompting, coaching, and support through the process, it is likely that it would not have occurred. With the proper supports in place, it did.

Variability of Response: Emerging Themes

Four explanatory themes surfaced when comparing the variability of response to the professional development offered in support of Balanced Literacy: organizational support, accountability, building culture, and leadership. While these are distinct themes, it became evident through this study that they are often intertwined.

From my perspective as a participant in the Balanced Literacy effort in the district, it was clear that there was a noticeable difference in the level of commitment among the various principals. At BLIT meetings, the differences were often tempered, but in my monthly meetings with IFs they reported a significant variation in the amount of commitment to the Balanced Literacy effort and support they felt from their principals (personal notes from IF meetings, September 3, 2004; November 12, 2004). A lack of

commitment from the building principal resulted in a lack of expectations and accountability for the teachers in the IF's buildings. This reduced the overall level of accountability and effort on the part of some teachers and, consequently, also reduced their use of the IF or AUSSIE coach for instructional support.

The daily life of the IF could be quite lonely, depending on their relationship with the teachers in their building. Perhaps due to this, the IF group in Harrisburg became a close-knit group. In my monthly meetings with them it was evident that not only was I providing professional development to them, but I was also mentoring them and providing a support network. A ground rule of the meetings was that IFs were not allowed to discuss their principal by name but they could share general frustrations if it was a concern for which their colleagues could offer a solution. From my perspective, the two outliers in this group were Simone Kennedy, the IF at Piedmont School, and Brooke Black, the IF at Hale School - for two very different reasons. Ms. Kennedy from Piedmont School often shared her frustration about the lack of support she felt in her building and that she was alone in her quest to improve instruction in her building. In an end-of-year IF reflection, Ms. Kennedy stated that she sometimes felt "very isolated from the others in the building, except for a few teachers who worked with [Ms. Kennedy] and the AUSSIE" (personal notes from end-of-year meeting, June 1, 2005). In IF meetings, Ms. Kennedy's friendly and understated personality and victim persona earned her sympathy and support from many other IFs.

Ms. Black from Hale School, however, was not the warm and fuzzy type and grew impatient with anyone who was critical of administration. During IF meetings, she sometimes left the room when her colleagues were venting about their principals. At one

meeting, she stated to the group that she and her principal got along very well and worked well together and she could not understand why the rest of the IFs could not get along with their principals (personal notes from IF meeting, February 15, 2005). Her timing in making such statements about the wonderful support she received from her principal and that she did not understand why others did not share her enthusiasm was generally not well received. I am not sure that Ms. Black ever noticed.

Organizational Support

Guskey (2000) provides a functional structure from which to view the impact of professional development on teacher and principal practice. One component of this is organizational support. Organizational support refers to the availability of needed resources, time, verbal encouragement, and organizational policies which aid the teacher in implementation of the initiative. According to Guskey, without these resources, implementation efforts are likely to suffer.

Capital resources for Balanced Literacy implementation were ordered at the central office level for all district schools including Piedmont School and Hale School and identical materials were sent to each building, based on student population numbers. As mentioned previously, the student population across the district is demographically similar, based on income and poverty levels.

Organizational Support at Piedmont School

Simone Kennedy, the IF at Piedmont School, remembers her first weeks as an IF as a time of uncertainty as she did not know much about Balanced Literacy and yet was expected to help others how implement it. As she acknowledged, “The struggle was

that I was learning to be a professional developer in addition to learning about Balanced Literacy” (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

Unfortunately there were many IFs and principals who were thrown into the fire without sufficient training. This led to the staff questioning their credibility, as the “experts” often were not expert enough to provide answers to teachers’ questions or the answers they provided were not consistent or even correct.

The district poured well over a million dollars into material resources as well as AUSSIE consultant billable hours and travel expenses. When it came to throwing money at an issue, Harrisburg excelled. Yet, most respondents agreed that this seemed like money well spent. Ms. Kennedy noted that the AUSSIE consultants and the district-provided resources supported her role as IF and building level professional developer:

We had building-based PD and worked with the AUSSIEs – a great learning experience for me because they already had experience working with [teachers] on what to do and how to do it... it was a great benefit to me. The amount of materials and resources were good... the AUSSIEs were a great support. It was a team effort... it wasn’t just me [providing the support] (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

While teachers were pleased with the resources provided by central office, they were not as pleased with having to follow a set curriculum (personal notes from conversation with AUSSIE and IF coaches, April 5, 2005). Decisions regarding instruction had previously been made at the building level, or, depending on the leadership of a particular building, sometimes at the individual classroom level. For

many teachers, having a direction and a plan was a welcome change but others missed their previous autonomy of choice and independence.

As Judy Armstrong, a primary grade teacher at Piedmont Elementary, noted:

This was a time of stress but also a time of excitement.... we were finally doing things in a logical manner... teachers were energized because they were finally getting resources for their classrooms and for the first time I can remember in my nine-year teaching career in Harrisburg, it looked like the district had a plan. It did seem to be moving too fast, though....many of us were overwhelmed (J. Armstrong, personal interview, June 3, 2008).

The AUSSIE consultants were a stabilizing factor for many teachers – when teachers felt overwhelmed, the AUSSIES were there to say that they had been through the beginning stages of Balanced Literacy implementation before, and what they were experiencing was normal. The IF, Ms. Kennedy, attested to the significant role of the AUSSIE consultants in providing support to her in her role as IF:

We had the AUSSIEs in our building. It was good support from each other - the networking - we were pioneers. [Coaching] was unheard of except in New York City and it was not an easy job - definitely the role of the IF was challenging (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

At Piedmont School, the organizational support was almost entirely from outside the building. Material resources were sent from the central office. The IF and teachers received support from the AUSSIE consultant assigned to the building. The building principal and the IF attended district level trainings on Balanced Literacy. The piece that was missing was the internal capacity –

notably, the lack of building leadership (personal notes, February 15, 2005). I got the sense that if the AUSSIE and IF coach went away, so would Balanced Literacy.

Hale School Capital Organizational Support

By contrast, even though Hale School received the same resources from outside the building, the leadership from the principal set the tone at the top. If the AUSSIE coach and the IF left the building, the Balanced Literacy program would sustain itself through the efforts of the teachers, under the leadership of their principal (personal notes from meeting with AUSSIE and IF coaches, March 8, 2005).

Brooke Black, the IF at Hale School, had a wealth of knowledge about Balanced Literacy which allowed her to begin building internal capacity almost immediately. Her principal understood the goals of Balanced Literacy and was able to support her efforts. Ms. Black notes that this team approach to human resource support, coupled with an abundance of materials and instructional resources were a benefit to her in her role as IF:

I think the biggest support is having the materials actually. We as a district purchased numerous materials to support the initiative and we were shown how to use each of the materials. That's the biggest support you can get, but us as IFs also served as supports to the teachers. We had regular meetings where we got support from the administration on the initiative and then we were able to take what we learned back to the building. So I think that everything was done in order and the supports that were put into place were strong enough to make it get to the point where it is today (B. Black, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

Because of Ms. Black's former role as an IF at Lancaster City School District prior to coming to Harrisburg School District, she was comfortable in the role of professional developer. She had used Balanced Literacy in her former district so did not have the steep learning curve that several of her colleagues did. This allowed Ms. Black to immediately begin to build internal capacity for implementation of Balanced Literacy at Hale School. She acknowledged the benefit of her past job experience in supporting teachers:

Having the Balanced Literacy background that I did before even coming to Harrisburg... I was able to take the pieces and run with it. I was able to give [teachers] more if they needed more. I was able to give them the support that they needed. Sometimes it was difficult to put all the pieces in place for Balanced Literacy, but the materials still provided something concrete that the teachers had in their hands that they could utilize for their instruction. Teachers were glad to have the additional resources and were eager to receive the training that went with them – that made my job easier (B. Black, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

Ms. Black, the IF, had more training and background than some of her IF colleagues but she reiterated the professional development she and her colleagues received and the tangible resources as strengths:

I think the whole [professional development]; the whole piece - the expectations from BLIT and the expectations we received from the AUSSIES - from wherever else it came from... it was all a strength. There was so much in the whole area of reading and writing and, before that, the whole genre was so very weak in the district at that time that anything that was brought in, especially the Balanced

Literacy, was very strong ... it was something put into place that wasn't there - there was structure ... resources put into place; it was very helpful to the teachers ... one of the strengths was it came in pieces... there was a plan – not rolling it all out at once was good (B. Black, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

Leslie Peterson, the principal at Hale School, noted that while she thought central office administration was supportive, and, while she liked the independence they gave her, she would have liked more feedback and perhaps the opportunity to team with another school.

I can only speak for myself. Administration was very supportive to my PD [professional development] efforts - I'm not so sure that was the case in the entire district. What was helpful was the independence that the district gave me in my planning of PD. With that, I was able to tailor the PD to my staff's needs. Teachers do not want to attend a PD if they do not see how it is relevant to them or their students ... they want information they can put to use. Teachers aren't statisticians, so they need time to digest data to make their own conclusions about their instruction. More feedback from the administration would have been welcomed - sometimes with the independence, you felt like somewhat of an island. I would've liked to begin to partner with other building as we progressed to Balanced Literacy. I think they [other principals] would have agreed to that so they would've had less planning to do. More funding is always a benefit to PD (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009).

The October 27, 2003 BLIT meeting minutes discussed the district's plan for professional development which addresses some of Ms. Peterson's concerns above. An

excerpt of those minutes is below. According to the meeting minutes from the October BLIT meeting, Ms. Peterson was not present at that meeting.

After some discussion the group [BLIT] made the following recommendations:

1. Professional development needs to be building specific and differentiated to meet the needs of the teachers in each building. The district can help by offering choices. Buildings can plan and offer PD together.
2. Need to develop a long term vision of PD based on needs of staff and a district definition of what good practice is (guided reading, shared reading, writing, etc.) that use *to, with, and by* strategies.

It was also noted at the October 2003 meeting that the positions of director of professional development and virtual director of reading had been eliminated. As coordinator of reading and federal programs, I assumed the responsibility for professional development and reading instruction in the Balanced Literacy initiative. Both IFs and reading specialists met with me monthly to receive professional development in Balanced Literacy philosophy. We discontinued bringing in outside speakers who were not connected with the Balanced Literacy efforts. The recommendation from the BLIT was that training efforts should be “coordinated between the District Office, schools, IFs, and reading specialists so the messages were consistent” (BLIT meeting minutes, October 27, 2003). The consistency in district level training assisted IFs and reading specialists to present a unified message to their staffs.

Accountability

Accountability was seen as a key factor in the implementation of Balanced Literacy and was discussed at many BLIT meetings and administrative team meetings.

On May, 2003, upon the request of the BLIT, a group of instructional facilitators met as the Professional Development Advisory Committee. Their task was “to provide input into developing the expectations for the faculty and administration in developing Balanced Literacy” (Professional Development Advisory Committee meeting minutes, May 7, 2003). The excerpt below from their informal meeting minutes reflects their ambiguity of some district administrators with regard to basic intent and concepts of the Balanced Literacy initiative:

We need a curriculum. The teachers need a continuum/checklist so they know what the expectations are and then you select where you want to go. On in-service day, offer lots of choices so you can learn what you need to learn.

This charge to the IFs on the committee was so broad that no one knew what it was that they were supposed to do. This confusion was one of the key reasons why supervision of the IFs and reading specialists was assigned to the reading coordinator rather than an outside consultant or the director of professional development, neither of whom either understood Balanced Literacy or had the necessary training and background in literacy.

Minutes from the June 9, 2003 BLIT meeting noted that the checklist and continuum, referred to above, had been developed by the AUSSIE consultants. Nonetheless, the BLIT members were not even close to consensus as far as their understanding of Balanced Literacy was concerned. Minutes from that June BLIT meeting revealed that some members believed that the Balanced Literacy developmental continuum “should be used as a resource.” Others stated that it “needs to be used when it is presented” while still others said there “is no pressure to know it and implement it now.” Little wonder that the staff was confused. The essence of the meeting notes from

that June BLIT meeting reflected the division in the district – one on hand, there was a request for supports and resources to increase accountability and, on the other hand, there was hesitancy to mandate anything. It appeared that in some buildings, the principal never required any compliance from anyone. As reading coordinator, I raised the issue of accountability at many BLIT and administrator meetings, delicately, but purposefully. The BLIT facilitator always followed my lead on this issue, as it was also one of his, but many times the conversations would end with principals or the teachers' union president saying that there were staff members who were not trained and how could we hold them accountable when they had not had the necessary training. Later, in private conversations with me, the IFs in those buildings would sometimes say that trainings were offered but staff members chose not to attend. It seemed clear to me that this was a building leadership issue. The IF was a member of the teachers' union and was not allowed to report to the principal on whether or not teachers attended trainings. Only if the principal was either in attendance at the training session or reviewed the sign-in sheets, as they were directed to do by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, would the principals know what teachers were attending the training and which were not.

The March 8, 2005 BLIT meeting notes yet again denoted a discussion regarding accountability:

Where do teacher observations, supervision, and evaluation fit into [Balanced Literacy]? Do teachers have to implement Balanced Literacy? What if they don't? Has teacher had enough support? What is 'enough support'? Principals can develop improvement plan for underperforming teachers. How are teachers held accountable and by whom? This is dealt with in teacher evaluation. [BLIT

facilitator] will conduct a teacher evaluation workshop tomorrow for K-8 principals. Do teachers have to work with an AUSSIE and/or IF? Yes, this is a non-contractual issue. School code states a district can implement any program they want. Time is past that Balanced Literacy is optional participation.

It would seem from reading the minutes of this meeting that it was settled – that teachers had no choice regarding the implementation of Balanced Literacy and attendance at the training sessions. It also seemed evident that principals could and would hold them accountable. Unfortunately this seemingly agreed upon “intent” played out quite differently in the various buildings, in part because the central office took no steps to ensure consistency.

The lack of accountability extended from central office to building administrators all the way to the classroom teachers. The superintendent and deputy superintendent appeared to waver on their belief in what the expectations were and this added to the confusion for the rest of the district. The deputy superintendent’s personal relationship with the president of the teachers’ union was often cited as the reason for lack of follow through when teachers were required to do something that the union disagreed with (personal notes from IF meeting, April 5, 2005). For example, if the teachers’ union president protested in a BLIT meeting that teachers had too much on their plates, it appeared that the administration backed off of the expectations (BLIT meeting minutes, January 25, 2005).

Piedmont School Accountability

Holding staff accountable at Piedmont School required having thick skin. The vice president of the teachers’ union was a kindergarten teacher at Piedmont School and was

infamous in the district for her sharp tongue and bold actions. She publicly voiced her disdain of Balanced Literacy and forwarded her own belief that the students needed a basal. One of her building colleagues, a fourth grade teacher, was another vocal critic of Balanced Literacy. I attended a grade level meeting, facilitated by the IF, in which he loudly voiced his dislike of Balanced Literacy and said that he was not going to use it. The principal was in attendance at the meeting. When I discussed his behavior with her afterward, she said, “Oh, he’s just venting – he’ll do it.” According to the IF, he did not and she pointed to the principal’s silence during his outbreak as an example of the lack of support that Simone Kennedy felt was one of her greatest challenges as an IF:

If they [the teachers in my building] didn’t want to do reading, they didn’t have to. This made my job harder as an instructional facilitator because teachers who weren’t teaching reading obviously did not see a need for a literacy coach (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

When the IF and the principal were in a meeting together and the principal sat mutely while teachers verbally attacked the IF and the work she did, the credibility of the initiative was severely damaged (personal notes from conversation with AUSSIE coach and IF, May 20, 2005). There appeared to be no teachers at Piedmont who were willing to support Balanced Literacy after such a powerful colleague had voiced contempt for it with impunity. Lisa Jackson, an intermediate grade teacher at Piedmont School, concurred with the IF’s observation regarding the building’s lack of accountability:

Some teachers complained and tried to make it [accountability] a union issue because they didn’t like the district telling them what to do. They were used to

[the principal] letting them do what they wanted (L. Jackson, personal interview, June 3, 2008).

When the AUSSIE coaches were in the building, they expected that the teachers would attend grade level meetings and professional development sessions. In one of my monthly meetings with the AUSSIE consultants, the Piedmont AUSSIE consultant mentioned that his expectation for attendance at meetings generated serious resistance from some teachers (personal notes from monthly AUSSIE consultant meeting, February 11, 2004). The IF in that building also noted that as a coach she experienced “lots of pushback” and shared her frustrations about the lack of accountability:

There wasn't a lot of accountability on the teachers' part. If they didn't want to do reading, they didn't have to. The majority were very resistant. The building philosophy was not focused on instruction and there was not accountability - my colleagues didn't want accountability (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

The AUSSIE consultant at Piedmont gave clear recommendations in his end-of-year report to the district administration that expectations for teachers at Piedmont needed to be raised. The 2004 AUSSIE report stated, in part:

I further recommend that the principal, instructional facilitator, reading specialist and I continue to:

- Give clear messages to teachers about the district's expectation that teachers will implement all of the Balanced Literacy reading and writing components;

- Support the planning and delivery of ongoing literacy staff development (AUSSIE end-of-year report for Piedmont School, May, 2004).

In one of the most telling comments coming out of my meetings with AUSSIE consultants, many of them who were former building principals themselves, they said that they felt that they were filling the role of the principal as well as literacy coach. They said that in buildings such as Piedmont, they had to hold teachers accountable because no one else did so; the problem was that when they left town, the expectation and the accountability left with them (personal notes from AUSSIE monthly meeting, May 20, 2004).

Hale School Accountability

At Hale School, Principal Leslie Peterson believed it was her responsibility to hold teachers accountable to the demands of implementing the Balanced Literacy program. She knew, however, that this was difficult to do and that it was easier to ignore dissent rather than deal with it. In public BLIT meetings her colleagues' reports about their successes and struggles with implementation of the literacy program were quite different from the private conversations she had had with them. She lamented her colleagues' lack of honesty about their struggles:

I think my perceptions about my building's implementation of Balanced Literacy was more realistic than my principal colleagues ... at BLIT meetings and principal meetings, I sometimes felt like I was the only one being honest – I knew from talking with the other principals that they were struggling with the same staff implementation issues ... I always felt that being open and honest about my

building's struggles was the only way the district could support me (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009).

Ms. Peterson blamed a lack of trust at the district level for her colleagues' reluctance to be open and honest about implementation issues. She believed, probably correctly, that the culture of central office applauded reports of success and was critical of those administrators who reported struggles. During a February 2005 BLIT meeting, Ms. Peterson opened a discussion of this by stating, "I think some central office administrators, including the superintendent, would rather hear a false report of success than the honest reality of staff resistance and teaching struggles." This comment opened the door for others who believed that enthusiasm over successes was shadowing the dark reality that some teachers were not following the Balanced Literacy model and that meant at least in some cases, that they were not teaching reading at all since that was the only program they had. Frank discussions at the next several BLIT meetings concluded with the question "how can we change the perception that accountability is a negative?" and the proclamation that "we all must be held accountable for the job we are expected to do" in the minutes from the November, 2005 meeting. Perhaps because Ms. Peterson was a respected district leader among her colleagues and central office, it appeared that her repeated criticisms about the district's lack of accountability were finally being heard.

At Hale School, Ms. Peterson's staff knew her expectations regarding Balanced Literacy. She did not waver on her standards of acceptable behavior for her staff - from the office secretary, to the crossing guard, to the teacher. The bar was set and staff and students knew it was higher than in other buildings throughout the district. For some staff members, the bar was too high and they could not meet the building standard.

Those staff members quickly departed, either voluntarily or involuntarily. When Ms. Peterson first arrived, the president of the teachers' union was not enamored of her boldness and firm unwavering standards. In later conversations with him, he would praise her and the way she turned the building around academically (personal notes, May 4, 2004). The district's assistant chief of security, and a close friend of the deputy superintendent, requested that her children be transferred to Hale School because she wanted the best academic environment for them.

The high standards did not come without effort on the part of Ms. Peterson. She followed the proper procedures and spent countless hours observing and evaluating her teachers as a means to improve the teaching and learning in her building and to hold all staff accountable for their students' academic achievement.

As evidence of the high regard with which Ms. Peterson's abilities were held, the superintendent and the BLIT facilitator asked Ms. Peterson to share her observation and evaluation procedures with her principal colleagues (BLIT meeting minutes, January 25, 2005). Several principals asked for sample improvement plans and copies of the observation instruments that she had brought with her from her previous district. The Harrisburg School District had no such observation instruments available for its building principals. Again, a lack of internal capacity from the very beginning of the initiative contributed to the lack of accountability felt throughout the district and the schools.

Culture

In 2005, the district's director of safe schools/healthy students, with funding from a state grant, surveyed staff at each school to examine climate and culture issues related to student learning. Data from that survey revealed an interesting contrast between

Piedmont and Hale. At Piedmont School, 64% of the staff agreed with the statement “The level of student behavior in this school interferes with my teaching,” while at Hale School, just 18% of the staff agreed with the same statement. This finding aligns with an AUSSIE report recommendation to Piedmont School that the staff “emphasize appropriate ways to manage groups of students” and examine appropriate classroom management processes and training (AUSSIE end-of-year report for Piedmont School, May, 2004).

Another disparity between the two buildings was evident in the response to the statement “This school runs smoothly,” to which 36% of Piedmont staff agreed, compared to 90% of Hale School staff. While the survey revealed differences in the two buildings’ climate and culture, the overall impact of the survey findings was minimal in the district. Still, it provides one interesting perspective on the differences in the cultures in the two building.

Piedmont School Culture

It appears that the Piedmont school culture could reasonably be characterized as toxic (Deal & Peterson, 1999), based on the overall building climate of mistrust and defiance – exemplified by teachers as well as students (personal notes, year-end meeting with AUSSIE consultant, May 27, 2004). The two top leaders in the Balanced Literacy effort, the principal and the IF, did not talk to one another and, if they were being honest, did not like one another (personal notes from IF evaluation meeting, June 2, 2004).

There was no unity at the top and an apparent lack of respect for either the IF or principal by the building staff (personal notes, year-end meeting with AUSSIE consultant, May 27,

2004). Simone Kennedy, the IF at Piedmont School, mentioned her building's culture as a barrier to her in her role as IF:

My building had a very unique culture. ... I wasn't the only one who thought that - the AUSSIEs thought that too, but I let them form their own opinion ... they thought that on their own. The culture of the building really lacked... when I look back at the particular building I was in... every building has a different culture (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008; AUSSIE mid-year report for Piedmont School, January, 2005).

Ms. Kennedy recognized the teachers' culture of apathy and lack of efficacy and conveyed her frustration at her staff's attitude. As she noted: "the teachers lacked efficacy. 'Who is going to do it for me?' was the attitude... I tried really hard to overcome that - they didn't accept responsibility for the students' learning." Apparently, in this culture everyone was busy assigning blame to someone else. This appears to have resulted in no one taking responsibility for the students' learning.

An area that specifically impacted learning was classroom management. In his Piedmont School report the AUSSIE coach identified a "need for classroom management processes and training" and "the development of an action plan for individual teachers for their professional development" as well as an effort for "whole school planning and support for student management and training to enable positive attitudes between teachers and students" (AUSSIE end-of-year report for Piedmont School, May, 2004). These recommendations were not addressed by either the building principal or the central office administration as a follow up to the AUSSIE report recommendations.

In his report for Piedmont School, the AUSSIE coach described a slight improvement in the school's culture during his time there: "In the course of the 4 months I have been working at [Piedmont School] I note small, but positive changes in the attitude and demeanor of some teachers toward professional development" (AUSSIE mid-year report for Piedmont School, January, 2005). While on the surface this sounds positive, it should be remembered that AUSSIE reports typically focused on the instructional achievements of the students, not on the attitudes and demeanors of teachers. As well, the fact that an instructional coach the AUSSIE coach, was being paid hundreds of dollars a day to work on teachers' attitudes and demeanor could be considered deeply troubling. Perhaps more troubling, though, is the fact that neither the building administrator nor the central office administration ever addressed this issue after the AUSSIE report was issued.

Hale School Culture

From the available evidence, it appears that Hale School had experienced a dramatic turn-around with the hiring of their new principal in 2003. The staff did things together – they held after school aerobic sessions, staff and student basketball games, and dance contests. The staff and students went to the principal's house for a field trip and picnic. During the school day, the hallways were quiet and classrooms were busy. In my estimation, the tone in the building was one of learning but was also warm and peaceful. The principal of Hale School, Leslie Peterson, mentioned her active support of staff in building community and a positive school culture:

The staff also could see the benefits of the program. They knew I wouldn't require them to do anything that I wasn't willing to do

myself, like sometimes that meant I would cover their class while they finished a DRA [Developmental Reading Assessment] ... or sometimes providing them with materials they needed but did without in the past was necessary. As principal, my job was to make their jobs a little easier. While I truly believe children are children, the urban setting has its own unique set of issues and concerns (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009).

Hale School had the same AUSSIE consultant for both years of the study. I had many conversations with this consultant and he was complimentary of the principal and the IF in the building (personal notes from AUSSIE meetings April 8, 2004; May 13, 2004; October 6, 2005). He knew that the principal sometimes had to smooth ruffled feathers when the IF did not filter her comments, but felt that they made a good team. He believed that the teachers in that building knew what they were expected to do and knew that there was not a choice in whether or not they complied, if they wished to remain in their jobs, noting that this “freed [AUSSIE coach] up to do my job instead of the job of the principal” (personal notes from conversation with AUSSIE consultant, October 6, 2005).

One of the statements in the AUSSIE consultant’s mid-year report from 2005 confirmed the district’s belief that the culture of Hale School had improved:

There is a positive culture at [Hale] as a place of learning and personal development. This is a considerable improvement compared to two years ago (AUSSIE mid-year report for Hale School, January, 2005).

The district literacy program seemed to give teachers direction and provided a focal point for grade level professional development sessions and discussions. Having attended grade level team meetings in Hale School, I know that they were organized and centered on student learning. My impression was that they were also collaborative and that teachers came to the meeting with an active participant role, not just that of observer.

Leadership

As data showed, one of the greatest missteps may have been to ignore leadership development before and during the implementation effort. District administrators, principals, and IFs were learning about Balanced Literacy simultaneous to (or five paces ahead of) the teachers they were charged with coaching. If the principal or IF had a knowledge base prior to the initiative, it appeared that they were better able to support their staffs than those principal and IF teams who were barely ahead of their staff in their Balanced Literacy understandings.

Piedmont School Leadership

While Ms. Adams did not participate in the professional development sessions as a presenter, she did attend all district-level professional development and most of the building level presentations. She even attended some grade level meetings. As the district reading coordinator I also attended some of the Piedmont School grade level meetings. The meetings were orchestrated by the IF, and they could be characterized as more of a presentation than a collaborative discourse (personal notes, February 15, 2005; February 17, 2005). In my discussions with the IF, she said that it was too difficult to keep discussions positive and if she let things get too conversational, the meetings

became gripe sessions during which she sometimes felt verbally attacked because of her role in being the Balanced Literacy messenger (personal notes from IF evaluation meeting, June 2, 2004).

The Piedmont principal, Sandra Adams, did not acknowledge that there was any dissension in her building when it came to implementing Balanced Literacy. On the contrary, in her conversations with me she would note only the positive behaviors of some of her staff members and seemed to generalize those behaviors to her entire staff (personal notes, February 15, 2005; February 17, 2005). Ms. Adams frequently noted that her background as a reading specialist was advantageous:

Being a reading specialist helped me to know more about the benefits of a Balanced Literacy approach earlier than most of my teachers. It didn't take them [teachers] long, though. It was just easier for me, you know, to get the pieces of it, like guided reading. They learned how to do the read alouds pretty quickly, but guided reading was harder for them to figure out (S. Adams, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

In spite of this, I know of no professional development sessions - either at the building level or the district level - that she took a lead role in and this appears to indicate that she had a very limited knowledge of Balanced Literacy. Across our many interactions, Ms. Adams never referred to the benefits of Balanced Literacy for urban students in terms of increased vocabulary, reading on an instructional level, or increased confidence and independence. Rather, she spoke several times about the importance of having a structure in place for the teachers as well as needed materials - both of which

were more easily achievable through use of a basal than Balanced Literacy. As she noted on one of these occasions:

I think [teachers] were glad for the materials and when they used Balanced Literacy in their classroom they started to notice improvements in their students. I think it would've been good for more structure, though (S. Adams, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

Although she indicated to me that her teachers “came on board pretty quickly,” that was not the recollection of the IF in the building, Simone Kennedy. Rather, she felt Balanced Literacy implementation was floundering in her building. As she noted:

The building philosophy was not focused on instruction and there was not much, if any, accountability. I keep thinking that if I would've had more support from my principal and she would have demanded some teacher accountability, I would've been able to make more of a dent – you know, more change. (S. Kennedy, personal interview, June 2, 2008).

In my many conversations with Ms. Kennedy, it was clear that she struggled with her role in the building. My perception was that there appeared to be a passive-aggressive power struggle between the principal, Ms. Adams, and the IF. For example, when the IF submitted a purchase order to her principal for her signature before it could be sent to the central office, she alerted me so that I could follow up to be sure it arrived with the other orders. There is evidence that many of the purchase orders she gave her principal never made their way to the district curriculum office, although sufficient funds remained in the building budget (personal notes from IF evaluation meeting, June 2, 2004). I witnessed several occasions when teachers were disrespectful to her in grade level meetings or

professional development sessions while the principal sat passively and offered no support (personal notes, February 15, 2005; February 17, 2005). I believe this lack of backing destroyed any thread of credibility the IF had and actually encouraged insolent teachers to continue their negative actions and behaviors. Eventually she applied for an IF role in another building and was transferred. It appears that the lack of building leadership was detrimental to the success of the Balanced Literacy effort in Piedmont School.

Hale School Leadership

Leslie Peterson, principal of Hale School, took her role as building principal very seriously. From the secretaries to the security guards to the custodians, she let everyone know she was about students and about education (personal notes, May 20, 2004). This change was not especially welcomed by everyone and some employees moved on, either by their own choice or with Ms. Peterson's encouragement. The staff that remained appeared to accept the fact that expectations had changed and that the bar was now set significantly higher than it had been in the past. From my perspective, these changes were directly attributable to the new principal.

As an instructional leader, Ms. Peterson took her place at the helm seriously. It was evident to Hale teachers that their principal knew what Balanced Literacy was, that she believed in the initiative, and that she wanted to see it implemented in the classroom (R. Wise, personal interview, June 4, 2008; A. White, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

From the very start, Ms. Peterson took an active role in Balanced Literacy professional development in her building and worked closely with her IF and AUSSIE consultant to plan the professional development activities for her staff, based on what she

knew about her staff's needs. Ms. Peterson was part of the Balanced Literacy initiative at the grass roots level by choice:

As an administrator I had an active part in professional development... in fact, the building plan [for professional development] was devised by me with the input of the staff and IF and many of the 'programs' were done by myself, the IF, or our Title I reading person. As an administrator I think it's very important to be seen as an instructional leader and resource – it's really necessary when you're trying to lead the district through a paradigm shift. If you're not knowledgeable in instruction and able to give ideas and supports to your staff you're ineffective as a leader (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009).

It was obvious to Hale staff members that their principal was keenly aware of their personal strengths and needs when it came to Balanced Literacy and, because of that, teachers and the IF felt supported by their building leader (B. Black, personal interview, June 2, 2008; R. Wise, personal interview, June 4, 2008). Principal Leslie Peterson acknowledged that, while she believed in Balanced Literacy as an instructional method, she knew it required more effort on everyone's part:

Balanced Literacy is the most effective way to teacher children to read and have success, but it's also the most time consuming ... and more difficult to achieve. Because of that fact, the principal needs to be supportive and truly believe in the initiative... you know, providing a superficial understanding and support of a program won't allow you to have success (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009).

As noted previously, Ms. Peterson had some experience with Balanced Literacy before she came to Harrisburg as Hale's principal. After she came to Harrisburg, she continued to attend professional development sessions for principals and for IFs because she knew it was important for her own credibility as a building leader for her to have the knowledge that she was expecting her teachers to have (L. Peterson, personal interview, February 12, 2009). Ms. Peterson's knowledge of Balanced Literacy was mentioned by her IF, Brooke Black, as a factor which positively impacted the professional development initiative at her school:

The principal who was at [Hale] at that point in time was very knowledgeable about literacy and that was a help... and I can't say that that happened across the entire district because there weren't a lot of principals who were knowledgeable about Balanced Literacy but just having that administrative support like that was phenomenal and then having the people in central office who were knowledgeable in Balanced Literacy as they were because if we didn't have people in place who weren't as knowledgeable it wouldn't have worked the way that it did. Some principals were not willing to present and offer the support the teaching staff needed to become successful (B. Black, personal interview, June 4, 2008).

As can be inferred from the above quote, Ms. Peterson was also highly energetic and committed to the Balanced Literacy approach. As she mentioned on numerous occasions, she wanted to have the best test scores, maintain the cleanest building, submit the best building budget, and have the happiest parents, teachers, and students. Many would tell you she did.

Ms. Peterson quite deliberately chose to be the instructional leader of the building, rather than the administrator who signs the paperwork, but who does not get involved in the messy business of instructional change. Being the hands-on instructional leader at the helm of the Balanced Literacy initiative – deeply entrenched in the day-to-day collaborative decision-making and negotiation process – is where Ms. Peterson appears to have found fulfillment and success.

Chapter 6

Summary of Findings

This study examined two K-8 schools in the same urban district that had similar professional development opportunities but with different results as evidenced by the data. Through the study, four major themes that significantly impacted the success of the reform effort emerged: organizational support, accountability, culture, and leadership. The four interrelated themes surfaced as factors critical to the successful implementation of the professional development effort around Balanced Literacy.

Organizational Support

The material resources provided by the central office to both buildings were the same. Thousands of dollars of books and supplies were ordered at the district level and were disseminated based on building populations. The teaching staff in both schools was similar in terms of demographics with like representations of male and female, minority and non-minority, and new and veteran teachers. Australia and United States Services in Education (AUSSIE) coaches and Instructional Facilitators (IFs) were available in each building to support teachers and principals as they learned how to implement Balanced Literacy. The critical difference appeared to be the building leadership and the ways in which the two principals set about organizing and making best use of the professional development resources provided.

Accountability

Building leaders at each of the two schools approached expectations and accountability differently. At Piedmont School, data from the participants revealed that

teachers were not held accountable for utilizing the components of Balanced Literacy – if they did not want to implement Balanced Literacy strategies, they did not have to.

On the other hand, teachers at Hale School knew that they were expected by their principal to implement each strand of Balanced Literacy once it was taught to them and were held accountable if they did not comply with the directive.

Culture

Another significant factor that emerged was the difference in the cultures of the two buildings under study. The Piedmont School IF and the AUSSIE consultant both commented that they believed that the culture of the school was a barrier to change. Similarly, in a district survey, the Piedmont staff mentioned student behavior as a chief interference with teaching and only 36% of staff stated that they believed their school ran smoothly.

Conversely, the IF at Hale School mentioned excitement about the Balanced Literacy initiative and her principal's support. In the same district survey, Hale School staff mentioned that their school set high standards for academic performance and 90% of the staff said they believed their school ran smoothly.

Leadership

Data show that the factor on which the two buildings differed the greatest was in principal leadership. The Piedmont School principal had limited involvement in the Balanced Literacy effort and was perceived as being detached from it. Participants believed that she did not hold her staff responsible for their implementation, and did not support her IF in professional development work - only 47% of Piedmont staff believed their principal supported efforts to successfully implement Balanced Literacy. In

addition, the Piedmont perceived that her principal's lack of support limited her ability to effect change in her school.

In contrast, the principal at Hale School was perceived as being heavily engaged in her building's Balanced Literacy efforts. Data show she was clear regarding her expectations for implementation of Balanced Literacy and that the staff was accountable to her for fulfilling them. Evidence showed that the Hale School principal worked closely with her IF in providing assistance and support to her teachers and, as the district survey revealed, 73% of them said they believed their principal supported their efforts.

Lessons Learned

Because I was closely linked to the Balanced Literacy professional development efforts in Harrisburg School District in 2003-2005, I was confident that I had a sound grasp of the district's Balanced Literacy initiative. Through this study I have learned that my colleagues and I missed valuable opportunities to ensure its success. At that time, I believed that the *organizational support* – the tangible and professional development resources doled out by the central office and the human resources distributed in each building - should have been enough to sustain the effort. But the data from the study revealed that resources are necessary, but not sufficient, to ensure a successful professional development effort around Balanced Literacy. The following key learnings emerged from this study: (1) professional development is context specific; (2) be prepared: build capacity first; (3) build internal capacity to sustain the initiative; and, (4) pay attention to the professional culture of the school. An overarching theme which

impacts the success of each of these areas is leadership – both at the central office level and at the building level.

Professional Development is Context Specific

When the Harrisburg School District superintendent came to the district in 2001, he investigated New York City's Community District #2, where Superintendent Anthony Alvarado reportedly had well-publicized success with student and adult learning through the use of a Balanced Literacy approach (Stein & D'Amico, 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1996; 1998). The expectation was that the success that District #2 experienced would be replicated in Harrisburg. Meanwhile, analogous to Harrisburg's foray into Balanced Literacy, in 1998 Superintendent Alan Bersin had elicited the services of Alvarado to assist him in a large scale implementation of Balanced Literacy in San Diego – again, with the implicit assumption of similar success. Neither smaller-size Harrisburg nor larger-size San Diego School District had the same level of success as District #2; rather, what both districts found is that the efficacy and effectiveness of the initiative is closely married to conditions and circumstances. The problem in trying to identify the critical elements of successful professional development programs is that most efforts focus on a search for one right answer. What was neglected is the powerful impact of context of the local conditions and factors that can and will wreak havoc on what may appear to be a highly successful reform effort with demonstrated effectiveness in another location. Reforms based upon assumptions of uniformity in the educational setting repeatedly fail (Guskey, 1986). Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) noted the importance of adapting the reform to local circumstances:

Adopting any reform package because it has been used successfully in some other district is a mistake ... following this recommendation is difficult for new district leaders, because they so often face considerable pressure to achieve results immediately. Nevertheless, engaging in the messy process of negotiation and collaboration is strongly preferable to installing a package of reforms that are not institutionalized. A negotiated, collaborative reform may take longer, but it stands a greater chance of being accepted and institutionalized by key constituents and thus is more likely to be sustained through time (p. 253).

From the findings, it seems evident that while Harrisburg School District attempted to put resources in place to guarantee the success of the Balanced Literacy initiative, what was overlooked was the importance of collaboration and building ownership and commitment to the reform. The teachers – who were the front-line implementers – appeared to have little ownership in the reform. Worse yet, it also appeared that they had no understanding of the basic tenets and instructional philosophy that undergirded the reform. They were basically constructing their understanding of reform as they went along, with the IFs staying a couple of lessons ahead of them. It is likely that there were teacher groups in Harrisburg that would have enthusiastically engaged in negotiation and collaboration, but they were not asked. Similar to the San Diego reform (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006), this early and neglected need to build ownership, collaboration, and eventually support for the reform was skipped.

Professional collaboration is especially important for beginning teachers in urban settings who face numerous challenges that their college education did not prepare them for (Crosby, 1999).

The BLIT facilitator's mantra was, "Implementation trumps strategy," and this was interpreted as local (principal) choices about how to implement district directives are more important in the end than the structure of the program and the material resources provided. It seems apparent from the data that the BLIT group did not internalize his message. Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, and Lipton (1999) shared a similar sentiment, but in more detail:

School improvement is [not] a technical problem that can be solved by such technical means as coherent policies that send a clear and consistent message; resources and technical assistance that help locals acquire new knowledge and skills; and monitoring mechanisms that provide information for fine tuning, holding educators accountable, and evaluating the reform's effectiveness. Such reform minded policy does not begin to capture how reform actually works. Reform is much less logical and technically rational. It is much more idiosyncratic – dependent upon the context of local relationships, histories, and opportunities (p.19).

While Harrisburg did not share the technical structures that San Diego had in place, they did put large-scale efforts in place (such as the AUSSIE consultants) in an effort to replicate District #2's success. Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest that every individual has personal and preferred frames that they use to gather information, make judgments, and determine and explain behavior. The four frames suggested by Bolman and Deal include the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame. Each frame provides one version of organizational life and a specific range of ideas, techniques, processes that may be used to improve the efficiency

and effectiveness of the organization (2003). In the Harrisburg reform, all four frames were at play and the role and impact of each should have been more closely considered. In their analysis of the San Diego reform, Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) indicate that the relationship between the structural, human resource, and political frames needed to be taken into account:

Strategies for district wide reform must be sensitive to the complexity of the local cultural and political context and the complexity of what teachers and others must learn to carry off reforms successfully. No matter how powerful the theory of action guiding instruction and learning, unless such matters as local relationships; teachers' beliefs about students' capabilities; constituents' beliefs about the meaning and purpose of schools; and existing habits, norms, and standard operating procedures are taken fully into account, the reform will not reach fruition (p. 253).

A key learning appears to be Harrisburg School District should have paid more attention to local context, as the literature suggests. The district's teachers' union is an internal force to be reckoned with. Other competing and often contradictory outside forces in the district include mayoral politics, legislature involvement in the district due to funding, PDE's involvement in the district due to low test scores, and heavy involvement of the ministerial community - all political - that influenced, for better or worse, the district's decision-making.

Be Prepared: Build Capacity First

Charting the course of action – having a vision and articulating that vision to all stakeholders - is critical to large-scale reform. Sparks & Hirsh (1997) describe

professional development driven by a clear, coherent plan rather than fragmented professional development as a requirement rather than a frill. This requirement relates to Bolman and Deal's structural frame and involves development of a clear, coherent plan. This simply was not done in this case and the proper groundwork for the reform was not in place before the reform began. IFs were barely a couple of lessons ahead of the teachers they were expected to assist. Principals' training was even spottier and the vast majority of teachers knew next to nothing about the reform. No one was really "ready" to begin the serious reform work.

For the first ten months of 2003 as the Balanced Literacy reform got under way, a former special education teacher was assigned to the role of director of professional development. It appears that this individual did not have the necessary training or background in professional development, adult learning, or Balanced Literacy to execute this role well. Thus, while her role could have been pivotal in ensuring training of administrators and staff, it drained time and energy from the reform effort. While she and some central office administrators created elaborate spreadsheets that involved many disjointed programs and consultants, the dots were never connected for the staff. Those spreadsheets were packed up and never seen again after she moved back to the special education department, leaving the director of professional development position vacant at a critical time in the implementation.

From that point on, there was no district level plan for professional development related to the Balanced Literacy initiative. Rather, the plan appeared to be created simultaneous with its execution. What this meant for principals and IFs – those who were most intimately involved with the Balanced Literacy effort at the building level –

was that they had to assist staff to implement a plan that was not yet written, and one that could and in fact would change on the whim of a new consultant. The principals were required to hold teachers accountable for carrying out the district's Balanced Literacy initiative yet they were still learning what that looked like.

While having a vision or a plan seems commonsensical to most educators embarking on a large scale reform, there were a lot of balls in the air in Harrisburg when the Balanced Literacy initiative was being born. A day in the life of a district administrator in Harrisburg in 2003 could involve meetings surrounding issues such as employee drug dealers, dilapidated buildings, having more district students incarcerated than graduating, weapons in the schools, gang violence, and lack of funding. While education and instructional improvement were not on the bottom of that list, theirs was not always the fire burning hottest.

Leaving the director of professional development position vacant appeared to be a significant error and that that critical role should have been strategically filled. A training structure could have been created for the district and building administrators – including an emphasis on leadership issues such as accountability and supervision. These essential systems were simply not put in place prior to the rollout for staff.

Building Internal Capacity for Sustaining the Initiative

While building capacity is clearly important at the teacher level, it is equally important at the administrative level. During early 2003 BLIT meetings, the district provided training opportunities by an AUSSIE consultant on the components of Balanced Literacy. However, the principals' leadership role in Balanced Literacy implementation was not addressed until 2005 when the BLIT consultant took on this responsibility.

The Columbia University professor, who facilitated monthly BLIT meetings, confided to me (and the superintendent) on several occasions that he thought Harrisburg “didn’t have enough work horses” to successfully pull off the Balanced Literacy initiative. He noted that while there were some administrators on board with the Balanced Literacy initiative who could assist the district with a successful rollout, there simply were not enough. What seems evident is that BLIT members needed professional development as much as anyone else in the district to assist them in fulfilling their roles in the Balanced Literacy effort. As Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) noted:

With complex reforms such as Balanced Literacy, the effects of limited capacity are magnified. The program’s underlying theory sees learning as rooted in social interaction. Thus, a shortage of exemplary models of leadership and instructional practice is extremely detrimental (p.56).

In order to build capacity, both Harrisburg and San Diego took similar steps. Both the superintendent in Harrisburg and Anthony Alvarado, working in San Diego, arranged for staff to visit New York City’s District #2 to view Balanced Literacy in action, and to meet and talk with principals and teachers. This experience of seeing the first-hand the evidence of the positive impact of Balanced Literacy strengthened the belief that it would work. The print-rich environment in the classrooms, the culture of learning, the urgency, and the engagement of students and staff are difficult to describe but are clearly evident when observed. Both districts named this event as one in which staff had a glimpse of their district’s vision. The missing piece for Harrisburg, however, appeared to be understanding and implementing the means to achieve that vision.

In addition to taking staff to New York's District #2, both San Diego and Harrisburg brought District #2 teachers to their city schools to teach lessons to their students. These lessons proved to be powerful demonstrations of what was possible in their own districts. San Diego hired top District #2 staff to assist in the rollout of Balanced Literacy and Harrisburg hired AUSSIE consultants who worked in District #2 to assist them in their rollout. This job-embedded support was helpful in assisting with the immediate and real-life problems faced by teachers – but more capacity was needed for sustaining the implementation effort.

Having district staff, expertly trained in Balanced Literacy, in house and on the ground level, was a critical component that was missing in both Harrisburg and San Diego. According to Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006):

To get ambitious reforms like Balanced Literacy off the ground quickly, high-capacity individuals are needed to model good practice at every layer of the system, to assist the learning of others, and to hold others accountable for learning the new practices (p.55).

In Harrisburg, the opportunity to observe authentic Balanced Literacy practices from the AUSSIE professionals was widely praised by respondents. What appeared to be missing for teachers and administrators, however, was their own internal capacity necessary for supporting the day- to-day work. According to Elmore (2002), change in instructional practice through the consultant model is labor intensive, and involves working through problems of practice with peers and experts, observation of practice, and steady accumulation over time of new practices anchored in one's own classroom setting. The literature is clear that is not enough to provide training; it is the on-going

implementation that impacts learning (Joyce, 2002). Again, “implementation trumps policy” comes to mind. Hubbard, Mehan and Stein refer to this as “implementation dominates outcomes” but it is the same message, only slightly different words.

Professional Culture of the School

The culture of a school can influence the way people think about and react to changes in instructional practices and requirements. Fullan (2001) found that when a school has a positive professional culture the staff development becomes more meaningful and the integration of new ideas and strategies into teaching practice becomes more likely. When relationships improved within a school culture, positive changes occurred and when relationships did not improve, positive changes did not occur. Schools with negative cultures tend not to value professional learning and to resist change (Fullan, 2001). In this study, the Hale School staff reacted much more favorably to the Balanced Literacy change efforts than the Piedmont School. Correspondingly, the culture of Hale School was much more positive and focused on students and learning than the culture of Piedmont School that was largely negative and characterized by anger, defiance, and blaming.

Successful schools display common features in their professional learning community such as a widely shared sense of purpose, norms of continuous learning and improvement, a commitment to and sense of responsibility for student learning, collaborative, collegial relationships, and opportunities for staff reflection, collective inquiry, and sharing of personal practice (Peterson, 2002). These characteristics contribute to commitment, motivation and staff and student learning. According to Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006), school districts that are unable to change the beliefs,

norms, and practices of its teachers and obtain their support is not likely to realize systemic, enduring change. Like San Diego, Harrisburg appeared to have failed to achieve significant buy-in from educators because what they asked them to do clashed with their perceptions of what counted as good teaching and learning and, even worse, required them to make significant changes in their practices (cultural frame). This clash of beliefs, norms, and practices created conflict.

Conflict was a common condition in San Diego as well as Harrisburg during the Balanced Literacy professional initiative rollout. This conflict seemed to often surface in the form of noncompliance on the part of teachers. Administrators did not reach below the surface to look for underlying causes for the conflict. Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein (2006) note:

Conflicts (also) can arise when all members of a school system do not understand or agree with organizational goals and the means to achieve them, when some members down the line conclude that educational leaders' ideas clash with their own interests or beliefs, when educators at school sites intentionally or unintentionally fail to do their leaders' bidding, or when educational leaders in distant offices do not develop sufficient sympathy for the lived experiences and practical circumstances of the people in local sites (p. 9).

Not only did the district not consider the history, they brought in outside consultants – who were not familiar with local circumstances - as decision makers. The use of outside consultants was a double-edged sword in Harrisburg. Without their involvement in the beginning, the district may not have had the momentum to get out of the starting block. The use of outside consultants gave the district administrative staff a

convenient “out” when things were not going well – it provided an excuse for administrators not knowing the answers to critical questions. In the most egregious cases the over-reliance on outside consultants allowed administrators to skirt ownership or responsibility for local issues.

The consultants who were steering the Balanced Literacy effort for the first year did not know the teachers in Harrisburg, nor the district’s culture, although they were making decisions which impacted both. The virtual director of reading lived in Rhode Island. The BLIT facilitator lived in Connecticut and worked in New York City. The AUSSIE consultants were from Australia and New Zealand but lived in New York City during the school year. The superintendent and deputy superintendent had recently come from New Jersey and each had apartments in Harrisburg, but also had homes (and spouses) in Cambridge and New Jersey, respectively.

There were only two central office administrators - the director of food service and the benefits coordinator - who were in the district prior to the superintendent’s tenure in the district. Dr. Kohn brought in central office administrators from cities such as Pittsburgh, New Jersey, Cambridge, and New York. This likely had a distinct bearing on the district culture, but it was the lack of attention to the administrators’ acclimation to and acculturation into the district seriously impacted the Balanced Literacy initiative’s success. The time it took for their transition into the district was valuable time that was lost.

The superintendent’s unequivocal enthusiasm for the Balanced Literacy initiative both enervated some and irritated others. Dr. Kohn was often referred to as the “Balanced Literacy cheerleader” due to his incessant storytelling about the successes he

witnessed in District #2 and his recounting of tales from the principal of PS 126. In San Diego, there were similar patterns of either zeal or pushback from staff members. As Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) stated:

The district leaders assumed that an enthusiastic concentration on improving instruction would improve all students' learning and close the achievement gap between low-income students and their more economically and socially advantaged contemporaries. To be sure, the district leadership was not ignorant of the literature that emphasizes the importance of the cultural and political dimensions of reform. Instead, they firmly believed that an excellent academic program that showed empirical results would not only improve students' learning but also win converts to the reform and silence its critics (p. 241).

The disparity between the negative culture of Piedmont School and the positive culture of Hale School was apparent. The success of the professional development initiative at Hale School appeared to be closely associated to their positive culture. Likewise, levels of student achievement were markedly higher at Hale School. According to Deal and Peterson (1999), this should not be surprising:

A positive culture can make school reforms work while toxic cultures can be harmful to their success ... In schools that embrace norms of performance, change, and efficacy, staff gladly experiment with new approaches, seek innovative practices to solve enduring problems, and reinforce a learning-focused vision for the school. A school's culture encourages learning and progress by fostering a climate of purposeful change, support for risk taking and experimentation, and a community spirit valuing purposeful progress (p. 8).

These qualities were lacking in Piedmont School but were evident in Hale School. Data from staff members in both schools revealed difference in the perceptions of the school culture. At Piedmont School, staff members were in survival mode – surviving negativism, student discipline issues, and power struggles. In Hale School, teachers felt that they were part of a professional learning community – all working toward the common goal of increasing student learning.

In an address to San Diego principals, Alvarado stated that for principals to be strong leaders, they must make the organization's beliefs overt, explicit, and pervasive (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein (2006). There should not have been any doubt in teachers' minds as to the building leader's beliefs about the initiative and expectations for the teacher regarding their role in carrying them out. The principal at Hale School used her leadership muscle to facilitate this knowledge for her teachers. At Piedmont School, although the principal espoused to be a supporter of Balanced Literacy, her actions never indicated that she was. She certainly did not, as Alvarado suggested, make the organization's beliefs "overt, explicit, and pervasive."

Recommendations

Several recommendations surfaced from this study. Districts who are contemplating a professional development effort around Balanced Literacy implementation should find the following recommendations helpful: (1) Get to know the local culture and conditions and modify the professional development to meet them; (2) use outside consultants only when they are working closely with those who intimately know the district's culture; (3) use the process of collaborative decision making involving key stakeholders; (4) provide proper training for those leading a professional

development effort around Balanced Literacy; (5) ensure that building leaders, professional developers, and teachers receive sufficient training to sustain the effort when the consultant's work is done; and, finally, (6) examine the history regarding curriculum and teaching resources, consistency of leadership, and the relationship with teachers' union before collaboratively developing a plan for execution of the initiative.

Districts who are contemplating a professional development effort around Balanced Literacy implementation should get to know the local culture and conditions and modify the professional development effort to meet them. Transplanting what worked in one district professional development effort to another context is a simplistic solution to a complex dilemma. Not only are reforms different from place to place, they are also different from time period to time period (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein 2006). Local culture and conditions change over time, just as consensus over what constitutes "best practice" changes. "What worked in Vegas (or New York or San Diego), stays in Vegas" may be an appropriate slogan.

Using outside expertise can be helpful only when the consultants are working closely with those who intimately know the district's culture. When those leading the effort have recently ridden into town, they appear a bit phony, with a faux professional air to their credibility. When an outside consultant does not know the nuances and history of "why things are the way they are," decisions are made that backfire and the firestorm that erupts takes the initiative off focus. Meanwhile the credibility of the consultant has been compromised and that becomes the excuse for not complying with the recommendations made.

Using the processes of collaborative decision making involving key stakeholders, as well as knowledgeable outside consultants if necessary, provides teachers with ownership and the reform stands a greater chance of being institutionalized – which is the ultimate goal. Before beginning the rollout with staff, spend time in the messy work of negotiating, collaborating, and compromising so that teachers are involved at a grassroots level. The ownership and investment of teachers and administrators in planning for the initiative is priceless in building trust and commitment when it is really needed – as it is uncovered to staff.

Before undertaking a professional development initiative around Balanced Literacy, it is vital to the effort's success that those leading the effort receive the proper training in their role in the rollout of the initiative and are knowledgeable about the initiative itself. This is important in guaranteeing that expectations and standards are clearly understood by administration before they are communicated to teachers. Content knowledge, leadership, supervision, and support are key components related to the administrators' role. This training should not be overlooked. A thin layer of knowledge overlaying a thick layer of fluff is quickly uncovered. An assumed next step is that administrators should hold teachers accountable for implementing the training they receive. Without this step, the effort is doomed to failure.

Not only is it important to provide the necessary training before the initiative begins, it is critically important that those holding the knowledge are not going home to another city or state. The consultant should be building capacity among the district staff members who live and work in the district – they should not be the gatekeeper to the knowledge. Those who provide the leadership within the district need to be ensuring that

building leaders, professional developers, and teachers receive the training they need to sustain the effort when the consultant leaves town. The consultant should work alongside the district administrators and professional developers, sharing expertise but also discussing the implications of the training for the teachers.

Finally, districts that plan to embark on a professional development effort in Balanced Literacy should take a step back and examine what teachers have experienced in the past few years as a teacher in your district. What type of curriculum and resources have they been provided with? Have they had consistent leadership? What is the district's relationship with the teachers' union? How different is Balanced Literacy from the model from which they've been teaching? As a follow up, work with teachers to plan and execute the Balanced Literacy professional development, through a collaborative and negotiated process.

The success of the professional development surrounding the Balanced Literacy reform effort in the Harrisburg School District was greater in one school in the district than in another. Piedmont School's success was limited by factors that were not out of the school's or the district's control. It was not about the students' socioeconomic status, the lack of qualified teachers, the lack of resources, or the physical conditions of the school environment. It was about the leadership in the building and the building leader's lack of accountability for the use of the resources – both human and capital – that limited the reform's success.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

[Introduction: “Hello. As you know I am researching the professional development efforts around Balanced Literacy that you participated in during the school years 2003-2005. All your comments will be kept confidential and will not be identified with you. Pseudonyms will be used when referencing interviewees. As you can see, I’m audio-taping this interview but I can turn the recorder off if at any time you’d rather not be taped.”]

Questions:

1. Let’s begin by talking about what your ideal professional development experience would be like. How would you describe it? What would it look like and how would it benefit you and your colleagues?
2. Let’s talk about the professional development you experienced as a [teacher/administrator] during the school years of 2003-2005 around the balanced literacy initiative undertaken by the district. Did you have any role in the planning and delivery of the professional development? If so, describe the process you were involved in. If not, would you have liked to have part of that process? Explain.
3. Tell me what you perceive to have been the strengths of the professional development surrounding the balanced literacy initiative. Did your values, beliefs, or behaviors toward Balanced Literacy change as a result of the

4. Talk about what you would have changed about the professional development if you were in charge. Do you think your colleagues would have agreed?

5. What supports (related to the professional development) provided by building and central office administration were helpful to you in your role? What additional supports would have been helpful?

6. Looking back, what is your overall assessment of the Balanced Literacy initiative? Why do you think your school responded the way it did? What are the other factors that impacted the initiative?

[Closing: “Is there anything else that you would like to mention that you believe is important and has not been addressed during the interview? Thank you very much for speaking with me today.”]

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EMPLOYMENT

- 2008 – Present Superintendent, West Perry School District
- 2007 – 2008 Assistant Superintendent, West Perry School District
- 2006 - 2007 Assistant Professor, Shippensburg University
- 2005 – 2006 Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Harrisburg School District
- 2003 - 2005 Coordinator of Reading and Federal Programs, Harrisburg School District
- 2002 - 2003 Assistant Principal/Literacy Coordinator, West Shore School District
- 2001 – 2002 Instructional Advisor for Reading, West Shore School District
- 2000 - 2001 Reading Specialist/Classroom Teacher, West Shore School District
- 1999 - 2000 Literacy Specialist, West Perry School District
- 1998 – 1999 Reading Specialist, West Perry School District
- 1997 - 1998 Instructional Support Teacher, West Perry School District
- 1993 - 1997 Classroom Teacher, West Perry School District

EDUCATION

- 2009 The Pennsylvania State University, D.Ed., Educational Leadership
- 2006 The Pennsylvania State University, Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility
- 2000 The Pennsylvania State University, Principal Certification Program
- 1996 Shippensburg University, M.Ed., Reading
- 1993 Shippensburg University, B.S., Elementary Education/Early Childhood