

A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify teachers' perceptions of how leadership styles and practices of administration can improve the process of broad-based change in an educational organization. The study focused on the lived experiences of 12 teachers and school administrators (coresearchers) during a major change in their school district. Guided interviews were utilized in order to understand the essence of their experiences. Results indicated the importance of communication during the process of change as it relates to perceptions of involvement, buy-in, self-worth, job satisfaction, and support and impact on instruction.

Keywords: leadership, middle school, junior high, education, communication, change, phenomenological, school reform, realignment, transition, transcendental.

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List of Abbreviations

Academic Coaches (AC)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI)

No Child Left Behind Act, 2002 (NCLB)

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Race to the Top (RttT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since the enactment of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2002), there has been a sense of urgency for school districts to demonstrate that students are making appropriate educational gains on a yearly basis. In counties where those gains have not been met regularly, educational leaders struggle with ways to transform their districts into ones that implement rigorous and relevant curriculum. Their motivation is clear: making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Districts continuously struggling to meet state standards for achievement must enact drastic changes that help to increase their scores. Those leaders that are not meeting their goals face varying consequences, ranging from increased expenditures for remediation services to loss of jobs and eventually state takeover of the schools that continue to perform below expectations.

High academic performance is the goal for every school district. For centuries, schools have been adopting and implementing new concepts, strategies, and curriculum in order to facilitate learning and discover which ones work best to develop learners. One such strategy is for school districts to structure their middle schools and design their middle school curriculum to focus specifically on the needs of the students struggling through these awkward years. The middle school movement began in the 1960s, growing out of the knowledge that preadolescent learners needed more than just a focus on academics. Middle schools became more student-centered educational facilities, with teachers who were trained to understand the specific needs of students at this age (Wiles, J., Bondi, & Wiles, M., 2006).

Currently, states and school districts are charged with reforming their schools. President Obama wants education reform to be a national mission (U.S. Department of Education, November 2009). His plan begins with Race to the Top (RttT) funds for which states can compete by developing plans to reform schools and school districts. This reform has put educational leaders in positions where they will be making decisions about major change in their schools.

Background of the Study

Leadership

Multitudes of books have been written in recent decades on aspects of leadership ranging from leadership styles to leading effectively in any setting. Educational leadership is no different than other types of high stakes leadership discussed in these books. Recent studies on educational leadership have shown that there is a correlation between district and building-level leadership and student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Therefore, both district and building level educational leaders are constantly searching for ways to increase student achievement scores, close the achievement gap between various subgroups of students, and make a name for their school or school district. To accomplish this, it is often necessary to undertake some form of school-wide or district-wide change, such as restructuring or school reform.

Restructuring

District-wide restructuring has been a trend for some time in education, with the primary intent being to increase test scores. With the advent of NCLB (2001) and the

accompanying high-stakes achievement tests, school districts desire to do what it takes for their students to succeed on their NCLB tests.

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) believes that, in order to ensure success for every student, teachers in the middle grades should be experts in teaching and understanding the specific needs and learning styles of students in this age group (Jackson & Davis, 2000). The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform selected North Carolina to become one of the first states to participate in the Schools to Watch program, which arose out of the NMSA's aforementioned beliefs regarding the purpose of middle schools. This program identifies middle grades schools that are meeting or exceeding strict criteria for excellence (NCDPI, 2010).

School Reform

Having the means to implement school reform is the first step to increasing a school's performance. One way for school leaders to acquire those means is becoming a School to Watch, an honor that comes with a many benefits. In 2000, the Carnegie Corporation updated their 1989 report entitled *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*. The 2000 report offered an in-depth look at reforming education at the middle school level. Schools which meet the Turning Points 2000 criteria of a School to Watch are able to provide the required ongoing professional development, hire and keep teachers who are trained in middle grades education, and provide curriculum grounded in standards relevant to adolescents (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

In light of reform mandates, education is facing a natural means of reform: budget cuts. In February 2009, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that most states were cutting educational expenditures and that budget cuts would total approximately \$350 billion by midyear 2011 (Johnson, Koulish, & Oliff, 2009). These cuts have caused teaching positions to be cut drastically, increasing class size across many districts, and in turn making it more difficult to provide the services mandated by federal and state legislative bodies. In addition to increased class size, teachers in the Carolinas have had an increase in costs of health benefits programs, a stagnant pay scale, and enforced furlough days. All of this has been a blow to teacher morale (Graham, 2010). These cuts serve to influence teachers' perceptions of their working conditions, leadership and job satisfaction.

Problem Statement

According to Marzano et al. (2005), "One of the constants within K-12 education is that someone is always trying to change it; someone is always proposing a new program or a new practice" (p. 65). In order to affect change, leaders must have a clear understanding of the changes they wish to make. They also must understand that in making changes there are risks for that leader and for the organization.

The perception held by the faculty, the staff, and the community of an administrator who has to implement drastic change can significantly affect the change process itself. Educational leaders have the daunting task of sharing their vision, getting stakeholder buy-in for the vision, and then setting out to accomplish that vision. This vision often means implementing changes that are necessary to meet state and federal

guidelines for NCLB, and most recently, Race to the Top, a federal “program that has given states an incentive to lead reform in a comprehensive and collaborative way” (Johnson, 2010, p.1). One of the problems for leaders is the perception that others have of them during times of change. One could argue that a true leader does not let what others think affect him or her, but in today’s educational setting, the average superintendent’s tenure is approximately 6-7 years (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). Educational leaders must seize the opportunities to initiate change that is in the best interest of students, in an optimal amount of time, even when that amount of time is uncertain. Knowing the statistics of tenure for educational leadership and the repercussions of high-stakes accountability models, superintendents and their school-level administrators are wise to include teachers in the daunting task of both school-wide and system-wide changes. Teachers who feel they have been involved in the planning and implementation of changes through open communication perceive the transition as being a smooth one (Hackman & Johnson, 2004). As the field of education continues to change at a rapid pace due to the focus on school reform, educational leaders are going to need a better understanding of the needs of the classroom level educator in order to move them forward to accomplish federal and state goals. Getting to the heart of teachers’ perceptions of educational leadership throughout major transition in a school district can assist educators in understanding how these perceptions can influence overall transition, job satisfaction ratings, and intrinsic motivation toward district goals.

This study took place in four middle schools in a school district in Eastern North Carolina. This school district transitioned from junior high practices to middle school

concepts over one summer vacation period, creating the uncertainties that come along with change. The Board of Education in that school district was presented the realignment plan on March 4, 2008, with the purpose of creating schools that were more closely aligned with other districts throughout the state. This district was one of only two counties in the state that still utilized the Junior High model. The realignment plan transitioned the four junior high schools (grades 7-9) to middle schools (grades 6-8), created elementary schools that housed kindergarten through grade five, and created a ninth grade academy and an alternative high school.

The board unanimously voted for this realignment, which had an estimated cost of more than \$2.9 million (Wall, 2008). Implementation of the district-wide realignment was announced soon thereafter, with teachers, district-wide, receiving notification by mail, dated May 08, 2008, of their teaching assignments for the new school year. Teachers were notified of the realignment via the letter they received asking them to name their top three choices of schools for employment the following year. Their only notification of assignment was from these letters named above (J. Warden, personal communication, September 21, 2010).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of the teachers involved in a major transition. As efforts to maintain proficiency on standardized tests continue to overshadow the teaching profession, both school-wide and district-wide change can mean the difference of a few percentage points in proficiency for many educational institutions. Besides the looming Adequate Yearly

Progress (AYP) that is expected on standardized tests, today's educational leaders are requiring educators to rethink the way students are taught. Change is inevitable for education, but major change is something that is on the horizon for all as educators seek ways to educate the 21st century learner through the new Common Core State Standard being adopted by 48 of the 50 states.

Professional Significance of the Study

In the wake of NCLB, and with RttT as an incentive program for funding school reform in the coming years, some school systems are on the brink of major reform. As schools, and/or school districts, decide to implement changes ranging from realignments of an entire school district to implementing a new curriculum at a single school, there are certain kinds of supports that need to be in place to assist teachers during those changes. This research will help future educational leaders to better understand the perspectives of the teachers who are thrust into major changes without the understanding, knowledge, and preparation necessary to make those changes. If educational leaders know and understand the perspectives of teachers, they will have the knowledge to plan for future changes by implementing any suggestions or outcomes introduced through this study. The objective of this study is to assist educational leaders by providing them with suggestions for implementing school-wide changes.

Research Questions

This inquiry has one main question with four sub questions. The main question is, "What are teachers' experiences during major transitions in a school setting?" The sub-questions are:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding communication prior to, and during, transition to the middle school concept?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the first years of implementation of the middle school concept?
3. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the support afforded them from administration and other leadership personnel during the transition?
4. How do teachers perceive their current level of job satisfaction in the wake of all the changes?

Delimitations

The scope and focus of this study was delimited to include only teachers, rather than all stakeholders (e.g., students, administrators, parents) involved in this organizational change. The participants were further delimited to only include teachers who were employed at the junior high schools for at least two years prior to the restructuring, that continued their employment at the school through the first two years of the middle school implementation, and that achieved certification (as opposed to lateral entry), at the time of the restructuring. Both male and female teachers were used for this study, with a goal of 12 participants between the four schools. Although Moustakas (1990) stated that one participant is enough, I am seeking three teachers from each of the four middle schools in the district. The increase in the number, as Moustakas states, will help richen the meaning of this study.

Because so many teachers were moved from the junior high to other schools, only teachers who were transferred because of certification areas were included in this study.

An example of a transfer due to certification areas may include, but is not limited to, those ninth grade teachers that had to be moved to the new ninth grade school because of course offerings that they were certified to teach. These teachers were limited to certified teachers who were at the junior high two or more years before the transition took place.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarity, it is necessary to define key terms that will be used throughout this research. The key terms are:

1. *Horizontal teaming* (also known as *interdisciplinary teaming*): Horizontal teaming “is the organization in which two or more teachers share the responsibility for instruction, curriculum, and evaluation of a common group of students for one or more years. It is further characterized by adjacent classrooms or shared team space, common planning time and common blocks of time” (Arnold & Stevenson, 1998 [as cited in Boyer & Bishop, 2004; Knowles & Brown, 2000]).
2. *Junior high*: Junior high is “a school usually including grade seven to nine” (junior high school 2010). For the purpose of this study, the schools used for this inquiry were four junior high schools that housed students in grades 6-9.
3. *Middle school*: Middle school is “a school usually including grades five to eight or six to eight” (middle school, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the schools used in the inquiry included students in grade 6-8.
4. *Middle school concept*: According to Turning Points 2000’s recommendations, the middle school concept includes schools that

- a. “Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how student learn best.
 - b. Use instructional methods to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
 - c. Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage all teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
 - d. Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
 - e. Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best.
 - f. Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
 - g. Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp. 23-24).
5. *Stakeholder*: A stakeholder is “one who has a stake in an enterprise or one who is involved in or affected by a course of action” (stakeholder, 2010). For this inquiry, a stakeholder can be staff, faculty, student, parent, community member, or anyone who has a vested interest in the school or school district.
6. *Twenty-first Century Learner*: A student who multi-tasks while learning. This type of learner uses internet as a source for learning looks to technology

as a primary means of instruction. Technology is at their core for interactions and education (Rodgers, Runyon, Starrett, & Van Holzen, 2006).

7. *Vertical teaming*: Vertical teaming teams consists “of teachers within specific subject areas, committed to improving student preparation through increased teacher-to- teacher communication and vertical alignment of the curriculum” (College Board, 2002, p. 1).

Research Plan

This inquiry was a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study that reviewed the lived experiences of teachers in one rural school district that made the transition from junior high methods to middle school concepts. The theoretical framework on which this study was based begins with a definition of leadership given by Hackman and Johnson (2004) in their book entitled *Leadership and Communication*. The definition from Hackman and Johnson stated that “leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs” (p. 12). With this definition in mind, this inquiry focused on the lived experiences of the teachers involved in the transition and their perceptions of the leaders communicating the change. Like Hackman and Johnson clearly communicated, leadership is about

- influence: who is influencing whom;
- group context: creating change that helps to either meet the needs of, or attain goals of, the group; and

- collaboration: the leaders and the followers working together for a common goal. (pp.11-12)

The inquiry included the data collection methods of collection of demographic information, interviews, qualitative documentation, and document analysis. Data analysis methods included phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, memoing, member check, and an audit trail. Triangulation occurred due to the fact that I used three or more methods of data analysis. I believe that I was able to keep any personal biases at bay during this research by consistently using detailed reflective journaling and reflective note taking in order to check for biases, otherwise referred to as *bracketing*. I enlisted the help of a third party to check for accuracy in her journals and notes. This third party was a person who was aware of the realignment of the school system, but had no personal connection to the changes or shifts in personnel.

Organization of the Document

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an overview of the study. It contains the definition of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and the theoretical basis for this inquiry. Chapter 2 is the literature review and contains information on the history of middle schools, current trends in middle schools, and history and trends in leadership. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology utilized to conduct this inquiry. Chapter 4 will present the findings of this study, with the concluding fifth chapter presenting a summary of findings.

Summary

Educational leaders are faced with the task of implementing the constant changes that are handed down through the various federal programs and state and local initiatives that intend to assist educators in producing 21st century learners. NCLB (2002), as well as RttT (2009), call for educational reform. Educators are anticipating the deadline set by NCLB, where all students will be proficient on state tests by the year 2014, while being challenged by the most recent initiatives set forth in the RttT program. Change is inevitable, but some school districts are headed for major changes. As the field of education continues to change at a rapid pace due to the focus on school reform, educational leaders are going to need a better understanding of the needs of the classroom level educator in order to move them forward to accomplish federal and state goals. Getting to the heart of teachers' perceptions of educational leadership throughout major transition in a school district can assist educators in understanding how these perceptions can influence overall transition, job satisfaction ratings, and intrinsic motivation toward district goals.

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of teachers in a rural community in North Carolina that recently realigned the entire school district, changing four junior high schools into middle schools and creating a brand new ninth grade academy. This initiative accounted for over 200 employees being moved from one school to another. It is believed that this study took teachers' perceptions of how leadership implemented the realignment of this school district and used them to inform changes in any school district or school across the nation. There were one main question

and four sub-questions for this study. The study was limited to the information provided by the sample of teachers from the four middle schools in this rural North Carolina town.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are volumes of information about the middle school concept, how education evolved throughout history to include middle schools, and the characteristics of middle schools that affect student achievement. In addition, there is a wealth of information on leadership practices and current trends in educational leadership. This literature review will provide the basis for this inquiry into middle school teachers' perceptions of leadership through change. This chapter begins with a review of literature that examines the history of middle school, including a timeline of the evolution of intermediate education. Next, current middle school trends, initiatives and changes are discussed. The chapter concludes with a review of literature that explores leadership practices at both the building level and district level and how educational leadership relates to leadership in general.

The History and Evolution of the Middle School

It would not be appropriate to discuss the history of the middle school without acknowledging its evolution out of the junior high school. Junior high schools can be dated back to approximately 1910, with discussions of junior highs dating back to speeches given by Charles W. Elliot, President of Harvard, as early as 1888. Elliot argued that college freshmen were not being adequately prepared during their time in public school. He believed that a more rigorous and varied curriculum should be introduced in the upper elementary years (Andrews, 2008). In 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education gave a description of what a junior high school should be. This description included:

- Gradual introduction to departmental instruction
- Some choice of subjects under guidance
- Promotion by subjects
- Prevocational courses
- Social organization (Ward, Mergendoller, & Mitman, 1982).

Even in the infancy stages of education, there was recognition that something different was needed for students who were in the preadolescent stages of development.

Originally the new movement, often called intermediate education (Wiles et al., 2006), had a similar philosophy to that of middle schools today. It recognized the need for addressing such issues as discipline, motivation problems, and dropout prevention.

There are several key names involved with the development of middle schools. Dr. William M. Alexander has been officially credited with the idea of middle school, but John Lounsbury, Gordon Vars, and William Van Til were also involved in the middle school planning initiative in the United States. The middle school concept arose out of progressive education. The works of Alexander and others can be traced back to the works of John Dewey (Wiles et al., 2006).

Because of the rapid growth of secondary education from 1910-1930, the idea that preadolescent learners had special needs was quickly lost. The junior high schools began to look more like “little high schools” (Wiles et al., 2006, p. 4). Their structure was much like the high schools in that they incorporated class changes, standardized class periods and departments, and developed musical bands and interscholastic sports (Wiles et al., 2006).

Because there was a need to address the age specific needs of pre-adolescent/early adolescent students, the first middle school was established in Bay City, Michigan in 1950 (Gatewood & Walker, 1971; Juvonen, 2007). The middle school concept began to surge by the early 1970s. In 1971, there were more than 2,000 middle schools in the United States (Gatewood & Walker, 1971). In 1977, the National Middle School Association was formed. By 1982, nearly half of all schools in the U.S. were middle schools (Ward et al., 1982). By 1997, middle schools were the most common type of intermediate education (Wiles et al., 2006).

Current Characteristics and Trends in Middle School

Middle schools today are under much scrutiny. According to Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel (2004), there have been several initiatives in education to reform middle schools. They stated that successful middle schools share these common beliefs:

- Excellence and equity for all.
- A challenging curriculum with high expectations and the provision of expert instructional methods that prepare all students to achieve at high levels.
- A collaborative school environment that shares a developmentally and intellectually appropriate purpose.
- A partnership involving parents and the larger community in supporting student learning.

They also stated that there are six factors that contribute to the arrested development of middle schools:

- Incremental implementation of the model.
- Lack of teacher education programs and licensure that focus on the middle school level.
- Lack of attention to curriculum.
- Failure of organizations to fully realize leadership for the middle level.
- Absence of research to sustain the concept.
- Overall misunderstanding of the original concept. (p. 4)

Rand Corporation provides research and analysis in critical areas in an effort to influence policy-making and decision making. In 2004, the Rand Corporation published a report specifically looking at the challenges facing middle schools. Bunting (2004), in her review of the Rand report titled, “Focus on the Wonder Years: Challenges Facing the American Middle School,” reported that the original outcomes of the middle school have changed. Today’s middle schools leave students feeling disconnected, unsafe, and unchallenged. According to her, “Life in the middle school was to be relevant, comfortable, and relaxed with plenty of time to reflect on the experience of being an early adolescent” (p. 132). She also reported that others found this concept to be flawed because adolescence is a time when students are more vulnerable and susceptible to influence. They felt that this “more flexible structure magnifies risks,” and “surging new hormones and unsettled psyches create the worst of times to uproot youngsters” (p. 133).

Because of the attention to the middle school level throughout the years, there have been a plethora of programs implemented in order to engage students. The most

recent trends in middle school programming include teacher participation in professional learning communities/collaborative teaming, discipline programs that focus on positive behavior support, cooperative learning programs/workshop models, standards-based instruction, and inclusion models for exceptional children that stress differentiated instruction. To better understand that the challenges teachers are faced with at the middle school level, it is important that we look at each of these programs separately.

Professional Learning Communities/Collaborative Teaming

Collaboration is certainly not a new term in education. Collaborative teams work together for a common goal. The latest trend in educational collaboration is what is called collaborative teams within Professional Learning Communities (PLC). According to the work of Dufour, R. Dufour, R., Eaker, and Karhanek (2004), PLCs differ from traditional schools because they (a) have a shared mission, vision, values, and goals, (b) work together in collaborative teams “whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals” (p. 3), (c) engage in collective inquiry, (d) are action oriented, (e) strive for continued improvement, and (f) are results oriented. Dufour, R. et al. “argue that when schools truly begin to align their practices with a commitment to learning for all, the educators within them begin to function as a Professional Learning Community” (p. 21). PLCs focus on three critical questions in their work: “Exactly what is it we want all students to learn? How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills? What happens in our school when a student does not learn?” (p. 21).

Discipline Programs That Focus on Positive Behavior Support

Discipline has been another issue in middle schools. With speculation that the preadolescent stage is a risky time to be uprooting students from the setting of the elementary school (Bunting, 2004); it is no wonder research has taken a close look at the behavioral issues that impede learning.

North Carolina, as well as other states, has adopted programs that reinforce positive behaviors in an effort to reduce behavioral issues in the classroom. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) initiative, which is an Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funded grant under the North Carolina State Improvement Program, school-wide PBIS programs are a team-based systems approach that establishes and reinforces clear behavioral expectations. The entire school staff adopts a “common approach to discipline that is proactive, instructional and outcome driven” (NCDPI, 2009, p.1). Today, when accountability and data are a must, PBIS offers a data-driven approach to problem behaviors that is individualized to each school setting.

Cooperative Learning/Workshop Models

Cooperative learning is not traditional group work. It is group work that is structured so students have a specific role to fulfill within the group. It incorporates problem solving and individual accountability into one task that would be too challenging for an individual student to complete within the desired time constraints (Millis, 2009). This teaching strategy allows students of differing levels to work together, using their specific knowledge base or talents, to complete a project or assignment. The idea is to

have all group members contribute to the task and for learning to occur based on those contributions.

The challenge within cooperative learning groups is to make sure that all members are doing their part within the project. As Hsiung (2010) points out, cooperative learning groups eventually have to deal with those members who put the group at risk of becoming dysfunctional. According to his research, the most common member functions that put the group at risk are those who do not get involved in the group and those who take over all the work. Teachers and group leaders must stay actively engaged in the structure of the cooperative learning group in order to minimize dysfunctional behaviors within the group.

One such way of implementing cooperative learning groups in the classroom is to model them after professional development workshops or hobby workshops. In workshop models, there is an introduction of the material. This introduction is usually 10 to 15 minutes of information and often has a sample of work available for the attendees to see. After the introduction, coresearchers in the workshop are put into groups and encouraged to work together to create a product. This work usually takes anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes. After the work is complete, there is a presentation of products and a closing to the workshop. Although this is a model that has to be adapted to the classroom setting and curriculum, it is a way to keep middle school students engaged by not overwhelming them with lecture time, allowing them to learn through a hands-on experience, and allowing them to demonstrate their learning through presentation of their work.

Kagan (1990), a well-known author and supporter of cooperative learning groups, discussed the difficulty of implementing cooperative learning. Here he offered what he called “structures” instead of activities for cooperative learning. Teachers who utilize cooperative learning structures, as opposed to activities, have learned ways to group classmates in order to account for the use of teams, positive interdependence, and individual accountability. Kagan offered a variety of structures to be used for “distinct objectives within the class such as teambuilding, class-building, communication building, mastery, and concept development” (p. 13). He believed that as a teacher learns a variety of structures, and becomes fluent in them, that teacher “can competently move in and out of them to reach certain learning objectives” (p. 15). He referred to this as a multi-structural cooperative learning lesson plan.

Standards-based Instruction

In order to meet the requirement within NCLB (2001), individual states have devised standards of learning that must be met at each grade level. Teachers have the task of getting those standards across to the students. Some districts create curriculum maps that keep teachers on task throughout the school year, with accompanying timelines that indicate when each goal and objective should be taught. These guides, often called pacing guides or plans of work, help teachers pace themselves during the school year, but often cause pressure when teachers feel they have fallen behind the pace set by the guide.

One of the trends in middle school education is to implement standards-based instruction. According to Green (2007), standards-based instruction involves clearly defining the expectations for student learning, having a plan for determining what

learning has taken place, and having a process for reteaching students who have not mastered a particular standard. He stated that standards-based instruction involves six steps:

1. Teachers need to be clear (themselves) about what they expect their students to know and be able to do by the end of a specific unit or lesson (based on the standards).
2. Teachers need to tell their student what they expect them to know and be able to do by the end of a specific unit or lesson (based on the standards).
3. Teachers need to teach students the knowledge and skills they'll need to show mastery.
4. Teachers need to check (assess) to see if the students have learned what the teachers expected them to learn.
5. Teachers need to report to the students whether or not they have learned it.
6. Teachers need to re-teach as needed and whenever appropriate. (Green, 2007, pp. 5-6)

Most teachers would not argue about the difficulty of this approach. There is concern about how to engage the student during re-teaching time who has already mastered the standard. In addition, this type of instruction is often difficult when teachers are feeling the pressure of the aforementioned pacing guide.

Inclusion models that stress differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction is not a new term. It is often found in information associated with gifted and talented students. In addition to the regular education teacher

providing differentiated instruction in the classroom, special educators must differentiate for students they serve while providing some modifications as deemed necessary by each student's individualized education plan (IEP). Providing differentiated lessons and modifications refers to the practice of "doing whatever it takes to meet the students' learning needs and that will vary from classroom to classroom" (Wormeli, 2001, p. 69).

According to Wormeli (2001), there are five essential features of differentiated instruction. They are early and frequent evaluation of students' understanding, adjusting complexity or range of assignments, orchestrating the learning experience, varying instructional approaches over time, and differentiating content from skills and process from product.

Supporting Wormeli's explanation of differentiated instruction, Tomlinson et al. (2002) discussed current brain research in their book entitled *The Parallel Curriculum*; that research suggested that students learn best when only moderately challenged. It also showed that when tasks are too difficult, students get frustrated, while stagnation and apathy set in when tasks are too easy. They went on to state that student learning is increased when activities are matched to the student's interests and preferred mode of learning. This preferred mode of learning is based on information from Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory, which evaluated the different minds of students and how they learn (Gardner, 1991). Creating lesson plans for students based on the ideas of Tomlinson et al. (2002) and Gardner (1991) means that teachers have to know their students well, group them for the maximum learning benefit of each student, and

continuously change things in order to keep the interest of the students while providing the optimal learning experience.

Turning Away From the Middle School Concept

In recent years, with the trends in educational reform, there are some school districts in both small and large areas that are rethinking the idea of middle school. Since its formation, intermediate education has been scrutinized and reformed time and time again. There are experts who argue it is simply not an appropriate time to uproot students from a familiar setting, as their bodies are going through changes and their psyches are at their most vulnerable (Bunting, 2004). There is a resurgence of K-8 schools across the country, as evidenced by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) report (2002). In 2001, the Duke University Talent Identification Program (TIP) noted that there has been a struggle with academic achievement in grades 6-8, causing many states to consider a movement back to K-8 schools. According to their study, “reform is underway in Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, and districts in at least eight other states across the nation are considering merging their middle schools and elementary schools into K-8s” (Geiser, 2011).

This turn back to K-8 schools is due to the plummeting test scores of middle school students, lack of motivation in the middle school learner, and overall stakeholder’s dissatisfaction with the middle schools. Eight states already have districts reporting the return to the K-8 grade-level configuration, with positive results already showing up in test scores, attendance, and behavior incidents. Some districts have reported unexpected results from these reconfigurations, such as increased acceptance of leadership roles by

eight graders and increased responsibility for their own actions by upper grade students (AASA, 2002).

Leadership

Each year volumes of articles and books are published on the topic of leadership. The study of leadership has existed for hundreds, possibly thousands of years (Marzano et al., 2005). As humans, we come in contact with some form of leadership in our lives on a daily basis. It would be safe to say that all of us are leaders and followers at some time in our lives. Yet, the topic of leadership is still the subject of much scrutiny and discussion. What is it that makes leaders stand out? Why do some people refer to certain others as excellent leaders?

Hackman and Johnson (2004) offered the following as a communicative definition of leadership: “Leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs” (p.12). This is just one definition of leadership. It would take only a few punches of the computer keys in a search engine on the internet to be able to print out hundreds of other definitions. It would be wise of someone seeking a leadership role in a given organization to seek out the definition of leadership within that organization. This would allow the job seeker to understand what it is that the organization values in its leaders. It is important to note that leadership can take on many different forms; however, as Blackaby, H. & Blackaby, R. (2001) pointed out, “There are well meaning people in leadership positions who believe that creating a stir or making things happen is exercising leadership. In reality, however, all they are doing is exerting negative influence” (p. 18).

Styles, or types, of leadership have been studied for years. In looking at leadership communication styles, Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) studied the authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire styles. These styles are described as strict control (authoritarian), supportive communication (democratic) and nonleadership (laissez-faire). They found that while authoritarian styles of leadership often had higher rates of productivity, there was also increased hostility, aggressive behaviors and discontentment. For those leaders adopting a democratic leadership style, they found that they had an equally high rate of productivity, while having a decreased turn-over rate and increased follower satisfaction. Laissez-faire leadership resulted in decreased follower motivation and satisfaction, as well as productivity for those who were not already self-motivated (Hackman & Johnson, 2004).

As the study of leadership continued, others theories began to emerge such as situational leadership, specifically Hershey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory, to those of trait theorists who believe that leaders demonstrate certain traits that indicate they are suited for leadership roles. There are other theories that state that there are certain types of power and influence that leaders use in order to affect change and motivate persons for productivity. There is one leadership style that has been identified by many corporations as acceptable in most situations. Transformational leadership is characterized by clear communication, good character, trustworthy behavior, supportive, stimulating, high expectations, inspiring and team oriented (MindTools, 2011).

Obviously, there is a great deal to consider when looking at leadership in education. How then do we define educational leadership during a time of continuous

educational reform? It would be a daunting task to define all that educational leadership encompasses. It is, however, feasible to break educational leadership into the different practices that exemplify it. Educational leaders are under constant pressure. They are continually scrutinized for the data-driven practices that occur at the school and district level. At the same time, they are expected to show results in student achievement and instructional leadership.

Effective Practices of Educational Leaders

Practices of educational leaders vary according to the work that needs to be done at both the district level and school level. Although some argue that it is not a best practice to treat educational leadership the same as business leadership (Cuban, 2004), there are still some business leadership practices we can share or adapt within the educational setting. Drucker (2006) gave some effective practices for executives that include the following:

- Getting the knowledge needed for the job.
 - Asking, “What needs to be done?”
 - Asking, “What is right for the organization?”
- Developing an action plan.
- Acting
 - Taking responsibility for decisions.
 - Taking responsibility for communicating.
 - Focusing on opportunities rather than problems.
 - Running productive meetings.

- Thinking “we” rather than “I.”

Marzano et al. (2005) echoed some of Drucker’s practices when discussing school leadership, but used specific terminology for the educational setting. Their plan for effective school leadership included (a) developing a strong school leadership team, (b) distributing some responsibilities throughout the leadership team, (c) selecting the right work, (d) identifying the order of magnitude implied by the selected work (setting priorities), and (e) matching the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative. Marzano and Waters (2009) listed behaviors that are specific to district leaders that include ensuring collaborative goal setting, establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction, creating board alignment with and support of district goals, monitoring achievement and instructional goals, and allocating resources to support the goals for instruction and achievement. Table 1 shows how the school and district leadership practices fit within Drucker’s practices for effective executives. The educational practices as described in the works of Marzano and Waters and Marzano et al. (2005) often overlap, in the chart below, under the practices set forth by Drucker.

Table 1

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty Combined

Getting the Knowledge	Developing an Action Plan	Acting	“We” rather than “I”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting the right work • Identifying the order • Matching the management style. • Establishing collaborative goal setting. • Establishing nonnegotiable goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting the right work. • Identifying the order • Matching the management style • Establishing collaborative goal setting. • Establishing nonnegotiable goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributing some responsibilities • Establishing collaborative goal setting • Establishing nonnegotiable goals • Monitoring • Allocating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a strong school leadership team. • Distributing some responsibilities • Establishing collaborative goal setting. • Creating board alignment • Establishing nonnegotiable goals.

Throughout all of the practices described in the above literature, one particular characteristic stands out that is not only a characteristic of leadership, but a practice as well. This characteristic or practice is that of communication, and takes us back to the definition of leadership described by Hackman and Johnson (2004): “Leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs” (p. 12). Educational leaders must be able to effectively communicate in every aspect of their job. Not only must they be able to communicate effectively, but they must also take responsibility for that communication; ensuring that it is done and understood.

Leadership and Student Achievement

Marzano and Waters (2009) discussed the link between district leadership and student achievement. They found a statistically significant correlation between district-level administrative practices and average student achievement. Their findings meant that as the district leadership improved, student achievement also improved.

If district leadership is presumed to have an impact on student achievement, it would be safe to assume that building level leadership would also have a significant affect. Marzano et al. (2005) reported that there was a correlation between school leadership and student achievement. They specifically stated, “A highly effective school leader can make a dramatic influence on the overall academic achievement of students” (p. 10).

Teachers’ Perceptions of Leadership

Teachers’ perceptions of educational leaders can influence the direction of school districts for years. These perceptions of leaders are often the foundation upon which the school culture and climate of an educational organization are built. It is interesting to explore how one develops perceptions of educational leadership.

According to the Constructivist Theory, our perceptions are influenced by our experiences, collaborative discourse, and reflection (Newton, Fiene, & Wagner, 1999. p. 5). According to these researchers, “We learn and develop perceptions by synthesizing new experiences into existing perceptions” (p. 4). Pitman (2000) furthered the research on teachers’ perceptions of educational leadership and discovered that there are many factors that influence the development of these perceptions. She stated that “leadership

perceptions may stem from matching information to categories stored in long-term memory. If the information observed corresponds with stored categories of traits, then perceptions of the person as a leader develop” (p. 22). According to her research, teachers’ perceptions are influenced by a number of factors. One of those is experiences, both as students and as professionals (p. 23). Over the course of a teachers’ life, all of his or her encounters with educational leaders help to shape their perceptions. A teacher’s grade school experience with a superintendent could have caused her to develop a certain perception of all superintendents. As this teacher had contact with a superintendent during her college years, either through interviews or through general communication, any experiences that conflict with the original perception cause that perception to be adjusted. This is likely to occur again during a teachers’ employment within a school district. Other experiences, such as school reform initiatives (Newton et al., 1999) or a teacher’s evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership (Pitman, 2000), also cause teachers to adjust their perceptions of educational leadership.

Teachers’ Perceptions Impacting Leadership

Educational leaders may not realize the impact of teachers’ perceptions on the overall outcome of a school’s performance. Just as in any business, it is important that educational leaders communicate and collaborate with teachers in order to increase the motivation towards the goals of the school because states expect collaborative efforts within school districts for school improvement plans, accreditation, and funding.

Understanding how the behaviors of those in leadership positions affect the organization is important to the overall makeup of an organization. Studies have shown

that persons who believe that the leadership within the organization is responsible for all of the decision making lack autonomy (Sprietzer, 2007). This leads to employees who expect the leaders to motivate them rather than being internally motivated to achieve certain goals (Vondey, 2008). As employees become less engaged in the goals of the organization, the organization suffers. Sinickas (2008) reported that “employee perceptions of leadership correlate strongly with a company’s financial success” (p.2).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggest that there is a growing body of research documenting the effects of leadership. They have found that while some say “this fascination with leadership merely reflects the general human need to be in control of one’s situation,” there are others who say that “the effects of poor leadership are easy to see” (p. 2). A study by Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) found that there is a direct correlation between teachers’ perceptions of principal’s effectiveness and school climate. This is important when considering that a positive school climate directly effects staff performance, overall school morale, and student achievement (Freiberg, 1998).

Leaders as Communicators

In order to be a leader, one must be an effective communicator. Hackman and Johnson (2004) offered the following definition of leadership: “Leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs” (p. 12). If this definition is used as the foundational definition of all leadership, then communication is one of the most important attributes of an effective leader, and the most important factor in actuating change in an organization. Kotter (1996) discussed how communication often fails

because people do not realize that “communication comes in both word and deed, with the latter being the most powerful form” (p. 10). He believed that when an organization is implementing change, that communication should be constant, through every vehicle possible, and that the “guiding coalition should model the behavior expected of the employees” (p. 21).

Communication is a constant in a leader’s life. It is something they are going to have to do often when it comes to communicating the vision for the organization and modeling the change that is expected (Blackaby, H. et al., 2001). Marzano et al. (2005) stated that “good communication is a critical feature of any endeavor in which people work in close proximity for a common purpose” (p. 46).

Race to the Top

Educational leaders have a daunting task before them. There is a call for immediate educational reform, for which these educational/instructional leaders will be responsible. President Barack Obama stated, “It’s time to stop just talking about education reform and start actually doing it. It’s time to make education America’s national mission” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). He signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). In a failing economy, this act was “designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). ARRA provided \$4.35 billion for an educational reform program entitled RttT. This program, a highly competitive incentive program to reform low performing schools and/or school districts, rewards states that demonstrate success in raising student achievement. There are four

areas targeted for reform. The RttT initiative requires plans to be submitted that outline how states plan to (a) assist students in succeeding in college and the workplace, (b) build data systems that measure student growth and drive instruction, (c) recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals, and (d) turn around low-achieving schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

States are currently competing for these funds. First round plans have been completed, and many states and/or school districts have developed plans that have been approved for this initiative. Schools are on the brink of reform, as stated by this initiative. Educational leaders are in dire need of a framework for implementing reform. It is not just teachers who are under scrutiny. The RttT program identifies that both effective teachers and effective principals need to be recruited, developed, and retained.

Summary

Middle school has evolved over the years because of the understanding that pre-adolescent students do need specialized instruction. Teachers in middle schools require special instruction and ongoing staff development in order to keep up with the current trends in strategies and initiatives for educating middle grades learners. Some of those trends include standards-based instruction, cooperative learning, positive behavior support, and professional learning communities. Middle school teachers must be committed to being life-long learners. However, trends in middle school change quickly and often. Now, as accountability abounds and student achievement is under a watchful eye, there is a growing trend of school districts converting back to a K-8 model (AASA, 2009). This trend has been made popular by plummeting test scores in middle schools.

Educational leaders play an exceptional role today. They are expected to be instructional leaders, managers, visionaries, and effective communicators. Their activities blur the lines between education and business practices, while educational reform initiatives across the United States, such as RttT, hold them accountable at every possible level from managing the school to community and parent involvement to academic achievement and continuous staff development. In a time when education as a whole is under close scrutiny and intermediate education is in a state of continuous reform, educational leaders are a valued commodity as long as they produce results to whatever degree deemed necessary by all stakeholders.

Teachers' perceptions of educational leadership can help shape the teaching profession, as these perceptions often are the foundation for the climate and culture of an educational institution. Each encounter a teacher has with a district-level or building-level administrator helps to construct the overall perceptions of people in that leadership role. These perceptions can help to make transitions much smoother and job satisfaction ratings higher through the building of collaborative relationships and the increase in intrinsic motivation toward the goal(s) of the school district.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Since the first middle school was established in 1950 (Gatewood & Walker, 1971; Juvonen, 2007), the number of middle schools in the United States has been consistently increasing. Research indicates that it is beneficial to preadolescents and adolescents to have the middle school years to make a smooth transition into high school (Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003). This chapter presents the research design and methods intended to carry out the proposed research. The research questions are present first, followed by the research design. Next, the setting is described. The process for selecting coresearchers is then identified, followed by the researcher's role. Then, the procedures for data collection and data analysis are presented, along with trustworthiness and ethical considerations information. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research proposal.

Research Questions

This inquiry has one main question with four sub questions. The main question is, "What are teachers' experiences with school leadership in the realignment of the schools from junior high to middle school?" The subquestions are:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding communication prior to, and during, transition to the middle school concept?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the first years of implementation of the middle school concept?

3. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the support afforded them from administration and other leadership personnel during the transition?
4. How do teachers perceive their current level of job satisfaction in the wake of all the changes?

Research Design

Qualitative Research is research that begins with the very basic desire to understand a problem. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated, "The qualitative researcher studies things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 3). Instinctively, humans have qualitative research tendencies because they seek to understand the problems we encounter, for with understanding comes knowledge. It is with this natural curiosity in mind that I chose a qualitative design for this research.

According to Smith (2011), "Phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first person point of view, along with relevant conditions of experience" (p. 2), and defines it as such. Creswell (2007) further described a phenomenological study as one that "describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences or a phenomenon" (p. 57). As humans, our experiences help to shape the perceptions we have about the world in which we live, about who we are and about our life, in general. People cannot separate the world from themselves when deriving meaning from any lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Each person perceives their experiences in a unique way based on their own experiences. We

each have our own frame of reference for encountering the world and for living through our experiences.

This inquiry is a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study that reviews the experiences of teachers in one rural school district that implemented the middle school concept at the beginning of the 2008-09 school year. The theoretical framework on which this study is based is a definition of leadership given by Hackman and Johnson (2004). The definition states that “leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs” (p. 12). With this definition in mind, this inquiry will focus on the lived experiences of the teachers involved in the transition and the perceptions of the leaders communicating the change. Like Hackman and Johnson (2004) clearly communicated, leadership is about

- influence: who is influencing whom;
- group context: creating change that helps to either meet the needs of, or attain goals of the group; and
- collaboration: the leaders and the followers working together for a common goal. (pp. 11-12)

Because I have lived the experience of district realignment, transcendental phenomenology was chosen due to its process for elimination of any presuppositions regarding a given phenomenon. This process, called epoche, was the first step in conducting the study as evidenced in the section entitled “Researchers Role” and Appendix A. According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher must approach the

phenomenon untainted by his own preconceived ideas about a particular phenomenon. He must approach it as if he were experiencing it for the first time, and only through the eyes of those describing it to him.

Transcendental phenomenology brings with it a specific methodology. It moves from the epoche to phenomenological reduction, where one describes what one sees in textural language. This means more than just objects, but is far reaching to the “internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self” (Moustakas, 1994. p. 90). It is “pre-reflective and reflective” (p. 91), where the researcher reflects on his own experiences, sets them aside, and experiences the phenomenon through another person’s lens. Then the researcher reflects back to his or her own experiences and learning, and possibly views the phenomenon in a different light due to what has been learned from the “new” experience.

From the reduction stage, transcendental phenomenological research moves to data analysis. In this process there are two steps, imaginative variation and synthesis of the meanings and essences. In imaginative variation, the researcher seeks meanings through possible perspectives. Moustakas (1994) explained transcendental phenomenology by stating: “Describing the essential structures of a phenomenon is the major task” (p. 98) with “free imaginative fancy coupled with reflective explication giving body, detail, and descriptive fullness to the search for essences” (p. 99). In the synthesis stage, the researcher integrates the “fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). Understanding the teacher’s lived experiences as it pertains to the

communication afforded them throughout the realignment will help in better understanding how to improve upon the experience of such monumental change.

Coresearchers

I used purposeful sampling at the research site, while including both snowball and criterion case sampling for the coresearchers. According to Creswell (2007), purposeful sampling is done when a researcher selects specific persons or sites because they provide the particular information being sought for the specified problem. For this reason, I chose four middle schools that have recently been restructured from junior highs to middle schools.

Snowball sampling (i.e., chain sampling) was used for participant inclusion in this study. Snowball sampling means that as interviews are conducted and people are identified who may have information pertinent to the study; they become potential coresearchers to include in data collection. This growth is much like that of a snowball picking up snow as it rolls down a hillside. This method is also referred to as theoretical sampling, where the researcher reserves the right to add persons based on their potential to add insight or expand a theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Criterion sampling was accomplished as coresearchers (also known as participants) were identified based on whether or not they met the specific criteria for the study (Creswell, 2007). Initial criteria for inclusion in the study was that coresearchers must have been teachers employed at the junior high school for at least two years prior to the restructuring, that the coresearchers continued their employment at the school through the first two years of the middle school implementation, and that the coresearchers were

certified personnel, not lateral entry, at the time of the restructuring. Both male and female teachers were used for this study, with a final count of 12 coresearchers between the four schools. As previously stated, this number is based on Moustakas (1990), who believed that, “Although it is possible to conduct heuristic research with only one participant, a study will achieve richer, deeper, more profound and more varied meanings when it included the experiences of others” (p. 47).

Because so many teachers were moved from the junior high to other schools, only teachers who were transferred because of certification areas were included in this study. An example of a transfer due to certification areas may include, but is not limited to, those ninth grade teachers that had to be moved to the new ninth grade school because of course offerings that they were certified to teach.

This transcendental phenomenological study focused first on the voice of the coresearchers, then presented that voice in both a textural and structural description before moving on to present the essence of the experience. It is through this understanding of the participant’s experiences that I was able to grow, learn, and better understand the phenomenon of broad-based change. Through the teacher interviews, I was able to gain a clearer picture of how the realignment of the school district was experienced and handled by teachers. The coresearchers were eager to describe to me their experiences, share their perceptions, and provide examples of their own experiences as well as the experiences of other teachers.

The coresearchers for this inquiry were extremely varied. During initial planning, it was hoped that 12 interviews would be complete varying my coresearchers between all

four of the middle school teachers involved in the transition and those teachers who had been teaching at the junior high school, but were moved to another school due to certification area. After meeting with each middle school faculty, I found that the middle school teachers who were most familiar with me were the ones who were willing to participate. They were helpful to me by contacting colleagues whom they knew might be willing to participate, thus increasing the number of interviews I was able to complete during the data collection period.

Because of the very personal nature of these interviews, minimal descriptive information was given in the introductions of the coresearchers. Instead, Figure 1 and Figure 2 on page 46 provide a quick demographics overview of all 12 of the coresearchers. Figure 1 contains information regarding gender, age, race, and licensing (traditional or lateral entry), while Figure 2 displays the education level, number of years of experience, and subject area (core or encore). For the purpose of this inquiry, core subjects include English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Encore subjects include Art, Music, Computers, and Physical Education.

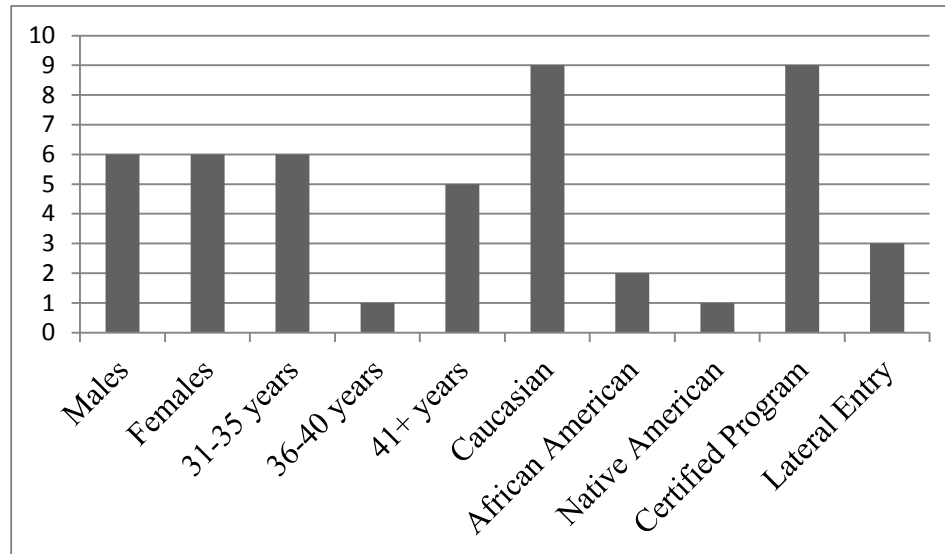


Figure 1. Attributes of Coresearchers: Gender, Age, Race, Licensing

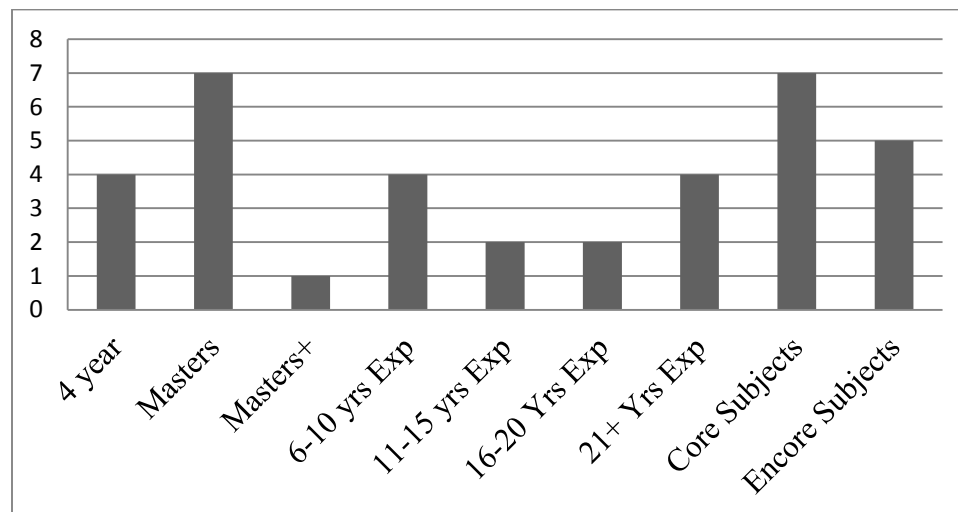


Figure 2. Attributes of Coresearchers: Education, Experience, and Subject Area

Junior High to Middle School Teachers

Seven certified personnel who worked in the junior high schools and still remained in the middle schools two years after the realignment were interviewed for this inquiry: Sam, a young, energetic, conservative teacher; Sara, a middle-aged recently

remarried woman who expressed her passion for her students' learning through tears; Richard, a soft-spoken, intelligent teacher and doctoral student who prides himself on being very strong with curriculum and instruction; Victoria, a creative, thirty-something teacher with one small child at home; Jardai, an intelligent woman with two upper elementary school children who keep her active all the time; Addison, a funny and beautiful young woman with three small children; and Jaiden, a middle-aged man, with two daughters who aspires to move into administration.

Table 2

Attributes of Junior High to Middle School Teachers

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Yrs Experience	Grade Level
Sam	M	W	13	6, 7, 8, 9
Sara	F	W	23	6, 7
Richard	M	W	18	6,7,8
Victoria	F	W	12	8, 9
Jardai	F	B	10	8, 9
Addison	F	W	10	8, 9
Jaiden	M	W	10	K, 6, 7, 8

Junior High but Moved Due to Certification Area

Four certified personnel who worked in the junior high schools but were moved to the 9th Grade Academy due to their certification area were interviewed for this inquiry: Shari, a middle-aged, married woman who hopes to retire soon and teach at the community college; Mary, an experienced teacher and extremely wise woman who is very passionate about teaching and has served in many roles as an educator; Quentin, a very happy-go-lucky young man who is expecting his first child; and Jeb, a gentleman

who is passionate about curriculum and enjoys teaching students who would normally be considered challenging.

Table 3

Attributes of Junior High but Moved Due to Certification Area

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Yrs Experience	Grade Level
Shari	F	W	20	7, 9
Mary	F	W	30	K-8
Quentin	M	B	8	6, 7, 8, 9
Jeb	M	N.A.	23	6, 7, 8, 9

Junior High but Retired After Implementation Year

One certified person who had worked at the junior high but chose to retire after the first year of implementation was interviewed for this inquiry: John, an experienced teacher who prides himself on his people skills and enjoys seeing students have fun while learning. John was chosen because he retired from the school system after the implementation year, but still works in a capacity that keeps him involved in the school system, especially with middle schools.

Setting

The school district in this study, which was comprised of 16 schools, four of which are now middle schools, has just undergone a total realignment from the junior high model to the middle school model. More than 200 school employees were moved across the county to different schools. Three out of four junior high principals retired or moved to other counties, while those that remained employed were moved to elementary schools, and elementary school principals were moved to the middle schools. Three of

the new middle schools gained former elementary school principals from within the county, while the remaining middle school gained a former elementary school principal from outside of the county. Details concerning the four target middle schools follow, with tables of current school enrollment, student body, and staff/faculty comparisons following information specific to each school.

School A

The school is located in the northern portion of a county that was once a thriving tobacco farming community. Over the past several years, with tobacco sales decreasing, tobacco farming has decreased, causing this small farming community to move from large cash producing crops to general produce. The community has come to rely on these crops along with local businesses and poultry production farms for employment. More than 70% of the students who attend this middle school receive free or reduced lunch. During a four year trend study, this school met AYP during one school year, 2008-09, the first year after the realignment for middle schools.

School B

The school is located in a small railroad town southeast of the county seat. This railroad community was once an important hub for passenger service as well as a freight service. Passenger services have decreased substantially, leaving this community with freight as the primary purpose for the railroad. Information regarding free and reduced lunch shows that 74% of the students at this school were eligible for free and reduced lunch.

For the school year 2007-08, School B made expected growth in seventh grade reading and high growth in seventh grade math. It made expected growth in both eighth grade reading and math. This school did not meet AYP anytime during a recent four year trend study.

School C

The school is located within the historic district of the county seat. It is a more affluent area of the county, but is adjacent to government housing as well. The school serves a community with varying incomes, with 66% of its students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Testing data from 2007-08 show the school met expected growth in reading and math for eighth grade and in reading only for seventh grade. Only 41.4% of the seventh grade students scored as proficient on the seventh grade writing test. This school did not meet AYP anytime during a recent four year trend study.

School D

The school is located in a traditional southern mill village. It is surrounded by four large textile mills, of which only one is still in operation. This community was once a thriving and close-knit textile town, but is now characterized as a low-rent, transient community. Information regarding free and reduced lunch shows that this school has 77% of its students eligible for this program.

Testing data for the school year 2007-08 shows that this school did not meet expected growth or high growth in any tested subject. Only 40.2% of this school's seventh graders were proficient on their writing test that same school year. This school did not meet AYP anytime during a recent four year trend study.

Below is a comparison of the coresearchers beginning with Table 4 that shows a basic comparison of the schools in regards to the location, number of certified staff members, total enrollment, percentage of students on the free or reduced lunch program and the four year AYP trend for that school. This comparison shows that the coresearchers were representative of a wide variety of settings, although the overall school district has a high percentage of students on free or reduced lunch and three out of four schools did not meet AYP over a four year analysis.

Table 4

Basic Comparison of Research Sites, 2007-2010

School	Area	Certified Staff	Enrollment	% Free/Reduced Lunch	4 Year AYP Trend
A	Rural	30	238	70%	met 2008-09
B	Suburban	42	575	74%	not met
C	Suburban	58	737	66%	not met
D	Rural	29	317	77%	not met

The following tables (5 and 6) show the comparison of the staff members and students in each school within the district based on gender and ethnicity. These data aides in understanding the cultural distribution of the schools in order to better understand influences on teachers' perceptions.

Table 5

Gender and Ethnicity of Staff

School	Male	Female	African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	Nat. American/ Alaskan	Other
A	17%	83%	33%	61%	3%	3%	0%
B	30.2%	69.7%	11.6%	88.3%	0.00%	0.00%	0%
C	no data	no data	16%	84%	0%	0%	0%
D	27%	73%	12%	73%	0%	0%	0%

Table 6

Ethnicity of Student Body

School	African Amer.	Caucasian	Hispanic	Nat. Amer./Alaskan	Other
A	42%	14%	14%	2%	1%
B	41%	45%	4%	7%	0.01%
C	37%	52%	3.80%	3.70%	3.40%
D	33%	54%	7%	3%	3%

Procedures

I first sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University (see Appendix B) before collecting any data for this study. Upon receiving both district and building level administration approval, data collection began by building rapport with all staff and faculty through an introduction and explanation of the study during a faculty meeting at each participating school. The target schools were located in a traditional southern town, whose residents look for connections to people with whom they come in contact, I drew on the connections that I had throughout the school system and the various surrounding communities. I established rapport with teachers through

regular contact in the normal educational environment during the first months of the study.

During the initial faculty meeting, I explained the criteria for participation and asked for volunteers. I distributed index cards for volunteers to provide their name and contact information. Consent forms (see Appendix C) for participation were given to all coresearchers of the study once they have volunteered and their eligibility for the study had been determined.

Once the study began, interviews were conducted with the initial coresearchers over a three month period. The interviews utilized open ended questions and occurred at an agreed upon time and place. Because I used snowball sampling, she used the information provided by each person interviewed to gather more participants who may have pertinent information on the research topic. I contacted each participant individually in order to set up their meeting time and place. Coresearchers were allowed to review transcribed interviews to ensure credibility and dependability.

Researcher's Role

As I began to reflect on my situation within this school district, the process of epoche started with a reflection of my role. I was formerly the school counselor at one of the middle schools in which she collected data. I was employed at this school for seven years, experiencing the transition to middle school, firsthand. Although I had been at the school for seven years, not all of the initial coresearchers had been employed at the school for the same amount of time. However, I believe that I had an excellent relationship with most of the employees. There were concerns that some coresearchers

felt that they could not be completely honest for fear of being reprimanded by administration should any of this information be obtained by leadership in the school district. Great care was taken to assure the confidentiality and anonymity of all coresearchers. I took care in presenting the study to ensure that the credibility and reliability of answers were maintained. I believe that I was able to keep any personal biases at bay during this research by consistently using detailed reflective journaling and reflective note taking in order to check for biases. I enlisted the help of a third party to check for accuracy in her journals and notes. This third party person was someone who was aware of the realignment of the school system, but had no personal connection to the changes and shifts in personnel. The individual was a professional in education, who professionally edits documents for graduate and doctoral students. This person was recommended by other doctoral students from local programs. After discussing the specifics of this study, and inquiring about her editing skills, she was chosen for this task. I have taken precautions to ensure the anonymity of the coresearchers by giving code names to each participant.

I was affected by the restructuring in that several of my coworkers were moved to other schools. Due to the ninth grade being removed from the middle schools, several teachers were relocated to accommodate for staffing at the ninth grade academy. Initially, I grieved the loss of my work friends, but have made new ones in their place.

I did not like the ways in which the various staff and faculty members who were moved were told that they were being moved. I also did not originally see how moving toward a middle school concept would be beneficial to the county by doing it in such a

manner that the restructuring took place before staff development and training were done. Through research and evaluation of the topic, I have seen that procedurally drastic measures must often be made in order to effectively begin a change in a school's culture. Although I continue to have mixed emotions regarding the restructuring, I have kept an open mind and have learned much from this study.

Data Collection

From the data, suggestions for improving implementation of large scale change can be identified. Although this research was conducted with only school personnel, these people are the ones affected the most during such changes. The study took place 4 years after the implementation of the middle school realignment. This time frame allowed teachers sufficient time to move past the intense emotional reactions they may have had at the time of the initial implementation and allow them to focus on the leadership and outcomes of those changes. With the current focus on education, this research will be valuable to educational leaders as we move forward in educational reform. Already, educators are facing monumental changes as many states have adopted the Common Core State Standards and must begin to develop a curriculum out of those standards (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). Understanding how teachers perceive change can help educational leader's transition teachers to the new curriculum as well as other changes that will be necessary in education in the coming years.

Demographic Information

During the course of the interview, demographic information was collected on each coresearcher. Using attribute coding, this information was used to note similarities

among coresearchers, whether that is educational experience, experience in teaching, area of teaching, and/or other characteristics that present themselves during the course of the study.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with teachers meeting the criteria for this study. Seidman (2006) stated that “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). Questions were developed based on gaining an understanding of teacher’s lived experiences throughout the transition by making sure the questions remained open ended and focused on specifics of the transition. During the interview process, the questions were used as a guide, allowing dialogue to happen naturally. This dialogue continued until the participant had the chance to tell his or her story and come to a natural closing (Moustakas, 1990).

Face and content validity of interview questions was established by presenting the questions to a panel of teachers and doctoral student administrators for review and by submitting the questions to the dissertation committee, respectively. I provided a copy of the interview guide to a group of five middle school teachers during a staff development day at the district level central office. Those teachers were not coresearchers in the study. The questions were also provided to a group of four doctoral student administrators immediately after a principal/assistant principal meeting at the district level central office. The purpose of distributing the questions was to have the teachers and administrators review them for approval in order to establish the credibility and dependability of the

questions. The five middle school teachers were all experienced middle school teachers who had moved into the district since the realignment, or who had been teaching at other grade levels and had recently moved back into the middle school grade levels. The four doctoral student administrators had been administrators within the district where the realignment occurred. Each of them had experience as either an assistant principal or principal. A simple check list to show appropriate questions (Appendix D) was provided to both groups.

The group of teachers approved all questions with only the suggestion that the research focus more on the experiences of the teachers as they moved through the transition from junior high to middle school. The group of doctoral level administrators approved all questions with no feedback.

To further establish credibility and dependability, I continuously submitted the questions to the dissertation committee and research consultant for feedback. The original questions were changed based on their feedback regarding terminology used. A simple change from “teachers’ feelings” to “teachers’ perceptions” was one of the suggestions that the committee made to improve the interview guide. This team also suggested that the research focus on teachers’ lived experiences during the transition.

Because of the feedback from the two teams and the dissertation committee, the interview guide questions were changed to reflect the correct terminology of perceptions instead of feelings. Additionally, changes were made to reflect the change in focus to teachers’ lived experiences during the transition. Appendix E contains a list of the interview questions for this study.

Qualitative Documentation

The use of field journals (Appendix F) and reflective note-taking (Appendix G) helped to record important thoughts, biases, reflections, and internal thoughts as suggested by Creswell (2005). I spent time after each interview reflecting and considering my internal dialogue during those interviews. Detailed field notes were kept throughout the study. This diary of thoughts, reflections, memos, biases, questions, and possible emergent themes was used as a source for data analysis once the study was complete.

Document Analysis

Following Moustakas' (1990) theory of total immersion into the phenomenon that is being studied, I collected as many documents as possible that contained information regarding the realignment process and perceptions of teachers involved in the realignment. Document analysis included reviews of the working conditions surveys completed by teachers during the transition period, newspaper articles, state and local policy and procedures, school board minutes, and other school documents that may be pertinent to this study.

A document analysis of newspaper articles, state and local policies and procedures, school board minutes and other school documents that may lend themselves to the study helped me to better understand how teachers were informed of changes. This analysis helped with the validity and reliability of statements made during interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was the key in this study as the data collected produced an enormous amount of information to be identified, sorted, and analyzed. According to Moustakas (1990), it is the “timeless immersion” (p. 51) into the materials that helps one to understand the lived experiences of the coresearchers. With Moustakas’ (1994) description of phenomenological analysis and representation in mind, I followed what Moustakas (1994) called a “modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data” (p. 121).

In this method of analysis, I first described my own experiences with the phenomenon, listed significant statements from my own experiences and transcribed interviews and categorized them into themes, wrote an individual textural description of the phenomenon for each coresearcher and myself, wrote an individual structural description of the phenomenon for each coresearcher and myself, then wrote a composite description of the phenomenon, or the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The steps to data analysis follow.

Phenomenological Reduction

Moustakas (1994) suggested that phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to look at the data collected and begin to describe the experiences of the coresearcher with reference to the textural qualities. This process was repeated several times, “I look and describe, look again and describe, look again and describe” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90), in order to truly synthesize the information. Within

phenomenological reduction, I completed the steps of bracketing, horizontalization, clusters of themes, organizing of themes, and developing textural descriptions.

Bracketing. Edmund Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological movement, believed that the researcher has to recognize and put aside their own perceived notions regarding the experiences they were studying. He called this process bracketing (Hatch, 2002). For the transcendental phenomenological researcher, the term “epoche” is closely related to that of bracketing. This term means that the researcher must “eliminate any suppositions” (Moustakas, 1994. p. 26) about the particular phenomenon. However, Churchill and Wertz (1985) made it clear that the researcher need not forget about their own preconceptions, but instead let it orient them toward the data as a guide. This is the first step, and an important step, towards keeping the researcher’s own biases and preconceived ideas from skewing the research.

As the first step in data analysis, I developed a detailed description of my own experiences with the phenomenon, starting with the “Researcher’s Role” section of this proposal, to assist in setting aside all preconceived experiences with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007, p. 235). During the process of data collection and analysis, I kept a journal of personal reflections (see Appendix G) regarding the interviews, paying particular attention to any preconceived notions that I might unconsciously reflect in the synthesis of the information. This is an essential step in addressing any of my biases regarding the phenomenon. In the event that I found biases within my reflections, the information was discussed with the third party reviewer to determine and document those biases. I continuously returned to the epoche and

bracketing processes in order to note those biases and to return to a state of viewing the realignment from the coresearcher's point of view.

Horizontalization. Moustakas (1994) described the process of horizontalization as one in which we consider and reconsider our experiences or the experiences of others. As documents were analyzed and transcripts were produced from the interviews, I listed all significant statements related to the phenomenon being studied. Each statement was then given an equal value (Moustakas, 1994). For each of the transcribed accounts of the lived experiences, I followed the steps given by Moustakas for the modified version of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. After statements were given equal value, they were considered on an individual basis for any significance to the description of the experience. All relevant statements were recorded. Each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement was listed. Moustakas (1994) described these statements as “the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience” (p. 122). A sample of the horizons of meaning or meaning units can be found in Appendix H. The invariant horizons provide me with highlights from the lived experience. The invariant horizons were given a code and recorded in a digital format to determine clusters of meanings or themes.

Clusters of meanings/themes. After horizontalization, the invariant horizons were classified in categories based on their meaning or themes. I used a spreadsheet to organize the data into meaning or themes that would help in the process of developing a textural description of the phenomenon. I engaged my dissertation committee for peer review in this process.

Textural descriptions. As Moustakas (1994) stated, textural descriptions are the invariant themes and qualities that emerge in the analysis of data in a phenomenological study. These invariant themes are developed by pulling out the nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping themes. Textural descriptions (see Appendix I) within the memoing tell what happened (Lane, Newman, Schaeffer, & Wells, 2012). Data analysis using the emergent themes (see Appendix J) from the interviews, my field journals, and the document analysis assisted me in developing the textural descriptions. In vivo coding, or using words and direct quotes from the coresearchers, helped to validate these descriptions. Both an individual and composite textural description was developed for this phenomenon. The individual textural description was done following the epoche stage and following final analyses of the individual interview transcripts and invariant themes that emerged from those transcripts.

Imaginative variation. After phenomenological reduction, I engaged in what is called imaginative variation. Moustakas (1994) described this task as “seeking possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions” (pp. 97-98). This process helped me to develop the structural descriptions of the phenomenon. This is the process that allowed me to let my imagination run wild, where all possibilities imagined were explored. I engaged in looking for invariant structural themes. I revisited my own feelings and thoughts, as well as those of the coresearchers, with regards to the

phenomenon, keeping possibilities of themes in mind as I reflected on the data (Moustakas, 1994).

Structural descriptions. Structural descriptions of the phenomenon tell how it was experienced by the coresearchers (Lane et al., 2012). According to Moustakas (1994), there are six universal structural themes. Those themes are “time, space, relationship to self, to others, bodily concerns, and casual or intentional structures” (p. 181). He further described the individual structural description as that description which “provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes and qualities that account for ‘how’ feelings and thoughts connected with the [phenomenon] are aroused and what conditions evoke [those feelings]” (p. 135).

In order to develop the structural descriptions, I developed a list of structural qualities of the experience. A sample of the structural descriptions can be found in Appendix K. From there, the structural themes were developed, employing the aforementioned universal structural themes (Moustakas, 1994). Both individual and a composite structural description were developed.

Essence of the phenomenon. The essence of a phenomenon can only be explained by those themes that are underlying but universal to the experience. The researcher takes the textural and structural descriptions and looks for that which is similar among the two (Moustakas, 1994). A sample of the essence of the phenomenon, also known as the combined composite textural and structural descriptions, can be found in Appendix L. For this study, I reviewed and coded the various attributes of the coresearchers from the demographic information, reviewed documents (field notes,

journals, interview transcripts, board meeting minutes, etc.) and their codebooks for the process for development of textural and structural descriptions, and finally, developed a composite textural and structural description of the phenomenon. I engaged in reflection and imaginative thought to further extract any other underlying themes or meanings from the experiences documented by this study. As Moustakas (1994) stated, there is no definitive process for capturing the complete and overall essence of a phenomenon, but only the ability to capture that essence as seen by that researcher at that moment in time. I used the data to develop the essence of the lived experiences of teachers who have experienced a broad-based change.

Memoing. As Moustakas (1990) explained in his heuristic approach to research, the voice of the researcher is ever present as he invests his time and energy into the study of a phenomenon. Because of this, I found it was important to reflect on my thoughts and feelings throughout the study, as well as reflect on my findings. I made notes in the margins of the original transcripts during their initial reading. These memoed notes (Appendix M) were included in the document and later categorized using a digital means for categorizing data.

The use of a field notebook was used to further document reflections throughout the study that were not associated with the transcripts, but more associated with the interviews themselves. I took note of posture, attitude, specific intonations in voice, anything that sparked further investigation or questioning, and significant quotes from the coresearchers. This information was analyzed at the conclusion of each interview and recorded in a reflective journal.

Member check/feedback. As interviews were transcribed (a sample transcription can be found in Appendix N), I sent the coresearchers digital copies via email to review for accuracy. The coresearchers were allowed to provide additional feedback regarding the transcriptions of the interviews. None of the coresearchers had any feedback to provide. They all confirmed that their transcripts were accurate.

Audit trail. Lincoln and Guba (1986) discussed the need for an audit trail in phenomenological inquiries naming six areas to assist me in development of the audit trail. Those areas are raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information. Because the goal was to increase the trustworthiness of this study, an audit of the influences that may have affected me was done throughout the inquiry (Carcary, 2009).

A chronological account of the inquiry was kept in a digital journal (see Figure 3). This account included all of the events of the study, as documented by me, which occurred during the length of this research. This account includes, but is not limited to, significant events affecting the research (i.e., interview dates, school events that affect morale prior to interviews) and personal events that may affect biases. In addition, I created an audit trail that established how significant processes were related throughout the inquiry. Figure 3 illustrates those relationships.

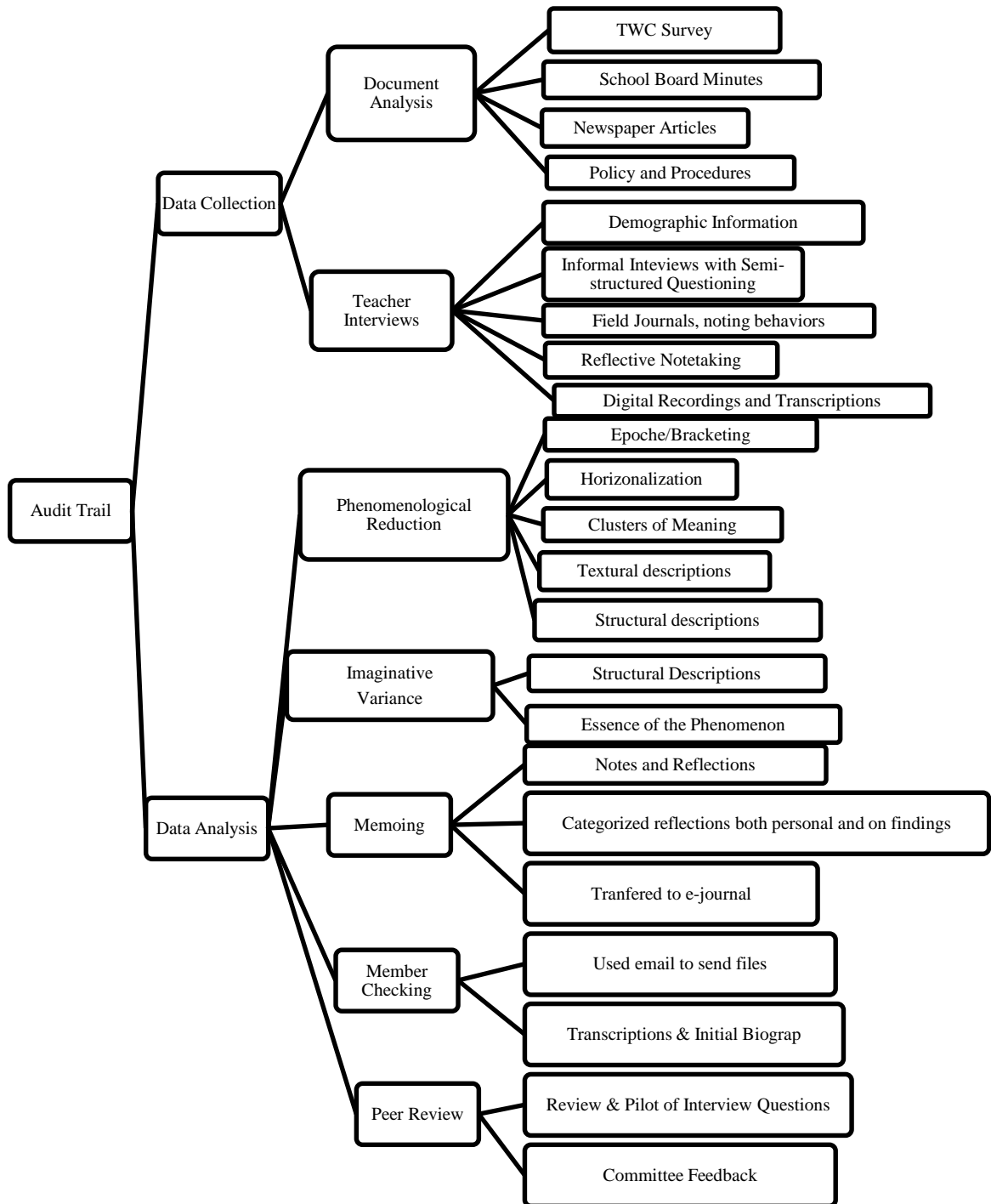


Figure 3. Audit Trail

Triangulation. Triangulation of data is simply when a fact or finding is able to be verified with more than one form of data collection. Triangulation occurred naturally as three or more methods of data collection and analysis (i.e., document analysis, interviews, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variance, memoing, member check, and peer review) were used within this inquiry. These methods included the steps within phenomenological reduction. Those steps are bracketing, horizontalization, clusters of meaning, textural descriptions, and the processes of imaginative variation, memoing, member check/feedback, and the audit trail.

Trustworthiness

In an attempt to prove the rigor of this study, I used the following naturalistic techniques that parallel the more quantitative paradigms of internal validity; external validity, reliability, and objectivity were used. Those techniques are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Credibility

Lincoln and Cuba (1986) listed several ways for credibility to be established in naturalistic research: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks. For this inquiry, credibility was established through prolonged engagement (lengthy interviews with each coresearcher), triangulation (by evaluation of various forms of data obtained during the study), peer debriefing (obtaining constant feedback from the dissertation committee and a panel of educators in a leadership cohort), negative case analysis (constant search for negative

information relating to the study), and member checks (allowing the coresearchers to review transcriptions and provide feedback).

Transferability

Trochim (2006) described transferability as “the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings” (p. 1). In quantitative analysis, transferability is referred to as external validity. Thick, rich, descriptive documentation, including direct quotations, vivid description of context, and paraphrasing were used in order to account for the details of the interviews and observations. For all interviews, an audio recording device was used to capture as much of the detail in the language as possible. Copies of emails and other electronic communication confirmed data gathered outside of the interviews.

Dependability

In quantitative research, dependability is measured by determining whether or not others would obtain the same results when observing the same data. In qualitative research, observing the same data is impossible, as one examines the lived experiences of individuals. However, through inclusion of multiple individuals’ perceptions of a particular lived experience, dependability can be established in qualitative research. These individuals bring their own frame of reference, values, beliefs, and preconceived ideas to the interview. Each person’s unique experiences help to shape the essence of the total experience. For this inquiry, an audit trail was established to assist with dependability.

Confirmability

Trochim (2006) referred to confirmability as “the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated” (p. 1). I took care not to make presumptions based on one piece of data, but rather corroborate it with other data and make sure that what was presented was only the data specific to the phenomenon as described by the coresearchers (Shenton, 2004). Through triangulation of data and the establishment of an audit trail, confirmability was established for this inquiry.

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain the confidentiality of all coresearchers, pseudonyms were used for the coresearchers, the school district, and the schools involved in this study. Storage of all data has been maintained in a locked cabinet in my home. Electronic data has been housed on two password protected external hard drives that are locked inside a secure cabinet in my home when not in use. The use of two hard drives is to assure there are two areas to back up electronic data. This data will only be used by me; no other people will have access to this data at any time. Once the dissertation has been defended and the three year retainment period has ended, all data will be destroyed in the following manner: All hard copies of data will be burned and all hard drives will be wiped clean and reformatted.

Summary

The theoretical basis of this inquiry is developed out of a definition of leadership given by Hackman and Johnson (2004). They said, “Leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet

shared group goals and needs” (p. 12). With that definition in mind, this inquiry has focused on the lived experiences of the teachers involved in the transition and the perceptions of the leaders communicating the change. Increased communication from leadership among the group aids in the collaborative efforts of all involved. People who feel they have been involved in the planning and implementation of changes through open communication and collaboration perceive the transition as being a smooth one.

This is a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study that has incorporated interviews and document analysis as forms of data collection. Member checking was conducted after transcription was complete. As interviews were transcribed, I sent the coresearchers digital copies via email to review for accuracy. Coresearchers were encouraged and allowed to provide additional feedback regarding the transcriptions of the interviews. None of the coresearchers had any feedback to provide. They all confirmed that their transcripts were accurate and that the themes extracted were in accordance with their beliefs.

Data was analyzed using phenomenological reduction and imaginative variance. These processes required that I describe in words what was seen and heard, including the relationship between the phenomena and the coresearchers. As Moustakas (1994) stated, textural descriptions are the invariant themes and qualities that emerge in the analysis of data in a phenomenological study. These invariant themes are developed by pulling out the non-repetitive and nonoverlapping themes. Textural descriptions within the memoing tell what happened (Lane et al., 2012). In addition to a textural description, it was important for me to develop a structural description. Structural descriptions of the

phenomenon tell how it was experienced by the coresearchers (Lane et al, 2012).

According to Moustakas (1994) there are six universal structural themes. Those themes are “time, space, relationship to self, to others, bodily concerns and casual or intentional structures” (p. 181). He further describes the individual structural description as that description which “provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes and qualities that account for “how” feelings and thoughts connected with the [phenomenon] are aroused and what conditions evoke [those feelings]” (p. 135).

I created individual structural and textural descriptions based on each coresearcher’s account of the phenomena. After completing these descriptions, a composite textural and structural description was completed (Appendixes O & P). Composite descriptions are those descriptions which take into account each individual description and synthesize it into one. In order to better understand the phenomena, the information was synthesized further into a combined composite structural and textural description. This was completed in order to describe the essence of the experience for the coresearchers. This essence was presented to each coresearcher for further review. All agreed that it captured the essence of the experience at the time of the realignment and the first two years of implementation. The variety of methods used to collect and analyze the data allowed for a better understanding of the perceptions of teachers who have experienced the transitions that this rural school district has experienced.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this inquiry was to identify teachers' perceptions of how leadership styles and practices of administration could improve the process of broad-based change in an educational organization. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological inquiry was conducted that focused on understanding the lived experiences of teachers during one school district's realignment, which transformed all junior high schools in the district to middle schools. The goal of the transcendental phenomenological inquiry was to provide a general description of "the essential structure of the experience reflecting the core elements shared by the participants" (Conklin, 2005). Teachers were asked to reflect on their experiences during the realignment, while a careful document analysis was done to aid in validity of data and timelines.

Analysis of the teacher interviews as they related to the research questions revealed significant information regarding teachers' perceptions of change. Through phenomenological reduction procedures and a careful document analysis, textural and structural descriptions were composed that revealed a series of emergent themes regarding these perceptions. Four primary themes were consistently present throughout the analysis of data. They were communication, implementation and support, impact on instruction, and personal feelings and self-worth. Chapter four includes an analysis of data that incorporates textural and structural descriptions from each of the coresearcher's interviews, composite textural (Appendix P) and structural descriptions (Appendix P), a combination of the composite textural-structural descriptions (Appendix M), a summary of the analysis of data, and a summary of the findings.

Research Questions

This study was designed to identify teachers' perceptions of how leadership styles and practices of administration could improve the process of broad-based change in an educational organization. This inquiry has one main question with four sub questions. The main question is, “What are teachers’ experiences during major transitions in a school setting?” The subquestions were:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding communication prior to, and during, transition to the middle school concept?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the first years of implementation of the middle school concept?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the support afforded them from administration and other leadership personnel during the transition?
4. How do teachers perceive their current level of job satisfaction in the wake of all the changes?

This research study was concerned with the subjective experiences of the coresearchers. It used the collective voices of these coresearchers to better understand the phenomena of leadership throughout the process of realignment in a school district from the junior high model to the middle school model.

Coresearcher Summary

This inquiry was a transcendental phenomenological study. According to Moustakas (1994), the nature of this type of study calls for the participants to be coresearchers in the study. For that reason, the participants of this study are referred to as

such. Twelve coresearchers were interviewed for this inquiry. All of the coresearchers were certified teachers who had been at the junior high level for at least two years prior to the realignment and either continued at the middle school level for two years after the realignment, were transferred due to their certification area, or retired one year after the realignment.

I met at each of the middle schools during faculty meetings to explain the study and answered any questions that potential participants might have during those meetings. Potential coresearchers were asked to leave their names and contact information on their table at the end of the meetings. After collecting contact information, I met with each coresearcher individually and explained the study in depth, answered any questions, and asked if they were willing to participate. A total of 12 coresearchers agreed to participate in this inquiry. Each coresearcher agreed to participate and signed a consent form (Appendix C) and was assigned a pseudonym for data analysis.

Coresearcher Profiles

For the purpose of this inquiry, the coresearcher's information below is listed by the coresearchers teaching area specific to where they were teaching after the realignment. Seven (58.3%) coresearchers remained at the middle school after the implementation years. Four (33.3%) coresearchers were moved to a new 9th grade academy because of their certification area during the realignment. One (8%) coresearcher retired a year after the realignment.

Interviews

Coresearchers participated in individual interviews either during their planning periods, after school or on weekends. Each coresearcher was allowed to choose the setting for their interview. Four participants chose to come to my office for the interview, while all others were interviewed in their classrooms, at their respective schools during their planning. Each participant was asked the same questions from the interview guide (Appendix E), but the interview was allowed to flow naturally as seen in the sample transcript (see Appendix N). All interviews lasted approximately one hour depending upon coresearchers responses. All interviews were audio recorded using a Livescribe™ smartpen and tablet and transcribed exactly as they were recorded.

Composite of Combined Textural-Structural Description

The composite textural-structural description was developed out of the individual composite textural and structural descriptions. These two realms are in continual relationship with each other; one without the other does not allow for a complete understanding of the essence of a phenomenon or experience (Moustakas, 1994). I found myself contemplating the noesis and noema that Husserl (1931) discussed as part of intentionality. For the purpose of this inquiry, noema is the idea of realignment (or change), not the realignment itself. Noesis, on the other hand, is what is real, what we are able to describe over and over again. I reviewed all of the data and began to analyze it further. From this analysis, I found that there were clusters of themes that emerged. I categorized similar statements and developed charts (Figures 4-7) to express that data. The charts are presented as the themes are introduced in the next section.

Themes

In discussion of the themes, I referenced coresearchers' statements in order to back up the selected theme. A representative sample of responses was used for this purpose.

Research Question One

This inquiry had one main question with four subquestions. The main question was "What are teachers' experiences during major transitions in a school setting?" The overall interview helped to answer this question and will be discussed later. The first sub question was, "What are teachers' perceptions regarding communication prior to, and during, transition to the middle school concept?" This question was designed to solicit information about how teachers perceived their involvement in the decision making process for the realignment of the school district.

Communication. As coresearchers reflected on their own experiences, the level of communication emerged as a major theme within research question one. Each coresearcher was able to discuss the communication received during the realignment with clarity. They all remembered every detail of how they were informed of the upcoming realignment and how faculty would be moved within the school district.

Involvement. Within the area of communication, the coresearchers perceived their level of involvement as minimal. Through effective communication, they believed they could have been more involved. The coresearchers believed that there was a need for the involvement of teachers in the process of change. One coresearcher stated that "one of the biggest problems is that they just didn't involve us at all. We were all just

told. I do not believe that is a very professional way of doing things.” Each of the coresearchers echoed these sentiments in their own words. They believed that as professionals who worked in the field, they had plenty of information to provide to those who were making decisions that affected their careers, evidenced by this coresearchers statement, “No one ever asked teacher what they thought would be good ideas for this realignment or transition. They are in the trenches. We would have had good ideas.” Teachers perceived they were left in the dark and not allowed to be included. One coresearcher described the process as the construction of a puzzle. She stated,

and so it’s like they [teachers] are trying to figure out what the puzzle is. It is a puzzle. But there is always this missing piece. The missing piece is the part that they control and they know what the rumors are. They might even start them, but they know what they are, and then they turn around and do whatever [they want].

Teacher communication. Because there was a lack of involvement of teachers in the realignment process, teachers perceived themselves as being left to communicate information as they heard it, whether correct or incorrect. One coresearcher stated that the news of the realignment was passed along “through the grapevine.” Another stated. “It was leaked by word of mouth rather than telling the masses. You know, like one principal might tell his staff something, then staff members told others throughout the school system.” One teacher recalled,

There was no communication. There really wasn’t. There wasn’t any of this it’s going to be okay. This is why we are doing this. What I kept saying was if somebody would just talk to us, teachers would buy in. Teachers want to do what

is best for their students, they really do. The problem is that we didn't know what was going to happen.

Reassignment. From the research, it is evident that teachers would have liked to be more involved in the reassignment process. Within the discussion of communication, coresearchers described their perception of how reassignments were done. One coresearcher describes it as,

We were told, and I don't want to get anyone in trouble, but what we were told in an off the record kind of way was that they went into the conference room at the central office, where all the white boards are, and they listed all of the teachers there. They had them written, ranked if you will, high, medium, and low; or effective, proficient, developing based on the new evaluation standards. They also looked at years of experience and test scores in the tested areas. That's how they chose them. There really was no choice to be made by teacher.

Although this was one coresearcher's perception, others discussed their ideas of how reassignments were done. Those who were reassigned to the Ninth Grade Academy were told that "only the best of the best would be chosen for this school," as two coresearchers recalled. Ironically enough, these two coresearchers also stated in their own words that they were unsure if this were something told to them to make them feel better about the change.

As coresearchers recalled the reassignments coming out in letter forms during the weekend of May 8, 2008, they recalled the reactions of fellow teachers. One coresearcher stated,

They had teachers crying in the hallways during End of Grade tests and they had to stop and not send any more (letters) out until after school. We were even out for the summer, and immediately when those letters came out, the phones started ringing, meetings started occurring to find out where people were going.

This was the noema, simply describing how each coresearcher was notified of the change. It was consistent across all coresearchers. Figure 4 is a composite of the communication the coresearchers remembered in regards to the realignment. It is a quick representation of the fact that:

- All coresearchers remembered receiving the form where they chose the schools in which they would like to work.
- All coresearchers remembered receiving their reassignment letter.
- All coresearchers put emphasis on the word “told” when describing how they learned of the realignment.
- All coresearchers remembered hearing the rumors first.
- All coresearchers felt like there was no communication about the realignment.
- All coresearchers felt some anger about the way in which communication was handled.
- All coresearchers mentioned control or power in their discussion of the realignment and how communication was handled.
- All coresearchers felt that there was no involvement of teachers in the process of the realignment

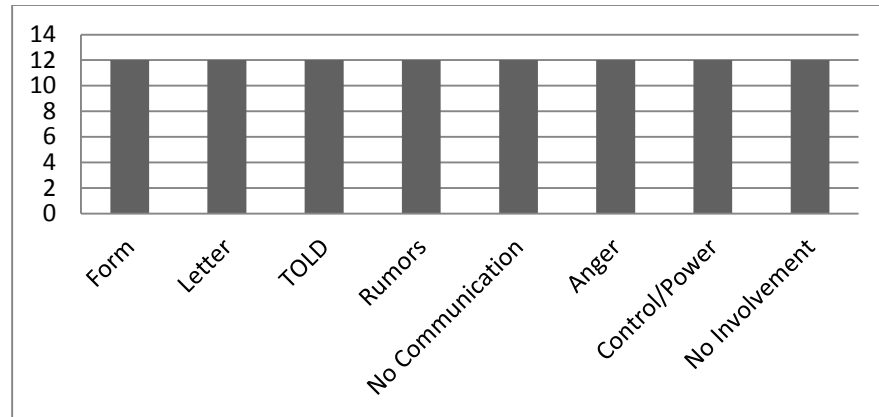


Figure 4: Communication Statements

Research Question Two

Research question two asked, “What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the first years of implementation of the middle school concept?” This question was designed to solicit information regarding the first two years of implementation of the middle school concept. It delved into the themes of professionalism, self-worth, collegiality, morale, and school culture based on teacher perceptions and opinions. Responses coalesced around three themes.

Self-worth. As coresearchers recalled the realignment and the first year of implementation of the middle school concept, the theme of self worth became apparent as they described their perceptions of themselves and their perceptions of how others viewed them. It is best to look at their perceptions as broken out by these two areas.

In relationship to self. As coresearchers reflected on their experiences during the realignment and those early years of implementation, some coresearchers compared their experiences at the junior high school to their experiences at the middle school. Oddly enough the building had not changed, only people and an overall concept for

implementation of curriculum had changed, but this had a huge impact on them because they felt as if they were left to fend for themselves. As one coresearcher stated, “teachers want to do right by their students.” However, not knowing what they were supposed to be doing, how they were supposed to be teaching, was toying with their perceptions of themselves as teachers. One coresearcher stated,

To begin with, it seemed like we were just kind of putting things together so that we had a variety of activities. It wasn’t until the last half of the year that we realized we needed to be strategic in choosing activities to support instruction. We just had to figure it out on our own.

The coresearchers are reflective in their practice. As they reflected on these early years, the love of their students came through as they discussed the mistakes they made and their perception of time lost during those early years. Statements such as, “I am still not sure I know what a middle school is supposed to be like and we are four years into the process,” and, “I think if they had prepped us with some good training it wouldn’t have taken us so long for us to get to where we are just finally getting to now,” were made out of frustration for wanting to be good teachers. Another coresearcher, clearly frustrated with not knowing what he was supposed to do, stated,

They didn’t give us any training on teaching techniques even though they said it needed to be different. They told us the old traditional teaching techniques no longer worked and reviewing is a no-no. They just didn’t give us much support at all. Just threw us to the wolves.

As perceived by others. In regards to the coresearcher's perceptions of how others perceived them as professionals, it is evidenced that their feelings of self-worth were affected at the foundational level of the communication of the realignment. With their statements of feeling less of a professional because they were not allowed to be involved in the foundational level of this realignment, I felt their sense of being deflated in their profession.

Their sense of worth also came from the way their building level administrators worked on creating a sense of family or community within the building. The coresearchers compared their junior high school "family" to their middle school "family," with some stating that "there was no sense of cohesion among the faculty," while others stated that "their principal had worked hard at helping to bring the faculty together as a family." One coresearcher stated that her principal brought them in to a meeting at the very start of that first year and told them they were not going to be loners at his school.

Another area where coresearchers felt that the perception of others affected their own self-worth was by the number of people that began observing in the classroom. Coresearchers were not informed that this would be happening to begin with and were surprised that the majority of visits were not accompanied by feedback. "People come in and they right a lot of stuff down. I am not sure where that goes. I would like to have some feedback though and feel that if they would share it with me, I could improve my instruction," one coresearcher stated in regards to the many people who observed in her class.

Career/job security. Teachers' perceptions of their career and/or job security emerged as a theme within research question two. Those early years led the coresearchers to feel unsure of themselves and their career. They wondered about their own job security as they became frustrated with trying to implement programs of which they were unsure. The coresearchers' frustration with trying to implement the middle school curriculum and philosophy when they were not even sure of what was expected was exemplified in this statement: "They just decided one year, then over the summer it happened, and boom! The week before school started it was 'here you are, you are a middle school teacher, now figure it out.'" The frustration is also manifested in the following words of one of the coresearchers: "I didn't know if I was supposed to teach my sixth graders like eighth graders, or my seventh graders like sixth graders, just confusing" Another teacher said, "They didn't give us training on teaching techniques even though they said instruction needed to be different." One teacher expressed the implementation frustration this way: "It was a sink or swim mentality. You either do it or find a job."

Professionalism. Teachers' perceptions of how things might have been done in a more professional manner was another theme that emerged within research question two. The coresearchers believed that there was some thought put into the overall realignment, but there needed to be much more planning. This was evidenced by statements made about everything from buildings being ready to coaches being put into place. One coresearcher recalled that the building where she was moved wasn't ready for older students.

Coresearchers biggest concern was in regards to training prior to the realignment. One stated that, “You would have thought they would have spent the year prior to the realignment sending us to every professional development opportunity they could have.” Several other coresearchers talked about the staff development days required the week before students came back to school that first year of implementation. Teachers were brought together in one of the cafeterias of a newly named middle school. For three days they were placed in groups to discuss doing group work with middle school students. They were told about “teaming and expected to develop team names and norms.” The coresearcher’s perception of this last minute training was that it was “overwhelming” and “stressful.”

I took the meaning units that related to the beliefs/perceptions of the coresearchers and categorized them by how many coresearchers had statements that were similar in nature. The meaning units were equal in nature, but related in belief or topic. Figure 5 represents the number of coresearchers who expressed having similar beliefs/perceptions during the realignment and first years of implementation.

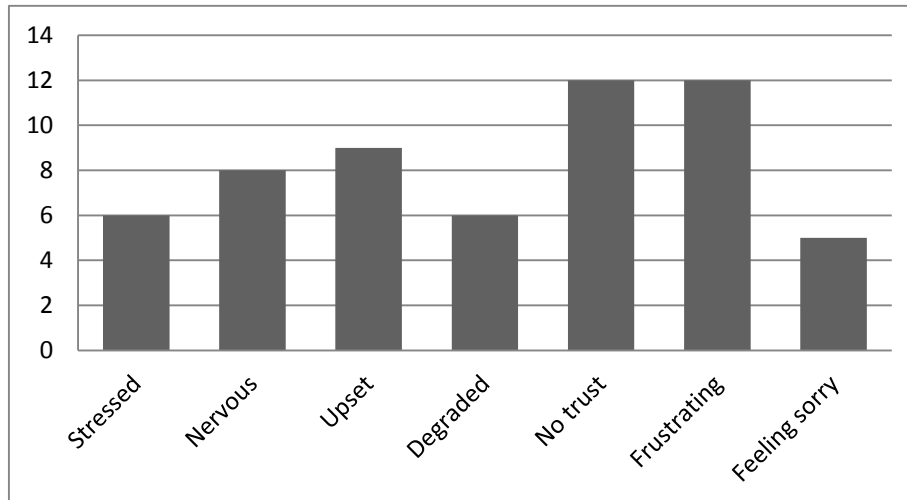


Figure 5: Perceptions of Self During Realignment/Implementation Phase.

Research Question Three

Research question three asked, “What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the support (leadership) afforded them from administration and other leadership personnel during the transition?” The query was aimed at discovering how the leadership personnel in the school system supported teachers during the realignment. Particular note was made in regards to staff development, professional learning communities, administration involvement, and curriculum department involvement, including academic coaches.

Support. Support through this change was where the coresearchers spent a lot of their discussion time outside of the theme of communication. The emergent themes from this question centered on implementation and support. Five areas of support were noted. These areas included teachers supporting teachers, Curriculum Department support, principal support, PLC support, and district leadership support.

Teachers supporting teachers. The coresearchers felt that other teachers were their biggest means of support during the initial two years of implementation. Veteran

teachers, in particular, were a wealth of information and support for other teachers. One coresearcher recalled what she felt her mission was during those early years,

what I felt like my job was, because I had worked in other places across the state- and had many more years of experiences than my peers across this county, my job, what I took upon myself, was that I tried to calm people. I explained to teachers that they signed a contract with the county, not the school itself, that they had the right to move teachers within the district as they saw fit.

It started with her helping others to stay calm, but moved into helping people get the idea of what a middle school looks and feels like.

Academic coaches/curriculum department support. Academic coaches were put in place by the district level curriculum department, according to the coresearchers. All 12 of the coresearchers had comments on the academic coaches. Some stated that they were in place, but they did not need them and felt that they had the right to tell them they were not needed, while others were not sure what they were supposed to be doing. One coresearcher's perception of the academic coaches is as follows,

We had support. Yeah we have academic coaches. I think the coaches want to help, but they have a stigma about them, like, hey, you got out of the classroom, why are you telling me what to do? I think they really tried. Ours was great, but they are also, they don't go to the answer meeting.

Another coresearcher describes her interactions with academic coaches as, "They have support people there for us, we just aren't sure what to do with them."

Principal support. Principal support was not discussed in great detail because the coresearchers felt that the principals were trying to carry out the initiatives set forth by the district level administration. However, most coresearchers commented that principals were trying hard to keep morale as high as possible, and were trying to make sure teachers were as informed as possible about meetings, initiatives and district personnel visits. One coresearcher, when discussing support and feelings of being left in the dark, stated, “Principals were hardened to these feelings, but they tried to treat teachers with respect through it all. They tried to show us they cared.”

Professional learning community support. Professional learning communities (PLCs) were the one initiative that coresearchers had such mixed statements about. Overall, PLCs have become a beloved initiative. In the beginning, the coresearchers stated they were unsure of how PLCs were supposed to work. They were briefly trained on PLCs in the initial staff development on those days prior to the opening of the school year in 2008, however, teachers in the schools were not sure how to properly run PLCs to begin with. One coresearcher stated, “There has been a lot of support through the PLCs, once we figured them out.” Similarly, another teacher said, “I like how we plan now.” Another coresearcher, reflecting on PLCs, stated, “If we had that kind of support when I first started teaching, I would have been a better teacher.”

District leadership support. District leadership support was evidence by the training set up prior to the opening of school. Other support came through consultants that were secured by district level administration. Coresearchers recalled their work with the North Carolina Department of Public Instructions (NCDPI) middle school department

consultants that came in and worked with them, visiting PLCs and observing instruction. Another consultant hired was not as available, but still very helpful, as one coresearcher recalled,

They did hire a consultant for the county that I thought was helpful and caused me to think differently about planning for instruction. I think whenever you think strategically about your planning, I remember him saying, “for whom is your lesson designed, for whom did it work?” it impacts instruction. I just don’t think everyone got to be a part of that, and now he is gone and someone else has been hired in his place.

Coresearchers perceived that support personnel provided by the district level administration changed frequently during those first two years of implementation.

Clusters of meanings were categorized. Figure 6 is a visual representation of the coresearchers’ thoughts regarding implementation and support during the realignment

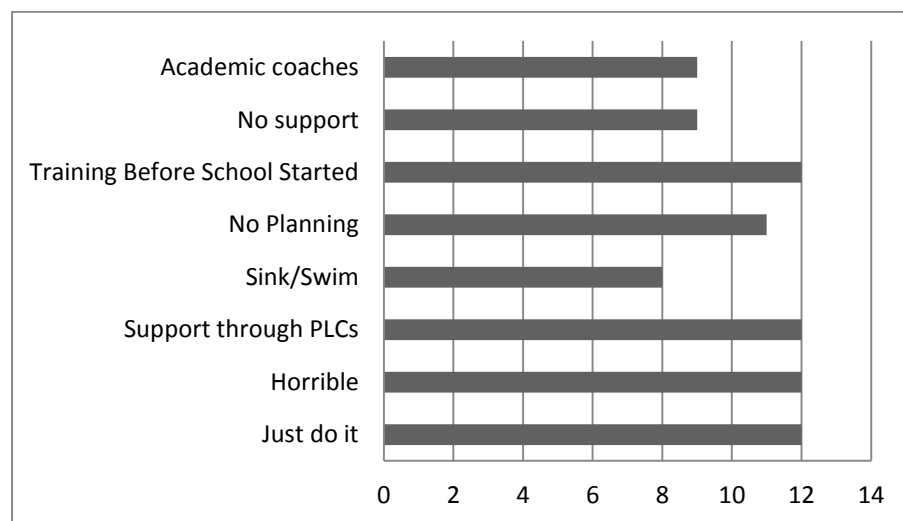


Figure 6: Implementation and Support: Similar Remembrances

The coresearchers also commented on the development of the academic coaching program. At the program's inception, there was certainly some reluctance. Shari commented, "They have support people for us, we just aren't sure what to do with them." In addition, the comment was made that "We have academic coaches who come to PLCs, but I don't think they really know what they need to be doing."

Research Question Four

Research question four asked, "How do teachers perceive their current level of job satisfaction in the wake of all the changes?" This research question was designed to solicit information on the general feeling of where the school district is at this time. I realized that teachers perceive change as difficult, and while going through it emotions can run rampant.

Job Satisfaction. I allowed coresearchers to examine their experience and apply it to where they were in their career at the time of the interview. Although this was not a specific question presented to each coresearcher, as they examined the impact on practice and test scores a natural state of reflection was expected to allow for this question to be answered. Two themes emerged as teachers examined the experience and impact on their career. Those themes include teachers' perceptions of how the realignment impacted test scores and their instruction.

Teachers' perceptions of impact on test scores. The coresearchers were unsure as to how much the realignment affected test scores although each of them brought up test scores in the interviews. Because teachers are now experiencing the inclusion of their students test scores on the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Instrument, test

scores are heavily on their mind. One coresearcher recalled that it was difficult to say the realignment impacted test scores because “the reading test was renormed the same year as the realignment.” Another coresearcher commented,

You can go back and look at the most recent test scores, where this county, every single school has made growth. This speaks volumes for the superintendent because it was, if you want to say, that it was because of the realignment and the emphasis on instruction, lighting the fire, a sense of urgency about it.

And another stated, “The county has always had low test scores. I know that there has to be a level of accountability, but now the county looks at growth not just proficiency.”

Teachers Perceptions of Impact on Instruction

As coresearchers discussed the realignment and the impact it had on instruction two common statements were exposed. With the realignment came a new sense of urgency in instruction as teachers were expected to be observed by anyone at any time. They called these observations “teaching behind the glass” as a reference to some schools of education that have labs where teachers teach in a classroom while being observed through a glass in the back of the classroom.

Sense of urgency in instruction. Coresearchers specifically commented on this sense of urgency when they recalled how important teaching from bell to bell became. The staff development given to them throughout the school year spoke to the sense of urgency, and opening school meetings with district leadership charged teachers to teach with a sense of urgency. One coresearcher expressed, “I had to change my teaching practice. If there is anything this county has done, it has changed our teaching practices

every year. We are certainly more kid friendly.” However, they were unsure whether it was the realignment itself that altered their teaching practices or the fact that during this time the school district implemented so many other programs. Another coresearcher addressed this issue: “There were already initiatives in place to change instruction through literacy coaches, so some of what we saw in the first year or two was a result of that initiative.” The coresearchers expressed their appreciation of PLCs, and felt that the team approach in that process was very supportive. On the other hand, many described their classes and programs as being micromanaged, or they felt that they were required to teach behind the glass.

Teaching behind the glass. Teaching behind the glass was a reference made by one coresearcher from his days of student teaching in a “laboratory school in Cullowhee, North Carolina.” He stated that people “visited his classroom all the time” once the realignment occurred. This was very different from when he taught at the junior high level where no one ever “darkened the doors of his classroom.” Other coresearchers recalled the number of visitors to their classroom that first year, but how they lacked feedback from them. The coresearchers that brought this up also commented that they wanted that feedback. They desire to be better at their craft, and as often as the visitors came in to observe, they could have offered valuable feedback. She stated, “People come in and they right a lot of stuff down. I am not sure where that goes. I would like to have some feedback though and feel that if they would share it with me, I could improve my instruction.”

The meaning units within the theme of impacting instruction were varied as well.

Figure 7 displays a visual representation of the number of coresearchers who had meaning units that could be clustered into the various categories.

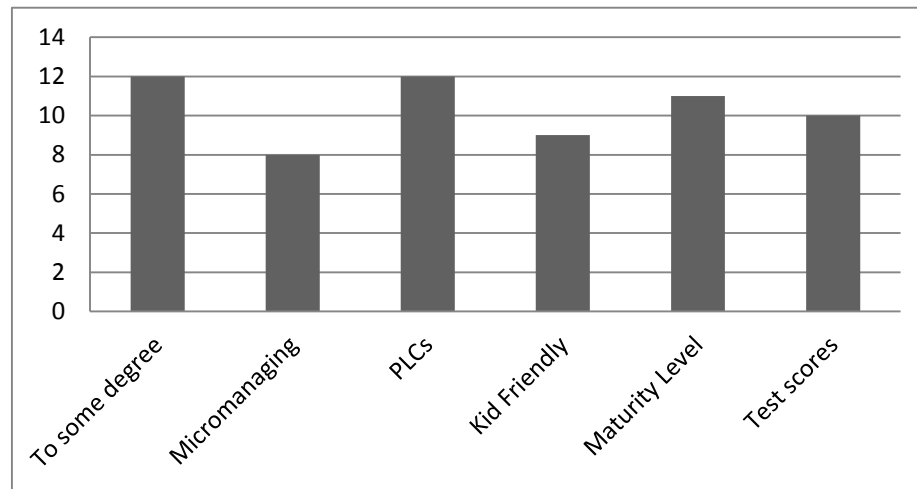


Figure 7: Impacting Instruction: Similar Feelings/Remembrances

As I reflected on all of the meaning units, individual interviews, individual textural and structural descriptions, and composite textural and structural descriptions, she considered how the coresearchers mentioned in their interviews how the realignment might have been carried out more effectively. Most of the coresearchers commented that it would have been difficult to make such decisions. Some stated that they felt he (the superintendent) was brought here to make the hard decisions and he made them. One coresearcher reflected that we “leaped into the 1980s” with the movement to middle schools. Several others mentioned that it would have been nice if the communication of the impending realignment had included them. However, they were not sure if including large groups of teachers would have caused “mass hysteria.” It is because of these statements that I was able to realize that 83% of the coresearchers agreed with the

realignment, but were uncomfortable with the way in which it was handled. While continuously working on freeing myself from my own feelings, thoughts, and experiences regarding this phenomenon (epoche), I studied each meaning unit, theme, textural description, and structural description, as well as field journals and notes, in order to develop the essence of this experience.

Research Questions Answered

Research Question One

What are teachers' perceptions regarding communication prior to, and during, transition to the middle school concept? Coresearchers reported that they believed communication could have been handled differently and been more abundant in an effort to involve more personnel in the transition. The emergent themes under communication included teachers' perception of their involvement in the realignment, how teachers perceived they shared information, and how teachers perceived their involvement in reassignments. Coresearchers remembered vivid details in regards to how they were notified of the realignment and their reassignments to schools. Mary recalled:

There was this mass mailing of a letter that was to come out. What I remember most about that was nobody left town that weekend. I sat on my front porch and watched for the afternoon mail truck to come by. Then I can remember, very vividly, the turmoil – the anxiety, that was in my stomach as I walked to the mailbox and then as I walked back to the house. I didn't even open my letter until I got back to my house. Backing up to that, though, we did get, like a letter of interest. You know, one of those letters that asks you about your interests. We

were allowed to put down our three choices of the schools we would like to work in, with no guarantee that there was where you were going to be.

Many of the coresearchers perceived the lack of communication as a lack of trust.

They felt as if they could not be trusted to be calm or to make clear decisions regarding the information as evidenced by Jardai's statement:

I think they could have just trusted us with the information. They could have communicated better. I know they didn't want to make a huge mistake by causing mass hysteria, but there could have been a slower transition.

Research Question Two

What are teachers' perceptions regarding the first years of implementation of the middle school concept? During the discussion of the first years of implementation, the themes that emerged included teachers self-worth as they relate to themselves and to others, teachers perceptions of their career/job security, and teachers' perceptions of professionalism in the overall school district. Coresearchers perceived their level of training for the middle school as minimal and very much as "flying the plane while building it." Sam reported:

They waited until the day before school started the year we were to be a middle school. I had not training until that time. We had all of these workdays before, like two days of meetings, prior to students coming back. This is where they had people telling us what it was like to be a middle school. We had a few trainings during the school year, that first year, too.

All of the coresearchers involved in the middle school reported that their training and implementation continues while they were engaged in implementing the model. They all believed that had they been involved in the planning of the realignment they might have been able to collaboratively come up with ideas how to assist teachers better in the implementation of the model. Sam recalled trying to figure out how to be a middle school teacher:

For me, it was just – you have so many people – an elementary school art teacher, a high school principal, a junior high teacher. Everyone just kind of shook out their own ideas of what it is supposed to be like. Everyone brought their own ideas and some were being really strict, while others were being super nurturing, patting everyone on the head.

Research Question Three

What are teachers' perceptions regarding the support afforded them from administration and other leadership personnel during the transition? For this particular question, any kind of support could have been identified. Coresearchers could have mentioned teacher leaders, academic coaches, administration, their professional learning community, or superintendents and curriculum staff. Many of the coresearchers felt that there was a major attempt to support them. As they reflected on the levels of support during those early years, coresearcher identified five areas of support which included teachers supporting teachers, academic coaches/curriculum department support, principal support, PLCs, and district level support. However, they believed that the support was sporadic because the leaders were learning along with them. Jardai reported:

Administration did try to support us with the academic coaches; I just think everything was so crazy, so chaotic in those early years, that the coaches didn't know what they were supposed to be doing. Our principal tried to be supportive, too, but he was catching a lot from his own meetings, we could tell. It was just stressful no matter what position you were in.

Other coresearchers looked to their teacher leaders, professional learning communities, and other teachers to help them during the time of transition. It took time for many of the coresearchers to develop relationships in the school after the realignment due to so many people being moved in the realignment.

Research Question Four

How do teachers perceive their current level of job satisfaction in the wake of all the changes? This question was answered within the overall interview. As teachers reflected on the phenomena itself, they naturally progressed toward thoughts of how the realignment has changed them, their instruction, any impact on test scores and their outlook on their career. There are other factors besides the realignment that have contributed to these perception, with the number one item being that of the new teacher evaluation instrument and how test scores will be factored into their evaluation. Victoria declares her fears:

The evaluation instrument is scaring me some too, knowing that standard 6 is coming on board. I appreciate it looking at growth, but it only holds the teacher accountable, not the students. It is going to hurt teachers who work at low performing schools.

The majority (83%) of the coresearchers felt that the realignment was necessary to move students and the school district forward. Mary reported:

It is what it is....it had to happen. And to be honest, to be in their position, you have to make those tough calls, regardless. He had a vision of what needed to happen. Did I disagree with his vision? Absolutely not. I had been in other places. I knew that probably what was better for [the county] was to go to a K-5 elementary program, to a middle school, etc. Because that was from whence I came, I had been through elementary, junior high; I had seen around the state the middle school model, k-5 and k-6 elementary schools. I felt like that was the better way. I also felt like I had stepped back in time ten years, when I first moved here.

However, the coresearchers perceive that the way things were handled caused a slope in morale and a definite division in the sense of community that had always been a strong part of the school district. John recalled:

Teachers feel disconnected in their own school now, too. They keep everyone so separate. It was purposeful to divide everyone and destroy the sense of family at each of the schools. If you felt like someone was comfortable at a school, even if you were a secretary, or a book keeper . . . you got moved.

To further reiterate that decline in morale, Sam reported:

I have learned, as a teacher, I am not a commodity. I am a peg to be placed in a hole. I learned it the hard way. You are going here . . . I don't like it there. It doesn't matter, you are an employee of this county and you will go where we tell

you to go. I have a K-12 degree. They can put me where they want me to be. I think that idea is not good for people. They want to think that they are special, that they are helpful and they are, but they want to have a choice. I love middle school. Am I in middle school right now? Heck no.

Summary

This chapter reported the results from 12 coresearchers who were certified teachers experiencing the realignment of a school district from a junior high model to a middle school model. Each coresearcher participated in an individual interview which was then processed through phenomenological reduction to identify any emergent themes.

Throughout this inquiry, I tried to use the voice of the coresearcher to purposefully examine the experiences they had during the realignment of four of the school district's schools from junior highs to middle schools. Through the interviews that were conducted, four main themes emerged regarding the experience:

1. Communication regarding the realignment
2. Implementation and support
3. Impact on instruction
4. Perceptions of self in regards to the realignment.

Regardless of the attributes of the coresearchers, all interviewed coresearchers had a clear picture of how the realignment process was communicated to them, what the implementation process and support given them was like, how this realignment has impacted instruction, and their perceptions throughout the entire process. The summary

of these findings is best depicted in the combined composite textural-structural description, which according to Moustakas (1994) is the essence of the phenomenon in a transcendental phenomenological inquiry.

Understanding a phenomenon in its purest form is the essence of a transcendental phenomenological inquiry. The textural and structural descriptions were developed from a careful analysis of data that included transcripts of interviews, field notes, board minutes, testing data, and newspaper articles. This inquiry provides interesting insight into how teachers perceive change, especially change in which they do not believe that they have been included.

The themes that emerged were intertwined in all of the questions/answers from the interview guide. I noted that as coresearchers were immersed in answering questions in regards to communication, their answers were wrought with their perceptions of how others perceived them. In turn, the coresearchers could not reflect on leadership without intertwining information about communication.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Findings

According to research, the middle schools across America have been under much scrutiny with a call for reform from both state and federal education agencies (Picucci et al., 2004). In their research, Piccuci et al. (2004) listed six factors that contribute to the development of middle schools. Those factors are:

- Incremental implementation of the model.
- Lack of teacher education programs and licensure that focus on the middle school level.
- Lack of attention to curriculum.
- Failure of organization to fully realize leadership for the middle level.
- Absence of research to sustain the concept.
- Overall misunderstanding of the original concept. (p. 4)

As the coresearchers described the two years after the realignment and their implementation of the middle school concept, it was clear that the leadership within the school district recognized the need to focus on that concept, introducing PLCs, providing ACs, providing professional development on strategies to use within the classroom, which includes both instructional (differentiation, collaborative grouping, etcetera) and behavioral strategies (PBIS). The coresearchers discussed the lack of training prior to the realignment, but because several coresearchers had done student teaching or internships within middle schools, they believed that this change was much needed for this school district to begin the reform it needed.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to identify teachers' perceptions of how leadership styles and practices of administration can improve the process of broad-based change in an educational organization. This inquiry has one main question with four sub questions. The main question is, "What are teachers' experiences during major transitions in a school setting?" The subquestions are:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding communication prior to, and during, transition to the middle school concept?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the first years of implementation of the middle school concept?
3. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the support afforded them from administration and other leadership personnel during the transition?
4. How do teachers perceive their current level of job satisfaction in the wake of all the changes?

The findings of this inquiry reveal that the coresearchers had a desire to be included in the process of change. They believed that effective communication and involvement in planning would have enabled teachers to take ownership of the vision established by leadership. This is in line with the definition of leadership that underlies the theoretical framework for this inquiry, "leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet the shared group goals and needs" (Hackman et al., 2004, p.12). These coresearchers felt that their experience could have been altered considerably had there been increased

communication throughout the process. However, they did note that the difficulty of the decision-making process and the number of people and families that this kind of change impacted caused them to question their own preferences in the process of change.

Discussion of the Findings

There is a substantial body of literature available on leadership and change; however, the perspectives of individuals who have been through that process of change have been overlooked within the existing literature. Marzano and Waters (2009), who have studied the perceptions of educators who have experienced change, discussed how leadership is viewed by teachers as a result of different types of change. They made a distinction between first-order change and second-order change, believing that first-order change is an extension of the past, while second-order change is a break from the past. According to Marzano and Waters' classifications, the realignment that the target school district experienced would certainly be categorized as second-order change. Second-order change can be difficult on school staff; some may even perceive the change to have made the school or system worse than it was previously. Marzano and Waters stated that "Leadership can expect some individuals within the system to complain that things have become worse as a result of the new innovations" (p. 107).

It is incumbent upon educational leaders to provide the communication necessary to express their vision for the state, school district, building, or classroom in which they work. Short and Greer (2002) posited that communication of that vision during a change process was important in developing the culture of the school.

Chapter four presented the analysis of data based on the statements of the coresearchers. Transcendental phenomenological reduction allowed for the emergent themes to emerge in regards to communication, implementation of the middle school model, support in regards to leadership, and impact on instruction and/or test scores. In regards to the themes that emerged from this inquiry, the literature indicated that communication would be of utmost importance. From Hackman and Johnson's (2004) definition that tells us that it is effective communication that indeed helps to modify attitudes and behaviors, to the study of transformational leadership which has been identified by many corporations as acceptable in most situations (MindTools, 2011), clear communication is one of the top characteristics discussed in effective leadership. The coresearchers from this inquiry echoed the literature as they cried out for clear communication. This communication, for them, would have served to help them feel more involved and valued as a professional. The coresearchers perceived that communication was non-existent as far as communicating the vision of the realignment. Drucker (2006) discusses the importance of communicating a vision and plan of action in his list of effective leadership practices, with Marzano et al. (2005) echoing them in his study specific to the educational setting and educational leadership.

When reviewing the data that aligned with the coresearchers' perceptions of the first two years of implementation of the middle school concept, an unexpected number of themes emerged that had to do with teachers' perceptions of self-worth within their profession and their overall job satisfaction. As this researcher delved back into the literature to make connections, she found that this was not uncommon. Leadership

encompasses practices that affect the school culture and climate. Newton et al. (1999) and Pitman (2000) studied how perceptions are developed and both agree that it is through communication, collaboration and reflection that perceptions are formed and/or changed. Perceptions of change, of leadership, of the direction of education all affect the climate and culture of a school building and school district as happy and secure employees make up that culture and climate. As the coresearchers reflected on their experiences in those early years after the realignment, they naturally discussed their feelings of self-worth and job satisfaction. They were afraid of change. They were afraid of the unknown. They were afraid for their own jobs. Basically, these coresearchers felt untrained and unsure of themselves in a career in which they had always felt relatively secure. This most definitely affected the school culture and climate as one coresearcher specifically identified in her interview.

This inquiry called for coresearchers to reflect on their perceptions of the support afforded them during the first years after the realignment. The emergent areas of support ranged from building level (teacher to teacher, PLCs, principal) to district level (curriculum department/academic coaches, superintendents). Overall, the results show that the coresearchers perceived that there was a willingness to provide support. However, since so many were new to the idea of the entire realignment, they felt like those in leadership positions were unable to provide the instructional leadership beyond what they were learning as they experienced those first two years. This carries back to the literature on leadership (Drucker, 2004) that states that effective leaders have a plan and communicate it well. It also corresponds with Kelly's et al. (2005) work on school

climate that states that there is a direct correlation between teachers' perceptions of leadership and school climate.

As the final themes emerged from this inquiry, identified as teachers perceptions of the realignments impact on test scores and instruction, it is not surprising to find that the coresearchers were most concerned about this area. From this study, it is well noted that teachers ultimately want their students to achieve. North Carolina has recently received \$400 million from the Race to the Top (RttT) program, which put a new teacher evaluation instrument in place for the entire state. According to the coresearchers, this evaluation instrument specifically rates teachers on facilitating learning, leadership in the classroom, as well as many other standards and elements within those standards. Most recently, this evaluation instrument is adding a standard six for teachers and standard eight for principals that uses student test scores to populate that standard. Teachers and principals will be rated as exceeds standard, meets standard, or below standard. The coresearchers want to know that the changes that they have experienced through this realignment will not only help them become more effective teachers, but will help their students to achieve. This corresponds with research by Marzano et al. (2005) and Marzano and Waters (2009) stating that there is a significant correlation between school leadership and student achievement. Although the coresearchers did not have specific scores in front of them during the interviews, they all made mention of the school districts recent announcement regarding all schools, except one, being schools of high growth (S. Lear, personal communication, August 18, 2012). This had never before happened in the school districts testing history. These coresearchers perceived that,

ultimately, the district and building level leadership had student achievement at heart when they initiated and carried out this restructuring of the entire school district.

Discussion in Light of Theoretical Framework

As I focused on the voice of the coresearchers, I noticed that three significant concepts emerged. One of those concepts was that their exclusion from the change process caused animosity towards the change itself. Many of the coresearchers believed that it took an unusual amount of time for teachers to get on board with all of the changes because of a flood of emotions and feelings of inadequacy resulting from their exclusion from the process. This directly relates to Hackman and Johnson's (2004) definition of leadership: "Leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs" (p. 12). Based on the coresearchers' stated perceptions of this change, communication was the one single factor that could have altered their overall view of the realignment.

Another concept that emerged from this study was that the coresearchers did not feel that experiencing a second-order change made the organization worse as a result, though that is usually the case (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The coresearchers believed that these changes were necessary and should have been undertaken earlier. They were mainly disillusioned with the way in which the realignment was handled in terms of planning and implementation. Marzano et al. (2009) discussed leadership during second-order changes and stated that leaders must be "proactive during the change process" (p.109). Because the change to middle school was so sudden, it was difficult for leaders

to speculate about, and prepare for, some of the anxiety that was expressed by teachers across the school district.

The final concept that I noticed as I interviewed the coresearchers was that they all felt that the realignment impacted instruction in some way. They overwhelmingly discussed the maturity level of students as an unexpected impact on instruction. Many of the teachers mentioned the obvious decrease in the maturity of the students as a result of the transition to middle schools, and the negative impact that the lack of maturity had on their classroom instruction. The coresearchers believed that support for instruction has been a work in progress since the first year of the realignment. They talked of academic coaches and PLCs, but admitted that they are still learning about them as they progress with the middle school concept. They admired the administration for their sense of urgency in instruction, and appreciated the staff development that was afforded them, but they also felt the stress related to their students' under-performance.

The examination of the lived experiences of these twelve coresearchers produced four emergent themes that may be useful to educational leaders if they are considering change on any scale. Those themes are:

The Importance of Communication. The coresearchers for this inquiry recalled vividly the communication that was afforded them throughout the initial stages of the realignment. They had a desire to be included and felt that even a task force devised of representative people from each of the junior high schools would have been sufficient to aid in the transition from junior highs to middle schools. Leadership should take into account the expertise of their employees when monumental changes are imminent. The

employees in this school district would have been more than willing to offer suggestions, brainstorm ideas, and assist with teacher buy-in at the building level. They could have been a driving force in assisting with community support and buy-in as well. However, since leadership did not include the teachers in planning for the realignment, the perception of teachers towards the change was overwhelmingly negative.

The impact of teacher evaluation on teachers' perceptions of change. The coresearchers for this inquiry believed whole-heartedly that the realignment enormously impacted instruction. Still, this impact on instruction may have been driven by the sense of urgency that they felt at the classroom level to improve instruction, but more importantly to increase student learning. It is difficult to determine if the realignment to a middle school concept was solely responsible for these changes, or if other variables also contributed, such as the new teacher evaluation instrument. Many of the coresearchers mentioned this evaluation instrument that had been adopted by the state as part of the RttT initiative. This new instrument rates teachers on a scale that identifies them as developing, proficient, accomplished, or distinguished; the instrument is a growth model evaluation instrument. Teachers had been accustomed to a scale that rated them on a scale ranging from “below standard” to “exemplary.” Additionally, the coresearchers commented on the various initiatives within the school district that increased the number of observations in their classrooms. One coresearcher called it “teaching behind the glass” and stated that it made it “a very uncomfortable situation” that caused “self-doubt.” She made it clear that feedback alone could have made these kinds of observations less stressful. I believe that leadership must find the proper balance between

compassion for teachers' needs and concern for results when implementing changes. Proper communication from administrators is the one thing that even the coresearchers said would have eased the stress of the many observations.

Managing the feelings and opinions of staff after change. I would not have felt comfortable concluding this inquiry without addressing the feelings and opinions of the coresearchers. It was quite evident during each of the interviews that these coresearchers were opinionated. Overwhelmingly, they described the Spring of 2008 as stressful, as was the Summer of 2008. The impetus for the stress was that they all received their reassignment letters or were told they were being "left-behind." They discussed how their anxiety would have been assuaged had they understood the process of teacher placement and been allowed to participate in it. The coresearchers had no reservations about expressing their own suggestions regarding how the realignment could have been conducted differently and implemented less painfully.

It is important to note that, although the final analysis of this study presents itself as negative, beyond the experience the coresearchers are happy and proud that their school district has finally made the switch to middle schools. They believe that their instruction has improved, despite their initial perceptions. This is in alignment with Marzano and Waters' (2004) expectations of people going through a change. They discuss the beliefs of people involved in change in detail, but point out that most people in their research who are excluded from planning a change continue to feel that the change has made their organization worse. The twelve coresearchers in this study differ in that they do believe this change resulted in a positive outcome for the school district.

Personal growth and knowledge. As a researcher who experienced the realignment right along with the coresearchers, I found myself constantly reflecting on my own experiences. I attempted to be true to transcendental phenomenology at every turn. It was a challenge to remain in a state of hearing/experiencing this for the first time (epoche) and bracket the phenomenon. However, I did find myself experiencing it anew with each coresearcher as they described the realignment with such passion and detail. Their tones and expression held me captive as they described their perceptions and the perceptions of their colleagues. I also found myself noticing small details throughout the interviews. If the interview was in the coresearchers' classroom, it was informative to see how the coresearcher presented themselves through their classroom design. During the reflections of each interview, I found myself noting how the coresearchers carried themselves: their posture, their proximity to me, and how they handled interruptions. I attributed these characteristics to their professionalism.

I found myself wondering what it would have been like to be each of the coresearchers who had experienced this change. Because I had known the schools in which the coresearchers have worked (or currently work) as well as the administration from the district level to building level, I found myself speculating how the coresearchers' personalities might have meshed and what kind of discussions they might have had in the hallways when the rumors were rampant about the realignment. As a citizen of a small town, I know the majority of the people who work in the school district, and attempted to interview people with whom I was not familiar. Yet, when I got into the interview setting, most of the small talk somehow worked its way around to those people

that the coresearchers and I had known or worked with in the past. I speculated that, in typical southern fashion, this only served to build rapport with each coresearcher.

During the times the researcher spent bracketing, I found it necessary to seclude myself because it was difficult moving in and out of such a state of reflection. It helped to keep things very organized. I used anchor charts to keep her thoughts organized and to keep descriptions of coresearchers in front of her at all times. I found myself staring at those anchor chart descriptions when reflecting on their interviews.

In the development of the essence of the phenomenon, those underlying themes that are universal to the experience and also known as the combined composite of the structural and textural descriptions, I not only reflected on each of the coresearchers, but reflected on my own experiences related to this phenomenon as well. I lived this along with them. Although I was not a classroom teacher, I was a junior high counselor who talked with many teachers during this time. I experienced the grief of losing colleagues to other schools. I experienced the uncertainty of not knowing where I would work the following year, implementing PLCs, implementing a middle school concept, and of change in general. I placed myself back in that counselor's position for most of the interviews; I simply received information and let the client talk themselves out. I did this for these coresearchers, only filling dead space with a restated version of what they had recently said or a question to further delve into that last statement. I wanted to immerse myself in their stories, their attitudes, and their feelings.

Implications

Implications for some best practices in implementing change and supporting change became evident during this inquiry. In regards to implementation and support, the coresearchers in this study felt that the majority of the responsibility for support either fell to the veteran teachers in the building or to principals who were already proficient at building a sense of family or community. Teachers believed that the district leaders were aware that they needed to provide support, and attempted to do so with academic coaches. However, the plan for supporting teachers with academic coaches was limited, at best, in those early years. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were a big help to the coresearchers and their colleagues. The coresearchers from small schools felt that it was more difficult for them than larger schools to conduct the PLCs in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, they believed their PLCs to be a means of support for them as they brainstormed instructional strategies for various levels of student learning. District and school leadership must be mindful of the misconceptions that teachers experiencing change might have in regards to the expectations laid upon them. Providing professional development in the areas of the best practices associated with the middle school concept would be helpful in supporting the initiatives brought about through the change, by adding to the skill set of the teachers expected to make this shift. Providing the professional development would increase the feelings of district and school cohesiveness, as everyone becomes a member of a PLC.

Limitations

This study is limited to the perceptions of the coresearchers. As Conklin (2005) stated, “Though my intentions be most noble, the presuppositions that I can achieve a pure transcendental ego is dubious” (p. 30). Like Conklin, I cannot claim to have even come close to achieving this pure state of mind. I am human. It is human nature to see things through the lens of your own experience. However, because of my recognition of this shortcoming, and because of my consistent use of epoche/bracketing, I do believe I was able to capture the essence of these coresearchers’ experiences. It is important to note that the teachers who were most likely to agree to participate in this inquiry were also likely to have strong opinions about the realignment.

Another study limitation is that the results may not be generalizable. I believe that my findings are an accurate representation of the perceptions of the coresearchers in this study, but I am not sure if those findings would accurately represent all teachers who experienced the realignment. It is uncertain whether all certified personnel who experienced this realignment felt similarly or had similar experiences. I would speculate that there were many who did not. Potter (1996) refers to generalization as the assumption that the findings in one study could apply to other studies with similar samples or settings. This particular research was done in one of the last counties in the target state to retain a junior high model. The study was very specific in time, location, and conditions. Therefore, there may be limits to the generalizability of the findings to other studies.

A third limitation to this study is the time factor. This study was conducted four years after the beginning of the implementation school year. This particular limitation may have influenced the coresearchers' ability to see the outcome of the change in a positive light. Marzano et al. (2009) discussed how people who experience change often view it in a more negative light and assume that the change was for the worse. The time frame that had elapsed between the realignment and the beginning of this inquiry allowed adequate time for the coresearchers to contemplate how the changes had impacted their thoughts about instruction, how it had impacted students, and how it had impacted the school district. It also allowed them ample time to overcome the initial anger and grief that often accompanies drastic change, although they were still able to reflect on the changes and recall their feelings with great detail when I interviewed them.

A final limitation (that became obvious during attribute coding) is that none of the coresearchers were new teachers; all of the participants had several years of teaching experience prior to the realignment. It is possible that years of teaching service could have been a variable that influenced how the coresearchers experienced the realignment of the school district.

Recommendations for Future Research

This inquiry into teachers' perceptions of change took place four years after the initial realignment of an entire school district. This realignment moved the ninth grade students to an academy where they would attend as one grade level. Taking the ninth grade students out of the junior high school, and moving sixth grade students into the junior high school, now to be called a middle school, caused movement among teachers

at the various grade levels. Throughout this inquiry, it was evident that veteran teachers were concerned for the new teachers that had been placed in the middle of the changes that were occurring. A study of how new teachers perceived this realignment might need to be explored in order to confirm or refute the finding within this inquiry. Additionally, a comparison of new teachers' and veteran teachers' perceptions of change might add to the body of knowledge in this area.

The time frame in which this inquiry was conducted was identified as a limitation, but also produces questions for further research. Although I believe that the time frame allowed for the coresearchers to have a lesser degree of negative beliefs, further research could be done to capture the lived experiences by conducting a study such as this within a year after said change. Such research could influence the body of knowledge on both leadership and change processes.

Future research might include conducting a quantitative study to measure the scores after the realignment. The coresearchers discussed the impact on instruction, believing it to have impacted instruction. However, there were so many factors that influenced instruction; it was difficult for the coresearchers to isolate anything that may have been particularly effective or ineffective in impacting the test scores.

Quantitative research could be conducted that tracks the test scores through the entire time period of the transition. This information would be very valuable as a means of measuring the impact of instruction during each step of the process, rather than just the end result. It would be interesting to determine if incremental academic progress was made, or if academic progress only occurred after the transition was complete.

Summary

The intent of this inquiry was to capture the experiences of the coresearchers as they experienced a district-wide realignment from the junior high model to the middle school model. This study accomplished that intent. Just as Marzano and Waters (2009) and Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), I believe that it is important to know people and their needs before embarking on monumental change. It is imperative to communicate the district's vision to the people, involve them as much as possible, and act strategically when planning for improvements.

This qualitative research yielded a greater understanding of how people experience changes. That understanding includes the importance of communication throughout change; the understanding that people equate their job satisfaction and self-worth as an employee to their inclusion in decision making; the understanding that people want to feel supported when undergoing change; and finally, the understanding that teachers want change to have a positive impact on education. Specifically, this inquiry focused on the educational setting and how teachers experienced change in one particular situation. The participants' stories and voices were invaluable to the essence of this study. They were able to bring their voice, and the voices of their colleagues, to the realm of educational research. As educators cry out to be treated as professionals, they need also to look for ways in which they can include themselves in professional research such as this. Their perceptions and perspectives are an invaluable means to affect change, even when the resultant conversations are difficult. Leaders need to embrace the perceptions of those who are subordinates as the nation calls out for educational reform.

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APPENDIX A: Sample Beginning Epoche

September 1, 2012

As I recall the school year 2007-2008, I remember the school in which I was currently assigned. I had been working in this school since the 2003-2004 school year. I had formed relationships with several teachers and considered them family. I remember hearing rumors of the possibility of changing the junior high schools to middle schools sometime after we returned from the Christmas break. Some of us (staff and faculty) talked about it in the hallways before and after school and at lunch. Most of us were not concerned about it too much because our school already had 6th grade students. I know that for me, 9th grade students were my favorite age group. I loved the responsibility with which you could entrust them. I loved the way we, as a school, celebrated their rite of passage to the high school.

As Spring approached, teachers began reporting more and more rumors they had heard about the possibility of change. I couldn't believe that no one was addressing these rumors, as now many teachers reported that they were hearing things from other schools. There was talk of a 9th grade school. I, personally, thought we were talking in the long-term. I knew that a school couldn't be built over night. Some people thought they were going to build this school on the campus of the high school so that it would be like schools in surrounding counties. Again, I didn't put much weight to it.

Just before Spring break, the rumors were flying. Our new superintendent, who had only been in our district since July 1, 2007, and had brought in several of his own people for the district office positions that had opened, had brought them all to the

various junior high schools to visit classrooms and observe the routines and procedures of the schools. With these visits, it seemed to confirm teacher's beliefs in the rumors they were hearing and I remember talking to various teachers about their fears of being moved. It was my speculation that if they were going to make the schools middle schools and move 9th grade students out, it would only make sense that 9th grade teachers would go to the new school, where ever that may be. Again, I still didn't put much weight in it because a school couldn't be built over one summer, right?

In the days before Spring Break, all certified staff received letters telling them that there would be a realignment of the school district to a middle school model; that one of the local schools would be made a 9th grade academy; and that elementary schools would begin moving toward a change in their grade levels, as well.

Thinking about all of this and how I felt as I went through this, I can remember feeling as if it was a lot to take in. I know that change is hard. But I felt that this school system had a lot of work to do to move toward the 21st Century. As I visited other school districts and made comparisons to my school district, I couldn't help but see that there were some necessary changes that we need to make. Because I had been working on my administrative license during this time, I found myself constantly referring to my educational background, especially in leadership. Even now, I think about how leaders should have a vision and be able to convey that vision to their followers. Yet, in looking at the big picture, this is a small town. People are different in small towns like this. You need buy-in, but how do you get it when it is this kind of change? Do you let information leak out a little at the time? Do you get a few people involved and let them carry the

information out to the masses? These are all questions I found myself jotting down in my notebooks during the process of change. These are all the same questions that I find myself pondering today as I revisit my feelings about this change.

APPENDIX B: IRB Consent Letter



The Graduate School at Liberty University

September 14, 2012

Theresa Gardner
IRB Approval 1399.091412: A Qualitative Inquiry into Teacher's Perceptions of
Change

Dear Theresa,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Fernando Garzon".

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054



Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX C: Consent Form

A Qualitative Inquiry into Teacher's Perceptions of Change
A Doctoral Dissertation Study
Theresa B. Gardner
Liberty University

You are invited to be in a research study of Teacher's Perceptions of Change. You were selected as a possible participant because you volunteered, having met the criteria for participation. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Theresa B. Gardner, School Of Education, Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is: to identify teachers' perceptions of how leadership styles and practices of administration can improve the process of broad-based change in an educational organization.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
To participate in an audio-taped interview.
Review transcripts of your interview for accuracy.
Review a description of your experience for accuracy.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has several risks:

There are minimal risks involved with this study. Those risks include those associated with completing a verbal interview discussing the district-wide leadership during the recent realignment of the participant's school district. As participants will be discussing current administration, there are risks that conflicts may arise between administration and the participant. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions will be secured on an external hard-drive that is locked in a secure location in the researcher's home. The recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed at the culmination of this study. No administrator (district level or building level) will be granted access to the interview recordings or transcriptions. They will be granted access to the final results of the study.

The participants will be given the opportunity of sharing their perceptions concerning the way in which large-scale change was handled within their school district. This study will provide the participants a voice that may help other school districts implement broad changes in a smooth and timely manner. It is hoped that this study will provide suggestions for other districts to implement large-scale change.

The benefits to participation are: Although there are no direct benefits to be gained by the participants in this study, this research will help future educational leaders to better understand the perspectives of the teachers who are thrust into major changes without the understanding, knowledge, and preparation necessary to make those changes. From the understanding of these perspectives, educational leaders can plan for future changes through addressing issues and implementing any suggestions or outcomes introduced through this study. The objective of this study is to assist educational leaders by providing them with suggestions for implementing school-wide changes.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

In order to maintain confidentiality of all participants, the researcher will use pseudonyms for the participants, the school district, and the schools involved in this study. Storage of all data will be maintained in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. This data will only be used by the researcher. No other persons will have access to this data at any time. Once the study is complete and the dissertation has been defended, all data for this study will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or Richmond County Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researchers conducting this study are: Theresa B. Gardner. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at Fairview Heights Elementary School, 910-582-7900, ext. 104, email: theresagardner@richmond.k12.nc.us. You may also contact my dissertation chair: Dr. Andrea Beam, Dissertation Chair, School of Education, Liberty University, Phone: 424-582-2445, Email: abeam@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: Checklist For Credibility/Dependability
Teacher's Perceptions of Leadership Through Change
Dissertation by Theresa Gardner
Liberty University, Lynchburg, Va.

Directions: Please check if the question is appropriate for the study described in the accompanying email. If not appropriate, please offer suggestions for revision of the question. When thinking about these questions, keep in mind these questions: Is it asking what it needs to ask? Could there be any misconceptions?

Question	Appropriate	Suggested Revisions
<i>Professional Background:</i> Describe your teaching experience	Not Applicable – this is only to gain information	Not Applicable – this is only to gain information
Describe your background in junior high school instruction versus middle school instruction prior to the realignment.	Not Applicable – this is only to gain information	Not Applicable – this is only to gain information
<i>Communication:</i> Describe the restructuring/restructuring of the junior highs to middle school.		
Describe communication		

<p>regarding the realignment.</p> <p>a. How were changes decided upon?</p> <p>b. How were you informed of changes?</p>		
<p>Implementation – Describe the first year or two of implementation of the middle school concept?</p>		
<p>Describe how the realignment impacted your instructional practices.</p>		
<p>Describe staff development that helped impact these practices.</p>		
<p>Leadership – Describe leadership throughout the restructuring/realignment and beginning years of implementation.</p>		
<p>Describe your experiences with educational leaders during the realignment</p>		

<p>and implementation of the middle school concept.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Building level administrators b. Academic coaches c. Curriculum specialists d. Superintendents 		
Describe specific administrative practices during the transition that have had a positive impact on the transition.		
Describe specific administrative practices during the transition that have had an adverse impact on the transition.		

Other comments or suggestions:

APPENDIX E: Interview Guide

- I. Professional Background
 - a. Describe your teaching experience.
 - b. Describe your background in junior high school instruction versus middle school instruction prior to the realignment.
- II. Communication – Describe the restructuring/realignment of the junior highs to middle school.
 - a. Describe communication regarding the realignment.
 - i. How were changes decided upon?
 - ii. How were you informed of changes?
- III. Implementation – Describe the first year or two of implementation of the middle school concept?
 - a. Describe how the realignment impacted your instructional practices.
 - b. Describe staff development that helped impact these practices.
- IV. Leadership – Describe leadership throughout the restructuring/realignment and beginning years of implementation.
 - a. Describe your experiences with educational leaders during the realignment and implementation of the middle school concept.
 - i. Building level administrators
 - ii. Academic coaches
 - iii. Curriculum specialists
 - iv. Superintendents
 - b. Describe specific administrative practices during the transition that have had a positive impact on the transition.
 - c. Describe specific administrative practices during the transition that have had an adverse impact on the transition.

APPENDIX F: Sample Field Note

Field Notes from 10-2-12, Coresearcher #1

Entering the school building it is apparent that this school is proud of its academic excellence. The front office staff was helpful in making sure I found my way to the room where I would be interviewing.

Admittedly, I am a little apprehensive or intimidated as I walk down the hallway. I don't know if it is because this is the first interview or if it is the reputation of this teacher preceding her in my thoughts. I have been told that she can be very cold and indifferent when it comes to adults, but that she is passionate about education. She taught my own children many years ago. In my experience and from my own children's experience, she was a "great teacher, but she doesn't play (my children's words)."

The room where we interviewed is where this coresearcher teaches every day. She had posters and anchor charts all over her walls. The anchor charts appeared to be made during instruction and were helpful to her students as they worked within the classroom. The teacher commented that some of the initiatives of this school district had made her a "bulletin board teacher." I am assuming this is what she meant by that statement. The charts, to me, made it apparent that she cared about her students; that she had high expectations for them; and that she loved teaching. Everything about her classroom led me to believe that she cared about education. It wasn't decorated in a cutesy fashion, like you might see in an elementary school setting, but it wasn't as stark as a college classroom. It had depth in it, from the charts that she and her students produced and apparently used throughout the year. She even had a section of the room

where she hung retired charts that students could go back and reference. I did not examine it closely, but from where I sat, it looked as if she had them coded by standards. I can say that her room looks different than what I remember it looking like at the junior high school.

Coresearcher #1 was dressed in khaki pants and a school spirit shirt. I would imagine that she doesn't look much different than the students in the hallway. She was very friendly and open to talk after several minutes of being in the interview. Oddly enough, when she read the consent form for the interview, she commented "oh yeah, so I will get fired," which made me a little concerned about her willingness to answer questions.

The coresearcher sat behind her desk during the interview, only stopping when receiving a phone call, or when another teacher came in the room to check if they were having a meeting. She appeared relaxed for the majority of the interview. I noticed her tense a little when asked about the district leadership and academic coaches. This was evidenced by her shifting in her chair and laughing uncomfortably when asked about her thoughts on them. She answered, but her answer let you know in no uncertain terms that she felt supported by anyone outside of her building. I sat in a student desk directly in front of her desk for the interview. I tensed up with her comment about getting fired, but relaxed after the first question.

Her room was set up with all the desks in rows facing the white board at the front. She stated that she uses a lot of partnering for student learning, but that students move their desks several times throughout the day or they get up and move around the room.

No curtains, only blinds at the windows. There was the smell of some kind of air freshener in the room and several plants around the room. She had lots of books for student use available, and had student journals stored around the room.

APPENDIX G: Sample Note from Reflective Journal

Reflective Journal Notes from Coresearcher #2.

As I sit and think about all that just happened in this interview, I am blown away with the amount of information this teacher was able to provide. She had such vivid memories, which led me to believe it was so very personal to her. I think the part that touched me the most was her account of getting her reassignment letter in the mail. I felt as if I was walking along the path to her mailbox with her. I did not have that experience, as I was at a graduation ceremony out of town. I did have someone go get my mail that day, because I was anxious to find out if I had been moved, but it just didn't affect me that deeply.

I did find that she had a personal struggle with knowing what needed to be done for this school district to grow; knowing that it is far behind what other school districts have done. I felt her pain as she struggled with trying to understand why things were done the way it was done. I have had some of the exact same thoughts as she mentioned in regards to feeling as if there is no good way to bring about such changes. I, too, toyed with the idea of how district leadership should have communicated the changes and/or the potential for changes. I found it unique that she mentioned rumors being started and spread throughout and that she wondered if they had been leaked on purpose.

I find myself wondering if I weren't so affected by the idea of change because I had been a school counselor and counselors, for the most part, can be changed to another school at a moment's notice. Teachers on the other hand have always had a history of

being hired by a principal and getting to stay with that principal until one or both of them retired or moved because of a promotion.

I wondered as she mentioned some of the things that happened to her and her friends and some of the ways she said they all felt, if this is how everyone felt. I know that people I worked with mentioned some of these same feelings (not being included, not being treated as professionals, no one caring what they thought), but I didn't converse regularly with every single staff person.

I am thankful that this coresearcher has had some good experiences with the district leadership. Although some of her perceptions and stories made me feel uncomfortable, I am thankful that she was able to be so honest and open about her feelings and her experiences even though she IS in a position where she works with these people every day. In my eyes, this validates her responses. She counts these people as her professional colleagues, but she was open and honest about things that she experienced, as well as things she heard from others.

.....

Even as I reflect on this interview, I think about how far this school district has come. This coresearcher remarked that this "school district was 20 years behind other school districts; that something had to change to prepare the students to be 21st Century learners." I see that communication is a big issue that this coresearcher believes could have been monumental in helping her to move through these changes. I see that keeping support in place from the district level for the various initiatives are important to her, but

that she felt supported by her building level administrators. She was very thankful that her administrator worked hard at creating a sense of family that she was “afraid had been lost.”

.....

APPENDIX H: Horizons of Meaning/Meaning Units

Horizons of Meaning: Communication.

- We were told, and I say that, "TOLD," that they were going to take, well, they wanted to see who would volunteer first, then, we were told, that they were going to fill [one school] with the strongest of teacher. I don't know if that were told to us to just pacify people who got moved in different directions or what. We can kind of read between the lines, (um) but that is what we were told.
- Heard things through the grapevine.
- It was leaked by word of mouth rather than telling the masses. You know like one principal might tell his staff something, then staff members told others throughout the school system.
- We started hearing rumors and next think you know it came on like a freight train.
- They never met with us to clear the air, still haven't.
- One administrator told me that they didn't want people to know all of the details because they didn't want teachers standing in the hallways crying, so instead they did a mass mailing of information, first to middle school teachers, over Mother's Day weekend.
- We were told, and I don't want to get anyone in trouble, but what we were told in an off the record kind of way was that they went into the conference room at the central office, where all the white boards are, and they listed all of

the teachers there. They had them written, ranked if you will, high, medium, and low; or effective, proficient, developing based on the new evaluation standards. They also looked at years of experience and test scores in the tested areas. That's how they chose them. There really was no choice to be made by teacher.

- There was no communication. There really wasn't – there wasn't any of this “it's going to be okay. This is why we are doing this.” What I kept saying was if somebody would just talk to us, teachers would buy in. Teachers want to do what is best for their students, they really do. The problem is that we didn't know what was going to happen. And now, every year, we don't know. We don't know if at the end of the year we should pack up our classroom or not because you could be moved.
- There was a lot of people mad about the communication, or lack of communication, even an email would have been nice.
- They had teachers crying in the hallways during End of Grade tests and they had to stop and not send any more (letters) out until after school. We were even out for the summer, and immediately when those letters came out, the phones started ringing, meetings started occurring to find out where people were going.
- And so it's like they (teachers) are trying to figure out what the puzzle is....it is a puzzle. But there is always this missing piece. The missing piece is the part that they control and they know what the rumors are, they might even

start them, but they know what they are and then they turn around and do whatever.

- One of the biggest problems is that they just didn't involve us at all. We were all just told. I do not believe that is a very professional way of doing things.
- No one ever asked teacher what they thought would be good ideas for this realignment or transition. They are in the trenches. We would have had good ideas.
- I don't recall ever being officially notified, there was just a heads up when my principal up and retired all of a sudden.
- There was just no buy in, but that was because people were kept in the dark, even the community was kept in the dark.
- They did not use the normal means of communication according to our training.
- They called in the business leaders and told them it was going to happen a certain way, but then the business leaders got upset because of how things were actually done.

Horizons of Meaning: Implementation/support.

- One of the first things the principal told us was that he did not want us to come over here and be a loner.
- Leadership just wanted us to do it; just do it, do it, do it. And the training will come as we go.
- We were such a family at the junior high.

- They just decided one year then over the summer it happened and boom, the week before school started it was “here you are, you are a middle school teacher, now figure it out.”
- That was the big thing that first year, learning to change up activities within the instructional time you were allotted.
- There has been a lot of support through the PLC’s, once we figured them out.
- It was a sink or swim mentality. You either do it, or find another job.
- To begin with, it seemed like we were just kind of putting things together so that we had a variety of activities. It wasn’t until the last half of the year that we realized we needed to be strategic in choosing activities to support instruction. We just had to figure it out on our own.
- Given that so many people left the county when the realignment occurred and that we were told that if you leave you can’t come back, people feared for their jobs. They didn’t really want to ask for help or support.
- I am still not sure I know what a middle school is supposed to be like and we are 4 years into the process. I do think this year we are getting more support, but we kind of have to, everyone has jumped ship and we are operating with so many new teachers. It’s really not funny, but, yeah, it kind of is.
- I think if they had prepped us with some good training it wouldn’t have taken us so long for us to get to where we are just finally getting to now.
- We have made so many mistakes in the process, some of those could have been avoided, I believe.

- They didn't give us any training on teaching techniques even though they said instruction needed to be different. They told us the old traditional teaching techniques no longer worked and reviewing is a NO-NO.
- They just didn't give us much support at all. Just threw us to the wolves.
- I like the way we plan now. If we had that kind of support when I first started teaching, I would have been a better teacher.
- I had to find a grammar program on my own that supported the curriculum.
- We just opened our minds and tried different things and administration was really just open-minded about it all.
- To begin with our schedules were crazy, like there just wasn't any thought into how it should be. Then administration threw it our half way through the year and we just tried something new.
- I think administration had thought through the changes, in the beginning, as best they could, and then once they started putting things into play, they learned from their mistakes.
- We are still trying to grasp what works, whether it is clubs or advisor-advisee or schedules or whatever, yes, even 4 years later, we just aren't sure.
- We have academic coaches who come to PLC's, but I don't think they really know what they need to be doing.
- We just aren't using our academic coaches and support people like we should, not that they know what they are supposed to be doing. Mostly they just carry information from one school to another, sharing ideas.

- They have support people there for us, we just aren't sure what to do with them.
- The facilities just weren't ready. Everything happened so fast, no one had time to get ready.
- I mean, I like groups and all. I get that for middle school students, but I need my students to be able to think on their own, too. We don't need to flood them with all this touchy-feely stuff every day.
- Administration did nothing that summer because it didn't matter. We were changing and we would have to do what we had to do that next school year.
- It seemed like we had gotten into this good ole boy system in years past, but now this new superintendent, with no ties to the community, no favors owed to anyone, just stepped in and made those tough decisions that had to be made. The sad thing was the way he went about carrying out those decisions.
- They held community meetings, but advertised them the morning they were to take place. They didn't want a lot of people attending. They just followed board policy that did not declare a time frame for announcing those meetings. It was pretty smart, actually.
- Meetings were minimal and teachers didn't dare go. We had been, in no uncertain terms, that if you leave, the door doesn't swing back.
- I remember the training for the middle school the first day of that first year. We had Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) people in that middle school cafeteria. We started PLC's (Professional Learning Communities), and

we had the Beginning Teachers (BT's) part; we had 14 brand new teachers at that particular middle school that year and they didn't have a clue.

- And you have to know that the principal I was with I had know before, I knew his leadership style and how he created that sense of community, that sense of family. That was his job at this new middle school, as well, to build that sense of support for one another.
- The support really came from the veteran teachers.
- Principals were hardened to these feelings, but they tried to treat teachers with respect through it all. They tried to show us they cared.
- Everyone just kind of shook out their own ideas of what it was supposed to be like.
- There wasn't any cohesion with anything.
- I didn't know if I was supposed to teach my 6th graders like 8th graders or my 7th graders like 6th graders; just confusing.
- We had support. Yeah we have academic coaches. I think the coaches want to help, but they have a stigma about them, like, hey, you got out of the classroom, why are you telling me what to do? I think they really tried. Ours was great, but they are also, they don't go to the answer meeting.
- The academic coaches are super nice and helpful. They gave me tons of stuff. I still have notebooks.

- People come in and they right a lot of stuff down. I am not sure where that goes. I would like to have some feedback though and feel that if they would share it with me, I could improve my instruction.
- Good people left.
- You would have thought they would have spent the year prior to the realignment sending us to every professional development opportunity they could have.
- We had a few days of staff development during the school year, but mostly just PLC work.
- They did hire a consultant for the county that I thought was helpful and caused me to think differently about planning for instruction. I think whenever you think strategically about your planning, I remember him saying, “for whom is your lesson designed, for whom did it work?” it impacts instruction. I just don’t think everyone got to be a part of that, and now he is gone and someone else has been hired in his place.

Horizons of Meaning: Feelings/opinions.

- A lot of teachers were upset, that was the first real feeling about it, they were upset that we were going to move, that there was going to be this whole restructuring of our district.
- All of this change is just so overwhelming.
- Teachers were nervous.

- I think teachers felt it was a slap in the face if they weren't chosen to move, but then relieved all at the same time.
- We are just stressed, even now, stressed.
- I think anytime you are going with monumental change you are going to have anxiety.
- I think next time, and there will be a next time for some change, that they need to go ahead and get on board, just knowing that change is necessary.
- I think they just need to trust us more with information and let us process it better.
- Teachers have a lot of good ideas and can contribute to that kind of change.
- It was chaotic – just being left in the dark.
- Lots of teachers had mixed emotions.
- Well there is one thing that really bothers me, and so far, it's worked out okay, but with all of these changes we have, it seems like they like to shuffle things around a lot more, people, shuffle people around. It's as if they are trying to prevent a family atmosphere; to prevent that sense of community within the school.
- With the realignment and the change of so many employees we lost that sense of community involvement where we used to be able to teach certain things that were edgy, we can't do that anymore.

- It is so frustrating doing something one way, then finding out when you get the actual training that it was the wrong way and this is how you should be doing it.
- You have to be about crazy to walk into this situation and teach.
- There has been a lot of turn-over. I am even working on my Masters so I can teach at the community college. I just don't think I can take one more change.
- Overall the teachers here are happy and we like this school.
- I remember feeling sorry for those that got moved and didn't want to be moved.
- Change is constant these days. It's been the pattern here since the realignment. I think it is mostly because we don't know what we are doing and every year it is something new.
- It was all just a power struggle; a need for control.
- We try to tell the newer teachers, those are the ones I worry about the most, who don't know that you just go with the flow. And next year there will be something else that is new, hot, or more important, and what you learned about this year will be forgotten.
- Things were just thrown in your face.
- It was a horrible time.
- I would have liked to have seen them plan and train better.
- There seemed to be so many idle threats about teaching. I don't know why we needed to be threatened.

- This was our county leaping into the 1980's with the middle school concept.
- I remember very vividly, the turmoil – the anxiety, that was in my stomach as I walked to the mailbox and then as I walked back to my home. I didn't even open my letter until I got inside the house.
- We got this letter of interest thing, you know, where we got to put our top three choices down, but that was a farce; something to appease the masses. They were doing that just to make teacher feel like that had a choice.
- Self esteem plummeted because #1 we had no control of where we were going to be, and I tell you, what I felt like my job was, because I had worked in other places across the state- and had many more years of experiences than my peers across this county, my job, what I took upon myself, was that I tried to calm people. I explained to teachers that they signed a contract with the county, not the school itself, that they had the right to move teachers within the district as they saw fit.
- And so my group was left behind at our school. We called ourselves the left-behinds, you know, the ugly red-headed step children.
- I knew that this change was necessary because I had worked other places. I knew we were one of the last counties to still have Junior High Schools.
- I also believe that part of it (the impact on instruction) came from fearing for your job, where in the past we have never had people coming into our classes, we had never had walk-throughs, or people coming in droves to see our classroom instruction, to observe and all of a sudden we were having this

happen. This created a very uncomfortable situation and caused self-doubt because you never got any feedback from those visits.

- The morale, it plummeted severely and people started to leave.
- Teachers want to feel like they are special and that they are helpful; and they are. But they want to have a choice.
- So now you just have teachers shutting down. They just look at you and say “tell me what you want me to do.”
- Teachers just had a real sense of feeling like they didn’t matter, I know I did. It was a real sense of being bull-dozed.
- There is a sense of fear to speak your mind, because you never know. If you are too vocal you are going to be moved to the outskirts of humanity; wherever that may be. The farthest point from your current location.
- When teachers found out they were going to be bounced around like no one cared, they were really upset.
- I couldn’t have dreamed of dealing with teachers the way they did. They treated them like sheep.
- I just grieve. I had such joy when I was in the classroom before the realignment. The joy is gone. I cannot tell you how many people who have told me the joy is gone.
- You have stripped them of their professionalism.

- Students and teachers were happier when we were junior high schools.
Ninety percent of children came onto campus with smiles on their faces.
Teachers enjoyed coming to work.
- Teachers feel disconnected in their own schools now, too. They keep everyone so separate. It was purposeful to divide everyone and destroy the sense of family at each of the schools. If they felt someone was too comfortable at a school, down to bookkeepers or secretaries, you got moved. They wanted no alliances.
- I would have used my people; those people that are able to see the big picture or those who think about the trickle down effects of some things.
- They just should not make whole school systems changes all at once; changed their whole world.
- They created turmoil for the sake of turmoil.
- I don't feel close to anyone anymore.
- Change is messy. Change is hard.
- I don't think there is anything they could have said to make it any better, after all, at the end of the day you are an employee of this school system. You are a teacher, not a factory worker and they can send you where they want you to go.

Horizons of Meaning: Impacting instruction.

- Oh, it definitely impacted instruction, because now, to be on a 90 minutes schedule, we had to learn how to add in activities that support our instruction.

- I remember feeling sorry for those that got moved and didn't want to be moved.
- Change is constant these days. It's been the pattern here since the realignment. I think it is mostly because we don't know what we are doing and every year it is something new.
- There were already initiatives in place to change instruction, through literacy coaches, so some of what we saw in the first year or two was a result of that initiative.
- We try to tell the newer teachers, those are the ones I worry about the most, who don't know that you just go with the flow and next year there will be something else that is new, hot, or more important, and what you learned about this year will be forgotten.
- You can go back and look at the most recent test scores, where this county, every single school has made growth. This speaks volumes for the superintendent because it was, if you want to say, that it was because of the realignment and the emphasis on instruction, lighting the fire, a sense of urgency about it.
- They started micromanaging our classrooms.
- At the middle school during second semester; do you remember the whole Algebra I thing? Where they just up and created classes and said we need to put all of these students in those classes? I think it was based on good data, but it was just last minute, no planning.

- We started having academic coaches, more of them, but you can't take an elementary school teacher, call her a coach and send her into a middle school or even high school and expect teachers to listen to her.
- It was just teaching behind the glass, constant turmoil; never knowing when someone is coming into the classroom.
- Planning time was changed. We now had PLC's with one day for reading, one day for math, one day for data, etc.
- The county has always had low test scores. I know that there has to be a level of accountability, but now the county looks at growth not just proficiency. That is a good thing. That makes sense.
- I think it has changed the students. They seem so immature at the end of 8th grade. They are being babied and not expected to think for themselves.
- It has impacted instruction negatively.
- I had to change my teaching practice and if there is anything this county has done, it has changed our teaching practices every year.
- We are certainly more kid-friendly.
- I am not sure if it truly impacted test scores, though. The reading test had been changed so it is difficult to determine that.

APPENDIX I: Textural Descriptions

Shari Simmons. Shari is a veteran core subject area teacher who taught at the junior high level for 14 years. She was moved during the realignment to the ninth grade academy, per her request, because of her love for ninth grade students. Shari loved the sense of belonging she felt at the junior high where she worked. The teachers that worked there had been together for several years, along with a principal who had worked to help build a family atmosphere. She enjoyed working in a school where she had such repore with her students' families that she could teach creatively without being judged by them.

Shari first heard the news of the realignment when administrators in her school asked each teacher which school and grade level they would like to work at in the following school year. The realignment process upset a lot of people, although Shari did not feel that way herself. She felt honored that teachers came to her asking her what she would do; wanting her opinion of what they should do. She loved the ninth grade and planned to move with that grade level if allowed. She was uncertain as to how teachers would be selected for the ninth grade academy, but was told that the administration wanted to see who would volunteer before they started making changes. "They wanted strong teachers," she recalled. However, she did make the disclaimer that she "didn't know if that was told to just kind of pacify people who got moved in different directions, or what."

Shari expressed her concern over the amount of change that occurred, not only all at once with the realignment, but also since the realignment. Since the transition, the

school district has begun several initiatives that focus on instruction. School and district administrators often visit the classroom to ensure that these initiatives are being implemented properly; this is the cause of much anxiety and stress for teachers. She is most concerned for the new teachers who do not understand all of these changes. She feels that the new teachers are overwhelmed by the intensive focus on instruction. They believe that every teaching technique or pedagogy learned during professional development must be demonstrated in their classrooms every day, and at all times. Shari has been taking the various initiatives and tucking them away in her toolbox of strategies to use with students. Because she is a veteran teacher, she has not had the need for assistance from academic coaches (ACs) who visit the PLCs and her classroom to observe instruction. Test scores have improved, according to Shari. However, she is concerned with the amount of time allotted them to provide the instruction necessary to ensure student growth. She is frustrated with initiatives taking precedence over effective teaching and would like to be left alone to do her job.

As she thought about the realignment and how things might have been handled to put teachers at ease, or to ease the community in the transition, she remembered how difficult it was to make the move. The facilities were not ready at the end of the school year, so teachers had to “pack up their items in boxes supplied by the school district, clearly mark them with their name, and wait for maintenance to move them during the summer.” At the beginning of the school year, Shari stated that the “urinals and sinks were still at the elementary school height,” and “lockers were being placed in already

cramped hallways.” She believed that it would have made for a smoother transition if the district enlisted a task force of educators to plan for such a drastic change.

Mary Edwards. Mary is a retired school teacher who has experience teaching all over the state of North Carolina. She has enjoyed teaching in her subject area for more than 30 years. She remained at the middle school after the realignment, but then was transferred due to certification area needs one year after the realignment. Mary expressed her joy and love for teaching many times during the interview. Even now, as a retired teacher, that love for education shines through in the way that she enjoys helping other teachers.

Mary had very vivid memories of how the notification of the realignment occurred. She remembered that all information related to the transition was received “through the grapevine at first. At times, she believed it was just rumors being circulated by staff, but expressed that at other times people mentioned that the principal had given them this information in a faculty meeting. She recalled that many of her colleagues were openly worried about where they would be sent the following year, and they wondered when they would be told. In early spring, she got her form letter from the district office asking her what her three choices for school and subject area would be for the following year. She personally believed that they sent these forms out “to appease the masses,” stating that “they were doing that to make the teachers feel like they had a choice.”

As the staff and faculty began to talk about all the changes the county was about to embark on, Mary felt it her duty to help people understand how necessary these

changes were in order for this county to continue educating students. She always encouraged her colleagues and friends in the community to be supportive of the change. She truly believed that this movement was in the best interest of the students in this county. She had worked in other counties and wondered why this county had waited so long to move to the middle school model. However, her colleagues confided in her about their negative feelings regarding how these changes transpired, saying they felt as if they “didn’t matter” and “were bulldozed.” She was constantly encouraging teachers to see the need for this change.

In early summer, just after school got out there was a “mass mailing of letters.” Remembering her own feelings about this letter, she expressed,

I sat on my front porch and watched for the afternoon mail truck to come by.

Then I can remember, very vividly, the turmoil, the anxiety that was in my stomach as I walked to the mailbox, and then as I walked back to the house. I didn’t even open my letter until I got back to my house.

After she received her letter, she made numerous phone calls to her colleagues to learn where everyone was going to be for the next school year. She and five of her colleagues called themselves the “left-behinds and the ugly red-headed step children” because they were left at their school, while the majority of the teachers were moved.

Mary anxiously awaited the phone call for middle school training during the summer. However, their training was not until the week before the students came back to the school. She remembered how the district elicited the help of the NCDPI to help with those initial meetings. DPI was very supportive, teaching staff members the teaming

concept and coming in throughout the school year to help with PLCs and teaming. Mary was very concerned for the 14 brand new teachers that were present at those opening meetings. She learned from her conversations with them that they were clueless as to what was going on. She continuously offered support to them, as best she knew how.

Speaking of support, Mary believed that her administrator, during the initial implementation year, strove to build that sense of community and family that so many people had at their previous schools. For the most part, however, she believed that support came from the veteran teachers that were left working in the county. ACs were in place, but were spending time in meetings with administration, helping them “micromanage the classrooms.” They were pretty unclear of their job descriptions, but eager to help in any way. As Mary brought up the “micromanaging of the classroom,” her facial expressions were pained. She believed that the realignment affected instruction because of the new sense of urgency that district level administrators were projecting onto teachers. However, she relayed that she grieved for the joy she had previously experienced in the classroom.

John Jenkins. John had been at the junior high level for nine years prior to the realignment. He has experience in several areas, including teaching core subjects, counseling, and administration. After the realignment, John retired with over 30 years of experience, but remains connected to the school system in his current position. He is passionate about education and enjoyed the junior high system as it was previously constructed. He enjoyed the sense of family that he had experienced at the junior high level. So many of the teachers at the school where he worked had been there, together,

for a long time. They looked out for each other. He remembers being told about the realignment and how teachers immediately got upset when they “found out they were going to be bounced around like no one cared about them.” He felt like teachers, in this instance, “were treated like sheep.”

His recollection of implementation and impact on instruction during that first year of implementation was just that there were so many new initiatives that it was difficult to keep up with what had to be done. He called the implementation of the middle school concept “the cart before the horse philosophy” since training was done throughout the year of implementation. Because he is now retired, he did not feel he could give an honest answer about how the realignment impacted instruction. He did comment that his personal opinion was that “it impacted instruction negatively.” His reasoning behind that opinion was that he believed people were unhappy and “happy people work better.”

Sam Collins. Sam is a young teacher of an encore subject, with eight years of experience. Encore subjects in this county are those that are normally considered electives or special classes such as art, music, physical education, and computer skills. He was newly married and passionate about his subject area. He was a coach and team leader in his school.

Sam had been assigned to more than one school during the years prior to the realignment. He recalled being excited about having the opportunity to choose the school at which he wanted to work for the next school year, but being torn because he knew that if he got that choice he would leave behind good friends at one of the schools where he currently worked. He and his friends talked about the possibility of all of these changes

in the hallways at school. To begin with, they talked about the rumors they had heard, and wondered which were true and which were false. Once notification came, he had many questions in his mind. He thinks in big pictures, and wondered how everything would get done.

Like others, he remembered getting the mass mailing of letters, and was awarded his first choice of schools. He was going to be at the middle school full-time, instead of having to leave midday and go to another school. Excited about this particular change, he contemplated change in general. He said, “Change is messy. Change is hard. Even if your position changes, even improved, it is still hard.” He believed the changes that were being made, this entire realignment, was being done because of the recent employment of a new superintendent. Although, he was unsure if he had been brought to the county to make these changes from the beginning. Sam had experience in other counties at the middle school level and knew that this school district was one of the last counties to convert to the middle school concept.

Sam felt like he received a lot of support during the first year, although he was not sure if the support aligned with his needs. He learned about teaming and PLCs, but needed to know how he was supposed to change his teaching for middle school students as opposed to junior high students. He felt like there were plenty of people around to help, such as ACs, but believed they were also unsure of their own duties and expectations. His take on ACs was:

We had ACs; yeah, we had people. I think the coaches want to help, I think they have a stigma about them. Like “hey, you got out of the classroom, why are you

telling me what to do?” But I think they really tried. Ours was great, but they are also, they don’t go to the answer meeting. My wife always says, “I asked our person and she didn’t know the answer.” I tell her, “Well, she is an academic coach; she doesn’t get to go to the special meeting – the answer meeting.” One of the coaches at my other school said, “Oh you can’t have these kids sitting for 20 minutes doing whatever.” But I said, “But hey, that is exactly what they are going to be expected to do at the end of the year. The most important thing, the thing that my job rides on, they are going to have to sit and read, take a test for hours at the time.” The coaches are the people that are supposed to be able to give you the answer, you know - coach, how can we do our pick and roll better? Well, Jimmy, let me tell you.” But it’s not that way with ACs, they don’t have the answer and it’s frustrating. They don’t get to go to the answer meeting. Right back to – they tell me we can’t expect them to sit and read for 15 minutes, when in reality, I am going to have them reading for more than an hour at the end of the year for a test, and you’re going to fire me if they fail. Ugh, my brain’s going to explode. But to get back, I think they all tried to help. I think they are all super nice. I think they all did everything they could. They brought me stuff. I still have the notebooks of reading strategies that one gave me that is very helpful. I just think there are still teachers that get to go around and help other teachers. They are not aliens. I just don’t want them to have a negative stigma. I think they chose really good teachers to be those coaches. I don’t think they would choose someone with a

really bad evaluation to go out there and do that. After all, they chose Jeremia, and she is awesome!

Sara Alexander. Sara is a 23 year teaching veteran. She is certified in two middle grades core subjects, which she has taught since moving to the area from another state. Sara has her Master's degree and had experience in middle school prior to her experience in this county.

During the opening of the interview, Sara thought several minutes about the transition to middle school. She stated that she believed "communication was fine." She could not recall a process of how it was decided upon who was moving or where they were going. She said that she knew "teachers were told where they were going. Teachers were given a letter where they were allowed to choose three schools they would like to work at and to rank them in order of where they prefer to work." She and her colleagues had been nervous during that time even though administration attempted to encourage teachers who were going to be moved to the ninth grade academy by telling them that they were only going to take the best of the best, the strongest teachers in their subject area. Even though Sara believed in the middle school concept and openly stated that this move amounted to the "county leaping into the 1980s," she still felt a great deal of stress because she did not know who was going, who was staying, or what the expectations were going to be.

Sara remembered feeling "bulldozed" during the opening training sessions for the middle school teaming concept. Being at a small school, she was unsure of how all of these teaming scenarios that NCDPI presented would apply to them. She stated,

As far as preparing everyone for the teaming concept [teacher teaming, student teaming, etcetera], it was very minimal. It was the week before school started. [The trainers form DPI said] “You are going to be a team now. Come up with a name for your team. What will your norms be,” etcetera? “You are going to work together now. You are going to have to plan together.” So we were just expected to make it work, but it’s not effective. Some decisions were made and were just bulldozed on in. So, we are all going to be middle schools, everyone is going to be a middle school. Decisions were made and they weren’t even thought through. Would it work at this school or that school?

As Sara further contemplated the support that was afforded her during the first two years after the realignment, she expressed her knowledge of how beneficial ACs could be to a school district. However, she felt that the ACs were used inappropriately in the first years. They were utilized to come in and observe, but they never gave feedback. Sara desired that feedback. In her passion for education, she desires to continuously grow as a teacher, and believed that the feedback from the ACs could have been helpful in her growth. Instead, she believed that they were used to carry information back to administration in an evaluative manner.

Richard Dixon. Richard is a former core subject area teacher who was hired lateral entry. He had 18 years experience in this county, all at the junior high and middle school level. He has his Masters Degree in Administration and was an assistant principal for 6 years, at the junior high level. He remained at the middle school after the transition for four years before moving to another county to take a district level job.

Richard does not recall being officially notified that there was going to be realignment, but instead said there was a “heads up” that something was going on “when his principal up and left, retired all of a sudden.” From that point, he stated there were “rumblings” within the school district, but “nothing official.” He said that for him “it was like it was all being done behind closed doors.” He and his colleagues talked about their concern over being moved. He specifically talked of colleagues who did not want to move and were angry that they were being required to do so. He stated that “people were scared to say anything for fear of their jobs.”

Richard didn’t believe that community members understood what was happening. He commented that “they didn’t understand all of the moves. I didn’t understand them. They asked me about moving, gave me a choice, and then told me that I had to go where they wanted me to go.” He believed that had people understood what was going on, had “normal means of communication” been used, that the community would have had more to say about the changes.

Richard emphasized that the teachers had no prior knowledge of what it was like to be a middle school. Even when considering the opening days of training from NCDPI, he believed that there was no significant or impactful training. He posited that there was an negative impact on instruction through the way that they were required to nurture children, as opposed to setting expectations for them to act responsibly. He believed that this lack of expectation resulted in more immature students. According to Richard, a combination of factors will affect district test scores, but he is thankful that they are now looking more at growth, as opposed to proficiency.

Victoria Conyers. Victoria has experience teaching at the high school and junior high/middle school levels. She has taught eighth grade core classes for the past eleven years. Prior to coming to the target county at the junior high level, she had taught at a middle school in another county. She has been a team leader at her school for several years.

Victoria recalled hearing rumors about the change to middle school, but stated that there was nothing definite until the teachers started getting forms asking them to identify their top three choices of schools and subject areas for the coming school year. Prior to that, teachers just repeated the rumors that they had heard the night before. Some of her colleagues were told that they would be moving the next school year and had not received any of their top choices from the form previously sent out. They were told to pack their classrooms and mark the boxes clearly with their names; maintenance would move the boxes to their destination during the summer.

She knew several of her colleagues were angry about the move. Some of them had gone to school where she worked, went away to college, and came back to this school to teach. Some of those same teachers were within a year or so of retirement, she recalled. They were not happy about having to move so close to the end of their careers. She felt bad for her colleagues, but stated that she was just “anxious,” and that it was just “chaotic being left in the dark.”

Victoria’s experience with training and support during that first two years after the realignment included the opening training sessions prior to that first year’s start date, the staff development days, and academic coaches coming into her room. The teaming

concept was the most important concept taught in the beginning, while PLCs was an ongoing initiative during the entire school year. She did not find the opening meetings and staff development days helpful. In regards to PLCs, Victoria did not believe a lot of planning had gone into how small schools would have PLCs. She would love the opportunity to spend time talking in a PLC environment with other eighth grade teachers in her subject area. However, it is difficult for her PLC to perform as a normal PLC might because she is the only eighth grade teacher that teaches her subject at her school.

She has mixed emotions about having ACs come into her room, and is not impressed with the level of support that they have been able to offer. She remembered that initially their ACs were former elementary school teachers who had never taught at the middle school or junior high level. She did not understand how that could be thought of as effective. After those ACs were replaced, she recalled having former junior high teachers assigned to the AC roles. However, they seemed to observe in a more “evaluative manner,” and were not looked at as support.

As Victoria contemplated how the realignment impacted instruction, she stated that prior to the realignment, she was involved in a lot of training that fit nicely with the middle school concept. The training she received revolved around collaborative grouping in the classroom, as well as literacy strategies to use in all content areas. She believes these former county initiatives were already in place to impact instruction, and was work done by literacy coaches that the district had hired as a result of a grant. She further surmised:

I am not sure that the change to middle school has actually impacted test scores.

We changed to the middle school at the same time that the reading test was changed, and they increased the proficiency rate for the test, so it is really hard to tell how the initial change affected scores. We did make growth this past year, but we still remain significantly lower than the state average. We have always gotten growth, while the past two years we have gotten expected growth or high growth.

Victoria reflected on how things might have been done differently in regards to the realignment. She felt as if the rumors were planted and that there could have been better communication. She expressed that all district stakeholders could have been more involved. As she reflected, she thought about change in general. She believes that with change comes some level of anxiety, so that should have been expected. She felt that had there been some level of trust amongst the educators within the county, a lot of that anxiety would have been reduced, and people would have got on board with the transition to middle schools sooner than they did.

Jardai Feather. Jardai has been a junior high and middle school core teacher for the past 10 years. She is very passionate about her subject area and her teaching is very creative. She has taught two different levels in her core subject area. Jardai has her Masters degree and is known for excellence in the classroom.

Jardai remembers her experience with notification of the realignment as one of anxiety. She and her colleagues shared the rumors they had heard each morning in the hallway while on duty. They heard things from other teachers at other schools during

their chance meetings at recreational ball fields and dance classes. The first official notification came when she got the form requesting her choice of schools and subject area, which sent everyone into a “panic.” The panic mostly came from teachers who did not understand why everyone received the letters, and not just the ninth grade teachers. Another cause of Jardai’s anxiety was the possibility of being separated from her colleagues. She had worked with them for several years and did not want to be separated. They all chose the same three schools, in the exact same order. Jardai received her letter with her assignment for the next year on Mother’s Day weekend. She called her best friend and colleague immediately. They had been left at their current assignments and she was relieved.

The opening day training was interesting to Jardai, as she found the teaming concept quite appealing. The idea of team planning could be helpful, but she wondered about how small schools would be able to do this. “I am not sure they thought about that,” Jardai posited. She wondered why they did not hold preparatory staff developments during the year prior to the realignment. She suggested that it would have been a good idea to choose a few people from each school to attend training, since they would not be able to send everyone. The training she remembered during the first school year after the realignment was conducted on staff development days, but “eventually that kind of fizzled out.”

Addison Stuart. Addison has been a junior high and middle school core teacher for nine years. She has taught the same subject since she was hired as a school teacher.

Addison is very proud of her teaching career and the test scores that her students produce. She has considered getting her Master's degree, but has not taken that step yet.

She recalled how anxious she was as she heard the rumors and discussed the rumors in the hallway of her school. She had been educated at the school where she taught and had enjoyed working with her colleagues since she was hired. The teachers within her grade level were very close, feeling as if they were a work family. She remembered receiving the form letter asking for her choice of schools, and how some people did not understand why they were getting the letter. This "not knowing" caused a lot of anxiety for everyone. She stated, "We kept waiting for some meeting at the school level, or even a simple faculty meeting, where someone would come and tell us what was going on. That never happened."

As Addison thought about the first year of the realignment, the implementation year, she recalled, "That first year was just a mess." She expressed her confusion over the opening training session, which covered the middle school concept. She said, "I am still not sure what a middle school is supposed to be like, and we are four years into the process." Although she did not find the training from NCDPI helpful, she did feel like the support that they have been allotted at the district level has improved each year. Directly after the realignment, the ACs were not clear about their expectations, but now they are trying to understand what teachers really need in order to grow and get better at their craft. Her principal was very supportive in those early years. She remembered, "He really wants us to improve and to better ourselves. I just don't think he knew what to do with all of those coaches."

Addison's beliefs on how the realignment impacted instruction brought her to discuss how the student's maturity levels have changed and what might have caused those changes. She stated that the expectations have changed for the middle school student. They used to look up to the ninth graders and see all that was expected of them; for example, their attendance requirements and credit requirements, among other things. Because there was an expected responsibility level for the ninth graders, the other students knew that those expectations would eventually fall on them. As a result, they tried to follow the same rules and acted in a more mature manner.

In regards to test scores, Addison offered some interesting insight:

I have really contemplated the realignment and how it impacted instruction though. I think about test scores a lot. I think that the county as a whole, through this realignment, learned some tricks on testing. We had recently employed a new testing guru and he knew about testing things that no one else knew. Like, we tested everyone by the end of ninth grade in Algebra I. He taught us about coding students and using data to predict their ability to pass the Algebra I test. I remember there was something about a 70% probability area and those students got transferred into Algebra I after Christmas. It all seemed like loopholes, but was pretty smart. So, it's hard to say what impacted test scores, now isn't it?"

Addison believes there should have been more faith put in the educators within this school district in terms of planning and implementing the realignment to the middle school concept. She thinks that teachers would have bought into the vision of administration had they been trusted with the information and been informed of the

expectations of students over the next few years. She felt as if she were left in the dark, and not effectively trained to handle what was being expected of them. She stated,

I think if they had prepped us with some good training, it wouldn't have taken so long for us to be where we are just finally getting to, now. We have made so many mistakes in the process, some of those could have been avoided, I believe.

Quentin Jones. Quentin was hired on a provisional license, which the school district personnel office refers to as lateral entry, and taught an encore subject at the junior high level; he also coached sports for five years. He was asked to move to the ninth grade academy because of certification and coaching, where he taught for three years. Quentin has his Masters Degree in Administration and looks forward to a career as a principal at some point in the future.

Quentin did not recall ever being officially notified of the realignment, but was told by administration that they needed him at the ninth grade academy. He did not mind going to work with the ninth graders, but was naturally anxious because of the change. He would be working with a new administrative staff and many teachers that were unknown to him. He felt for his colleagues that did not want to move, but were being forced to move.

As far as moving to the ninth grade academy, there was not a significant amount of training involved. He just remembered being able to teach his class like he had always taught it. There was some anxiety because there were a lot of visitors to his class. The visitors were administrators, both building level and district level, as well as community members and other out of county educators who just wanted to see how a ninth grade

academy operates. He felt like he always needed to be on his toes. He was thankful that the majority of the focus those first couple of years was on the middle school.

Quentin commented on how testing changed at the ninth grade level. District administrators believed that they could utilize data to predict achievement, and then place students according to that data. He felt that this was a strategy brought to the district by the new testing coordinator, and felt that it was an incredible tool for helping students feel successful.

Jaiden Johnson. Jaiden Johnson has taught an encore subject at the middle school and junior high level for 17 years. He enjoys coaching. He attended the school where he taught, went away to college, and returned to teach at the same school. He has his Masters Degree in Administration and hopes to become a principal in the near future.

He remembered the realignment and how everyone knew something was going to happen. The county had recently hired a new superintendent and Jaiden felt that it was time that the school district “broke out of the rut of being junior high schools.” He recalled receiving the form and making his choices of schools in which he wished to work. Jaiden was indifferent as he spoke about the possibility of his own movement, but remembered some teachers being upset that they did not get placed in any of the three schools that they chose.

Jaiden felt as if he had been “thrown into the middle school thing.” The training at the beginning of the year had not been helpful to him, and because of coaching he was not able to attend much of the staff development that was planned during the school year. He felt that because of this lack of understanding what a middle school was supposed to

be, he was unsure of what the expectations of his teaching were from administration. He explained that grading changed; they were no longer allowed to give a grade lower than a 65. Students changed; they believed that they would be passed without any effort. As a result, teachers felt degraded. He thought about test scores, but believed it would be difficult to determine if the realignment had any impact on test scores because the reading test had been renormed that year, and the county had always been strong in math.

Jeb Bond. Jeb is a veteran teacher of 25 years, having taught an encore class at the junior high for 22 years before moving to the ninth grade academy. Jeb prides himself on his teaching career and the connections he made with students and their families throughout his career. He has fond memories of academic competitions in his content area, both state and national, where his students placed and even won.

Jeb first heard of the potential realignment of the school district through rumors in the school hallways and at meetings he attended where other teachers would talk to him about what they had heard. His first official notification came when his curriculum director told him that the school district was finally going to open a ninth grade school and that she needed him to go; she wanted him to go. He was completely overwhelmed and unable to give her an answer, although flattered about the offer. This occurred in late February of 2008. He finally told her that he preferred to stay where he was currently teaching, if he could. From that point, he was anxious about what might happen, speculating that because of the expertise he had in his subject area, he would be moved to the ninth grade academy. But because there was no official notification from other administrators, Jeb did not give any of it much thought. “Next thing we know, it came on

like a freight train,” he remembered. In March, forms came that asked teachers to list the schools where they would prefer to work. Speculation was swirling regarding how they were choosing teachers to go to the ninth grade academy. Jeb was stunned by it all, not knowing what to think or say to people when they questioned him about what he wanted to do.

Jeb recalled Mother’s Day weekend, receiving his letter of reassignment. It was Saturday morning when he received the letter, and he opened it with much anxiety. His best friend, whom he taught with at the junior high school, was out of town. He drove to her house to get her letter so he could call her with the news. They wanted to remain together, and had chosen all of the same schools on their form. He was reassigned, but she remained at the middle school. He recalled how disheartening this was for both of them. Jeb recalled that over those next few weeks of school, “the level of anxiety was through the roof.” He felt as if he was losing a family and that what he wanted, or what he had worked for all of these years, meant nothing. He explained that “they didn’t even give me the common courtesy of an email letting me know they were thinking about making these kinds of changes. It was a horrible time.”

Once Jeb moved to the ninth grade academy, he did not find that he received much support. Instead, he felt it was the opposite. Administration questioned his teaching style and pushed him to implement computer modules without the proper safety training for the equipment that went along with the computer modules. He complained that “there was no training for us on how to deal with students at this new level.” He felt that placing all ninth grade students together changed the dynamics of the school. In a junior

high model, ninth graders had a sense of responsibility because they were “the big kids on campus.” Now they were struggling for control of that top social position, when in reality, all students were equal. Discipline issues soared, with no support from administration. He was told that administrative assistance with discipline would be increasing, but “we had nothing beyond the normal.” He felt that expectations for teachers increased, while expectations for students decreased.

APPENDIX J: Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes

- I. Communication
 - a. How leadership communicated the realignment process
 - b. How teachers communicated among themselves
 - c. How teachers were notified of their reassignment
- II. Impaction on Instruction/Test Scores
 - a. Teachers perceptions of impact on test scores
 - b. Teachers perceptions of impact on instruction
 - i. Sense of urgency
 - ii. Teaching behind the glass
- III. Implementation and Support
 - a. Teachers supporting teachers
 - b. Academic Coaches support
 - c. Principal support
 - d. PLC Support
 - e. District Leadership support
- IV. Perceptions/Opinions
 - a. Teachers perceptions of self-worth in relationship
 - i. How they felt about themselves

- ii. How they thought they were viewed
 - b. Teachers perceptions of their career, job security
 - c. Teachers perceptions of how things could have been done differently
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APPENDIX K: Structural Descriptions

Shari Simmons. Shari's love of the grade level she teaches is the structural element that accounts for the experiences she has had. She is very committed to that grade level and the curriculum that goes along with it. She has high expectations of herself and her students, and is currently working on her own education in order to be able to move to a higher level of instruction.

The recent hiring of a new superintendent prior to the realignment could also have been a factor in the way she experienced this realignment. Because this superintendent was not tied to this county or any of the people in it, a sense of job insecurity loomed over her. She even commented at the beginning of the interview, as she read the consent form, "Oh great, so my opinions and perceptions? I am so gonna get fired."

She had a close relationship with the teachers she had worked with for many years at the junior high level. The constant movement since the new superintendent arrived was a negative for Shari, especially because there was so little movement prior to his arrival. Shari enjoys a sense of family in her work environment, and commented on how strong it was at the junior high where

The other thing that I was thinking about, well maybe, the only thing that really bothers me is, and so far it's worked out okay, but with all of the changes we have, it seems like they like to shuffle things around a lot and prevent us from having a family atmosphere.

She reflected on the fact that “there has been a lot of turn over.” When talking about a colleague leaving she stated, “I can’t take another change. This is about to push me over the edge.”

Mary Edwards. Mary’s strong Christian background and her natural desire to help others are the structural elements that account for how Mary came to have the experiences that she has had with the district realignment. Mary is compassionate and caring. She has had a multitude of experiences and has taught in several counties other than the target county. Her willingness to express herself so openly may have come from a recent career change.

Mary had worked in the target county with the prior administration and knew that the district had experienced very little movement in personnel. She stated, “I am not positive the new administration really cared what people wanted as far as their work environment.” The hiring of the new superintendent who had no connections to this county could be a possible influence on her experiences, as well as the fact that she had taught middle school elsewhere and felt that we were a county that was behind in education because we were still using the junior high model. She commented:

This county needed this change. I believe he was brought in here to do a job and he has done it. Do I think he could have done it better by doing it different?
Sure. But he made the hard decision that had to be made.

Mary has a strong work ethic and is very traditionalistic. She is proud of her work, and although she enjoys the old traditions, she does not disregard the new. She

stated that she “loves educating others and learning what new strategies there are out there to be used in the classroom to help engage students in their learning.”

According to Mary, self-worth was quite an issue for the teachers in the district. This was evident when she stated that she and her friends called themselves the left-behinds. She said, “you know we were the red-headed step-children.”

John Jenkins. The fact that John no longer works in the county where the realignment occurred is the structural element that could have influenced his experiences. He had worked in several school systems and had been very close to previous superintendents. He had been at the junior high school for nine years prior to the realignment, and had been very close to the staff and faculty where he worked. He had experienced a strong sense of family while at the target school.

John’s sense of self-worth was very influential to his feelings about the realignment. He felt very useful and appreciated at the junior high; he was a people person and was able to build and keep a sense of family there. He openly talked about how there were “no longer any allies in the county” after the changes occurred.

John’s age may have affected how he experienced this realignment. He made the statement that “there was just no sense in these changes. A man my age knows when things are good and when things are bad. We had a good thing.”

Sam Collins. The fact that Sam had been in the target county when the previous administration was in control is the structural element that could have influenced his experiences in regards to the district’s transition to middle schools. He knew that there had been minimal movement of teachers in the county prior to this new superintendent.

Although Sam expressed his understanding of the need for change, he knew that it is messy and hard. He talked at length about how change is necessary in order to grow and learn. Sam is very conservative in his thoughts regarding relationships, his career, religion, and politics, which makes him open-minded to change and not so quick to judge those that had to make such difficult decisions. He attended school in this school district, though and feels a strong sense of responsibility to the community, as well as to his own family. As he spoke about his responsibility, it was evident that he is a newly married and wants to provide for his wife, and hopefully have children in the future. He talked openly about making his parents proud, stating that they had prominent positions in the community and it was important to him to prove that he was a responsible career-minded husband

Sara Alexander. Sarah has several structural elements that may have influenced her experiences as they related to the realignment to the middle school concept; pride in her career and her capabilities/worth as a teacher stood out immediately. She prides herself on her reputation as a teacher and the test scores her students produce each school year. She has gotten to know other educators all across the state because of that reputation for excellence. She had worked in this county with the former superintendent and knew there was very little movement of teachers and staff. She has an understanding of change, as she has moved around a lot and had worked at middle schools in the past in other school districts. She even commented that this was “our county leaping into the 1980s. It was a necessary change.”

Responsibility to her family, her students, and to herself is another structural element that stood out as a structural element influencing her experience. Sara is a newlywed and feels an inordinate amount of pressure from the new teacher evaluation instrument. She commented that she believed that “it makes it easier for them to get rid of us.” She feels stress about her students making growth; this stress was evident because she had tears as she spoke to me. She desires to be considered a highly qualified teacher.

Richard Dixon. Richard’s tenure as a member of the previous county district administration team is the structural element that could have influenced his experience with the realignment. He knew that this new superintendent had no ties to the target county and that there had been very little movement of teachers and staff prior to his employment. Richard took pride in the fact that he had worked hard to further his own education, hoping to further his career because of it. He was moved to administration for a short time, and then returned to the classroom upon recommendation from the superintendent. This recommendation may have created some animosity in Richard towards the new district administrators. He has a strong work ethic and his goal was to excel in the education field.

Richard has a strong sense of responsibility to others, including his family. Richard expressed his desire to make his family proud. He spoke in particular about his son, expressing that his son was very proud of him. He reflected on his dedication to helping others as well, commenting that he had “helped new teachers out a lot at the middle school.” He was proud of the fact that he had been able to help the new teachers with understanding how the school district had changed, where the district was in

relationship to the change, and with all of the duties of being a teacher. He enjoyed helping them understand their curriculum, as well as how to manage classrooms and develop their skills as a teacher. Richard loved being a teacher to all and had a strong sense of responsibility to help others.

Victoria Conyers. The structural elements that might have influenced Victoria are the stressors of the realignment, the introduction of the teacher evaluation instrument, another new principal at her school, with the loss of the position of assistant principal, and the stressors of responsibility to herself and family. Victoria does not live in the county in which she works, so in essence she has no ties to this area either. She had worked in a neighboring school district prior to her work in this school district and had a bad experience with some of the administration that had worked in both places, as well. She feels pressure to show him that she is an effective teacher, while also feeling pressure to maintain high test scores. She is very competitive and outspoken.

Victoria has a strong sense of responsibility to her students, colleagues, and family. She talked openly about helping her colleagues and desiring to help others. She felt stress about the new teacher evaluation instrument and how test scores were going to be added to that instrument as part of the teacher's evaluation.

Jardai Feather. Jardai's history at the school in which she worked for so long, in conjunction with the change in administration, are the structural elements that might have influenced her experiences with the district realignment. She had had a recent career change, although her previous career was also in the education field. She also had a husband who was an educator in the same school district. They worked together for

many years at the same school. He was moved in the realignment. Jardai is very proud of her teaching skills and has goals to further her own education. She believes herself to be a strong leader in her classroom and her curriculum area.

Jardai is committed to her family and friends. She works hard to stay connected to her family, by never missing school functions, ball games, and extracurricular activities in which her children are involved. To further show her commitment to family, she discussed never missing her husband's games as a coach. She makes time for her friends, the majority of them being educators, and discussed the responsibility she felt to them in helping through the realignment, when she, herself, felt stressed throughout it all.

Addison Stuart. Addison grew up in this school district and attended the school in which she worked. Those facts are the structural elements that may have affected her experiences during the district's transition from junior highs to middle schools. She had known the teachers in that school for a very long time. She was also familiar with the former superintendent and his policies on movement within the district. She has a husband that works at another middle school (former junior high) in the district. She desires to have a long career in education, with plans for promotion. She has young children at home and has admitted to struggles with money. Losing her job would be devastating to her, and in the back of her mind, if she lost her job, her husband could be next because they work for the same school district. Addison has a strong opinion about everything. She commented about the new teacher evaluation instrument and how it changed people's perceptions of themselves. She worried about how all the movement would affect people's opinions of her because she was left at the middle school and not

moved. She commented that “it made it look like those that were left behind weren’t good enough to be moved.”

Quentin Jones. The structural elements that may have influenced Quentin’s experiences are the fact that he attended school in this school district and was familiar with the previous superintendent and his policies. Additionally, his wife is a teacher in a neighboring school district. Quentin aspires to be in administration in this school district. Quentin was a newlywed at the time of the realignment and desiring to become a tenured teacher. Losing his job would certainly have been something that would have influenced his experiences as well as taint the answers to the questions I asked him.

Quentin believed in the realignment, stating that “it was a necessity for moving our students into the 21st century.” He did comment that the “lack of involvement of personnel in the decision making process caused a lot of people to feel as if their opinion didn’t matter.” He also commented that the self-esteem of many of his colleagues plummeted.

Jaiden Johnson. Jaiden attended school in the target school district, has a wife that teaches in this school district, and had been moved multiple times since the second year after the realignment. These are all structural elements that may have influenced Jaiden’s experiences with the realignment. He has small children at home and a mortgage. He lives in one of the nicer neighborhoods in the county and is well-respected. He is the oldest of his siblings; one of his younger siblings has had some difficulty keeping a job.

Jaiden feels a sense of pride in his reputation and his career goals. He aspires to be a superintendent one day and hopes to remain in this county to do so. He discussed the new teacher evaluation instrument, talking of its ratings and how it has made teachers feel. He commented that “with the new teacher evaluation instrument and the constant change within our school district, it has made teachers feel as if they are out of control and no longer effective.”

Jeb Bond. Jeb had been employed at one of the junior high schools for 20 years prior to the realignment, but was moved during the realignment. Both are structural elements that may have influenced his experiences with the realignment from junior highs to middle schools. He lived within the school district and went to school in this district as a child. He knew the former superintendent personally and loved the sense of community he had been afforded by being at the junior high for so long. Jeb was also experiencing some stressful situations in his own life at the time of the realignment. He had a son recently deployed to Iraq and was having health problems. Jeb has a strong work ethic and a fighting nature that does not allow him to back down from anything or anyone. He is proud of his teaching capabilities, but had sensed feelings of disrespect and felt threatened in his career. When new administration came in, he felt like he was no longer in control of his program. Technology became such an emphasis that he felt instruction became almost secondary. He felt the responsibility and weight of test scores on his career, knowing that these scores would eventually be tied to his evaluation, although he did not fully understand the way this evaluation instrument worked.

APPENDIX L: Combined Composite of Textural and Structural Descriptions

All mankind experiences change from the earliest moment of existence to the last instance of consciousness. Change occurs continuously throughout life. We become conditioned to change; the weather, the seasons, our own growth, and even life and death. The concept of change, while carrying verisimilitude and constancy in the human psyche, is inherently fraught with many unforeseen calamities. For example, we have become accustomed to the occasional thunderstorm, yet that familiar thunderstorm can potentially spawn an unexpected and devastating tornado, bringing with it unanticipated destruction. Our faith, relationships, and experiences supply us with the ability to cope with, accept, and even thrive during these times of unpredictable change.

Each of the coresearchers in this study has an innate sense that some degree of change naturally occurs in life. Oftentimes in our careers, we experience a change in the top level of management or administration. These simple thunderstorms of change are sometimes predictable in a professional setting, yet can bring about a tornado of unexpected consequences. For example, if one group of educational administrators had previously taken a cautious approach to movement of teachers and staff within a district, and had practiced a school-level management technique for many years, and then an incoming group of administrators decides upon a business model that more aggressively moves teachers and staff within that same district, those new administrators' actions might have a devastating and demoralizing impact, creating a disconnection between

teachers and administrators that may adversely influence the performance of both teacher and students.

All people have a desire to be included in the process of change, no matter what kind of change is being implemented. A feeling of belonging is established when the heralds of change allow and encourage the contributions of those whom the change most affects. This is true whether the contribution is as simple as the elicitation of employee input, or as involved as the implementation of an employee's plan. Once an employee has built strong alliances with coworkers and community leaders, and has established themselves in their work environment, they will never truly accept a new approach without first having been made a part of the process of change.

APPENDIX M: Sample Initial Coding and Memoing

Descriptive Codes

*To start the coding process, I chose an interview at random and began some descriptive coding. These were some of the codes that emerged.

Interview of Coresearcher

Numbered/Descriptive Codes	Comments/Quotes
1. Communication	<p>Theoretical Framework</p> <p>Coresearcher felt it was “more through the grapevine.” Then recalled a “mass mailing of a letter that was to come out. What I remember most about that weekend is that no one left town.”</p> <p>She comments on community involvement: “They held community meetings or whatever. There was no “you have time to get your act together and speak” at these meetings. They were advertised and held usually within the same day. Meetings were minimal and teachers didn’t dare go.”</p>
2. Feelings/Perceptions	Coresearcher is very descriptive in her

	<p>account of getting her reassignment letter:</p> <p>“Then I can remember, very vividly, the turmoil, the anxiety, that was in my stomach as I walked to the mailbox and then as I walked back to the house. I didn’t even open my letter until I got back to my house.”</p> <p>Note: All of the coresearchers feel that this communication was significant. Every interview has an account of this letter and the “anxiety” associated with it.</p> <p>Self-esteem – “plummeted because 1. we had no control over where we were going.”</p> <p>“My group was the left-behinds....the ugly red-headed step.”</p>
3. Opinions	<p>Possibly grouped with feelings?</p> <p>Coresearcher reflected on the form letter requesting top three choices. She adds her opinion regarding that step:</p> <p>“Now, do you want my personal opinion about that? My personal opinion about that is that it was a farce. It was done to</p>

	<p>appease the masses. They were doing that to make teachers feel like they had a choice.”</p> <p>- I wonder though – had they included people and not made the tough decisions of how and where people would go, could it have caused groups of friends to be all at one school, and groups of people who were struggling teachers to be grouped at other schools.</p> <p>“To be honest, to be in their positions, you have to make those tough calls, regardless. He had a vision of what needed to happen. Did I disagree with his vision? Absolutely not.”</p>
4. Support – Among Teachers	<p>Combined as support and implementation???</p> <p>This coresearcher felt that her job was to calm them through this process. She had worked in a middle school before and felt that this district needed to change to the middle school model.</p>

<p>5. Support - from Leadership</p>	<p>This may be combined into a general support area.</p> <p>This coresearcher felt that her principal worked hard at supporting the faculty and staff during that first year of implementation. She commented that she “knew his leadership style and how he created a sense of family – that sense of community. That was his job at the middle school as well....to build that community and support for one another.”</p> <p>Academic coaches – This coresearcher was concerned about the implementation of academic coaches: “You can’t send someone in from an elementary school to a high school and expect teachers to listen to them, Instantly at teacher just tunes them out.”</p>
<p>6. Impact on Test Scores</p>	<p>This may need to be combined with impact on instruction.</p> <p>Coresearcher contemplates how the realignment impacted test scores: “Well</p>

	<p>you can go back and look at the most recent test scores, where this county, every single school has made growth. This speaks volumes for him because it was, if you want to say, that it was because of the realignment and the emphasis on instruction – lighting a fire – sense of urgency about it. I also believe that part of it was fearing for your job. Where in the past we have never had people coming into our classes, we had never had walk-throughs, or people coming in droves to see our classroom instruction – to observe. All of a sudden we were having this happen and it created a very uncomfortable situation and caused self-doubt because you never got any feedback from those visits.”</p> <p>Note: When looking at the test scores in preparation for this study, test scores have continuously climbed each year following the realignment.</p>
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<p>7. Impacting Instruction</p>	<p>This coresearcher makes mention of “teaching behind the glass” in several parts of her interview. She refers to this impacting instruction, “They started micromanaging our classrooms. We had to put schedules on our door....if your schedule said you were supposed to be teaching math at 11:30 and at 11:31 they walked in and you weren’t teaching math, you were in trouble. So all of the creativity, the teachable moments, were gone.”</p> <p>Personal thoughts: During this time the new teacher evaluation instrument was also implemented with RttT funds. I cannot help but wonder if all of this happened at the same time but felt like it was all related. This county had been on a downward slide academically. Teachers admit that something had to happen. All of it happening at once was just coincidence???</p>
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APPENDIX N: Sample Transcript

R= Researcher (interviewer)

C= Coresearcher (interviewee)

White Female

R: Tell me about your educational experience.

C: Well I've taught school for 21 years, this is the 21st year. I started off 7th grade for maybe 14 years and 9th grade for like the last 7 years. Um, I teach honors classes, usually I have one or two honors classes and then I have standard classes for the remainder of the day.

R: What did you teach at the junior high level?

C: At the junior high level, mostly, it was 7th grade. The last 2 years were 9th grade.

R: That's right, you had my children.

C: Yes, I did. I sure did.

R: Describe your background prior to the realignment, as well as after the realignment.

What I am looking for is anything to do with instructional practice throughout the day, umm...

C: What was the typical day like?

R: Yes.

C: When we were at the junior high level, we had 6 class periods a day, 55 minutes each with one planning period during that time and year long, of course. What else can I tell you?

R: What about your planning period? How were they structured? Did you have structured planning?

C: That's a good point. No, not really.... no structure. With planning periods, you were free to get your tests run; you were free to do what you needed to do. It was not a professional learning community like we have right now. At the junior high I planned with another teacher (name given) who was the other English teacher. We always planned but there was never anyone who told us that was what we were supposed to do. That's what we did because we wanted to.

R: What do you think about PLC's?

C: I like PLC's. We PLC down here in English a lot. We are supposed to do it on Thursdays but during football seasons we do Wednesdays because one of our teachers (name given) has football. But we...in fact the teacher across the hall was heading over here just as you came up. We check with each other constantly. We are always in my class room. We go over our test data. We go over what we are going to put on our tests. We plan together. We do our word walls together. Everything is together now.

R: Now versus the Junior high days: Do you feel like you are more of a team than you were at the junior high, with the old model for planning? A lot of the reading I have done talks about the old teaching/planning model and how the teachers were left alone, that their world was their classroom and some were actually lonely – or loners. Their world was their classroom and they often didn't know what was going on in other classrooms. There were no teams.

C: I was at an advantage at the junior high (name given) because of the teacher I planned with (name given) being there. She and I worked together really well. When we came over, well she retired, but when I came over to this school (name given), we started

PLC's. One of the first things the principal (name given) told us was that he did not want us to come over here and be a loner. I don't want you to go into your classroom and shut your door and stay in your own world. He said that we were going to be on teams. That was easy to transition to, for me, because, like I say, I think I had that advantage of teaming with another teacher at the junior high (name given). Another teacher (name given) came over at the same time I did. He and I are still here together. We meshed really well together. He is the thinker and I am the talker.

R: Describe the restructuring, or realignment, or the junior highs to the middle school. Tell me everything you know, or can remember. Start with how you were told you were coming here, you mentioned you wanted this move, so talk to me about everything about that

C: From best I can remember, I remember that they came to us, but I can't remember who "they" is. We were asked, first, who wanted to move. A lot of teachers were upset...that was the first feeling about it – they were upset that we were going to be moving, that there was going to be this whole restructuring. I remember one teacher (name given) coming to me and asked "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I'm going, I love this grade level (grade level given)." I knew it was not about where I am, but about the grade level that I teach (grade given). I didn't want to do the other grade levels (grades given). She was like, "If you are going then I think I will go." We were such a family at the junior high (name given), we were really, well the group of teachers that came over here from there were just a real tight-knit group. We just got along well. We hardly ever see each other now, though. We may see each other at lunch. We are on

separate halls and it's like having a school within a school or maybe even two schools within a school. Those kids, and I may be getting ahead of myself, but, um, our kids are structured here so that they are taking English and History, right now, plus two electives OR they are having Math and Science and two electives. So, none of my students that I teach right now have math right now and none of them have Science, they all have History. In the middle of the year, we are going to switch over, it's just like they are getting promoted and we will get to see those kids that we've never seen.

R: So you kind of flip-flop them.

C: Yes, exactly....so you kind of get the kids to where you want them and then trade off. It doesn't always work out real well, because we are like two different personalities. It's like our school here (she points to the English/History side of the school) has its own personality, while their school (she points to Math/Science side of school) has their own personality. We always say, "How come we get the good ones first semester and the rough ones second semester?" We were just having that discussion, but we know it's just a different way of doing things.

R: Ok, now I am trying to get a feel for what you know about when they started all the changes, do you know anything about how it was decided who would be moved? How they chose people to move or stay at schools?

C: We were told and I say that"told"..... that they were going to take...well, they wanted to see who would volunteer first, then we were told that they were going to fill this school with strong teachers. They wanted strong teachers. I don't know if that was told to just kind of pacify people who got moved in different directions or what. We can

kind of read between the lines. Um, but that is what we had been told. Most of us that are here wanted to come, though, I mean, I know the ones from [the junior high I came from] (name given), I would say all of them wanted to come. I know we had some at the beginning who didn't want to come. They were not happy about being moved here.

R: Right. I had a friend that did not want to be here. I always tried to encourage him, especially by saying he was chosen because he was so good.....so strong.

C: Yes, he was one of the only ones.

R: And I never could really figure that out because he was such an excellent teacher. Very strong in his area. Ok , now.....the first year or two of being here, in this new school, and being here with all of these changes.....did it impact your instruction? Or any practices? Just talk to me about that generally.....or as specific as you can be.

C: Oh, it definitely impacted instruction, because now, to be on a schedule where you are in class for 75 minutes, no, I need to go back and add.....I don't think about it anymore. I think it's an hour and a half – 90 minutes. We go from 8 to 9:30 for the first block....so yeah, an hour and a half, as opposed to the 55 minutes from junior high. We did have to learn how to change up activities. In English I think it easier to do that – to change up those activities. That was the big thing – the first thing that first year.....learning to change up activities within the instructional times you were allotted. You were not going to lecture the whole time. We knew we were going to have time for some hands on and time to move through all kinds of different activities to enhance student learning. Um....I can say that, for us in English, I don't think that was a big problem. Because we would say, like, ok. We had this routine that we started to develop. We all wanted to be on the

same routine. I am thinking back to the first year, and what the plans looked like. It seemed like we were just kind of putting things together so that we had a variety of activities. I believe it was the second semester of the first year that we started getting a little more structured.

R: It was almost like being a new teacher....having to learn all over again, except you still had the same content.

C: Yeah, yeah.....Luckily I had found this grammar program that one of my relatives had done....well.....in his school....an early college in another town in NC (named town). He had told me how much he liked it and had really good test scores and all. He said he had learned so much in a short time and really liked this program. So, I tried it out and that is what we have been using here ever since then. I think we were really just opened to all kinds of ideas from all kinds of different schools. We just opened our minds and tried different things, making them our own.

R: There was certainly more time for that luxury, whereas, good heaven, with 55 minutes you were probably pressed for time.

C: You were! By the time you would get started on something, it would be time to close it out and, you know, you just couldn't get a whole lot done.

R: Do you have a block that is split, or that you have to move students during....like for lunch?

C: 3rd Block is, and the first year we were here, ours was split and it was a big, big problem. We were a tested subject and the principal (named principal) took that out. He saw that it just wasn't working. We would bring them in, get them settled down, then

have to move them to lunch and spend more time when we returned settling them down. We just lost too much instructional time. Ever since then, we have been left alone for lunches. We have A lunch which is not split.

R: Are there still some classes, maybe non-tested, that are still split?

C: Yes, some are. Oh, yeah, they have also been careful with this....they give English 4th block planning, we needed that.....and Math gets 3rd block planning, so that their lunch is not interfered with, either.

R: How do you think the structure of the day has come about over these last few years? Do you think it was just trial and error? Obviously your teams had a lot of input over the years.

C: They did give us a lot of input. I think the administration had thought through it, in the beginning, as best as they could, and then, once they started putting things into play, they learned from their mistakes. Like I say, after that first year where it was split, we were, like, this is just not working, and we haven't had it happen since then. They have also been careful to put, like, our honors classes, they put them at a specific time and our lower kids at a different time.

R: How is that?

C: Well, right now, I've got two honors, a first block and a second block honors, with 3rd block being standard. Another teacher (named) has a 3rd block honors class. I don't know how to really explain that. We don't have them at the same time, basically, so if we need to move kids around we can do that. Like for someone who is transferring in, it's just easier to move kids around.

R: How has it been with kids transferring in?

C: Oh, that is a huge difference. It is entirely different. I love that part of it. You know as a junior high you had students moving from school to school (named schools). It seemed my role was constantly changing.....forever changing. Not anymore. That was a huge improvement because we have very few kids who come in. I mean I think I can think of maybe 5 all year, last year. Another thing that is really good is that we don't have all of those assemblies and, can I say mess? We don't have interruptions. That was one of the things that when this other teacher (teacher named) and I worked together would drive us crazy. Anytime we had those programs where the kids were moved around, shuffled around a lot, or where they were filtered here or there, or needed to go do this or go pick up that.....we just don't have that any more. It is 100% instructional time, now.

R: What about quitting school? Are they drop-out age here? Has there been less talk of that here?

C: We do have ages 14-16, with an occasional 17 year old.

R: So, is it any different here, as far as talks of dropping out?

C: I believe it is much better here. But I think it is because we are all focused. Plus, like we were saying in the lounge, today, the county does everything they can think of to keep these kids in school. Between the transitional school, the alternative school, or if they fail in English this semester, they have the opportunity to take it again in place of an elective for next semester. I explain it to them, you will lose an elective and have to take English again next semester if you fail it this semester. And just when you think they can't do

anything else, they always do....we are fixing to start this up again, something they call an intervention and enrichment period. I have kind of mixed feelings on that. We have not figured that one out, yet. Just to get kids where they are supposed to go and to make it worthwhile time.

R: What do you all use to determine your grouping of these students? Common assessments?

C: I think each department kind of uses something different to determine that. I would say common assessments and um, grades....their report cards, progress reports.

R: Are you going to have I/E period all at the same time?

C: I think this is what we are trying to figure out. Right now, we are saying that, for example, the English department will have I/E period on one specific day. And it will be the last forty minutes of the class period, so that we can shuffle our kids around during our own time. Before that we have tried clubs, where students signed up for three possible clubs, then students went out to the clubs, but at later times would need intervention. It was just hard to figure out if they were in their club, or skipping or what?

R: Is there any difference with skipping classes at this level?

C: You know, not that I can tell you. I can tell you I know less of what is going on as far as discipline. If a fight occurs somewhere in the school, unless it is right here in my hallway, I don't usually know about it. An office worker (worker named) has just started putting out our suspension list. Before she started this, I didn't know who had gotten suspended unless I taught them. I think it is neat to get that list, so that you know they are taking care of business throughout the school.

R: Describe leadership throughout the restructuring process? Talk to me about all leadership or supports, which can be academic coaches, teacher leaders, building level administration, all the way up to superintendents. I know right before the alignment, they started really looking at the academic coach model. I am not sure how that has impacted you during this realignment, if you would like to start there. Talk to me about how it was compared to how it is.

C: I can't remember much but I know as I talk through it, it will come to me. I know we had floor leaders which took things from the floor to the administration in junior high. Now we have department chairs that carry information out to the departments. I am a department chair. Now they come to our PLC's. Academic coaches.....I don't see them very much unless there is something new. I don't think they really know what all they need to be doing. It's like they ask what we need help with, and we are fine. We don't really need any help with anything.

R: I think what I am seeing, at least at the elementary level and middle school level with the academic coaches is that they are helping to carry information from one school to the next. They share amongst the schools and disburse information from central office. I think that since you are one school, there isn't as much for them to do because you are so departmentalized and you are the specialists.

C: They do come and sit in on lessons....we had one (AC named) that sat in three of the classrooms just to kind of see what is going on. We just aren't using any of that, that I know of. I mean we are really not. I mean I am honest with the AC (named), and have no problems sending an email, and I don't mean to be a little snippy, but I know I am

sometimes when I just say, “We don’t need any help right now.” For us it is kind of like more of a burden. We have to think of something that we can talk about with the academic coaches. Now we have had NCDPI to come in and they were great. This was when we were chosen for something. I don’t know if we needed extra help or what it was, but this lady came in and helped us start the PLC’s. She brought in information about wiki’s, which we were too busy to do that, but she came in with a lot of information. I have gotten all kinds of stuff from her....great ideas like using index cards to put students in groups, using a coding system that only I know what the codes mean on the backs of those cards that help me with differentiating instruction.

R: Do you think you have had more support since the realignment?

C: Definitely had more support since the realignment.

R: Is there anything you can think of, like, when thinking about the ones that were not happy about moving – or when thinking about those that jumped on the idea of moving....is there anything that you think could have been done differently to make this realignment a smoother process? Or if you think about all of the changes....this large scale change....is there anything you think they could have done differently?

C: We know we had issues with facilities. This facility not being ready for the kids. We still have complaints of the halls being too crowded. *(It is important to note here that this school had been built as a primary school – grades K-3- and converted during the summer before the realignment).* We had to put lockers in and it is crowded, but you also see the cone out in the hall. We have to figure out our traffic system and how to move the students. I just cannot imagine the costs in getting facilities ready.

R: I remember being part of the opening day training at the middle school level and how no one knew what middle school was, or why it was so monumentally different, and we were being trained only days before students were to return. How was this for you all?

C: I remember feeling sorry for you all, thinking I had made the right decision (Laughs). My license is in middle grades and I just kept thinking, I do not want to get into all that group stuff. I mean, I like groups but I am not going to have my kids....at this grade level they don't need to be working in groups, they have to think independently. They don't need to have touchy-feely stuff every day. I want them to think on their own. You know....this has kind of been the pattern, though....and I think we are just getting used to it....the whole "this too shall pass." There is a lot of that that's around. Every year it's like, "Ok, what dog and pony show are we going to have this year?" And they will just tell us, and we will just go through with it. You know, we will do it. We will try to tell the younger teacher....those are the ones I worry about the most because this is overwhelming. For somebody who is just coming in and seeing all of this going on. We are all kind of relaxed about it because we just know that this is this year's thing and next year there is going to be something else. And you just do what you have to do to make it through.

R: That is the one thing even for me, because there has been a lot of change. And I know that this year's push is vocabulary and I get that. If I had only had better vocabulary instruction, I can't imagine, but this push – this constant push of something new and different. I see these new teachers being overwhelmed and stressed. They question me about keeping up with what we are doing this year and should they be doing

what they learned last year, too, or is that gone. I don't know how to answer those questions a lot of times.

C: This has turned me into a bulletin board person and I am NOT a bulletin board person. I wonder myself is it the words or is it that I know I have to have it up so I can reference it. Today I was telling a student (named student), you know this....it's on the board, it's on the board. He is looking all in his notes and I just keep saying "they are on the board." So you know we have the words all over the place, but when they go to take a test or a quiz, they can look at it but next week they will be gone and when they need it for something else, it won't be there. Something else will replace them. The other thing I was thinking about is....well maybe the only thing that really really bothers me is...and so far it's worked out ok, but with all of the changes we have....it seems like they like to shuffle things around a lot and prevent us from having a family atmosphere. That worries me because....we had that at my other school (school named) and I know other schools did too (named various schools).

Interruption – Phone rings.

When I first moved here, I filled in for a teacher (named teacher) who had a hysterectomy. I remember thinking about the sense of family we had, and that is what I thought teaching was supposed to be like. I loved it. Now when all these changes occurred, that is what I most feared. I was losing my [planning partner] (named teacher) anyway, and then moving, which wasn't bad. We embraced the principal (named principal), then he was gone. Now we have a new principal and I wonder, next year, who is it going to be? Is it going to be him?

R: That is a general feeling I have heard from most people. Even the community sense.

C: That was a big start over for me. At the junior high, we could teach different things because we knew the parents and families. We could teach things that were on the edge....I would not try that here because I don't have that connectedness. It would be many, many years before I would attempt that, if ever.

R: How is it having students one year.

C: That is tough. I don't get to know them like I used to. I had to cut out a lot of stuff. The names leave you faster. I may have them this year and then see them in the community next year and ask "what grade are you in now?" When they say 10th, I feel bad because it hasn't been that long. I also worry about the material we cover. We just can't cover the material we once did....moving from year-long to semester. We had to narrow down. It started off we could either do the Odyssey or Romeo and Juliet but we can't do both. Now we have to figure out a way to squeeze it in at all. So that part of it, I feel like they are getting a lot of credits, but I don't know about the depth within the classroom. That is a concern.

R: Have they thought about spreading, say, like, English over the whole year, but letting other classes continue to be semester based?

C: They are doing that with one class. They are experimenting with one teacher (names teacher). She has the lowest of the low in first block. She has them for 45 minutes then switches with a Math teacher (names teacher). They will do this all year long.

R: Are they going to compare test scores at the end of the year, looking specifically at growth.....maybe even at the growth among all of the classes? Or will they look specifically at these students growth?

C: They are. I am not sure how they are going to do all of that. They are going to look at the success of the students.

R: How have your test scores been as a school? I mean, obviously, the big sign as I entered the school says "School of Distinction." So I guess they have been good.

C: Yes, they have and that is something else we were just talking about. If we have continued to make growth and do well, why do they keep changing things up? That is the frustrating part. We are not....now this comes from your Math and English teachers...our scores are good, so why get us to do all of this other stuff, when it is other departments who have the majority of students failing. Why keep having us do all this stuff, it kind of gets frustrating.

R: Tell me about Common Core. How is that changing things here? How are you getting into that?

C: We are using PLC's and trying to look more at those standards. Honestly, though, since MSL's have been taken off for this semester, and they aren't going to have them ready for next semester either, because they are not going to do a half of a year's data. I've been working on those. Honestly, the questions, when we went to be trained for MSL's, and for common core, we right into the same thing we were in before. They have taken off two kinds of questions that we were doing previously, and it's actually a tighter format of questions. Not quite as broad. It's almost like your questions will be more

predictable. The MSLs are developed at the state level but scored locally. I knew something was up because when I went to turn in my time sheet people were not showing up.

R: Is there anything of anything else that you feel like you would like to add to this? Or if you think of anything in the near future you can contact me about any of it.

C: One thing – it is tougher when you have four people working together, it's just like children. You can have two that play well together, but you enter in that 3rd or 4th person and they may not mesh as well. It has been a problem. There has been a lot of turn-over. Our people have had issues. It has just been tough. We literally have had prayers offered in one particular room. You have to be about crazy to walk into this situation – we all joke about that.

I am working on my Masters so that I can move to the community college. I tell you what made me move to that now is that a fellow teacher (named teacher) said he would be moving on before long, I told him I couldn't take another change. This is about to push me over the edge.

R: This is at every school. There has been so much change. Teachers are willing to talk about being overwhelmed with changes. I have to wonder about the sense of community.

C: Yeah, when you have the sense of community – you don't mind going to work. You like it. You feel that sense of family. Somebody asked me – may have been my own children.....”do you think you will go to the high school?” I hope they don't move me. I want to be left in the classroom. I want them to leave me alone. I don't want to go

anywhere else. I feel like there is some resentment towards people who are coming in the classroom with little experience and tell them what they need to be doing.

Overall, the teachers here are happy and we like it here.

R: Did it impact scores, I do want to know more about that.

C: Yes, they did tweak some things and it did impact test scores and instruction.

R: Thank you for your time, please feel free to email me with anything else you might think of in terms of the experiences you had during this realignment.

END TRANSCRIPTION

APPENDIX O: Composite Textural Descriptions

Composite Textural Description

The coresearchers in this inquiry claimed that the earliest exposure to the knowledge of the realignment of the school district came with rumors in early spring of 2008. No one specifically remembered any kind of notification prior to receiving a letter in March, 2008, requesting them to rank their top three choices of schools that they would like to work in during the following school year. All of the coresearchers alluded to their feelings of anxiety and fear during this time, as they did not know what to expect and had little information as to what was taking place. No one recalled any staff meetings or district level meeting where the realignment process was explained. Their reception of a letter mailed to them either May, 8, 2009, or between June 10 and July 1, 2008, was their official notice of their assignment the following school year. Perceptions related to this, as described by the coresearchers, were perceptions/beliefs of not being important or valued and of not having a choice.

In regards to support in implementation, the coresearchers acknowledged training sessions that occurred August 18 and 19, 2008. They agreed that there were half-day trainings throughout the school year, with the Department of Public Instruction being instrumental in all of those trainings. Additional, but minimal, support was available through academic coaches. The presence of academic coaches, for the majority, brought feelings of anxiety, as the coresearchers were unsure of the role of the academic coaches. Some coaches were more evaluative in nature, while other coaches remained clueless as

to their role. Principals offered support at some schools, but only in the sense of trying to build a healthy culture through a familial setting.

As changes occur (such as those described in the realignment of an entire school district), it is natural to think that there would be some type of impact on instruction, possibly evidenced by changes in test scores. The majority of the coresearchers in this inquiry had thoughts about how the realignment impacted their instruction, the instruction of others, student learning, and students' test scores. They believed it difficult to postulate that the realignment was the only determining factor for any significant changes in test scores. However, the coresearchers stated that they found it difficult to know how they were supposed to instruct students during those first years of implementation. Some of them claimed that they were more nurturing, while others were not sure how they were supposed to treat students. Most of the coresearchers described a change in students to a more immature level, expecting more to be given to them with less accountability and responsibility.

During the interview, the coresearchers naturally reflected on how things might have gone differently during the realignment. Overwhelmingly, they expressed their perceptions of not being included in the process, of how they believed they had been "stripped of their professionalism," but believed that they could have been valuable instruments in helping to make the realignment process much smoother. Most of the coresearchers believed that teachers could have offered great insight into everything from the planning stages of teacher movement to the selection of teachers and implementation of the middle school concept. They were explicit in their ideas for how professional

development could have been handled, and how they might have been better supported through the transition period.

APPENDIX P: Composite Structural Description

Composite Structural Description

The lens through which one views their current experiences is colored by all of their previous experiences in life. One cannot experience changes without consciously, or subconsciously, calling forth prior experiences that can help them cope, problem-solve, or simply survive the experiences at hand. Being able to draw on these experiences can encourage more positive thinking or negative thinking, depending upon the situation. Perceptions of change will be filtered through these experiences. The change experienced in this inquiry has the core themes of altered perception of self-worth in relation to one's professionalism, core values, responsibilities, and personal goals.

One phenomenon that was commonly experienced by the coresearchers during the district's realignment process was a deflated sense of self-worth in relation to professionalism. Self-worth is one of the basic human motivations (Maslow, 1943). People need self respect as well as self-esteem from others in order to grow as an individual. Professionalism is usually characterized as style or behavior in the workplace (Kinsinger, 2005); not only pride and competence in tasks performed, but also how one carries themselves in the performance of their duties. During this study, it became evident that all coresearchers believed that self-worth and professionalism had an inverse relationship as the transition was occurring. That relationship was caused by perceptions of exclusion. During the course of the transition, from the very first scuttlebutt about the new administration planning a major move sometime in the future to the actual receipt of the reassignment letter, all that went through this experience felt very excluded from the

process. Whether a new teacher, or a veteran of many years, the perception of exclusion from the realignment process was felt universally. This devalued sense of self-worth was a common theme in this research, intensified by past experience, but tempered by a system of almost total autonomy in decision making at the classroom or program level as well as inclusion in the school-based management process. Teachers reported beliefs of being belittled and were left to question their own self-worth. They discussed that they no longer measured up and were not due any respect as professionals.

Core values that are held by an individual are typified by the person's most deeply held beliefs and values. Those core values drive their actions. Most teachers come into the profession with the deeply held belief that they can indeed make a difference in the lives of young children. Teachers typically believe that they can help bring about positive transformational change in education over the course of their career. Teachers typically bring with them a firm belief in the children that they will be teaching and optimism that they can inspire, challenge, lead, and support their children through the learning process. Teachers usually think that they can positively impact education and challenge the inequities of the larger educational system. Teachers often believe that they can elicit support and make alliances with the parents and community in order to provide the largest impact on the educational opportunities and growth of the children. Over time, teachers gain confidence in their abilities and are able to reaffirm their belief that they are making a positive impact, especially when they teach in a more self-governed system.

Individuals seek a job or a career for many reasons: responsibility to others, status within the community, and personal goals are just a few of the reasons that people work (Shane, 2010). Teachers usually enter the field with the prior knowledge that the rates of pay for educators are historically lower than many other career fields. Therefore, many people enter the field of education for reasons other than salary. Teachers are usually very passionate about teaching and are comforted by the knowledge that teaching jobs, after reaching career status, have been known to carry with them a high degree of job security. Knowledge that a job is a reasonably secure one often offsets the lower salary and helps in the fulfillment of responsibility to others, such as families and loved ones through the deeper relationships established without the stress of job security. Job security makes life status changes such as marriage, children, or buying a new home much easier to contemplate. The security found in the teaching field also helps teachers reach personal goals, such as pursuing an advanced degree or planning summer vacations with the family.

The process of a major realignment of a school system often brings with it rumors of reduction in force, talk of the closing of schools altogether, or movement of teachers to different schools entirely. These rumors, when coupled with employee exclusion from the realignment process, tend to foster anxiety among school employees. When the information spreads to the excluded teachers slowly, over a period of months, it only adds to the stress and anxiety. That confusion and uncertainty has a ripple effect on the abilities of employees to keep their minds on the tasks at hand because their minds are constantly bothered by the danger of losing the ability to carry out their responsibilities to

their families. Now, after years of feeling safe and secure in their career, a shroud of uncertainty hovers over each teacher. Many of the teachers were left to question their life status and personal goals offered by the teaching profession. Some teachers even contemplated seeking employment elsewhere; for during this period of uncertainty, nothing could have been more frightening than the fear of not being able to provide for their families and having to face an uncertain future.