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The Logistics of Implementing a Field-Based Comprehensive School Reform Initiative

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THE LOGISTICS OF IMPLEMENTING A FIELD-BASED COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM INITIATIVE

by

Dawn E. Reeves

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership, Research and Technology Western Michigan University April 2014

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THE LOGISTICS OF IMPLEMENTING A FIELD-BASED COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM INITIATIVE

Dawn E. Reeves, Ed.D.

Western Michigan University, 2014

This research is a qualitative, reflective case study regarding a cohort in the form of a district-university partnership between the Oak Park Schools in Oak Park, Michigan and the College of Education at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The initiators of the program envisioned a more successful urban school district by offering training beyond the traditional professional development to district teachers with an incentive of a Master’s Degree. The criteria of this particular initiative mandated that the program be field-based where all courses met in district buildings and be non-traditional, where all content was focused on the needs of the district while encapsulated within university requirements.

The narratives and findings of this study unveil some of the processes of its creation, design, implementation, and impacts it had on its participants during the cohort and 12 years after. The analysis of the data reveals that the success of the program is directly related to its evolution as a professional learning community by its qualities and characteristics.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude is extended to Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer for her extreme guidance, utmost patience and unwavering persistence as my dissertation Chairperson and to Dr. Denny McCrumb and Dr. Mark Rainey for serving on my committee.

Special heartfelt thanks are presented to my mother Rita Leeds, brother Neal, and sisters Mindy and Michelle for their resolute support and for providing the inertia and momentum to keep going.

My sincerest gratefulness and appreciation reaches to Dr. Alex Bailey, Dr. Gary Marx, Dr. Frank Rapley, Dr. Ron Crowell and the teacher participants of the cohort – my educational journey has been profoundly impacted both personally and professionally by our learning community.

Dawn E. Reeves
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Wilms, in 2003, wrote:

Every urban school district in America is struggling to improve student achievement with politicians professing to have solutions. Improving teacher training, reducing class size, lengthening school days, testing students, and tying teachers’ salaries to test scores represent a few of the most mentioned proposals. The reality is that most of these initiatives will fail to have any impact in the classroom. The reason is because proposed remedies to educational decline are more than symbolic political gestures designed to win the confidence of voters. Most have little to do with the challenge of how to improve the quality of teaching and a child’s learning. To make matters worse, most reforms are mandated by legislatures and school boards without consulting teachers and administrators, those closest to the scene of action. Not surprisingly, teachers and administrators either ignore the mandates or comply minimally, safe in the knowledge that, in time, the reforms will “blow over.” (p. 606)

Marx (2001) contended that urban school reform is effective only to the degree to which change occurs in the classroom. He wrote:

In practice, teachers and administrators work hard doing what they think is best for students and their school; however, their daily activity is not always guided by the espoused set of district or state expectations regarding the intended
outcomes. Lacking any other frame of reference, many educators equate working hard with being successful. The social structure of the typical school system helps people in the organization survive; it does little to help them pursue success as defined by those who try to initiate reform. (p. 529)

Porter (1995), cited in Marx, Hunter, and Johnson (1997), argued that urban schools will improve when common learning expectations focus organizational effort on teacher performance to increase students’ achievement. Program activity and process implementation are important only in relation to the results that are obtained.

This investigation presents multiple perspectives on the challenges, barriers, and supports that were met and overcome in the creation of a school–university partnership between the College of Education at Western Michigan University and Oak Park Schools “to increase student achievement in an urban environment using a field-based master’s degree program as the vehicle for teacher professional development” (Marx, 2001, p. 4). Referencing Su (1999) that universities can provide important resources and scaffolding to urban schools attempting to transform the way they educate diverse groups of children, the overarching goal of the partnership was simultaneous teacher preparation, professional development, and institutional renewal.

Of all the problems facing U.S. schooling today, three of the most critical involve teacher learning. The first concerns gaps in teachers’ understanding of what their students can do. The second concerns teachers’ lack of skillfulness in assessing and assisting their students’ growth along a continuum tuned to high and authentic standards. And the third concerns teachers’ reluctance or
incapacity to work collaboratively and accountably across classrooms and grade levels to ensure that all the students in a given school meet these standards in the end. (McDonald, 2001, p. 229)

Renewal and reform in education is not a new phenomenon; it has been embedded throughout its history. Presently, reform is being mandated in the areas of goals, practices, organization, administration, credentialing practices, curricula, and financing. A review of education research by Redemer (1999) revealed that teachers in the school context are at the heart of change, that staff development is an essential component of effective change, that change is continuous learning processes, and that recognizing and attending to innovation concerns can effectuate the change. Viewing teachers as pivotal change agents, as educational research advocates, places professional development (PD) at the center of successful change and school improvement.

Referring to the Concern Theory research of Fuller (1969), Redemer contended that the individual is integral in evoking that change because change is a personal experience and that personal concerns relate to how an innovation is implemented and therefore facilitates PD strategies.

Sagor (2000) affirmed that to meet the challenges of educating today’s diverse population and provide equal opportunity, “we need a teaching force armed with data that they can use to make the pursuit of continuous improvement a normal part of school life” (p. 43). As research institutions and educators, universities are critical in collecting data in addition to providing the training to properly analyze and implement those data.
Oak Park Schools

Ethnography and Demographics of Oak Park Schools

Located on the northern boundary of Detroit, Michigan, and consisting of the City of Oak Park, portions of Royal Oak Township, and Southfield, Oak Park Schools had drastically changed demographically over the past 25 years. Statistics compiled by Marx (2001) show that Oak Park Schools evolved from an all-white, mostly Jewish middle-class community and district, into a mixed-class of predominantly African Americans who migrated from the inner city, and immigrants from the Middle East and Asia, presenting new challenges with new diversity. In 2001, of the 4,100 students enrolled, 84% were African American, 13% were Caucasian (70% of this population were from Chaldean or Arabic-speaking households), and 3% were Hispanic or Asian. Nearly 50% of the student population came from households at or below the poverty level, with 10% receiving special needs services and 11% in bilingual programs. For fiscal year 2000-01, the district consisted of four elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and had an operating budget of $32,595,427. Staff included 231 teachers (74% Caucasian, 26% African American, and 1% Asian); 57 paraprofessionals in support positions; 14 custodial, clerical, and office personnel; and 17 administrators. African Americans filled over 60% administrative, paraprofessional, clerical, and staff positions. Females occupied about one half of the administrative staff and 80% of the paraprofessional and instructional positions.
Previous District Reform Efforts

In 1995, the Board of Education, Superintendent Dr. Alex Bailey, and Consumers Energy developed a formal partnership in response to low scores on the 1992 Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Only 15% of the fourth-grade students performed satisfactorily in reading and mathematics, 12% of seventh-grade students performed satisfactorily in reading, and 5% of 10th-grade students performed satisfactorily in mathematics. The district-wide initiative, The Sixteen-Step Strategic Planning Process (see Porter, 1995; Marx et al., 1997) as created with funding from the Mott Foundation, used achievement data profiles to set performance goals for students, teachers, and administrators, and align organizational structures. A long-range improvement plan, based on standards for success indicators identified by stakeholders from the community, was implemented. Administrators and teachers were given intensive training in data-driven decision making. Temporarily, MEAP scores more than doubled at all levels, graduation rates increased, and fiscally the district was solvent. However, by 1999, achievement gains had slowed, and in some areas declined, and have remained below the state average for most grades and content areas.

A brief overview of the changing demographics and ethnology of the Oak Park Schools and its community shows the rationale for comprehensive school reform in the Oak Park Schools. Review of literature on traditional PD and graduate programs indicates that they have not substantially improved teaching and, subsequently, student achievement. The logistics, challenges, and barriers in the initiation and implementation of a field-based cohort program between the Oak Park Schools and the
College of Education at Western Michigan University has not been previously documented and is the focus of this study.

**The District-University Partnership**

According to Marx (2001), the data analyses on student performance and program effectiveness of the 1995 initiative indicated that much of the successes resulted from tweaking existing practices and procedures having a positive impact on students who were borderline performers. Marx writes:

Most interventions focused on student remediation and little had been done to initiate changes in administrative or teaching practices that might be required to meet the needs of students who were struggling. District administrators concluded that providing meaningful professional development opportunities for teachers designed to increase their content knowledge and instructional skills should be included in as a key component of future initiatives intended to raise student achievement to higher levels . . . [Therefore] a field-based master’s degree program, as a form of professional development with a university was initiated to increase district capacity as directed in the district’s school improvement plan. Improved student success and achievement was the anticipated outcome by focusing and addressing the particular needs of district, staff, and students. Two conditions considered when negotiating with universities: (1) the university and district agreed that the success of the program depended on demonstrated improved student achievement, and (2) course content be presented so as to be perceived as relevant to teachers. It was our
belief that if a university would collaborate with district staff to ground educational experiences required for a master’s degree in the district curriculum and the daily work of the teachers, student achievement would increase. (p. 7)

All district personnel were encouraged to participate in the partnership between Oak Park Schools and the College of Education at Western Michigan University in a graduate program in elementary education with an emphasis on the urban school beginning in the fall of 1999 and lasting until 2001. Thirty-two candidates (24 probationary or recent hires), including the district reading specialist, 29 elementary teachers, one middle school teacher, and one high school teacher, enrolled. Superintendent Bailey and Assistant Superintendent Marx provided district leadership, guidance, planning, and instruction in collaboration with College of Education Dean Rapley and Professor Crowell.

The district provided all classrooms and funded tuition, fees, and texts. “The expenses incurred were slightly higher, but still comparable to the hourly stipends that would have been paid to engage these people in workshops for the amount of class time required of a 36-hour degree program (Marx, 2001, p. 8). In August 2001, the successful candidates were conferred with Master of Arts degrees in Reading resulting from the cohort-determined concentration on literacy.

Being a field-based district-university partnership, where the classes were held in district classrooms and the course content determined by the necessity of Oak Park Schools within university parameters and requirements, made this model unique. The logistics of incorporation were never documented, nor were the challenges, barriers, and
supports in the creation and implementation of this non-traditional approach to a master’s program by the district and university professors.

It is important to note that upon the completion of this initial cohort, a second cohort was started in which some teachers continued on towards a doctorate. This involved 24 teachers and was offered in a similar format.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

My study attempts to address the challenges, barriers, and supports that were met and overcome in facilitating a field-based cohort program for a master’s degree between Oak Park Schools and the College of Education at Western Michigan University as a form of comprehensive school reform not yet documented. Linking graduate education to school improvements has not worked in most instances. Sanders (2005) cites the 1987 report conducted by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration which found evidence that hundreds of universities were teaching substandard courses to virtually anybody willing to pay tuition. Things were so bad, across the country; roughly 300 should be shut down altogether, as they lacked even the capacity to improve. The rest would need to be overhauled. (p. 456)

Dissimilar to traditional university graduate programs, partnerships between universities and school districts, or other forms of professional learning communities, this cohort program was novel in that the assignments and course of study for the degree were designed and aligned by focusing on action research regarding the current educational system, beliefs, norms, and culture within Oak Park Schools and the vision
of what it could be, by the teacher-participants themselves. Participants gathered, analyzed, and implemented their learning in practical classroom situations, giving the distinct advantage and opportunity to discern and incorporate effective theory into practice and practice into theory specific to the district, while enhancing the learning of district students and assisting in reform and renewal efforts. Previous research clearly indicates the effectiveness of school–university partnerships as models to the restructuring and renewal of public education (e.g., Burton & Greher, 2007; Goodlad, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 2000), but does not elucidate the logistics of implementing one.

My research is a case study designed to investigate the conditions, barriers, and dynamics of the relationship between the school district and university in implementing a field-based district-university partnership. The intent of the research is to assist future groups to successfully create, facilitate, and implement a successful combined teacher PD-graduate program. Inclusive of this study are the categories of challenges associated in the organization needed to deliver the program; those associated with the implementation context (e.g., multiple schools, unequal participation rates, and multiple reform strategies implemented); those related to program design (e.g., curriculum, instruction, and assessment); and those related to environmental turbulence (e.g., district and university politics, accountability, and intensification associated with federal and state policy). Specifically, the study is designed to respond to the following research questions:
1. From the perspective of the administrators what were major challenges and barriers of the district and university in developing a site-specified cohort master’s degree program, and how were they overcome for receiving approval?

2. From the perspective of the administrators involved, what conditions were established by the district and university at the beginning of the initiative, how were these met, and what impacts did they have on program implementation and quality?

3. From the perspective of the administrators, what external and internal challenges and/or barriers were presented to the district, university, and instructional leaders when determining the content, pedagogy, and assessments of the participants in the initiative, and how were they overcome?

4. Based on this model, what modifications for future district–university cohort partnerships are offered by administrators of the district and university?

5. From the perspective of the teachers involved in cohort program, how did the overall program impact their work as teachers then and over a decade later?

Rationale for the Study

Sanders (2005), in “Preparing School Leaders–Shared Responsibility” cited the 1987 report “Leaders for America’s Schools,” conducted by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, which found evidence that
hundreds of universities were teaching substandard courses to virtually anybody willing to pay tuition. Things were so bad, across the country roughly 300 should be shut down altogether, as they lacked even the capacity to improve. The rest would need to be overhauled. (p. 456)

Cohorts, as a form of PD in which professional learning communities are developed in a school–university collaboration with the teacher-participants researching theory and best-practice leading to the application of derived data-driven interventions and strategies in their personal classrooms and buildings, have a great potential to create and sustain desired changes. This type of model is the focus of my research and presents a unique opportunity to study an effort whereby teachers and university staff became the impetus and agents for educational reform and renewal through instruction and reculturation that may be adaptable for use by other educational institutions desiring greater student achievement and success. The strategies, challenges, barriers, and requirements necessitated in delivery and implementation of such a field-based cohort model is the inquiry of this study that may further serve as model for other school–university partnerships.

**Methodology Overview**

A retrospective intrinsic case study was conducted because the cohort continued over a period of 2 years beginning in the fall of 1999. Intrinsic case studies are utilized when a researcher wants to better understand a particular case because of its uniqueness (Berg, 2004). The research focuses on the logistics of implementing a field-based
master’s program that served as professional development for Oak Park Schools’
teachers in the form of a district–university partnership.

Purposive sampling (judgmental sampling) of the administrators/instructors will
be utilized to collect data, as I am interested only in authentic information regarding the
specific cohort from those directly involved with its creation and implementation. The
interviewees will include Drs. Bailey and Marx, originally from Oak Park Schools, and
Drs. Rapley and Crowell from the College of Education at Western Michigan
University. Convenience sampling of teacher participants will be utilized for data
regarding the impacts the program had on them during, and 12 years after.

A series of open-ended questions provided to the administrator/instructor
interviewees via e-mail, phone conversation, or personal contact will be used to
document the research questions of what were the logistics, barriers, and supports of
implementing a field-based cohort by the district and university, and their
recommendations for further models. Responses as to the impacts the program had on
the teacher participants will be conducted via e-mail in reply to open-ended questions..
This interactive approach, whereby I will be able to further question the interviewees
for clarification or additional information and unstructured interviewing style with
open-ended questions will give the respondents opportunities to be reflective and as
inclusive or exclusive as desired. Triangulation of the data will be used to validate and
show reliability of the responses both between individual respondents and, when
necessary, between different respondents.
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The results from this study are limited in the following ways:

1. To the specific field-based cohort between Oak Park Schools and Western Michigan University occurring from 1999 to 2001;
2. To the specifics of the needs and desires of the Oak Park Schools to improve achievement of their urban students;
3. To the specifics of Western Michigan University’s graduate program requirements;
4. To the dynamics of the instructional leadership personnel involved; and
5. To the intervening decade since the cohort occurred and the ability of the respondents to recall the details being studied.

It may, however, serve as a model and suggestions for future field-based school-university partnerships.

Definitions and Terms

The following terms are used throughout the dissertation. Although there may be multiple definitions for a specific term, these definitions accurately depict the intended use of the term.

Achievement gap refers to the persistent disparity between the academic performance of African American and Hispanic students to that of white and Asian American students (Evans, 2005).

Action research is a form of research that generates knowledge expressly for taking action to promote social change and social analysis. It involves members of a
community or organization to become co-researchers to study their own context or framework in which a problem situation exists (Sagor, 2000).

*Coaching* is a relationship with someone to learn with. Communities are collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals (Sergiovanni, 1994).

*Collective autonomy* refers to the staff’s commitment to develop and pursue a shared vision and the means employed by the members of the school community to make this vision reality (Glickman, 1993).

*Learning teams* are where members learn with and from each other, creating a synergy and alignment of effort (Senge, 1990).

*Mental models* is developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions—your own and those of others around you (Senge, 1990).

*Mentoring* is a relationship with someone to learn from (MacLennan, 1995).

*Personal mastery* is personal growth and learning (Senge, 1990).

*Professional development* (PD) is systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students (Guskey, 2002).

*Professional Development Schools* (PDSs) are for the development of novice professionals, for the continuing development of experienced professionals, and for the research and development of the teaching profession (Holmes Group, 1990).
*Reflection* is a disciplined way of thinking involving the reconstruction and reorganization of experience increasing one’s ability to direct the course of subsequent experience (Dewey, 1916).

*Shared vision* is developing images of the future along with the values that will take them there and the goals to be achieved (Senge, 1990).

*Systems thinking* is viewing the collective and interactive elements of an organization including the interrelationships, complex dynamics, and long-term implications, and unintended consequences of our action (Senge, 1990).

*Team learning* is where collaborative teams work interdependently to achieve common goals without losing individualism (Senge, 1990).

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter I presents the background of the Oak Park Schools and the reason they sought a university partner for the professional development of their teachers to increase student achievement. Chapter II is a review of research and related literature. Chapter III is a complete overview of the methodology used to gather the data that are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V includes the analysis of the data, theme summary, conclusions and connections to other literature, recommendations for additional research, researcher’s reflections and references.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Existing literature illuminates the conditions and characteristics of urban schools and programs for greater teacher efficacy for increased student achievement. There is a plethora of information on the effectiveness of university graduate programs and various forms of professional development, but is void with respect to a field-based cohort graduate program in the form of a school-university partnership and its institution. My literature review will elucidate the rationale for this unique plan and the research will document the goals and undertakings in its implementation by the Oak Park Schools and the College of Education at Western Michigan University. Section 1 of this chapter covers attributes and characteristics of the urban school, and the characteristics of effective urban schools. Section 2 discusses teachers and their efficacy, followed by Section 3, which covers the achievement gap between minority urban students and suburban students. Section 4, about the reformation, renewal, and transformation of schools, is divided into four subsections: (a) why schools need reform, renewal, and/or transformation; (b) the needed reforms for effectiveness in schools in the future; (c) the change process and education; and (d) why certain reform, renewal, and transformation have failed to bring about the desired outcomes. Section 5 is devoted to PD, the rational of this research, and is divided into three subsections: (a) the purpose of PD, (b) the failures of traditional PD, and (c) documented effective PD characteristics. Section 6 on traditional PD models currently instituted is divided into
five sections: (a) coaching and mentoring, (b) PLCs, (c) PDSs, (d) school–university partnerships, and (e) Master Teacher programs.

**Urban Schooling**

**Attributes of Urban Schools**

Carnoy and Levin (1985) indicated that how schools meet the needs of urban students is critical, as they are a valuable, underutilized resource and public education is their only entitlement and social institution available to them. Banks (1995) referred to the changes in racial, ethnic, and language groups that make up the nation’s population as a “demographic imperative” (p. 3).

Meyerson (2000) stated that it is a national tragedy and disgrace that most public schools fail to teach poor children. He reported that 58% of low-income fourth graders cannot read and 61% of low-income eighth graders cannot do basic math. He continued:

>The magnitude of this educational malpractice is staggering: Of the roughly twenty million low-income children in K-12 schools, twelve million aren’t even learning the most elementary skills. These children have little hope of mastering the responsibilities of citizenship or the rigors of global competition. (p. 1)

Urban schools are typified as being less congenial to learning. They proportionately have fewer resources (experienced, certified teachers, outdated technology and textbooks, larger class sizes, buildings in disrepair), increased violence, and lowered academic expectations. Kozol (1991) called them “savage inequalities.” Joyner (2000) contended:
Thousands of teachers in public schools today are unwittingly operating out of a deficit perspective when teaching poor children. Consciously or not, these teachers have adopted the “bell curve” mental model—that student performance should be distributed across a bell-shaped curve, with some students destined to be below average. After all, somebody’s got to be in the first percentile, just as somebody has to be in the ninety-eighth. We generally expect wealthy children to perform better on the curve than poor children, and white children to perform better than black, brown, and red children. Related to this model is the pervasive mental model that children’s brains are separate from the rest to their lives; that, as my longtime friend and colleague Jack Gillette puts it, children are like “brains on a stick,” and can either be educated or not, based on the innate academic capabilities of those brains, separate from any other aspect of the child’s life. . . . For teachers who have grown up in poor neighborhoods, or who come from minority backgrounds, these mental models are double pernicious, because the adults feel stigmatized themselves. (pp. 387-388)

Bennett (1987) avowed that linking poverty and bad schools is a call for inaction, a wrongful self-fulfilling prophecy of despair. Educational leaders have succumbed to what Reeves (2006) called the Potted Plant Theory of Leadership:

A determined impotence represented by the deliberate choice to surrender leadership initiative and eviscerate the hopes and aspirations of students and committed teachers. After all, the resonating goes, since demography is destiny, there is nothing educators and leaders can do except witness the inexorable
destruction of the lives of another generation of students as demographic influences take their toll. (p. 19)

Reeves (2006) implores one to examine the factors affecting the interaction of the two variables resulting in the negative statistical correlation between student poverty and achievement. He suggests that although there is only one cause and effect, one must also know what other variables exist, which ones are most important, what sequence do they appear, and which ones are most impacted by our influence.

Citing Ingersoll (2003), Reeves continued:

. . . forces us to confront two realities . . . that teaching quality matters . . . it is a decisive variable associated with improved student achievement . . . [and] no matter how much we improve the quality of teachers, we allocate this precious resource in a perverse manner, giving the most effective teachers to economically advantaged students and denying those teachers to impoverished students. (p. 21)

The truth is that the data bear out what the young people are saying. It’s not that issues like poverty and parental education don’t matter. Clearly they do. But we take the students who have less to begin with and then systematically give them less in school. In fact, we give these students less of everything that we believe makes a difference. We do this in hundreds of different ways. Historically, we have not agreed on what U.S. students should learn at each grade level or on what kind of work is good enough. These decisions have been left to individual schools and teachers. The result is a system that, by and large,
doesn’t ask much of most its students. . . . The situation is worse in high-poverty and high-minority schools. (Haycock, 2001, pp. 20-23)

Marshall (2003) recognized three aspects of the urban school challenge:

(1) talented but often independent teachers working in isolation from their colleagues and external standards, (2) provocative research theories about the key factors associated with effective urban schools, and (3) the limited power of the central office to change schools that had a great deal of autonomy and very little accountability. (p. 106)

He identified and described 10 barriers to effective urban schools: (1) teacher isolation, (2) lack of teamwork, (3) curriculum anarchy, (4) weak alignment, (5) low expectations, (6) negativism, (7) a harried leader, (8) mystery grading criteria, (9) no school-wide plan, and (10) not focusing on outcomes.

Edmonds (1979), in “Effective Schools for the Urban Poor,” noted:

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far. (p. 23)

Reeves (2006) agreed:

The common theme is the false assertion that demography is destiny, that even the best schools cannot close the gap. In fact, schools and entire school systems can close the achievement gap. The only question is whether the leaders and policymakers have the will to do so. (p. 20)
Strong instructional leadership focusing on basics, a safe and humane climate, effective use of data, and high expectations may make some urban schools successful. His three key messages about urban schools are:

1. Demographics are not destiny: inner-city children can achieve at high levels;
2. Some specific school characteristics are linked to beating the demographic odds; and
3. We need to stop making excuses and get to work.

Louis and Miles, cited in Fullan and Miles (1992) in their study of urban schools, found that schools that were least successful at change always used shallow coping styles (doing nothing at all, procrastinating, “doing it the usual way,” easing off, or increasing pressure) as opposed to deeper ones (building personal capacity through training, enhancing system capacity, comprehensive restaffing, or system restructuring/redesign). . . . Schools that were successful in changing could and did make structural changes in an effort to solve difficult problems.

(p. 18)

Reeves (2006) asserted:

Allocation of resources, along with parent involvement, systematically high expectations verified by common assessments, and host of other leadership practices are necessary to ensure equity. Analytical models can shed light on these matters, but accurate statistical analysis alone is insufficient for pursuing educational goals . . . the constructive use of data rather than being tools for
rating, ranking, sorting, or humiliation . . . are celebrations of teacher
effectiveness. (p. 20)

In *Diversity Within Unity: Essential Principles for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society*, Banks et al. (2001) explained their suggestions for effective urban schools:

- PD programs that help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within U.S. society and the ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behavior;
- Curriculum that help students understand that knowledge is socially constructed and reflects personal experiences as well as the social, political, and economic contexts in which they live and work; All students are provided with opportunities to participate in extracurricular and co-curricular activities that develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase academic achievement and foster positive interracial relationships;
- Salient superordinate or cross-cutting groups in order to improve intergroup relations;
- Environments where students learn about the values shared by virtually all cultural groups (justice, freedom, peace, compassion, and charity), stereotyping, and other related biases that have negative effects on racial and ethnic relations;
- Teachers that help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language
groups and social opportunities for these interactions under conditions designed to reduce fear and anxiety;

- The school’s organizational strategies ensures that decision making is widely shared and that members of the school community learn collaborative skills and dispositions in order to create a caring learning environment for students;
- Leaders ensure that all public schools, regardless of their locations, are funded equitable; and
- Teachers use multiple culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills.

Carter (2000), in *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*, shared traits that other schools can replicate for success:

- Principals have the freedom to make important decisions for their school including staffing, budgets, and curriculum, and not be micromanaged while held accountable for academic achievement;
- Excellent leadership that creates a culture of outstanding achievement. “High expectations are one thing—the relentless pursuit of excellence is another. Tangible and unyielding goals are the focus of high-performing schools” (p. 9);
- “Effective principals turn their schools into schools for teachers . . .
   Improving the quality of instruction is the only way to improve overall
student achievement. Teacher quality is the most accurate indicator of a student’s performance in school” (p. 9);

- Rigorous and regular testing to monitor enforcement of school goals;
- School teaches by example that self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem embedded in achievement are the means to success;
- Extend the school mission into home by contracting with parents and teaching them how to support their children’s efforts to learn; and
- Extend times on task with support programs. Eliminate social promotion as a clear demonstrated mastery is required to move to the next level.

Haycock (1999) cited research findings from The Education Trust (1999), which had surveyed 1,200 schools identified by their states as top scoring and/or most improving schools with poverty levels over 50%, and suggested:

- Use state standards extensively to design curriculum and instruction, assess student work, and evaluate teachers;
- Increase instructional time in reading and math in order to help students meet standards;
- Devote larger amounts of funds to support PD focused on changing instructional practice;
- Implement comprehensive systems to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students as soon as it is needed;
- Focus efforts to involve parents on helping students meet standards; and
• Have state or district accountability systems in place that have real consequences for adults in the schools.

In 1998 by Presidential directive, the U.S. Department of Education published the following recommendations in *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders*:

• Raise academic standards and hold schools and students accountable to them;

• Keep schools safe and free of drugs;

• Build school capacity and leadership by improving curriculum, instruction, trust and ownership;

• Provide extra time on task for students;

• Increase parental and community involvement;

• Provide PD to teachers; and

• Reward excellence in teaching.

**Efficacy and Isolation of Teachers**

Research clearly shows a good teacher is the single most important factor affecting student learning—more important than standards, class size, or money. Haycock (1998) asserted that poor and minority children depend on their teachers like no others. In the hands of our best teachers, the effects of poverty and institutional racism melt away, allowing these students to soar to the same heights as young Americans from more advantaged homes. (p. 2)
A culture of teacher isolation is common to many departments and schools, severely limiting access to the curricular and instructional ideas of colleagues and shielding them from constructive criticism and positive recognition of their instructional practices. Rarely are there opportunities to discuss teaching techniques related to thinking, or specific ideas regarding subject matter discouraging collective action even though teachers frequently face very similar concerns (Brown, 1991; Bullough, 1987; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin, Pfeifer, Swanson, Owens, & Yee, 1986; Sarason, 1982). Onosko and Newmann are cited by Grant and Murray (1999):

Teacher isolation, writes Onosko and Newmann (1994), severely limits teachers’ access to the curricular and instructional ideas of colleagues and shields them from both constructive criticism and positive recognition of their instructional practices. Opportunities are rarely available to discuss teaching techniques related to thinking, or specific ideas regarding subject matter . . . such a culture discourages collective action even though teachers frequently face very similar concerns. The culture of isolation, in fact, leads some teachers to withhold from colleagues their “hard earned” instructional ideas. In addition, individualism, noncommunication and at times, competition contribute to the development of indiscriminant, uncritical attitudes toward instruction; that is, teacher “agree” to respect the practices of their colleagues regardless of their colleagues’ effectiveness. (p. 37)

Lortie’s 1960s surveys cited in his Schoolteacher: A sociological study revealed that only a quarter of all teachers had much contact with colleagues and nearly half
reported virtually no contact in planning classes or jointly reviewing student work. In 1997, surveys by Grant and Murray indicated slightly more than half of the teachers had sustained contact with colleagues in planning, mentoring, and jointly managing schools. Still, “the negative impact of teacher’s isolation on the quality of teaching and schools is so widely accepted that it has become part of the conventional wisdom of the teaching profession” (Grant & Murray, 1999, p. 186).

Minority teachers in the United States were, and currently are, underrepresented. Between 1890 and 1920 in the United States, only 5% of teachers were African American compared to 11% of the total population and were restricted to teaching African American children in the impoverished segregated southern schools. Approximately 32% of all pupils in kindergarten through grade 12 are African American, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American, while only 13% of their teachers are (Grant & Murray, 1999, p. 12).

Although the family income of teachers themselves has increased significantly (salaries in the United States are higher than that of other countries except Austria and the United Kingdom), they, however, maintain a lower status in relation to national wealth (teachers’ pay averages only one and a half times the Gross Domestic Product compared to twice the Gross Domestic Product in 25 countries surveyed) (Grant & Murray, 1999, p. 12).

The Achievement Gap: Myth or Reality?

The “achievement gap” refers to the persistent disparity between the academic performance of African American and Hispanic students to that of white and Asian
American students. According to Evans (2005), “[It] is perhaps the most stubborn, perplexing issue confronting American Schools today” (p. 235). The relationship between race, class, and school performance has been one of the most consistent features of education in the United States (Fass, 1989; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Educational outcomes of racial minorities and poor children typically reflect broad patterns of inequality (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Miller, 1995; Noguera, 2003).

Since the 1960s, the most popular explanations of academic performance emphasize the importance of cultural differences. Ogbu (1987) identified oppositional attitudes, a poor work ethic, and, in some instances, a culture of poverty as causes of lower academic achievement. However, Evans (2005) indicated that even in suburban schools where middle-class African American and Hispanic students have professional parents, schools with abundant resources, and certified teachers, divergence in achievement also persists, suggesting that the gap has its roots in the way students are treated and taught in school. Reeves (2006) concurred:

Differences related to class and income, the educational background of parents, the quality of school students attend, or the kinds of neighborhood students live in significantly affect student achievement. . . . Simply put, letter grades do not reflect student achievement in an astonishing number of cases. This situation has long been tolerated because of the pervasive belief that teaching is a private endeavor and grading policies are the exclusive domain of those private practitioners. (p. 113)
Haycock (2001) suggested the achievement gap is rooted also in the financial and personal resources of urban schools:

The truth is that the data bear out what the young people are saying. It’s not that issues like poverty and parental education don’t matter. Clearly they do. But we take the students who have less to begin with and then systematically give them less in school. In fact, we give these students less of everything that we believe makes a difference. We do this in hundreds of different ways.

Historically, we have not agreed on what U.S. students should learn at each grade level or on what kind of work is good enough. These decisions have been left to individual schools and teachers. The result is a system that, by and large, doesn’t ask much of most its students. . . . The situation is worse in high-poverty and high-minority schools. (pp. 18-19)

Miller (1995) added that cultural explanations of academic ability reinforce inaccurate stereotypes and fail to account for the high degree of diversity within racial groups. Student behavior is impacted by opinions and perceptions that others have for them which, in turn, become self-fulfilling prophecies. Good and Brophy (2000) called the concept of teacher expectations the “Pygmalion” effect or “self-fulfilling prophecy,” where teachers tend to have lower expectations for students of color and poor students than for white students and more affluent students. Minority students are more often assigned to remedial or low-track classes. African American students are also more impacted by teacher perceptions than white students. Students are aware of the differences in the way teachers treat students believed to be high and low achievers and
some students see the differential treatments as biased and inappropriate. Noguera (2003) believes that the factors influencing the success of immigrants and underachievement of middle-class blacks is largely the result of the way racial and gender identities are constructed in schools. He wrote:

Several studies have shown that students are influenced by the perceptions and expectations of the adults who teach them (Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Weinstein, Madison, & Kuklinski, 1995). We know relatively less about how student perceptions of their radical identities affect their outlook and performance in school. Patterns of achievement suggest that race, class, and gender are related to academic performance. Certain categories of students, namely African Americans and Latino males, are consistently overrepresented at the lower rungs of the achievement ladder (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Miller, 1995). However, we know relatively little about the subjective dimension of this phenomenon or how awareness of these patterns might affect how students see themselves. . . . Understanding the process through which young people come to see themselves as belonging to particular racial categories is important because it can have profound implications for the norms and behaviors they embrace in connection with their social and academic performance. . . . Black students from all socioeconomic backgrounds develop “oppositional identities” that lead them to view schooling as a form of forced assimilation. . . . The few who aspire to achieve academically . . . must pay a heavy price for success. . . . Black students who perform at high-levels often are ostracized by their peers as
traitors and “sell outs,” and are compelled to adopt a “raceless” persona to avoid the stigma associated with membership in their racial groups. (p. 52)

Critics of the achievement gap assume that schooling exerts a powerful, transformative impact on large numbers of students. The truth, alas, is that schooling has much less leverage on children than commonly thought. Not just on Hispanic and black but on all students . . . we have come to equate “education” with “schooling.” This is a serious error. (Evans, 2005, pp. 582-584)

“Viewed in the context of an entire childhood, schooling is a relatively ‘weak treatment,’ responsible, in most cases, for no more than 25% of the total outcome, if that” (Mathis, 2005, p. 66). “The contention that the achievement gap is a school problem misunderstands and mistreats schools, and more important, African American and Hispanic students” (Evans, 2005, p. 584). Gardner (2000) said that one can accurately project a child’s chances of completing college and eventual income by just knowing his or her zip code. Jencks (1972) affirmed Coleman (1969) in that the school’s influence was “marginal,” that children are affected far more by what happens outside of school. “Six hours of instruction a day for 180 days a year cannot overcome the effects of a deprived and impoverished home environment for 18 hours a day, 365 days a year” (Mathis, 2005, p. 590). Noguera (1998) suggested that the problem is not an educational problem, but a societal one because poor, hungry, sick and homeless children have a range of un-met needs that inhibit their ability to learn
... a political question ... when it comes to student outcomes in public schools we get what we pay for. (p. 6)

Psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1995) wrote that “whether children learn does not depend primarily what happens in school, but on the experiences, habits, values, and ideas they acquire from the environment in which they live” (p. 107). Evans (2004) contended that for most children the parenting they receive, their socioeconomic status, and the media culture in their environment is more significant than their schooling and actually undermines their academic achievement.

Adding to the lower academic achievement of urban students is their transiency. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) reported:

Urban students are more transient, negatively impacting the individual’s learning and their fellow classmates. Between first and third grades, 27% of black students and 25% of Hispanic students change schools three or more times, while just 3% of white students change schools often. In many urban classrooms, the turnover rate of students approaches 50% per year. . . . Urban students watch more television, more than 4% of black students and more than 20% of Hispanic students watch more than six hours of television daily compared to 3% of white students. . . . Only 38% of black students live with two parents compared to 75% of white students, many in poverty leading to increased absenteeism, achievement and behavior problems. (pp. 2, 45)

Lee and Burkam (2002) related the lack of literacy before entering public schools as a factor in the disparity in the achievement of urban students:
Urban homes have fewer books, a direct correlation to learning... urban kindergartners typically start school at least a full year behind others in reading and have a vocabulary of 5,000 words versus 20,000 for suburban peers. They are not enrolled in preschool, low-income parents don’t speak or read to their children as frequently. (pp. 42-44)

Additionally, black children have significantly higher rates of low birth weight and lead poisoning, conditions that can impair cognitive and academic abilities (Conley & Bennett, 2000, pp. 458-467, cited in Evans, 2005, p. 583).

Noguera (2003) wrote:

Such factors influence the academic performance of all students, but because of the tendency to generalize about the performance of racial groups, they often are ignored. . . . It is even more troubling that because culture is treated as an overriding explanation of academic ability, we often have ignored other factors that influence school performance and that we actually might be able to do something about. . . . Explanations of academic performance that emphasize the importance of culture generally ignore the fact that what we think of as culture—customs, beliefs, and practices associated with particular groups—is constantly subject to change. Particularly in a country like the United States where the steady influx of immigrants and the popular culture produced by the mass media exert profound influence over values and norms, the idea that culture could be treated as a static independent variable is very misleading and results in misconceptions. Yet, this precisely what a number of scholars who
study the relationship between race and education have done (e.g., Anderson, 1988; Fordham, 1996; McWhorter, 2000; Ogbu, 1987). (pp. 44-46)

Delineating the achievement gap is important ultimately for our future as a democracy and nation. “To close the gap will require more than school-based strategies and programs, and holding them, almost alone; accountable for closing it is a doomed strategy that can only disserve our most vulnerable children” (Evans, 2005, p. 584).

However,

to be clear, external social forces and political misdeeds in no way relieve us of our responsibility to provide equality in education, to engage students, to align instruction with standards, to improve pedagogy, to employ diverse methods, to use formative assessments, to disaggregate data, and to track every student’s progress. (Mathis, 2005 p. 295)

In accord, Reeves (2006) set the imperative:

[Does] not diminish the importance of student nutrition, health care, housing, and other factors directly associated with student learning. This is not an either/or controversy. It is a superficial and inaccurate conclusion to claim “even the best can’t close the race achievement gap.” In fact there are schools and districts where the statistical relationship between student achievement and poverty is close to zero. It is equally and superficial and inaccurate, however, to claim that because some schools and districts have been successful in mitigating the influence of poverty, school leaders and society in general should neglect factors associated with poverty, race, and class. (p. 75)
Edmonds (1979), in “Effective Schools for the Urban Poor,” stated, “We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that” (p. 23). Evans (2005) noted:

Though the victory of Edmonds and others over Coleman and Jencks was sweeping, it hasn’t produced anything like the success its advocates envisioned. Schools have not been able to overcome the effects of social and economic changes that weakened the foundations of family and community life and thus of child rearing in America. And in recent decades, evidence has continued to underscore the limitations of schooling’s impact on students. These findings have been demonstrated in research that has been ignored by achievement gap critics and school improvement advocates alike. (p. 585)

The achievement gap cannot be completely closed by changing school programs without social reconstruction. Mathis (2005) pointed out four central fallacies employed to argue that schools can do this job by themselves.

1. *The fallacy of the successful example* . . . Countless profiles . . . have been written about successful schools. Typically, federal and state politicians stage a high-visibility media event to recognize a poor school that has registered high test scores . . . National Assessment of Educational Progress scores in 2004 for reading and math increased between four and six points over the previous five years for white and Hispanic students while scores for minority groups increased six to thirteen points during this same period.
College entrance rates increased by five percent for white and Hispanic students over the past decade, while rates for black students increased by twelve percent. (p. 590)

2. *The fallacy of the educational panacea* . . . It is strongly implied that, if we attend the workshop and implement the program faithful, all children will achieve mastery . . . [What] Hargreaves (2004) refers to as “training cults” . . . There is scant independent and accepted research evidence that such programs can successfully—by themselves—bridge the achievement gap. (p. 590)

3. *The fallacy that “adequate yearly progress” on test scores decreases the true education gap* . . . The result is educational apartheid. The more affluent schools can continue to provide a rich variety of educational and cultural opportunities . . . the poorer schools, however, find themselves increasingly trapped into a dull and spiritless routine of drill and practice, with the narrow objective of passing the examinations. The effect is to widen some truly significant gaps. (p. 590)

4. *The fallacy that vouchers bridge achievement gaps* (pp. 590-591).

School leaders and educators can help delineate the achievement gap by:

1. *Increasing student time on task.* Schools serving students with reading skills that are years below grade level must alter their traditional schedules, which are designed to provide one year’s progress in reading (Reeves, 2006, p. 102).
2. **Making schools welcoming, comforting, and a safe environment for students and their parents that engage them in the school and learning.** Since learning is personal, teachers must build personal relationships with students and parents and consistently articulate high expectations along with the commitment to help them to reach their goals (Evans, 2005).

3. **Integrating cultural awareness and history into the curriculum** (Evans, 2005).

4. **Differentiating instruction to contain the elements of variety and flexibility in methodology and goals.** Teachers must support mastery of key concepts rather than specifics and individualization and adaptation must be the building blocks of instruction (Evans, 2005; Tomlinson, 2001).

5. **Expanding an emphasis on civic virtues to equal that given to basic skills and rejecting the fundamental premise that education is a business or commercial enterprise.** “It is an example of a ‘commons,’ owned and nourished by the citizenry, for the benefit and advancement of all groups. Its aim is to build a society that has no gaps” (Mathis, 2005, p. 593).

6. **Documenting clear and public standards for what students should learn at benchmark grade levels.** “They are a guide—for teachers, administrators, parents, and students themselves—to what knowledge and skills students must master” (Haycock, 2001, pp. 18-19).

7. **Building partnerships with parents and others who know and understood the social reality of the students.** Without them finding a way to reach them in
school and improve their academic performance would be extremely difficult. Student achievement depends heavily on factors such as two parents in an intellectually stimulating home, whether they attend to the child’s learning by regular school attendance, monitoring their child’s homework, limiting television, and inculcating perseverance and self-regulation (Baron & Coley, 1992).

8. *Extending the school day and year with early education programs, full-day kindergarten, summer and after-school programs, small class sizes, and adequate resources* (Mathis, 2005).

9. *Reculturation.* Peer cultures in some urban schools exert negative influences on academic performance. Good students are labeled as “too white” and/or “sell-outs” (Ogbu, 2003; Steinberg, 1996). Steele (1999) termed it “disidentification” and “stereotype threat,” in which black students protect themselves against the pain and humiliation of being seen less capable by not investing themselves and their energies in schooling (pp. 68-69).

Externally, society must “invest in programs that are well outside the conventional ways of thinking about schools. We must address health, mobility, housing, nutrition, unemployment, family structure, medical and dental care, and a host of other factors” (Mathis, 2005, p. 591).

**Reformation, Renewal, and Transformation of Schools**

A demand for educational change is not new; it has persisted since the beginning of public schools. Redemer and Nourie (1999) wrote, “Educational changes are sought
in school goals, practices, organization, administration, credentialing practices, curricula, and financing” (p. 116). Their review of educational research revealed that teachers in the schools are at the heart of change and ongoing PD that merges theory with practice is an essential component of effective change as it is a continuous learning process. “Viewing teachers as pivotal change agents, as educational research advocates, places professional development at the center of successful change and school improvement” (p. 116).

McDonald (2001) asserted that three of the most critical problems facing U.S. schooling today involve gaps in teacher learning: their understanding of what their students can do, their lack of skillfulness in assessing and assisting their students’ growth along a continuum tuned to high and authentic standards, and their reluctance or incapacity to work collaboratively and accountably across classrooms and grade levels. Concerns theory (Fuller, 1969) claims that the individual is a vital consideration in change and that the individual experiences differing developmental stages of change: (a) teachers are important in the process of change, because change is a personal experience; (b) personal concerns relate to how an innovation is implemented; and (c) concerns information facilitates staff development strategies.

Organizations work the way they do because of the ways that people work. Polices and rules did not create the problems in classrooms or schools today, nor will they eliminate them. The difficulties faced by schools (as in all organizations) are always deeply influenced by the kinds of mental models and relationships at large in the system—at every level, from the teacher and
students in a classroom to the national political governing bodies that oversee all schools. If you want to improve a school system, before you change the rules, look first to the ways that people think and interact together. Otherwise, the new policies and organizational structures will simply fade away, and the organization will revert, over time to the way it was before. (Senge et al., 2000, p. 19)

Blackwell (2003) raised the question of what is meant by student learning that the purpose of education reform is to improve. Blackwell stated that, additionally, there is no consistent and systematic framework grounded in well-designed research for thinking about education programs or state licensing systems. Moreover, there is no research on the commonalities of standards or programs or on the particular aspects that contribute to quality. One consequence is that standards for teachers and teacher education are caught in a time warp of imitation and habit that is derived from behaviorism and other early theories of learning. (pp. 363-364)

Marx et al. (1997) commented that urban school reform is only effective to the degree to which change occurs in the classroom. . . . In practice, teachers and administrators work hard doing what they think is best for students and their school, however, their daily activity is not necessarily guided by the espoused set of district or state expectations regarding the intended outcomes. Lacking any other frame of reference, many educators equate working hard with being successful. The social structure of the
typical school system helps people in the organization survive, it does little to help them pursue success as defined by those who try to initiate reform. . . . Porter (1995) argued that urban schools will improve when common learning expectations focus organizational effort to teacher performance to increase students’ achievement. Program activity and process implementation are only important in relation to the results that are obtained. (pp. 529-531)

**Needed Reforms of the Early 21st Century**

Reforms, restructuring, and renewal of urban schools is critical to furtherance of the American ideal, as Sparks and Hirsh (1997) wrote:

Too many students learn far less than they are capable of achieving. This problem is particularly acute in schools serving high concentrations of low income students and is a tragic waste of human potential. In addition to the personal loss borne by these students, our democracy and economic well-being suffer when young people are unprepared to fully assume their responsibilities as citizens and wage earners in an increasingly complex world. (p. 2)

According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), the most effective model for substantive school improvement is to build the capacity of school personnel by creating learning communities. Sergiovanni (2000) used the term *community of practice*. These learning communities as defined are still extremely rare and the development of a school-university cohort as a model of a learning and practicing community is the basis for this document. Senge (1990) referred to them as “learning organizations.”

Banks (1997), in “Education in a New Era,” elucidated the need for educators
to counterforce and help students acquire a strong commitment to democratic values and become reflective citizens. Students should also be helped to understand that a gap between ideals and realities always exists in a democratic society and that their role as citizens is to take actions to help close that gap.

(p. 27)

Irrespective of academic advancement within the last two decades, the increased racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in the United States has produced serious academic and social problems in racially segregated schools where tracking and special programs prevail (Orfield, Eaton, & The Harvard Project on School Desegregation, 1996, cited in Banks, 1997, p. 23). Citing Gay (1997), she reported that African American and Latino youths are still substantially behind white mainstream youths on many indexes of academic achievement have lower graduation rates from high school, and a greater number of retentions, suspensions and dropouts. He further wrote, “To create democratic educational institutions . . . educators must reform the cultures of the nation’s schools, as well as the curriculum to institutionalize and legitimize the knowledge systems, perspectives, ideologies, and behaviors of [our] diverse groups” (p. 38).

Sparks (2002) advocated that the purpose of education is to prepare students to thrive in a multiracial multiethnic democracy, to not only understand their own culture, but also to have the ability to negotiate unfamiliar cultures. As a result, good teaching that closes achievement gaps offers a multicultural perspective and provides students with the skills for negotiating various cultures. Servage (2008) writes that, “Central to
critical pedagogy is the idea that schools can be places where, through dialogue, we are enlightened of the conditions that rob some members of society of their freedom, dignity, and hope (p. 65) Biesta (1998) states,

A focus on teaching for academic success is not enough to overcome problems of societies deeply divided by class, race, gender, and gross disparities in wealth and social capital. Thus we must turn to critical reflection in the sense that it used by critical pedagogists. Schools can be sites where we uncover and challenge beliefs and practices that undermine democracy and perpetuate social injustices. While critical pedagogy has many trajectories, these are “all in one way or another committed to the imperative of transforming the social order in the interest of justice, equality, democracy and human freedom” (p. 499).

Amend Pedagogy and Practice of Teachers

Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind, the use of standardized testing has been used as the assessment tool for determining student learning and instructional modes for increased proficiency.

The evolution of assessment in the U.S. over the past five decades has led to the strongly held view that school improvement requires the articulation of higher achievement standards, the transformation of those expectations into rigorous assessments, and the expectation of accountability on the part of educators for student achievement, as reflected in test scores . . . we can also use assessments for learning [to] help students learn more . . . Assessment of and for learning are both important . . . if we are to balance the two, we must make a much
stronger investment in assessment for learning. . . . Not the same as “formative assessment,” [it] is far more than testing more frequently or providing teachers with evidence so that they can raise instruction, although these steps are part of it . . . [and] must involve students in the process. (Stiggins, 2002, p. 761)

Numerous national studies report that increased professional knowledge on the part of teachers yields higher levels of student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). It is becoming increasingly clear that, far more than policies and organizational strategies that only provide the backdrop against what educators are able to do their work, teachers’ abilities to teach in powerful ways are essential to improved student learning. (Falk, 2001, p. 119)

**Collaborative Leadership**

A key aspect to the specific cohort program studied was the collaborative leadership and decision-making by the instructors and teachers in assessing the needed reforms and their initiation (Buckingham, 2005; Reeves, 2006). The success of a collaborative approach requires, according to Reeves (2006), the following:

- Attendance and compliance can be compelled, but only the employees can volunteer their hearts and minds.
- Authoritative decisions can only be implemented through collaboration.
- Sustained, substantial systemic performance is achieved through networks, not individuals.

Collaborative leadership integrates differing perspectives, interdependence, and shared work that provides a backbone for developing relationships and commitment for
change (Reeves, 2006; VanVelsor, McCauley & McCauley, 2010). Shared leadership is critical as top-down control to change tends to lead to over-control and coercion producing shallow compliance, sabotage, or overt resistance. De-centralized attempts such as site-based management are not proven effective (Fullan, 1993), as they fail to take on systems thinking (Senge, 1990).

**Reculturation of Schools into Learning Communities**

The findings of McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), based on one of the most extensive research projects ever undertaken, show that the local contexts (schools, departments, and communities) are the predominant determinants of teacher efficacy and professional satisfaction, as they are crucial to setting classroom climates and expectations. Reculturing from teacher isolation to a learning community is paramount in school renewal and increased student achievement, a derisive aspect of the specific cohort of this study. That is why a culture dedicated to learning would dedicate its resources to those institutions that most shape our development as learners. They might or might not resemble the schools we have today. But they would be places where everyone, young and old, could learn how to learn. If we want the world to improve, then we will need schools that learn (Senge, 2000, p. 4). Easton (2008) agreed when he stated, “In a culture in which learning rather than development is the focus, attitudes, conversations, and behaviors change. Even mental models change, individually and collectively” (p. 758). Simmons et al. (1999) deduced that in collaborative reform involving diverse stakeholders, the reform participants must become able to interact effectively in complex situations involving human and institutional differences at many
levels (prior experiences, values, vision, assumptions, power, communication habits, knowledge bases, skills, and reward structures).

To create a culture in schools to be learning communities, the NCTAF (2003) listed the following criteria:

- Teachers must know their students well.
- The curriculum must be engaging and intellectually challenging.
- Student “voice” must be encouraged.
- Students must have opportunities for authentic learning.
- Students must have an emotional support system.
- Schools must forge close ties with parents.
- Schools must provide a safe, respectful environment.

The Change Process in Education

Facilitating and maintaining the reform desired by the Oak Park School required learning about change. Hall and Loucks (1978) described several attributes:

- Change is a PROCESS, not an event. Introduction to and training in new ways of doing things does not assure that people will immediately begin to do them. Change is a process that must unfold over time.
- Change must be understood in terms of what happens to INDIVIDUALS. Understanding how individual teachers and administrators may respond to changing their behaviors and practices is critical.
- Change in individuals is a higher PERSONAL experience. Each person perceives, feels about, and reacts to change in an individual way.
• Change by individuals entails GROWTH, both in terms of how they feel about the change and their skill in applying any innovations. This incremental growth is part of the process of change which an individual undergoes over time.

The 2004 “Bringing Best Practices to Scale,” an initiative co-sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, cited by Daggett (2004) explained three consecutive stages in order to achieve high academic standards for all students:

1. Convincing school stakeholders as to why a school needs to change. Reform begins with a desire by some, and at least willingness by others to be led, to change what currently exists. Administrators and staff embrace change as exciting and challenging rather than intimidating and threatening. They understand that schools today need to be updated and kept apace with society and therefore students and adults must be life-long learners as technology and learning changes are inevitable. “Today’s students will have to work harder, faster, and smarter than their predecessors to enjoy success in adult roles and schools need to reinvent themselves to prepare students to meet the future demands that will be placed upon them” (Daggett, n.d., pp. 1-2).

2. Utilize reliable and valid data to determine and drive what needs to change after understanding why.
Successful schools recognize that today’s education system was designed for another time and place in which people typically had lifetime jobs that required predictable skills performed in a familiar environment. Over the past forty years, our society and our economy have gone through dramatic changes that require workers to possess different sets of skills from those that the education system has traditionally provided. . . the old methodology was intended for an education system whose job was to select and sort students, not to try to get all of the to achieve high standards of proficiency (Daggett, 2004., p. 3).

3. Successful schools envision a system focused on the future. Students must learn how to learn, process information with higher order skills, and be adaptable to change for success in a dynamic changing world.

Schools preparing students for today and tomorrow link relevance, rigor and relationships. Relevance helps create the climate and motivation for rigorous work (thought, analysis, reflection, synthesis, problem solving, and debate) and positive relationships have a directly proportional effect on both.

When guiding principles are deeply embedded in the culture of the school and underpin all human interactions, positive relationships, better collaboration, and an overall sense of caring, support, and teamwork are the result. Student alienation and strained relationships among adults and with students are minimized.
4. Determine how to change the school, how to create a strategic, collaborative plan and how to manage change. Taking risks, understanding that change is dynamic and focusing on strengths moves the plan forward.

Senge et al. (2000) described six key principles for success in school improvement:

1. Change is only sustainable if it involves learning and self-dedication.
2. Change starts small and grows when urgency and patience are balanced.
3. Successful pilot groups are used for intriguing and motivating others.
4. Significant change initiatives question prevailing strategies and purposes of the institution and the vision of what they can become.
5. Successful change occurs through multiple layers of leadership. Formal and informal leaders become stewards to the students, each other, the district and community by providing different resources.
6. Challenges and barriers are natural and part of organizational change involving learning organizations that can lead to failure, setbacks, and backlash.

**Failures of Reform and Renewal**

The cohort initiative of this study was uniquely designed using the research of effective reform and models of PD.

Even though we already know the best way to improve instruction, we persist in pursuing strategies that have repeatedly failed. . . . In the years since “reform” first became a byword in education circles, strategic planning has had a
pervasive influence on reform and improvement efforts. . . . It is clearer to me now that these plans—for all their seemingly tight, logical connections between mission, belief, goals, actions, responsibilities, and evaluation—were like beautiful but badly leaking boats. (Schmoker, 2010, p. 425)

Agreeing with Schmoker, Reeves (2006) emphasized the actions of teaching rather than strategic planning which is inflexible and non-creative. Other current models for whole-school reform are characteristically elaborate, prescriptive, systemic, overloaded and fragmented with time constraints (Barth & Vandenberg, 1984; Corcoran, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1997a; DuFour, 2002; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 1999; Glickman, 2002; Little, 1982; Sarason (1996); Senge (2000); Sparks, 2001; Stiggins (2002); Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The Law of Initiative Fatigue is Reeves’ adaptation from the term originally used in the Harvard Business Review. It is when capital and personal resources are held constant and the numbers of initiatives rises, organizations implode.

**Professional Development as a Reform Potential**

**Purpose of PD**

Guskey (2002) defined professional development initiatives as “systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students” (p. 381). Opportunities for professional development can benefit the practice of teaching, the learning of students, and the culture of schooling (Borko, 2004; Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Knight, 2002; Perry, 2004).
If educators are to intellectually engage their students in depth of understanding and breadth of content coverage, they too must be intellectually engaged. Educators must, as a matter of personal responsibility, engage in continuous growth and the quest for knowledge as a lifelong pursuit. Quality professional/staff development opportunities provided by the school district and sought as a matter of professional integrity by each educator are essential to ensuring success for all students. (“Professional Development,” Michigan Curriculum Framework, 2004, p. 1)

Fullan (1991) noted, “The ultimate goal is changing the culture of learning for both adults and students so that engagement and betterment is a way of life in schools” (p. 34).

A legitimate and essential purpose of PD is the development of an inquiry stance on teaching that is critical and transformative, a stance linked not only to high standards for the learning of all students but also to social change and social justice and to the individual and collective growth of teachers. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 46)

Griffin (1983) stated that PD programs are “designed to alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end” (p. 2).

Desired outcomes of PD in education include information transfer, skills acquisition, and behavior changes. It may exist for personal change or improvement, credentialing, induction, school improvement and increased student achievement, professional, to satisfy bureaucratic and career advancement purposes, and/or to involve
teachers as responsible members of an institution (DuFour, 2002; Gage, 1984; Gall & Renchler, 1985; Lanier & Little, 1986; Richardson, 2003; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990).

**Failures of Traditional PD**

When creating the cohort initiative, the originators researched why traditional PD fails to meet their outcomes. While the names have changed over the years—from “in-service education” to “staff development” to “PD”—the assumptions, forms, and substance have remained virtually the same. Most PD approaches position teachers as passive consumers of prepackaged knowledge or, at best, compliant participants whose role has been to absorb information from the research and reform communities—whether or not it is useful or appropriate (Choy, 2006; Falk, 2001; Fosnot, 1989; Giroux, 1988; Guskey, 2000; Lewis, 2002; Lieberman, 1995; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Little, 1992, 1993; McCotter, 2001; Meier, 1992; Reeves, 2006; Richardson, 2003; Sarason, 1996). PD has been organized without teacher input without regard to their perceived needs or classroom dilemmas they encounter. Lieberman and Wood (2001) wrote that experts engaged in PD have little or no knowledge about the teachers, are not differentiated to meet the varied cultures of their schools and themselves, and infrequently provide sufficient follow-up and support for meaningful and lasting improvements. They stated:

Teachers are “in-serviced,” as if teaching were merely a set of technical skills to be memorized and applied uniformly in all times and places. In the face of these traditional approaches to PD, it is not surprising that improvements in schools
have been minimal and that teachers have grown weary of efforts to “develop” them and improve their classroom practice. (p. 174)

Review of the research conducted by Gallagher et al. (1998) reported that there is widespread consensus on two points affecting the interests and needs of teachers: most PD programs available to teachers are too vague with respect to the goals and procedures, and individual teacher interests and needs must be taken into account during the planning of PD programs (Butler, 1992; Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2001; Metropolitan Life/Harris Interactive, 2003).

Grant and Murray (1999) said:

Commercial curriculum developers are also guilty of promoting their products with no evidence of their effectiveness. A survey of five hundred curriculum contractors conducted by the Kentucky State Department of Education found only sixty-four contractors could produce any evidence of improvements in students’ learning. (p. 188)

Mack (2000) remarked that the failure of PD results from treating the teachers as the reason for failing schools and students. He wrote:

The language of the course descriptions illustrates this. Curriculum is designed to be “teacher proof,” and “training” programs are “delivered.” Teachers are lectured at “sit and get” in-service meetings designed around a formula or prescription. . . . There are three great ironies at play here. First, the “cure”—the continual clinical approach—inflames the disease; it makes teacher resistant to almost any innovation that comes their way, even the useful ones. . . . Second,
during the last few years the teaching profession has begun a renaissance of its own—moving toward engaging children by honoring what they bring to the room. But the top-down nature of education favors the status quo and continues to treat teachers the way we used to teach kids. This is a major barrier to retaining a vital teaching force. It’s not just low salaries that drive teachers away. It’s the way structures like traditional, one-shot training, embedded in a system resistant to change strip them of their dignity, their professionalism, and their visions. . . . Third, staff developers often feel alarmed that they are forced into advocacy in order to be heard in the clamor for teachers’ attention. As policies and directions are increasingly determined by the state and by school boards, there is a burgeoning need for staff developers who can practice and model genuine inquiry. Participative involvement is one of the few ways that administrators can develop the capabilities that schools need to implement the demands of the larger system. (p. 382)

Richardson (2003) explained that research-based practices for effective PD are avoided not just because they are expensive, require extended periods of time, too difficult for districts to determine how to support and regulate an inquiry approach, and empowering teachers to decide the goals and changes leads to unacceptable decisions, but as a result of a cultural norm, that of American individualism.

Tocqueville focused on the remarkable independence and rugged individualistic nature of the life of an American. . . . The American character strongly affects the way in which many Americans—teachers and other professionals
included—approach their work. In schools, it is abetted by the egg-crate environment and the practice of “closing the classroom door.” Many classroom teachers would subscribe to the following view: “This is my space, and I am responsible for it. It is mine. It reflects me. I am the teacher here. This classroom is unique and is therefore unlike any other classroom because of my uniqueness and my particular group of students.” . . . It makes the development of a collective sense difficult for professionals and others even to contemplate. As teachers, the individualistic culture affects the way we think about change, how we seek help for the improvement of practice, whom we talk with about what we do in our classrooms. In fact, this way of being makes it very difficult to import great ideas from Japan or other nations where the ways of life are quite different. (p. 145)

**Research-Based Best Practices for Effective PD**

The cohort initiative was based on the ideal that efficient and sustaining PD occurs in the workplace in learning communities (DuFour, 2002b) where there is relevancy to each other (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990) and there is sharing of different meanings for the new ideas and innovations (Falk, 2001; Fosnot, 2001; Giroux, 1998; Grant & Murray, 1999; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Guskey, 2000; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hammel, 2007; Lieberman, 1995; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Little, 1992, 1993; Marzano et al., 2001; Meier, 1992; Reeves, 2006; Richardson, 2003).

Characteristics for effective PD include:
- Being schoolwide with targeted teacher networks or study groups;
- Be a combination of content with how to teach it;
- Be active learning by the teachers;
- Be long-term with follow-up;
- Providing opportunities for observing others, being observed, and peer coaching;
- Taking risks;
- Encourages collaboration and collegiality;
- Fosters agreement among participants on goals and visions;
- Be research-based including active research;
- Having a supportive administration;
- Having adequate funding for materials, outside speakers, substitute teachers;
- Developing buy-in among participants;
- Acknowledging participants’ existing beliefs and practices;
- Promoting cultural understandings, equality, and equity and their affects on student learning;
- Incorporating the principles of adult learning and the change process;
- Integrating individual goals with school and district goals;
- Is placed within the philosophy and organizational structure of the school and district;
- Making use of an outside facilitator/staff developer; and
- Be connected to other areas of school change.
Lieberman and Miller (2000) gave the following five basic premises for effective PD that previous research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1997; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993) has shown are rare or nonexistent in current PD:

1. Teachers’ prior beliefs and experiences affect what they learn.
2. Learning to teach to the new standards is hard and takes time.
3. Content knowledge is critical to learning how to teach subject matter so that students understand it.
4. Knowledge of children, their ideas, and their ways of thinking is crucial to teaching for understanding.
5. Opportunities for analysis and reflection are central to learning to teach.

The Michigan State Board of Education developed three categories of standards for PD which, when structured and implemented within ongoing school improvement planning and collaboration, improves and sustains the adult learner capacity:

1. Standards for context, the organization or culture in which new learning will be instituted are:
   a. Understand and apply the elements of a market driven education system;
   b. Understand and apply systemic change principles and anticipate change as a dynamic process;
   c. Contribute to the plan and design of their own intellectually rigorous PD;
   d. Increase personal level of involvement in implementing a continuously improving learning community; and
e. Use data on student academic achievement as the foundation for selecting professional growth alternatives.

2. Standards for content, the skills and knowledge, both pedagogical and disciplinary, that effective educators need to possess or acquire thorough participation in PD activities are:
   a. Demonstrate high learning expectations for all students.
   b. Demonstrate continuous improvement as a facilitator of student learning.
   c. Demonstrate continuous progress in developing current content knowledge and its application and the skill-based and instructional strategies required to facilitate effective learning for all students.
   d. Demonstrate knowledge and use of cross-disciplinary instruction and cross-disciplinary teams to facilitate student learning.

3. Standards for process, the means for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills are:
   a. Use inquiry and reflective practice within the learning community.
   b. Identify personal and adult learning needs and styles, and select appropriate modes of participation.
   c. Implement research-based leadership strategies to support and sustain ongoing developmental activities.
   d. Integrate technologies as tools to assist with the curriculum development, instructional management and assessment practices.
e. Invest time in an ongoing process of collegial dialogue, collaborative learning, and exploration of new and/or proven instructional strategies.

**PD Models**

**Coaching and Mentoring**

*Coaching* and *mentoring* are terms that often are used interchangeably; however, there are differences between the two. One difference is that, in practice, coaching, although it can last for extended periods, is temporary and often is an inherent part of the role and responsibilities of a mentor whose job is long-term (Jones, 2001; Scandura & Williams, 2001). A subtle yet important difference between coaching and mentoring, described by MacLennan (1995), is that mentoring is a relationship with someone to learn from, whereas coaching is a relationship with someone to learn with. MacLennan also pointed out that someone can unknowingly be a mentor but no one can unknowingly be a coach (Crawford, Roberts, & Hickman, 2010).

Cognitive coaching rather than peer, executive, or team coaching is, according to Crawford, Roberts, and Hickman (2010), the preferred approach to PD. Garmston & Wellman (1992) defined cognitive coaching as

a commitment to the development of the mind of the teacher as a central focus of a school's staff development program, and the promotion of a new school culture in which collegiality, risk taking, honest communication, and experimentation are continuing expressions of school renewal. (p. 175)

They cite the description of McLymont and da Costa (1998) as being a non-judgmental process that is based on a pre-conference (plan), observation (practice), post-conference
(reflect) format. The disadvantage of coaching for PD is that “According to many educators (Cochran & DeChesere, 1995; Swafford, 1998; Veenman et al, 2001), coaching needs follow-up support or some other form of PD to sustain initial results.” (p. 175) Carter (2000) noted that coaching is a temporary approach to PD and is not intended to be a lifelong commitment.

**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

The diversity of American students and increasing technological advancements are changing PD into professional learning, where teachers are self-developing and are change agents.

Lieberman and Mace (2008) wrote:

Teachers are on the front lines of a changing society. Teaching as telling is no longer appropriate for a knowledge society that needs students who are prepared in problem solving, adaptability, critical thinking, and digital literacies, just to name a few. These changing stakes are accompanied by changing demographics. Public schools now serve increasingly diverse student populations and schools and their teachers are being challenged to respond. Teachers work in isolation and only rarely have a chance to observe their colleagues or talk about their teaching work. Although many agreed on the purposes of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), its implementation has fallen short of expectations by reducing accomplished teachers’ opportunities to draw on the wisdom of their experiences to serve their students. Student learning needs improvement; teacher
knowledge seems to be one answer (Bundy, 1980; Easton, 2008; Sergiovanni, 1994). (p. 226)

Senge (1990) coined them “learning teams,” where members learned with and from each other, creating a synergy and alignment of effort. Learning communities are defined or characterized as:

- Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, 1998).

- A culture of learning, in which everyone is involved in a collective effort of understanding (Bielaczye & Collins, 1983).

- Multigenerational groups of individuals whose identities are defined by the roles they play and the relationships they share in that group. It is cohesive because of a shared construction of a culture built upon behavioral norms, routines, rules, and a shared purpose (Riel & Polin, 2001).

- Are diverse, and that diversity is prized, not viewed as a problem . . . has a sense of shared purpose . . . [and is] marked by an emphasis on cooperation and collaboration rather than competition. People see their stake in others, and arrangements are created that encourage young people to improve the life of the community by helping others (Reeves, 2006, p. 112).

- A group working together to achieve a goal, assess their progress, make corrections, and hold themselves accountable for achieving their common goal (McLaughlin, & Talbert, 2010).
• Places where teachers discuss and debate and test issues in the context of classroom life. In intellectual communities, teachers do not talk about being professionals; they experience it (Barab, & Duffy, 1998).

• Collections of individuals tightly bound together by natural will and to a set of shared ideas and ideals transforming them from a collection of “Is” into meaningful relationships of “we” (Sergiovanni, 1994).

Easton (2008) wrote:

The most beneficial learning activities are those that are embedded in the work that educators do. Such professional learning activities might include action research, assessment design, book studies, critical friends groups, lesson study, and many more. Other strategies help educators access student voices, use case discussions, do classroom walkthroughs, analyze data, mentor, coach, prepare portfolios, and much more. (p. 756)

Tinzmann et al. (1990) recognized the following benefits for students and communities:

• Community educators recognize the need for learning across the whole life span and see all members as potential, self-directed learners.

• The school seeks not only to connect students and parents to community resources, but also to give them power over their own lives.

• Schools and communities work together to enhance the education of all citizens, both those “inside” and “outside” the school walls.

• Students see links between school and the rest of their lives.
• Parents enjoy participatory relationships both with the school and the community.

• The community more effectively provides services to the school serving as a learning environment for its students, and all community stakeholders can enhance their own educational growth.

Professional learning is differentiated from development, according to DuFour and Eaker (1998), by:

• Everyone in the building, including students, knows and understands mission, vision, and values of the school.

• Inquiry is constant and unceasingly.

• Shared learning is the norm.

• Change results from learning by all personnel

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) explained three significantly different aspects regarding teacher learning that promote PD:

1. “knowledge-for-practice,” where university-based researchers generate the formal knowledge and theory for teachers to use;

2. “knowledge-in-practice,” where teachers learn by inquiry, learning, and classroom interactions; and

3. “knowledge-of-practice” or “inquiry as stance,” where personnel utilize action research in their own classrooms and schools, the knowledge and theories of colleagues to theorize and construct their work and connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues.
To capture the ways we stand, the ways we see, and the lenses we see through as educators . . . an inquiry stance provides a kind of grounding within the changing cultures of school reform and competing political agendas. . . . Teaching and thus PD are centrally about forming and re-forming frameworks for understanding practice: how students and their teachers construct the curriculum, co-mingling their experiences, their cultural and linguistic resources, and their interpretive frameworks; how teachers’ actions are infused with complex and multilayered understandings of learners, culture, class, gender, literacies, social issues, institutions, histories, communities, materials, texts, and curricula; and how teachers work together to develop and alter their questions and interpretive frameworks, informed not only by thoughtful consideration of the immediate situation and the particular students they teach and have taught, but also by the multiple contexts within which they work.

From the perspective of inquiry as stance, PD is associated more with uncertainty than certainty, more with posing problems and dilemmas than with solving them, and more with the recognition that inquiry both stems from and generates questions . . . the kind of consequences that lead to more democratic schooling and to the formation of a more just society. (pp. 50-56)

Community of Learners/Practice contrasts PD is three aspects according to McLaughlin and Zarrow (2001): it is a social process generating knowledge and understanding from different individuals as opposed to individuals, it advises how
policy can foster coherent links between external sources and internal capacity, and it activates teachers’ inquiry into classroom practices and refashions external knowledge into resources particular to the particular school context.

We found instances where “problems” were transformed from “social facts” to subjects for inquiry and problem solving. This transformation was most apparent in high school faculty, where explanations for poor student performance moved from those based on beliefs about students’ attitudes, backgrounds, or capacities to the “fit” between what their students needed to learn and achieve and what was provided them. Faculty wrestling with rethinking student performance in their school find themselves looking at student data in new ways. (Richardson, 2003, p. 93)

Senge et al. (2000) stated that reflective questioning is particularly important to teaching because it is a moral undertaking and teachers need to think about the methods by which they teach, as well as the observed and hidden consequences of it.

When teachers get into the habit of collecting and reflecting on evidence about their students, they become more able to recognize and appreciate the different ways students learn. These understandings enhance teachers’ abilities to provide effective instruction. . . . In addition to safeguarding against bias, observation and documentation of students and their work helps to understand students in the context of their culture and to appreciate student strengths that might otherwise go unnoticed. This recognition subsequently leads to providing
better supports for student learning and to making more informed decisions that affect them and their futures. (Falk, 2001, p. 121)

Dewey (1916) defined reflection as a disciplined way of thinking that involves the “reconstruction and reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one’s] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (p. 170). Higgins (1999) explained its function is to shifting how teachers frame their experience by making meaning in the relationships and interrelationships between the element’s experiences.

Inquiry extends beyond the constructivist theory of learning, according to Richardson (2003), in that it also demands teachers to engage in systemic inquiry regarding student learning and their teaching. Joyce, Wolf and Calhoun (1993) agreed:

Collective inquiry concerning the effects of our actions on students—learning with and from each other and gaining in knowledge, technical skills, and interpersonal relations—sustains school renewal. In this healthier environment, promising changes can be made as an ordinary part of organizational life, rather than being thrust into uncongenial territory. (p. 5)

Senge (1990, 2000) detailed five “personal” disciplines unique to PLCs:

- Systems thinking, which is viewing the collective and interactive elements of an organization including the inter-relationships, complex dynamics, and long-term implications, and unintended consequences of our actions.

According to Joyner (2000), the focus is on devising mechanisms and
processes promoting collaborative relationships and structures for change and not on particular practices.

- Personal mastery, which is personal growth and learning. Although individual learning does not guarantee it, organizations can learn only through individuals who learn. High-functioning learning organizations have three critical practices: personal visions, creative tensions between our vision and reality, and a quest for truth or willingness to uncover ways we limit and deceive ourselves, and a willingness to challenge the way things are characterize those with a high degree of mastery.

- Mental models, which is focused around developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions—your own and those of others around you and developing the ability to talk safely and productively about dangerous and discomforting subjects.

- Shared vision, which is developing images of the future along with the values that will take them there and the goals to be achieved. “A school cannot function as a PLC until its staff has grappled with the questions that provide direction both for the school as an organization and the individuals within it” (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p. 3). In developing a shared vision and not just a vision statement, current concerns and problems must be voiced, hopes and desires for the future must be shared in a very generative process to develop a sense of trust and hope that will build a
momentum for the steps to come, and action must be taken that is reflective of the individuals working together.

Glickman (1993) used the term *collective autonomy* to refer to the staff’s commitment to develop and pursue a shared vision and the means employed by the members of the school community to make this vision reality.

- Team learning, which is where collaborative teams work interdependently to achieve common goals without losing individualism.

Fullan’s four core capacities for effective change agents that parallel Senge’s five disciplines for learning organizations are:

1. Personal Vision – sense of moral purpose
2. Inquiry – continuous learning
3. Mastery – skill-based ability to implement and live the change
4. Collaboration – to function as part of a learning community.

While superintendents are often facile users of the rhetoric of teacher empowerment and talk effusively about the importance of putting teachers in charge of their work, they also understand that actually giving teachers power may disrupt and challenge what Elmore (1992) called the regularities of schooling, when superintendents and principals use their authority to impose control over teachers’ professional actions this way, teachers feel like technicians rather than like professional thinkers. Teachers then, in turn, use *their* authority to impose control over students making them into technicians rather than thoughtful readers. As a result, neither
teachers nor students are free to be mindful; both teachers and students feel “controlled”

. . . it’s also the tone and atmosphere of a school and what it says regarding what
education is all about. (Duffy, 1994, p. 19)

Levine (2010), in his examination of the predominant forms of communities,
noted:

An impressive array of scholars and reformers have called for teachers to
overcome their historic isolation through the development of “teacher
professional community” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993), “professional learning
communities” (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005), “inquiry communities”
(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992a), schools as “communities of learners” (Barth &
Van der Bogert, 1984), “instructional communities of practice” (Supovitz,
2002), and similar variations on the theme of “learning communities”
(McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000). Some call for teachers to
work as part of a larger community beginning in pre-service teacher education
(Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Koeppen, Huey, & Connor, 2000; Kosnick &
Beck, 2003). (pp. 109-110)

The proliferation of community-oriented reforms has led some researchers to
question their effectiveness. Grossman et al. (2001) observed that “community has
become an obligatory appendage to every educational innovation” (p. 492) and to
conclude that the word *community* “has lost its meaning” (p. 492). DuFour (2004)
similarly concluded that the concept of professional learning community is “in vogue”
(p. 6) but worries that phrase now describes “every imaginable combination of
individuals with an interest in education” (p. 6). DuFour also fears that the concept of community is “in danger of losing all meaning” (p. 6). Westheimer (1998) found the literature on teacher community “disappointingly vague” (p. 3), and warns that without richer and more careful conceptualization, “the rhetoric of community is rendered ubiquitous and shallow” (pp. 109, 148)

Servage (2008) is critical of the PLCs as being transformative when she writes, While improved pedagogical skills doubtless have positive impact, an exclusive focus on these skills does not promote the critical reflection required to understand PLCs—and schools—as complex social and political entities. And, I believe that transformation can occur only if the school is able collectively to imagine other possibilities for itself. (p. 63)

Duffy (1994) contended that Most of the problems [of intellectual communities] are rooted in values . . . [they] cannot work unless professors and school administrators value teachers as equal participants. Rather . . . than yearning for a predictable set of behaviors, unless researchers value teachers’ personal, practical knowledge just as much as they value academic knowledge; and unless administrators and teacher educators value teacher judgment and the practitioner’s process of combining thought and action in ways which may seem messy to those not actually working the classroom situation. (p. 18)

Most teacher collaboration is contrived, being administratively mandated with a specific outcome. “True collaborative cultures,” according to Grant and Murray (1999),
“emerge from and are primarily sustained by teachers themselves” (Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Lewis, A. C.; Little, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). (p. 187)

Teachers need time for thoughtful planning and assessment, much of which must be done in solitude. Individualism and isolation, according to Grant and Murray (1999), allows teachers to separate their own work from the organization and from the work of other teachers, is an effective response to one new reform or another, and in some instances professional survival. Lieberman and Miller (2000) cited Anderson (1996):

The most important teacher learning takes place in collaborative work with other teachers—and time for such collaboration is scarce indeed. More experienced teachers have been indoctrinated into practices of traditional instruction and find using new instructional approaches, such as constructivism, difficult. (p. 101)

Professional Development Schools (PDSs)

The Commission on Teacher Education of the American Council on Education (Prall & Cushman, 1944) recommended the involvement of teacher education institutions in the work of school in-service programs, that they develop “cordial working relations.” This was followed by Rogers (1945) stating, “Wide awake schools of education are finding work to do far beyond the bounds of college campuses. Their cooperation with school staffs in studying school needs and supplying consultants is a substantial contribution to in-service education” (p. 19).

Goodlad (1991a) suggested that teacher education suffered from a lack of prestige, a lack of program coherence, a separation of theory and practice, and was
subjected to regulated conformity. Finding that teacher education was not a high priority of their respective institutions, university professors felt their teaching was undone by the student teachers’ school-based experiences, they looked to school-university partnerships as a key to both school renewal and the preparation of those who are involved in schooling.

Based on the research of Darling-Hammond (1997b), that the “effects of teacher expertise are so strong—and variations in preparation so great—that they account for most achievement differentials among white and minority students” and that “most teachers entering the profession are inadequately prepared with few opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills.” She recommended that PD be embedded in the daily work of teachers through joint planning, peer coaching, study groups, and research. Levine (2006), citing the Holmes Group, recommended transforming teacher education into PDSs focused on classroom practice, purporting them “to be the strongest bridge between teacher education and classroom outcomes, academics and clinical education, theory and practice and schools and colleges” (p. 105).

In some schools, teachers and university professors have collaborated to created PD schools, providing a forum where teachers and student teachers can read research and discuss how it can be used in their teaching. PD less often takes place in a vacuum now, and it is increasingly tied to teachers’ efforts to improve their schools. This shift is critical in a time when multiple reforms are being implemented simultaneously in schools. (Grant & Murray, 1999, p. 188)
PDSs are a movement to improve the education of preservice and in-service teachers through educational collaborative partnerships (Holmes Group, 1986, 1990) using resources, power, authority, interests, and people from separate organizations to create a new organizational entity for achieving common goals. They are also called clinical schools (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986) or professional-practice schools (Levine, 1988). The common goal is to improve the education of teachers by forming centers of collaboration between higher education and public schools that serve as models for inquiry and best practice. Four goals of PDSs by the Holmes Group (1990) are:

1. Encourage research-related efforts. Frankes et al. (1998) provide numerous examples of teachers involved in research-related activities such as research projects, research sharing, and school improvement practice (Berry & Catoe, 1994; Jett-Simpson, Pugach, & Whipp, 1992; Snyder, 1994; Lemlech, Hertzog-Foliart, & Hackl, 1994).

2. Teacher as decision-maker. A movement toward teacher empowerment and the development of new roles and democratic structures in PDS (Francis, 1992; Whitford, 1994).

3. Teachers work collaboratively with colleagues and universities as teacher educators and full partners in planning, teaching, and supervision.

4. Teacher as political activist. To bring greater social justice and equality to schools. Frankes et al. (1998) cited there is little published evidence of the
achievement of this goal beyond the creation of a number of PDSs in urban areas, the purpose of their creation.

Mager (1999) delineated several important features of a PDS:

Obviously, it is guided by principles, not prescriptions. Learning is at the heart of the enterprise. It is to serve all learners—children, youth, and adults—as members of the learning community. It is complex organizationally, bringing together individuals with different roles and representing different institutions. It is dynamic, changing as it is created. And, indeed, it is to be created, not “borrowed whole.” The organization that emerges from the efforts of the educators and teacher educators and other stakeholders is to be the “new institution” called for in the final principle. (p. 139)

School–University Partnerships

There is a great body of literature on school–university partnerships that explains their mutual benefits.

Educators across Pre K-12 spectrum seem to realize that (a) schools benefit from the resources, perspectives, and know-how of universities; (b) universities need partner schools to prepare teachers well; and (c) social—especially urban—problems are so seemingly intractable that all public institutions have the responsibility to work together to effect positive social change. Goodlad (1990) captures the sense of its imperative well in his phrase “simultaneous renewal.” (Valli, 1999, p. 2)
Burton and Greher (2007) cited the findings of several researchers with respect to the benefits of collaboration for university professors:

In higher education, faculty who participate in PDS work develop stronger connections between real world teaching contexts and methods courses (Trubowitz & Longo, 1997). In their work on faculty involvement in PDSs, Beck and Kosnick (2002) learned that through purposeful involvement with teaching in a PDS, school–university partnerships are strengthened and campus programs are enhanced. As faculty participates in the PDS they gain familiarity of the nature of schooling to better understand the challenges preservice and in-service teachers face. In addition, university faculty improve their approach to the practicum and their teaching practice as the collaboration engenders more awareness of the educational process, particularly as difficulties and successes in schooling are encountered (Beck & Kosnick, 2002; Teitel, 1997; Trubowitz & Longo, 1997). (p. 18)

Lieberman and Miller (2000) explained their characteristics of collaboration:

1. Authentic problems of practice. Research and reform ideas often catapult teachers to invent strategies that fit their classrooms, schools, and districts. Teachers’ gain knowledge through inquiry into their own practice providing opportunities for them “to make their assumptions, intuitions, and prejudices public and accessible for reflection and change” (p. 60).
2. Structures and mechanisms for teacher learner are collaborative. A variety of roles for teachers are provided, including participant, learner, leader, liaison, developer, teacher, researcher, and scholar.

3. Professional communities (school–university partnerships, networks, and coalitions) are organized around such concerns as subject matter, school reform, pedagogy, and standards.

4. These learning communities are “evolutionary and flexible, rather than permanent and rigid” internally and externally to schooling (p. 60).

5. Have a tightly held structure with respect to values but loosely held structure with respect to the work.

6. Find ways to provide time for sharing, evaluation, ideas, studying, action research, change and improvement.

7. Involve teachers, administrators, and university educators as equals in the decision-making process.

Action research (PR & D) has assisted teacher efficacy through collaborations between teacher-researcher and university by targeting areas needing change, collecting data, analysis, and dissemination of the results. PR & D is a process characterized as being educationally realistic, collegial, extensive, intensive, and comprehensive. It occurs in settings of authentic problems and ensures that the research processes, as well as the findings, are educationally realistic and useful. The collegial nature of PR & D nurtures the process of integrating theory, research, and practice.
Master Teacher Programs

Crawford et al. (2010) entered into a school–university partnership recognizing the need for longer-term engagement in PD and an authentic partnership model where the relationship would consist of frequent and ongoing opportunities. The initiation began with the district to provide PD to a cadre of teachers over a 3-year span with one of the final goals being the development of teacher leaders to effect individual and systemic change throughout the district. Their conceptual framework relied on reflective practice (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987) of classroom experiences through which to observe and explore teachers as learners. They commented:

Rather than behaving purely according to impulse, tradition, or authority, teachers can be reflective—they can be deliberate in their actions with open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and intellectual responsibility. Sharing these definitions with teachers gives them license to ponder. Reflective practice gives teachers an opportunity to ask thoughtful questions about best practice, to reflect on core values, and to make concrete plans for improving instruction within their own classroom contexts. In this way, the Master Teacher Program builds independence and initiative by supporting teachers as they begin their reflective journeys, and by nurturing confidence so that teachers know they can continue to be a reflective practitioner separate from the program.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The Methodology chapter is divided into an overview of the research in section 1, the instrumentation in section 2, the methods of collecting the data in section 3, analysis of data in section 4, and how the study was organized in section 5.

Research Design and Overview

A retrospective intrinsic case study was conducted because the cohort continued over a period of 2 years beginning in the fall of 1999. The research focused on the criteria, logistics, challenges, supports, and barriers and how they were met or overcome in implementing a field-based cohort between Oak Park Schools and the College of Education at Western Michigan University. It also examined the perceptions of some teachers involved in that program and their reflections on how it impacted them. A case study explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (Stake, 1995, cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 15)

By concentrating on a single phenomenon, individual, community, or institution . . . the researcher is able to capture various nuances, patterns, and more latent elements that other research approaches might overlook. The case study method tends to focus on holistic description and explanation. (Berg,
2004, p. 251  Purposive sampling (judgmental sampling) was utilized to collect data from the administrator/instructors as the researcher was interested in only authentic information regarding the specific cohort that can be extrapolated to other educational institutions. The interviewees included Drs. Bailey and Marx from Oak Park Schools, and Drs. Rapley and Crowell from Western Michigan University. Convenience sampling was used for responses from the six teacher participants, whereby they were located because they were still teaching in the district and willing to be interviewed.

**Instrumentation**

The open-ended questions given the interviewees were chosen to document the research questions of what were the desired outcome or objectives, the logistics, barriers, and supports of implementing a field-based cohort by the district and university and recommendations for further models. Delivery of the research questions and responses by the interviewees was through e-mail, phone conversations or personal contact.

*Research Question 1:* From the perspective of the administrators involved what were major challenges and barriers of the district and university in developing a site-specified cohort Master’s degree program and how were they overcome for receiving approval?

*Administrator Interview Question 1.0:* What major challenges and/or barriers of the district/university had to be met or overcome for receiving approval for the cohort initiative?
Research Question 2: From the perspective of the administrators involved, what conditions were established by the district and university at the beginning of the initiative, how were these met, and what impacts did they have on program implementation and quality?

Administrator Interview Question 2.1: What conditions or criteria were established by the district/university for implementing the cohort? These may include, but are not limited to, class meetings, course requirements, and syllabi content, using action research and authentic district data, as examples.

Administrator Interview Question 2.2: How were the conditions and/or criteria mentioned in Interview Question 2.1 met?

Administrator Interview Question 2.3: How did the conditions you cited in Interview Question 2.1 impact program implementation or quality?

Research Question 3: What external and internal challenges and/or barriers were presented to the district, university, and instructional leaders when determining the content, pedagogy, and assessments of the participants in the initiative, and how were they overcome?

Administrator Interview Question 3.1: What external challenges were presented to the district/university when determining the content, pedagogy, and assessments of the teacher-candidates of the initiative?

Administrator Interview Question 3.2: How were the external challenges and/or barriers cited in your response to Interview Question 3.1 met?
Administrator Interview Question 3.3: What internal challenges and/or barriers were presented to the district/university when determining the content, pedagogy, and assessments of the teacher-candidates of the initiative?

Administrator Interview Question 3.4: How were the internal challenges and/or barriers that you cited in Interview Question 3.3 met?

Administrator Interview Question 3.5: What external/internal pressures did you perceive by the district/university during the initiative?

Administrator Interview Question 3.6: How did you relieve the pressures described in Interview Question 35?

Research Question 4: Based on this cohort initiative, what modifications do the program administrators suggest for future field-based district/university partnerships?

Administrator Interview Question 4.1: What recommendations, modifications, and suggestions do you offer for future field-based district/university cohorts?

Research Question 5: From the perspective of teachers involved in the cohort program, how did the overall program impact their work as teachers, both immediately after the program and over a decade later?

Teacher-Participant Interview Question 5.1: Reflecting on the cohort program you were involved in from 1999 to 2001, what impact, if any, did it have on you as a teacher immediately after the program was
completed? How did it change your practices, beliefs, and efficacy of your instruction and its delivery, or other aspects of your professional career?

*Teacher-Participant Interview Question 5.2:* Reflecting on the cohort program you were involved in from 1999 to 2001, what impact, if any, does this program still have on you, if any, over a decade later? How did it help change your practices, beliefs, and efficacy of your instruction and its delivery, or other aspects of your professional career?

These research questions were field-tested by non-participant teachers at the Oak Park Freshman Institute in June 2012. The testers were not able to respond to the questions but indicated clarity, reflective thought, and the opportunity for the future respondents to be as inclusive or exclusive as they desired. No changes were deemed necessary after spending approximately a half-hour individually with the four testers during their lunch periods.

**Data Collection Methods**

This interactive approach and unstructured interviewing style with open-ended questions gave the respondents opportunities to be reflective and as inclusive or exclusive as desired. Triangulation of the data was used to validate and show reliability of the responses, both between individual respondents and, when necessary, between different respondents. Validation as to the reliability of my interpretation of respondents’ answers was accomplished by re-questioning the respondent for elaboration via email.
Data Analyses

The individual responses were aggregated by research questions by the researcher. Verification of some of the responses by the instructors will be triangulated with published papers they wrote during and shortly after the cohort. Because this is a qualitative study, the commonalities and differences will be noted in the conclusion.

Organization of the Study

Research questions were designed to collect data regarding the logistics of the problems and solutions in creating and implementing a field-based cohort between Oak Park Schools and Western Michigan University as a form of professional development to enhance teacher efficacy and increase student achievement. The review of literature includes the unique challenges of urban schools, the disconnect between theory and practice in the training of teachers, the role of professional development and its inadequacies that were the justification for the school–university partnership. Although the data collected applied to this cohort specifically, it serves as an approach for future school–university partnerships.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to describe the processes of creating and implementing a field-based cohort between the Oak Park Schools and Western Michigan University, and how it impacted the participants both short and long term. The mission and delivery of this program was so unique, and only a few articles published by the administrators/instructors involved had occurred. From my study, data collected provides a narrative of the logistics and benefits of the program from origination to termination. Interviews were conducted through personal contact, phone conversations, and e-mail, using open-ended questions provided by the researcher during fall 2013, and early winter of 2014. Permission to use the actual names of the administrators/instructors had been granted, but a decision was made to use pseudonyms for both the administrators/instructors and teacher participants.

This chapter provides a summary of the interviewees and their reflections.

Description of Study Participants and their Reflections

Dr. B

Dr. B is an African-American male who retired as Superintendent of the Oak Park Schools six years ago and currently tutors at-risk elementary students within the district. It was his vision, “to be the first successful urban school district,” and he conceived of a district-university partnership to achieve it. Specifically, the overall objective of the field-based program was the reculturation of the district by educating
district teachers on how to be effective teachers of urban students for higher student achievement and success. He noted:

There was an obvious need to retrain teachers that were experiencing a great deal of difficulty educating minority youngsters in the school district. The Oak Park Schools district had changed from a predominantly white school district to a predominantly black school district. Teachers that had been successful teaching white students were not as successful teaching black students. The high school experienced massive failures in language arts, sciences, and math. The Porter Project, a previous professional development attempt by the district to achieve greater student success was not effective. Dr. B’s determination and knowledge of the emerging professional learning communities research and other district-university partnership models led him to create a cohort that was a combination of the two, and which would be field-based, non-traditional and meet district needs. He noted:

It was understood that no program like this existed in the country. That is, no university was working with an urban school district with the intent of providing a doctorate or master’s degree at no cost to the participants. The template just didn’t exist. The challenge was finding a university and individuals within that university who understood the unique challenges of developing an educational program for teachers teaching in a minority school district. For Dr. B, the major barrier in developing the program, “was the many fractured interests. Each of the members of the group involved in the program had their own
particular interests and focus. . . . I attempted to orchestrate a program that would try to bring together these members of the group involved in the program from self-interests with individual goal perspective to that of developing a successful minority school district.” He also noted:

The idea of advanced degree programs mostly conducted off-campus presented a number of challenges for all parties. Convincing a Board of Education that it was to their best interests to provide a free education for its staff was a tremendous challenge. Convincing all stakeholders that we’re all on the same side working toward the same goal proved to be a daunting task.

He adds, “It should have been understood that this program was breaking new ground. WE made the assumption that everybody would understand how important this program was, and get on board. This was a major miscalculation.” In retrospect, he would have dedicated more time and energy in bringing together the Board of Education and educational administration from the district and university, for clarification of desired outcomes and research indicating the value of the cohort to student achievement. He shared:

The initial purpose of the program was to bring together teachers from the same building working together in a common group with a common goal. It was to examine effective practices in minority schools and to try to duplicate these practices adjusting for Oak Park’s differences.

In actuality, the cohort consisted of one teacher respectively from the middle and high schools, along with 30 elementary teachers from different buildings and grade
levels. Being a district based program, the teacher led action research drove and directed the areas of effective practice which was to be learned and incorporated immediately in their classrooms. Dr. B voiced that:

Bringing together all teachers from all levels proved to be one of the strongest components of the program. . . . There seemed to be an overall energy to make change. Bringing teachers together sharing their successes and failures became a catalyst for a camaraderie that had not been seen in the district for some years. Elementary teachers seem to spearhead the ‘we need to make changes and not blame the students’ themes.

Mentioning it several times during the interview, he noted:

More than ten years after the program, elementary teachers still have a very strong cohort group in their buildings. Based on their training, they take the educational initiative to help and train new teachers, are more ready and more accepting of training and new ideas.

Overall, Dr. B pinpoints that there were a number of successes both in the district, working with the university and the Board of Education.

Having the opportunity to meet with the President of the college and the Dean of the Education school showed me the many possibilities of an urban school working with a university. I was very impressed with the caliber of educators at Western Michigan University and their interest in urban schools.

In retrospect, Dr. B voiced the need for more effective and sustainable modes of communication between all stakeholders of a district and university if they hoped to this
type of program. He implores that, “more time has to be devoted to nurturing and cultivating these different but common goal groups. For anyone wanting to maximize strategies that will transform urban education collaborative into actions, this cooperation is essential.” In retrospect, Dr. B acknowledges that, “since no one has all the answers for improving urban education, then we must agree on a means to bring together as many strategies and people to help our failing districts.” To achieve this, he suggests a high level of diplomacy and sincerity between individuals, districts and universities. He admits,

All too often we play to win, not to change things. I spent too much time trying to win and not enough time orchestrating change. You must be aware of the contextual and demographic variables and be able to work within them.

Dr. B remarks that many district problems were resolved within the cohort group. “The cohort group had an amazing ability to bring about changes in the district. The structure of the program had, at each school, a group of teachers working on the same goals and objectives that of improving schools.” In retrospect, he admits that more individuals should have been included as participants, citing board members and para-pros specifically, “that would have meant that at some point in time, all of the educational stakeholders would have been together. What a missed opportunity.”

**Dr. R**

Dr. R is a Caucasian male who is retired from Western Michigan University where he had served as the Dean of Education and of the Continuing Education Unit responsible for all off-campus sites. His position, he remarked, was fortuitous as he had
the authority for approving new programs and could provide the qualified faculty. The partnership was included in the Continuing Education Department that he had just revised, making it independent of the University. All program costs were paid through the tuition money; Western Michigan University did profit financially from the program.

Dr. R readily embraced the program, interested in discovering conditions critical for student learning. Professionally, he was interested in how university teaching changed teachers. His department was participating in the Reading Recovery Program, a joint project between Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo schools. Reading Recovery is a literacy intervention for first grade students at risk of not becoming successful students that has been studied and proven to be very successful. In Reading Recovery, Western Michigan University placed teacher-leader interns in urban schools. His mantra coincides with Dr. B’s, “how do we transform school district’s to be successful for all kids.” One intention of his in his role as Dean,

Was the renewal of university staff by placing them into schools to find out what was going on, to determine how do kids learn and we teach so kids learn. . . .

Most teachers believe that if we teach, kids learn; which is not congruent. You teach only if kids learn. Lectures don’t make it!

It was agreed between himself, and the others working on the program,

That the three “Rs” of learning would occur: the rigor would be the same as campus courses, just packaged differently; the relevance, that whatever was done during the courses would be carried on throughout the teacher’s
classrooms; and relationships between instructors and teachers would be positive although would take time to develop and be different than with other programs.

Dr. R recognized,

To create a learning organization at both Western Michigan University and Oak Park Schools there would have to be a transition from cohort to collaboration where the district had equal footing in delivery of instruction. Due to the uniqueness and newness of the cohort, and that the “critical mass was occurring at Oak Park Schools, not at Western Michigan University” all instruction and learning was to be based on the needs of the district and the coursework planned and delivered as it went along using action research to drive it.

One of the major mistakes noted by Dr. R was that no one documented the early events of the program. In retrospect he declares the success of the cohort as “extraordinary, evidenced by the changes in the classrooms of the teacher participants and district, assessments and evaluations of coursework, and the desire by over one-hundred and fifteen district teachers enrolling in a second cohort.” Disappointing to him was, “being field-based and spontaneous, the learning levels obtained during the program and its organization were not easily shared at the university. It was however, great at the teacher and district level.” He regrets, “structurally no plans were made by Oak Park Schools on how to keep the purpose.”

Dr. M
Dr. M is a Caucasian male who retired from Oak Park Schools where he had been Assistant Superintendent and the co-initiator and co-instructor for the cohort. He is currently a professor of educational leadership at Eastern Michigan University. Dr. M was integral throughout all phases of the cohort including, but not limited to, the selection of the university provider, gathering and disseminating district data relevant to assessing the needs that drove the instruction, and co-instructor. According to Dr. M, “Western Michigan University was chosen after searching from several others through networks from previous relationships because Dr. R welcomed the program and was accepting of the district criteria.”

It was the lack of efficacy and reception of the Porter Project that Dr. B wanted more than a professional development program to change the culture of the district. Our thoughts were that an advanced degree would equate to incentive that would equate to reculturation.

He credits Dr. B, “with the insistence on a field-based, non-traditional cohort with the district being in control of the practical intervention.” He described the professional development/degree program as,

A co-construct in design - that the program would be a master’s degree, specific to the needs of Oak Park Schools, but within the structure of the university requirements. The vision was to create a successful urban school district with practical use by the teachers in their classrooms. The focus was on presenting professional development with the relevance and rigor of traditional university courses.
Action research by the teachers “was utilized to operationalize how to improve.”

One of the early concerns cited Dr. M,

Regarded the use of district data by the Board of Education. It was resolved by clarifying to the members how the information would be used to enhance student achievement. There was never a problem with collecting and analyzing student data though, as the Porter Project utilized student profiles. . . Regardless of the data, at the end you have a problem and don’t know what to do with it.

The coursework, Dr. M conceded,

Was frequently co-constructed on-the-fly. I have a high tolerance for ambiguity, and once content was decided upon, both Dr. C and I could deliver it the next day. At all times, there was a good faith effort to meet university standards with the understanding that the cohort didn’t necessarily facilitate those standards.

The content, assessments, reflective papers, and projects were designed so that “scaffolding” or learning journey would occur so students could reach the next level. . . . The reciprocal, collaborative and collegial aspect between me and Ron was one of the strengths in the success of the program.

Dr. M credits the cohort with his own personal growth and the role he can play as a learner, as well as leader. Being a secondary physics teacher prior to his central administration position, the cohort “gave me the opposite of a reductionist viewpoint by exposing me to varying perspectives of elementary and secondary schooling.” He was greatly impacted by Dr. C’s expertise in constructivism and social constructivist theory. For him, “the cohort was a true learning community and being with Western Michigan
University afforded me the opportunity to publish and therefore the credentials to be where I am today.” In his current teachings at Eastern Michigan University, “I implement the constructivist scaffolding, social constructivism and journaling that I learned while participating in the cohort. I now describe teaching as being an interactive activity, not merely one of implementation.”

In retrospect, Dr. M says, “I wouldn’t conceptualize the field-based, non-traditional program as a cohort, but an authentic professional learning community. How could anyone invest that much, and guarantee the teachers will stay around, even though cheaper than traditional professional development!” He recommends,

The model presented by the Oak Park Schools-Western Michigan University partnership not be replicated. Other schools desiring renewal, reformation, or transformation need to create their own based on their own needs. Individualized partnerships between schools and universities in which degrees are conferred, should be allowed to be less standardized with the emphasis on conceptualization, creativity and be needs driven. To address those needs, design effectively and rapidly.

**Dr. C**

Dr. C is a Caucasian male who is retired from the Department of Education at Western Michigan University where he was Associate Professor of Education and Professional Development. His Ed.D. complimented the educational training of Dr. B, Dr. M, and Dr. R, by adding his expertise not only in curriculum and instruction but also psychology. He is currently co-chair of the Curriculum Committee for the
Academy of Lifelong Learning at Western Michigan University, a volunteer position and serves on the Academy’s Executive Committee and Advisory Board. He volunteered to be co-instructor in the cohort because of his interest and prior involvement in urban education. He was the University Coordinator for the Prairieview Professional Development School in the Lakeview School District for six years, an initiative supported by the New American Schools project of Michigan State University.

Dr. C recalls,

The goal of the district was two-fold: to make Oak Park Schools a successful minority school district and to reform the educational culture of the schools. Frank was clearly in favor of the university working with the school district on-site. . . . and was able to clear the path for this program. The conditions of the initiative were arrived at jointly, after intensive dialogues in the initial planning stage about how the program would meet district needs. Western Michigan University professors would develop a program meeting the needs of the school district and be delivered in Oak Park buildings. The program to be delivered would be our existing Master’s Degree but would be structured and delivered ‘differently’. . . . In the initial meetings it was determined that the focus would be on literacy while addressing the cultural component. As we met with the teachers every week, and in every class, we assessed their competency levels to determine their needs. . . . We worked hard to assure that the teachers understood that we were addressing their needs and helping them to become better teachers. To use a cliché, we were working to empower them.
Dr. C further remarked,

Designing, creating and implementing the needs-based content within the university curriculum was constructivist and required sharing of knowledge, experiences and personal strengths between all the participants. In the beginning, once the general level of teacher competency was determined through action research and projects, Dr. M and I planned the content and structure of the lessons. Eventually, through the activities and interactions, the teachers became involved in determining the substance, how it was packaged and delivered. . . . I remember [Dr. B] facilitated workshops on urban culture; the general characteristics of minority students, their learning curves and research-based concepts of how to make them successful. We even brought faculty from outside our program to share their expertise in different areas of literacy. For example two teachers from the university reading faculty were brought in and another from Ann Arbor who taught about running records for reading.

One of the challenges in meeting university requirements with content designed around district needs was,

One cohort course might extend over two or more semesters until it was delivered and the objectives met. That is, the course sequence, content, and delivery would be in line with district needs but that didn’t always correspond to the university time-frames and their computers so grades were often delayed. . . . Weekly planning was important to make sure that the content was meeting
university needs as well as district needs. . . . [and] since the content dealt with literacy, care was taken to make sure that it was research-based

Dr. C recollects,

I and the other instructors of the cohort were aware of the incessant concerns by a few of the university faculty that the program was not rigorous enough and did not meet university standards. There was, at one point, an outright challenge to [Dr. R] by another faculty member, but this challenge never resulted in any kind of action at the university level. We were confident in what we were doing and we saw continuous changes happening with the teaching staff and in the classrooms as we visited. There clearly are risks when a program deviates from an established norm and when the delivery is outside of these norms.

Dr. C mentioned two external challenges at the district,

Perhaps they are only assumed. The school Board, I believe was never on board and really did not understand the nature of the program nor the goals. The other more insidious challenge existed within the district by the principals of a couple of the schools. This is only an assumption as there was never anything more than discussion of the actions – or inaction – of principals.

Dr. C noted one internal challenge that was met with fortitude and drive.

The program was delivered on-site, a great distance from the university. And the way it was designed was collaborative, in all respects. Therefore, it was implicit in the whole program that there would be collaborative planning and delivery. This was a challenge for two reasons – one is the time variable, the
other was in creating relevant lessons. We ([Dr. M, Dr. JM, Dr. C, and Dr. R]) spent a lot of time making sure that we were on the same page theoretically and planning for delivery and carrying out the delivery. We met all challenges through collaboration, planning and delivery.

Dr. C contends,

The extension of time to cover content to meet the needs of the cohort is, a key variable in any field-based program, satisfying the university computers which do not allow for additional time for grades to be given. . . . Not recording or videotaping the oral interviews, reflections and evaluations that were periodic for feedback and assessment by the teachers, [was] ‘a big mistake!’ . . . [My] recommendations and suggestions include advanced agreement by all the players regarding the design and delivery mode of the program, an understanding that there will be glitches and bumps in the road – and sometime absolute errors – as the program progresses.

Dr. C’s final statement was,

I want it known how important teaching a cohort is. This program could only have been delivered to a cohort of teachers! It was an authentic professional learning community in which all individuals from the university and district involved, learned, reflected, collaborated, and built relationships to assess, evaluate and implement learning that would positively influence our teaching practices for greater student learning.

Teacher 1
Assigned the pseudonym “Walt,” teacher 1 is Caucasian and was a second year elementary teacher in Oak Park during the time of the cohort and is currently still teaching in the same building. He participated in the subsequent field-based cohort sponsored by the district with Western Michigan University in which either a Master’s Degree or Ph.D. in Education Leadership was offered. Walt received his Ph.D. within a year of the program’s completion. Reflecting on the impact the cohort had on him during and immediately after the program,

I not only benefitted from the salary bump associated with my advanced degree, but I benefitted professionally because of the new collegial network that was in place to offer support. . . . I have had so many conversations that begin like this: ‘I sure wish we still had the cohort in place’.

Walt credits the cohort, “with changing my teaching practices to the degree in which I can’t really extract who I am now as a teacher, from who I was then. I am more reflective now, I can say that much.” He gave one specific instance that changed his teaching with certainty, “the cohort taught me the value of building relationships with my students and with their families. That may be the single most important thing I have learned thus far in my career.”

With respect to the impacts the cohort has had on him more than ten years after completion,

It’s the building of relationships. . . . It’s the reason I still enjoy the job. I build relationships, starting on day one, and then management is pretty easy, so I’m freed up to teach while so many of my friends and colleagues are grumbling
about “these %&#$ kids. . . . [and] the focus on reflecting became a part of who I am. I would say it helped me shift from an external locus of control to an internal one.

**Teacher 2**

Assigned the pseudonym of “John,” teacher 2 is Caucasian, and was a beginning teacher at the time of the program who is currently a teacher leader in the same Oak Park building. He enrolled in the second Leadership cohort. When discussing the impacts the program had on him during and immediately after the program, he comments on the building of relationships,

I was able to become closer with people in my building and district to enhance my understanding of where the district was going. The cohort helped to open meaningful lines of communication between grade levels while building knowledge in specific areas. The cohort renewed my pursuit of student achievement and developed an understanding of becoming a lifelong learner.

Ten years after, he continues the “quest for best practices with our ever evolving population of students.” He specifically indicated, “it has resulted in giving me the focus in what needed to be done in order to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

**Teacher 3**

Assigned the pseudonym of “Rick,” teacher 3 is African American, and was an elementary probationary teacher at the time of the program. He is currently the building principal at the school in which he taught and was the Title I teacher. He is presently
writing a dissertation through his enrollment in the second cohort initiative with Western Michigan University.

The cohort definitely changed my practices, efficacy of instruction and changed the course of my career. The most significant influence the cohort had on me as a classroom teacher is it made me think deeply about my personal beliefs about education, instruction and student learning. . . . Prior to my exposure and participation in the program I never thought about the ‘bigger picture’ as it relates to being an educator. . . . My involvement in the program resulted in my focus on my pedagogy and student learning and in so doing; I have learned the value of systems thinking and reflective practices. . . . The value of making personal connections, time value, synergy and backward design. . . . Has made me a proactive educational professional.

The greatest aspect of the cohort according to Rick, “was that it promoted teacher leadership and teacher’s professional growth.”

Rick definitely credits the cohort with his current position and gives him the direction in which he leads as principal. “Because of the change of practice I made as a classroom teacher which mainly was me becoming fully immersed in reflective practices that guided me. . . .” The cohort experience, “it helped me develop and strengthen my interpersonal and communication skills.” As principal, he considers himself, “a promoter of teacher growth and dedicated to creating a shared vision of an outstanding school through collaboration with my staff, parents, and members of the community.”
Teacher 4

Assigned the pseudonym “Don,” teacher 4 is Caucasian, and was a first year middle school math and computer teacher at the time of the cohort. He was the only teacher from the middle school to partake in the cohort initiative and currently teaches in the same building. He notes:

Although the emphasis of the cohort was elementary teacher efficacy, pedagogy, and determining the needs of the urban elementary students within the Oak Park Schools, I instituted some of the strategies in my classroom . . . the emphasis on literacy was a bit difficult for me but . . . . There were some strategies that I could adjust a bit to make it work for my kids.

The greatest impact it had on him during and immediately after the cohort was,

It made me more aware of the type of child I had in my classroom and it allowed me to use different methods to help them with reading difficulties. . . . .

Realizing that some of the challenges that my kids were facing and how holes in their education process caused them to miss out on some key areas. . . . I became more sympathetic and felt I began to understand some of their difficulties and how this led to other problems leading to behavior issues. Whenever I create a lesson now, I feel that I think more about the audience that it is intended for.

Writing about the impact it had on him more than a decade later,

I can’t believe that it has been over a decade later! The majority of participants were from the elementary schools so I do not see a lot of those teachers on a regular basis. But on the first day at the welcome back breakfast, I do see a lot
of familiar faces from the cohort. I do feel that I do use of lot what I have learned on a regular basis. I feel that the program has helped me become a much better teacher for our kids. Our students have some unique qualities and challenges and the cohort helped me to better understand that and allowed me to become better qualified to reach them.

Teacher 5

Assigned the pseudonym “Barbara,” teacher 5 is African-American, and was a first year elementary teacher at the time of the program, and is currently still teaching in the same building. She is writing a dissertation as a participant in the second cohort with Western Michigan University.

The cohort provided an excellent foundation for my teaching. Much of the information we worked on supported knowledge in teacher leadership and reading, with many of the concepts and ideas being on the cutting edge of Oak Park’s curriculum. Because it was my first year teaching, it had a profound positive effect on my practice and the efficacy of not only my practice, but that of my colleagues and the district because we were working together.

Ten plus years later, Barbara writes,

My belief is that if we had continued working together, Oak Park may have become one of the successful suburban/urban districts. Those professional relationships that were developed have continued across the district even as we have become more fractured and less cohesive. . . . Interestingly, many of the ideas we worked on, such as curriculum alignment K-12, grading based on
specific standards and consistent district leadership across levels, may just be beginning to take place.

**Teacher 6**

Assigned the pseudonym “Neal,” teacher 6 is Caucasian, and had five years teaching experience when the cohort started. He was and continues as the Title I teacher in the same elementary building, and he participated in the subsequent Ph.D. cohort. One of the major impacts the cohort had on him during and immediately after, As a result, I have worked to continue and build upon those lessons presented through our meetings and activities. I also believe my professional demeanor has, as a direct result of the practical application of educational theory and research, continued to yield a higher-level of instructional engagement and self-evaluation.

Neal looks back upon the cohort as,

An approach to a Master’s Degree between Oak Park Schools and Western Michigan University specifically designed as an opportunity to implement an action research approach. Administrators from both organizations collaborated to develop a series of workshop-formatted instruction in direct relation to research identified needs and goals. . . . This process is a direct and sensible one: district needs were identified through evaluation of district and state data, instructional records, and district professional development; the university presented theories and instructional strategies, beliefs and activities to address these specific needs and goals, and; teachers directly applied this information
and experience to ongoing instructional organization, delivery and evaluation.

Measured district data informed and largely determined continuing program
development.

Neal acknowledges,

Through this experience, I gained a significantly heightened sense of
confidence, insight, and professional growth with regard to my skills as an
educator. This heightened sense of the “professional-self” occurred to me over
the course of the program as I was allowed to participate, actively and
purposefully, in my own program of study.

Neal recalls,

Collaboration was significant in the very basic structure of the cohort and how I
teach today, even at the elementary level. University staff met with district
administrators and cohort members to determine program/district goals,
instructional avenues, and action researched-based activities. The majority of
meetings were, in large part, elevated discussion groups wherein leadership
frequently traded-off between instructors and classroom teachers.

As a result of the cohort,

My teaching practices have evolved into a series of brief teacher-led
presentations followed by centers-based and small group instruction and
practice. . . . Even the manner in which I evaluated students began to be
patterned upon a series of more frequently administered formative assessments. .
. . Individual and even peer conferencing has become a significant element of
ongoing evaluations and assessments as is the use of tiered rubrics (leading from introduction levels to mastery).

As a Title I teacher, Neal is responsible in varying degrees in determining the goals, developing strategies and interventions, of at-risk students for greater achievement and for providing workshops for teachers, and parents/guardians.

The role of teacher and leader in part, is to increase the capacity of all stakeholders. I frequently find myself unconsciously reaching back to the lessons learned through the Oak Park-Western Michigan collaboration - they have become imbedded in my daily practice that completely! The frameworks of inquiry and workshop (including small group and centers-based instruction and intervention), the means of increasing levels of collaboration between teachers, teacher and students, students and parents, and parents and teachers, and the insistence of valid data collection, evaluation and application.

The learning and practice he received as a participant in the cohort has him changing education beyond his classroom, his building, and the district extending to county, state, and even national levels since the completion of the initiative.

It has allowed me to actively participate in the development of district professional development and curriculum council work. Finally, this work has allowed me to genuinely understand that my development, my evolution as a teacher, must remain a constant, completely collaborative and inclusive course of action.
CHAPTER V

EMERGENT THEMES, CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

This retrospective, qualitative case study was conducted to provide insights into the creation and implementation of a non-traditional, field-based cohort between Oak Park Schools and Western Michigan University and the impacts it had on the teacher-participants concurrently and a dozen years later. Purposeful sampling of the originators and instructors of the initiative revealed different qualities, characteristics, and minimal evidence of its efficacy. Convenience sampling of teacher-participants provided indicators in their professional growth and embryonic district transformation. The following emergent themes were identified after analysis and pattern identification from the responses collected from the four administrator/instructors and six teacher participants. These themes are not prioritized or listed in any specific order and some were stated explicitly, while others implicitly or were inherent either in the theme or the response.

Emergent Themes

Theme 1: The Cohort was Designed with a Common Concrete Vision and Mission for Oak Park Schools

All four administrator/instructors related the same vision and mission, which was Dr. B’s moniker, “to make Oak Park Schools the first successful urban school district.” Dr. R referred to it when he said that it was congruent to his mantra, “that district’s be successful for all kids!” and noted that an additional mission of his was “to renew the university staff by placing them into schools to find out how kids learn and we teach so kids learn” which correlates directly with the mission of the cohort. Dr. M,
who co-initiated the partnership with Western Michigan University, restated the vision referring to the mission as, “by presenting a field-based, non-traditional cohort with Western Michigan University.” Dr. C stated, “the goal of the district was two-fold: a successful minority school district and to reform the educational culture.”

None of the teacher responses directly stated the vision and mission, but all six implied them when they wrote about the impacts the cohort had on them concurrently and presently. Renewal, reformation, and/or transformation in education, teacher efficacy, and teacher practice have an inherent component for student achievement and, integral to teacher efficacy and practice are their beliefs, values and norms.

Walt credited the cohort, “with changing my teaching and teaching practices to the degree in which I can’t really extract who I am now as a teacher from who I was then.” John stated that the cohort renewed, “my pursuit of student achievement and developed an understanding of becoming a lifelong learner,” that he “currently quests for best practice,” and that it “has resulted in giving me the focus in what needed to be done in order to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement.” Rick replied that the cohort made, “me think deeply about my personal beliefs about education, instruction and student learning. Prior to my exposure and participation in the program I never thought about the ‘bigger picture’ as it relates to being an educator.” He explained that his involvement in the program has, “resulted in me focusing on my pedagogy and student learning.” Don instituted some of the strategies in his classroom and others he had to adjust to middle school “to make it work for my kids.” He maintains, “The greatest impact the cohort had on me was that it made me more aware
of the type of child I had in my classroom and it allowed me to use different methods to
help them with reading difficulties.” Barbara affirmed, “much of the information we
worked on supported knowledge in teacher leadership and reading. I had a profound
effect on how my practice and the efficacy of not only my practice, but that of my
colleagues . . . . Neal identified, “As a result, I have worked to continue and build upon
those lessons presented . . . . I also believe my professional demeanor has, as a result of
the practical application of educational theory and research, continued to yield a higher
– level of instructional engagement and self-evaluation.”

**Sub-Theme 1.1: The vision has sustained itself through the current practices of the teacher participants and their current mission to utilize their learning during the cohort to achieve it.** All teacher respondents indicated that over a
decade later, their current practices in their current positions are embedded in the same
vision of greater student achievement, and all of them describe different attributes and
learning gained from their participation in the cohort to achieve it. Walt refers to the
value of building relationships with students and parents, and “is the reason I still enjoy
the job,” and that reflecting “helped me shift from an external locus of control to an
internal one.” John discussed his “becoming a lifelong learner” that he uses to access
current trends and best practices. Rick “learned the value of systems thinking and
reflective practices, the value of making personal connections, time value, synergy and
backward design” thereby being a proactive educational professional and leader. Don
uses the greatest impact he derived from the cohort, understanding the urban culture that
made “me more aware of the type of child I had in my classroom . . . and I began to
understand some of their difficulties and how this led to other problems leading to behavior issues. Whenever I create a lesson now, I feel that I think more about the audience that it is intended for.” Barbara believes that had the cohort had continued, “Oak Park may have become one of the successful suburban/urban districts.” She also noted that “many of the ideas we worked on, such as curriculum alignment k-12, grading based on specific standards and consistent leadership across levels, may just now beginning to take place.” Neal continues to “build upon those lessons presented through our meetings and activities. He acknowledges that “through this experience I gained a significantly heightened sense of confidence, insight, and professional growth with regard to my skills as an educator. This heightened sense of the ‘professional-self’ occurred to me over the course of the program as I was allowed to participate, actively and purposefully, in my own program of study.”

**Theme 2: The Initiators were “Out-of-the-Box” Thinkers and Risk-Takers who could Reflect, Create and Reflect Again Spontaneously**

All of the administrative/instructional individuals may be characterized as inventive, intuitive and risk-takers as much as intelligent evidenced by their intentions, actions, and thoughts from their responses. The criteria for the program was that it must be field-based, occur on the campuses of the district, that it be non-traditional with the needs of the district as the infra-structure for the curriculum. Dr. B, it was understood that no program like this existed in the country. That is, no university was working with an urban school district with the intent of providing a master’s degree at no cost to the participants. The template just didn’t exist. . . .The challenge was finding a university and individuals within that university
who understood the unique challenges of developing an educational program for teachers teaching in a minority school district.

In Dr. B’s mention of the challenge of convincing the Board of Education and other stakeholders of the value of offering a degree program for improved student achievement, he wrote, “It should have been understood that this program was breaking new ground. WE made the assumption that everybody would understand how important the program was.”

Dr. R stated, “due to the uniqueness and newness of the cohort . . . and it being needs-based, the coursework was planned and delivered as it went along using action research to drive it.” Dr. M, who co-constructed the initiative with Dr. B and Dr. R, and co-constructed the curriculum and instruction with Dr. C, wrote that they sometimes, “designed and created on-the-fly.” He admits, “I have a high tolerance for ambiguity and that once content was determined that I and [Dr. C] could deliver it the next day.” He also alluded to the risk of offering a master’s degree for free without any commitment by the teachers when he wrote “because how could anyone invest that much and guarantee that they will stay around even though cheaper than traditional professional development.”

Dr. C, “There clearly are risks when a program deviates from an established norm and when the delivery is outside of these norms.” He also discussed the challenge of integrating the needs of the district into traditional courses and sequencing, “[the cohort] was not constrained by semester or university time frames” leading to delayed academic grades in those courses.
Theme 3: The Cohort was an Authentic Professional Learning Community. Collegiality and Collaboration Were Necessary Components

All ten respondents categorized the cohort as a professional learning community either directly or indirectly, during or after the program, through their descriptions of their learning processes and practices. Professional learning communities are characterized by a group of individuals pursuing advanced training and/or learning in a specific arena and who remain current in the evolving knowledge base through ongoing action for greater personal and subsequent interpersonal or organizational growth.

Dr. B sought a synergistic program that would evolve from “self-interests with individual goal perspectives to that of developing a successful minority school district.” He also wrote that the “initial purpose of the program was to bring together teachers from the same building working together in a common group with a common goal. It was to examine effective practices in minority schools and try to duplicate these practices adjusting for Oak Park’s differences.” Dr. R sought renewal of university staff by placing them into schools to find out what was going on and to determine “how do kids learn and we teach so kids learn.” When talking about the “transition from cohort to collaborative, where the district had equal footing in delivery of instruction” he directly referred to the creation of the program as a learning organization at both Western Michigan University and Oak Park Schools.

Dr. M directly referred to the cohort as a true learning community when crediting the cohort with his own personal growth and the role he can play as learner as well as leader. He spoke about how projects were designed so that “scaffolding or learning journey would occur so students could reach the next level.” He remarked that
the constructivism, scaffolding and journaling he learned and executed during the cohort constitute his methodology that he employs as professor of students at Eastern Michigan University. Other specific aspects of his own learning he identified when he said that the cohort gave him “the opposite of a reductionist viewpoint” with respect to his exposure to varying perspectives of elementary and secondary schooling important in being an effective assistant superintendent. When asked for recommendations, modifications, and suggestions for future field-based district-university cohorts, he replied, “I wouldn’t conceptualize the program as a cohort, but a professional learning community.”

Dr. C directly denoted the cohort as a learning community in his final statement “It was an authentic professional learning community in which all individuals from the university and district involved, learned, reflected, collaborated, and built relationships to assess and evaluate and implement learning that would positively influence our teaching practices for greater student learning.” He also circuitously alluded to it when he wrote about how the needs of the district and teachers were identified and the subsequent collaboration to respond to them. “[It] was constructivist and required sharing of knowledge, experiences and personal strengths between all the participants . . . We even brought faculty from outside our program to share their expertise in different areas of literacy.”

None of the teacher respondents directly called the cohort a professional learning community but their responses regarding the impact concurrently and presently have the characteristics and have all of the defining qualities. Walt credited the cohort,
“With changing my teaching practices to the degree in which I can’t extract who I am now as a teacher from who I was then,” indicating application of his learning and the importance of reflection on his instruction, delivery and evaluation in his classroom. Later he wrote, “The cohort taught me the value of building relationships . . . and it helped me shift from an external locus of control to an internal one. . . . I benefitted professionally because of the new collegial network that was in place to offer support.” For John the cohort resulted in “his pursuit of student achievement and developed an understanding of becoming a lifelong learner” and his “quest for best practices with our ever evolving population of students.” Rick wrote, “Prior to my exposure and participation in the program I never thought about the ‘bigger picture’ as it relates to being an educator”, that he considers himself “a proactive educational professional,” and that he is currently “a promoter of teacher growth and dedicated to creating a shared vision through collaboration” with community shareholders. Don noted, “the cohort helped to open meaningful lines of communication between grade levels while building knowledge in specific areas” and that it helps him to “[be] a much better teacher for our kids. Our students have some unique qualities and challenges and the cohort helped me to better understand that and allowed me to become better qualified to reach them.” For Barbara, the cohort “had a profound effect on my practice and efficacy of not only my practice, but that of my colleagues and district because we were working together.” Neal recalled how collaboration was significant in the very basic structure of the cohort and how he teachers and leads today. “University staff met with district administrators and cohort members to determine program/district goals, instructional avenues, and
action research-based activities. I frequently find myself unconsciously reaching back to the lessons learned. They have become embedded in my daily practice that completely.” Neal’s final statement was, “Finally, this work has allowed me to genuinely understand that my development, my evolution as a teacher must remain a constant, completely collaborative and inclusive course of action.”

**Theme 4: Although a Non-Traditional Approach for Credits Leading to a Master’s Degree, there was Rigor and Relevance**

All four of the administrator/instructors acknowledged the explicative from the very beginning that the cohort would have the rigor of traditional university courses and follow similar syllabi and that it would be relevant to Oak Park teachers and students. Dr. B’s entire rationale for creating the cohort was to train and educate district teachers for improved student achievement and success. “A major challenge was to find a university and individuals within that university who understood the unique challenges of developing an educational program for teachers teaching in a minority school district.” Dr. R recalls the agreement with Dr. B that “the rigor would be the same as campus courses, just packaged differently . . . [and] that whatever was done during the courses would be carried on throughout the teacher’s classrooms.” Dr. M stated, “The focus was presenting professional development with the relevance and rigor of traditional university courses. . . . at all times there was a good faith effort to meet standards with the understanding that the cohort didn’t necessarily facilitate the standards.”

Dr. C wrote the most regarding the rigor and relevance.
The program to be delivered would be our existing Master’s Degree but would be structured and delivered differently. In the initial meetings it was determined that the focus would be on literacy while addressing the cultural component. . . .

[We] worked hard to assure that the teachers understood that we were addressing their needs and helping them to become better teachers. To use a cliché, we were working to empower them.

Dr. C referred to the relevance again, “That is, the course sequence would be in line with district needs, the content would also be delivered to meet district needs. . . . We were confident in what we were doing and we saw continuous changes happening with the teaching staff and in the classrooms as we visited.” His recollections included being aware of other university faculty doubting that the program was not rigorous enough and meeting the university standards. “There was, at one point, an outright challenge to [Dr. R] by another faculty member but this challenge never resulted in any kind of action at the university level.”

Although none of the six teacher respondents addressed the aspect of rigor, it is an important component for learning. All of them remarked about the relevance the cohort had on their teaching concurrently and presently. Walt, “I am more reflective. . . [and] continue to build relationships. That may be the single most important thing I have learned thus far in my career.” John commented, “the cohort enhanced my understanding of where the district was going. The cohort helped to open meaningful lines of communication . . . while building knowledge in specific areas.” Rick states that the cohort “definitely changed his practices, efficacy of his instruction and changed
the course of this career.” Don continues to implement many of the pedagogy strategies and definitely the use of data and reflection in his teaching. For Barbara, the cohort “provided an excellent foundation for her teaching.” Neal has “worked to continue and build upon those lessons presented through our meetings and activities.”

Theme 5: The Cohort had a Positive Impact on Individuals, Their Classrooms, Their Buildings, the District and Other Communities

Sub-theme 5.1: The cohort positively impacted the efficacy of individual teachers, their classrooms, and the district. Three of the four administrator/instructors described the positive impacts the cohort had on the teachers and their classrooms and/or district. The one who omitted this aspect of the cohort did recount how it impacted his own effectiveness. Dr. B noted, “Bringing together all teachers from all levels proved to be one of the strongest components of the program . . . There seemed to be an overall energy to make change.” In retrospect, Dr. R remarked, “The success of the cohort was ‘extraordinary’ evidenced by changes in the classrooms of the teacher participants and district, assessments and evaluations of coursework, and the desire by over one-hundred and fifteen teachers enrolling in a second cohort.” Although Dr. M did not expound his reflection regarding his perceptions of how the cohort influenced the teachers and their efficacy, he did credit the cohort “with exposing him to varying perspectives of elementary and secondary schooling” important learning to being an effective assistant superintendent of the district and the impact Dr. C made on him with respect to the learning theories of constructivism and the subsequent scaffolding that he continues to use in teaching his Ph.D. students at Eastern Michigan University.
All six of the teacher respondents avowed that the cohort had a positive impact on their teaching efficacy. Walt wrote about “changing his practices . . .” and that he is “more reflective now.” John stated, “I was able to become closer with people in my building and district to enhance my understanding of where the district was going. The cohort helped me to open meaningful lines of communication between grade levels while building knowledge in specific areas.” Rick remarked, “I have learned the value of systems thinking and reflective practices . . . time value, synergy and backward design.” For Barbara, “Much of the information we worked on supported knowledge in teacher leadership and reading, with many of the concepts being on the cutting edge of Oak Parka’s curriculum. . . it had a profound effect on how my practice and the efficacy of not only my practice, but that of my colleagues and the district.” She continued, “Many of the ideas we worked on, such as curriculum alignment K-12, grading based on specific standards and consistent district leadership across levels, may just now beginning to take place.” Neal acknowledged, “It has allowed me to actively participate in the development of district professional development and curriculum council work. Finally, this work has allowed me to genuinely understand that my development, my evolution as a teacher, must remain a constant, completely collaborative and inclusive course of action.”

**Sub-theme 5.2: The action research led to action.** All of the administrators mentioned the use of action research. Dr. B recalled, “teacher-led action research drove and directed the areas of effective practice.” Dr. R remembered, “All instruction and learning was to be based on the needs of the district and that the coursework was
planned and delivered as it went along using action research to drive it.” Dr. M explained, “The action research came about to operationalize how to improve. . . [and] that regardless of the data, at the end you have a problem and don’t know what to do with it.” Dr. C supported the use of action reaction when he remarked, “. . . through the activities and interactions, the teachers aided us in determining what substance was needed, how it was packaged and delivered.”

Two of the teacher participants referred to action research. Neal declared, “As a direct result of the practical application of educational theory and research, I continue to yield a higher-level of instructional engagement and self-evaluation. . . . The instruction [was] in direct relation to research identified needs and goals. This process is a direct and sensible one: district needs were identified through evaluation of district and state data, instructional records, and district professional development.”

**Sub-theme 5.3: The cohort was a practicum for integrating best practices, being a reflective practitioner and a bridge between theory and practice.** Two of the administrator/instructors made comments regarding best practices, reflection, and/or turning theory into practice. Dr. B, “Being a district-needs program, the teacher-led action research drove the areas of effective practice which was to be learned and incorporated.” Dr. M explained, “the assessments, reflective papers, and projects were designed so that scaffolding or learning journey would occur so students could reach the next level.”

Four of the teacher respondents wrote about best practices, being a reflective practitioner and/or turning theory into practice. Walt, “I am more reflective now. . . .
The focus on reflecting became a part of who I am. I would say it helped me shift from an external locus of control to an internal one.” John acknowledged, “[it] renewed my quest for best practices with our ever evolving population of students . . . [and] gave me the focus in what needed to be done in order to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement.” Rick claims, “I have learned the value of . . . reflective practices . . . [and] has promoted my teacher leadership and teacher’s professional growth.” Rick later stated, “Because of the change of practice I made as a classroom teacher which was mainly me becoming fully immersed in reflective practices that guided me. . .” Don practices reflection, “Whenever I create a lesson now, I feel that I think more about the audience that it is intended for.”

Sub-theme 5.4: The cohort incorporated practical aspects in which the lessons learned were to be immediately used by the teachers. Dr. R was the only administrator/instructor who referenced the requirement of the practicality of the lessons, “That whatever was done during the courses would be carried on throughout the teacher’s classrooms.”

Neal was the only teacher respondent to directly address the practical aspect of the cohort stating, “I also believe my professional demeanor has, as a direct result of the practical application of educational theory and research, continued to yield a higher-level of instructional engagement and self-evaluation.” He pointed out, “The teachers directly applied lessons and experience to ongoing instructional organization, delivery, and development.”
Sub-theme 5.5: The cohort began the reframing of educational culture and reculturation of the district. Two administrator/instructors remarked that the cohort effected change in the educational culture of the district. Dr. B, “Elementary teachers seem to spearhead the ‘we need to make changes and not blame students’ themes. . . . [and] more than ten years after the program, elementary teachers still have a very strong cohort group in their buildings . . . . They take the educational initiative to help and train new teachers, are more ready and more accepting of training and new ideas.” He also wrote, “[T]he cohort group had an amazing ability to bring about changes in the district. The structure of the program had, at each school, a group of teachers working on the same goals and objectives that of improving schools.”

Three teacher respondents inferred that there was a reculturation in the district. Walt, “I have had so many conversations that begin like this: ‘I sure wish we still had the cohort in place . . .’” Barbara notes that, “My belief is that if we had continued working together, Oak Park may have become one of the successful suburban/urban districts . . . many of the ideas we worked on, such as curriculum alignment K-12, grading based on specific standards and consistent district leadership, may just now beginning to take place.” Neal recalled, “Individual and peer conferencing became a significant element of ongoing evaluations and assessments as did the use of tiered rubrics (leading from introduction levels to mastery).”

Theme 6: The Cohort was Built on Relationships that have been Sustained

Three of the administrator/instructors discussed the relationships that were built and are critical to learning and effecting change. Dr. B, “Bringing teachers together
sharing their successes and failures became a catalyst for a camaraderie that had not
been seen in the district for some years.” Dr. R, “Relationships between instructors and
teachers would be positive. . . . But it would take time to develop and would be different
than with other programs.” Dr. M remarked, “The reciprocal collaborative and collegial
aspect between me and [Dr. C] was one of the strengths in the success of the program.”

Four of the teacher respondents remarked that relationships were built and how it helped them evolve professionally. Walt, “The cohort taught me the value of building
relationships, with my students and with their families. That may be the single most
important thing I have learned thus far for my career . . . [it’s] the reason I still enjoy the
job.” John, “I was able to become closer with people in my building and district to
enhance my understanding of where the district was going.” Rick stated, “I have
learned . . . the value of making personal connections.” Don wrote, “The majority of
participants were from elementary schools so I do not see a lot of those teachers on a
regular basis.” Barbara voiced, “Those professional relationships that were developed
have continued across the district even as we have become more fractured and less
cohesive.” Neal offered, “Individual and even peer conferencing became a significant
element of ongoing evaluations and assessments.”

Narrative Theme Summary

Ideologically and conceptually, the initiative originated as a form of professional
development with the incentive of a master’s degree. By the qualities and
characteristics imparted by all respondents, directly or indirectly, it evolved into an
authentic professional learning community that has sustained itself today. Responses
collectively included research-based best-practices, collaborative investigation through action research, continuous engagement and study, and a collegial collaboration of support and personal growth not accomplished individually to improve student achievement.

Overall analysis of the data revealed six emergent themes and six sub-themes:

1. The cohort was designed with a common concrete vision and mission for Oak Park Schools; 
2. The vision has sustained itself through the current practices of the teacher participants and their current mission to utilize their learning during the cohort to achieve it; 
3. The initiators were “out-of-the-box” thinkers and risk takers who could reflect, create, and reflect spontaneously; 
4. The cohort was an authentic professional leaning community where collegiality and collaboration were essential; 
5. Although a non-traditional approach for credits leading to a master’s degree, there was rigor and relevance; 
6. The cohort had a positive impact on individuals, their classrooms, their buildings, the district, and other communities; 
7. The cohort positively impacted the efficacy of individual teachers, their buildings, the district and externally to the community; 
8. The action research led to action; 
9. The cohort was a practicum for integrating best practices, being a reflective practitioner and a bridge between theory and practice; 
10. The cohort incorporated practical aspects in which the lessons learned were to be immediately used by the teachers; 
11. The cohort began the reframing of educational culture and reculturation of the district; 
12. The cohort was built on relationships that have been sustained. All stated themes and
sub-themes directly correlate and respond to research questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 and indirectly to question 4.

**Summary and Connections to Other Research**

The mission of the cohort was to create a district-university partnership as a vehicle for attaining the vision of Oak Park Schools being a successful urban school district. The criterion established by the district initiators, Superintendent Dr. B and Assistant Superintendent Dr. M, was that the program was to be field-based, non-traditional, and that the curriculum emanate from the needs of the teachers and/or district and be practiced in the classroom. As incentive to the teacher participants, the district would pay all tuition and text fees without future obligation and that a master’s degree would be conferred at its termination. Dr. R, then Dean of Education and Continuing Education at Western Michigan University, approved the initiative through his own position and authority seeing it mutually beneficial to the university as an avenue for renewing his faculty with respects to the functionality and modes of education in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The only criterion insisted upon by the university was that all content was to have the rigor and relevance of traditional campus courses and that positive relationships be developed.

The two co-constructors and major co-instructors were Dr. M from Oak Park Schools and Dr. C, Associate Professor of Education and Professional Development. Their mutual reciprocal collegiality and collaboration was cited by Dr. M as one of the strengths of the program. Their relationship allowed for spontaneously creating lessons
based on their reflections of what was learned or experienced by the teacher participants the previous class session. All four of the administrator/instructors shared personal characteristics critical to operationalizing the program and critical to its success. They can be classified as “out-of-the box” thinkers and risk-takers. They all shared in the quest for increased student achievement through greater teacher efficacy.

Being non-traditional and field-based presented a few challenges to the design and delivery of the program but not its integrity. Dr. R assured that the courses aligned with the requirements of the university master’s program. Dr. C recalled that occasionally grades were recorded semesters after the beginning of a course because integrating teacher and/or district needs and action research didn’t always coincide with traditional semesters. Dr. M and Dr. C were deliberate in their focus and planning of coursework that it considered the needs of the teachers and district while maintaining congruency with respect to the rigor, relevance, and standards of traditional campus courses. Both remarked about needing to create lessons rapidly to scaffold the learning from one session to the next. Dr. C recalled bringing faculty from another department and university to share their expertise. None of the teacher respondents attended to the rigor of the program and all of them responded positively to the relevance. The four administrator/instructors remarked about the positive change in them as professionals, their classrooms and district leaders. All teacher respondents commented on specific changes the cohort made on them professionally, some to their colleagues, buildings, and district.
Although the disparity between student achievement in suburban and urban schools cannot be closed by changing school programs without social reconstruction, there are structural and functional aspects of schools that can be addressed to help narrow the gap. Teachers are the heart, soul and decisive factor in the classroom and therefore the central change agents in the renewal, reformation and transformation of schools. Their training and reculturation through continuous and collaborative inquiry as learning communities about their practices, beliefs, norms and integration of research-based best practices is necessitated (McDonald, 2001; Redemer & Nourie, 1999).

The ultimate goal of professional development is changing the culture of learning for teachers and students for engagement resulting in life-long learning thusly building the collective capacities of faculty to achieve their goals (Bork, 2004; Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; DuFour, 2002b; Fullan, 1991; Gage, 1984; Gail & Renchler, 1985; Griffin, 1983; Knight, 2002; Lanier & Little, 1986; Perry, 2004; Richardson, 2003; Sparks et al., 1980; Sparks & Louckes-Horsley, 1990). The excellence movement of the 1980s’s with its top-down, standardized, reliance on rules and regulations and the restructuring of the 1990’s with its paired concepts of national and local site-based autonomy were not fully successful. Their failures can be attributed to non-social aspects such as the complexity of schooling; a lack of clarity on the intended results and the change process itself; they were not persistent and they were not embedded in changing the culture of schools (assumptions, values, beliefs, and norms.)
Traditional professional development has not been proven successful either. Such professional development is often passive, not always relevant, sometimes pre-packaged, too vague in content and mission, not inquiry based, requires extended use of time, not research-based best practices, not collaborative, and often treats teachers as the problem (Choy, 2006; Falk, 2001; Fosnot, 1989; Giroux, 1988; Gallagher et al., 1988; Grant & Murray, 1999; Guskey, 2000; Lewis, 2002; Lieberman, 1995; Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Lieberman & Wood, 2001; Little, 1992, 1993; Mack, 2000; McCotter, 2001; Meijer, 1992, Metropolitan Life Harris Interactive, 2003; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Reeves, 2006; Richardson, 2003; Sarason, 1996).

The cohort of this study, a partnership between the Oak Park Schools and Western Michigan University arose to create the vision of the district being a successful urban district. It was based on the ideal that effective and sustained professional development occurs in learning communities where there is relevancy and collaboration for support and innovation. As Marx (1997) noted urban school reform is only effective to the degree to which change occurs in the classroom. An integral aspect of the cohort studied was that it was voluntary, utilized collaboration of authoritative leadership and decision-making in assessing what reforms were critical, was sustainable, considered the individual, school and district, presented concepts of change, built networks and bridged research-based theories into practice. The relevant content created the motivation for reflection, rigorous work and relationships (Buckingham, 2005; Daggett, 2004; DuFour, 200b; Eaton, 2008; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Falk, 2001; Fosnot,
2001; Fullan, 1993; Giroux, 1988; Grant & Murray, 1999; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Guskey, 2000; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hammel, 2007; Lieberman, 1995; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Little, 1992, 1993; Marzano et al 2001; Meier, 1992; Reeves, 2006; Richardson, 2003; Senge, 1990; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990; and VanVelsor & McCauley, 2004). These attributes make the cohort into what is now referred to as a professional learning community.

Results of the study provide an overview of the structure and functionality of the cohort by the initiators, how their individualism and positions allowed for its creation and execution and how it positively impacted the teachers during the program and how it has sustained itself a dozen years after.

**Further Research Recommendations**

No recommendations for further research regarding this specific cohort are made. However, it is strongly suggested that future district-school learning communities that are field-based and non-traditional be created based on their individual needs, vision, and mission.

**Researcher’s Reflections**

The results of this study coincide with school improvement research, professional learning communities, organizational theory, and systems thinking. It serves as evidence to organizational change whether seeking reform, renewal or transformation. When that organization is a specific educational entity, irrespective of being urban, developing into a learning organization the culture changes resulting in greater success for all its stakeholders.
As a teacher participant in this cohort, my own reflections identified some barriers/challenges that did not get mentioned in the findings or there was insufficient data to support them as thematic that may have relevance for future cohorts. The status and empowerment given to the cohort teachers to experiment, use new instructional delivery methods, and our openness to discuss conditions and events occurring in our buildings and district was envied by our colleagues and very discomforting to the principals. It is unfortunate that records were not kept tracking the processes, the learning that was obtained, and the successes or failures that occurred that would have been valuable documentation in studying this cohort and offer evidence for modifications in the future. Although we remain as a PLC and are active leaders, our functionality as a driving force to effect school improvement has diminished as a result of no formal plan for sustainability and changes in all administrative positions. Lastly, cohorts as modeled in this study may serve as a method of teacher retention as all of us remain in the district with exception to those who have retired.

It is vital that future district-university partnerships be developed as they are mutually and individualistically beneficial to them as learning organizations and not just in education. The world is changing and evolving at an extremely fast pace. In America, our numerous new immigrants are bringing their different cultures and languages from more countries than ever before. Politically, our inclusionary vision and legislation of considering individuals based on who they are and what they contribute overshadow what they are. If we as a society are to embrace and assimilate them into the principles of our republic and assist them to be actively producing
citizens, then we must be vigilant and successful in continuous renewal of our educational endeavors. If we are to delineate the social and education gaps between the affluent and urban, then we need effective educational institutions to fulfill the learning gap that exists. Adding to that complexity is the changing educational processes due to the rapid innovations and technology. To stay apace with all these changes mandates an educational system that is continually assessing, devising, implementing and evaluating its efficiency. This can only be achieved through the work of learning organizations.
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Date: September 26, 2013

To: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
    Dawn Reeves, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 13-09-39

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled “The Logistics of Implementing a Field-Based Comprehensive School Reform Initiative” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are analyzing a business partnership and not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.