MAKING CONNECTIONS: IMPLEMENTING AN INTEGRATED THEMATIC INSTRUCTION CURRICULUM MODEL TO ASSIST TEACHERS OF AT-RISK MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS.

By

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Dissertation

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Rowan University: 2009

In the era of the No Child Left Behind Legislation (NCLB) schools are responsible for the achievement of all students including those who are labeled at-risk. In order to reach the at-risk students at Henry Catherine Middle School I led a year long implementation process using integrated thematic instruction to connect learning throughout the school curriculum, thus providing a deeper understanding of disciplinary content (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998; Beane, 1993; Campbell & Harris, 2001; Wood & Jones, 1994).

The conceptual framework of this four cycle action research dissertation centered on the teachers’ use and perception of integrated thematic instruction. Throughout the cycles I used mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative measures in order to understand the change process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The action research paradigm
allowed me to build, expand, and reflect throughout the various cycles (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The discoveries I made through this research revealed how teachers used integrated thematic instruction in their classroom learning environment. Teachers felt that the integrated theme required extensive planning time, similarly grouped students, and collaboration (Bintz, Moore, Hayhurst, Jones & Tuttle, 2006; Brandt, 1991; Beane, 1993; Drake, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2007; George, 1996; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan, Robinson et al., 1995). Further, the teachers felt that in order for integrated thematic instruction to flourish at Henry Catherine Middle School the structure of the school day would need to change.

As the leader of this project, I explored how my espoused theories on leadership compared with my theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). In order to accomplish this I used reflective journaling, interviews, and feedback from the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). I found that my espoused theories were similar to my theories-in-use.

These discoveries about integrated thematic instruction can inform other school districts seeking innovative curriculum approaches for teachers responsible for at-risk students. A similar model could be implemented as a year long professional development project. It is assumed that by providing professional development for teachers will, in all likelihood, benefit at-risk students in their classroom.
DEDICATION

“The aim of education should be to teach us how to think, rather than what to think”

James Beattie

This dissertation would not have been possible without my friends and family. There are three women and two children who have been my support network and inspiration.

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Theresa C. Cook and our two wonderful children Henry and Catherine. Theresa, you went above and beyond anything I could have imagined when supporting me through this process. I think of all the times I was at class, the library, coffee shops, the basement, or even the dining room while you took the kids to the Philadelphia Zoo, Chucky Cheeses, or our friends’ houses so I could work. I am ready to be a husband again. Just let me know what I have to do next. To Henry and Catherine, thankfully you were so young that I never missed out on any of your special events because of this dissertation. Now I am all yours. I am ready to coach and support you as you begin to reach for your goals.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother Vivian C. Cook who always believed that I would do something great with my life just like the little train that could! I’ll never forget the first time you dropped me off at college. I cried tears of joy because I knew how much it meant to you. Thank you for believing in me!

I would also like to thank Melissa Williams. We went through this process together every step of the way. I appreciate all of the conversations we had throughout the last three years. I will always remember how we pushed the envelope in class, research, and our leadership.
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“A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” Siddhartha Gautama

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I would also like to thank Christine Johnston and the entire Let Me Learn family. Chris, you have been a mentor for me and have not only inspired me to accomplish this task, but to realize that I can grow so much more.

To my cohort: I will miss working with you in class. I hope I kept you laughing. I especially like to thank Jackie Galbiati for all of our philosophical conversations on leadership theories and organizational dynamics.

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CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION

School districts are seeking innovative ways of delivering standards-based curriculum due to the high stakes accountability under the No Child Left Behind Legislation (NCLB). Certain aspects of the new accountability structure in New Jersey, including the Collaborative Assessment for Planning and Achievement (CAPA) structure, suggests school districts utilize various forms of curriculum delivery, specifically integrated units. According to section 37.8.3.8.1e of the administrative code, “School leadership promotes staff/team planning vertically and horizontally across content areas … (e.g., common planning time for content area teachers, emphasis on time on task, and integrated units)” (http://www.state.nj.us/education/capa). Thus, one way in which school districts can adhere to administrative code and capitalize on learning at the same time is through integrated thematic instruction.

Background of the study

Henry Catherine Regional High School District (a pseudonym) is comprised of Henry Catherine High School and Henry Catherine Middle School, serving the residents of two municipalities. It is located in the southern region of New Jersey. According to the curriculum and student handbook, the two communities are generally rural with 70% of the combined 76 square miles of land undeveloped. The middle school has approximately 620 students in seventh and eighth grade, with about 60 faculty and staff. All full time faculty members are highly qualified in their area of expertise under the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001.
During the past few years, Henry Catherine Middle School has been implementing programs to address the broadening achievement gap. For instance, programs such as a standards-based math program, a literacy initiative, common planning time, increased summer school opportunities, and an expanded tutoring center have had an impact on student achievement at Henry Catherine Middle School. Assessment results have increased since 2004, but these results have not been substantial enough to achieve annual yearly progress. If Henry Catherine Middle School failed to make annual yearly progress again on the 2008 New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK), the school would have been required to go through a CAPA review. It was no secret that the administration and teachers did not want to go through a CAPA review. The feedback from the CAPA review could have had lasting impact on governance and curriculum of the middle school. The main objective of Henry Catherine Middle school was to meet the annual yearly progress set forth by the state so that they were not forced to be regulated.

Thus, the district was seeking ways to increase performance on the NJASK for at-risk students. Each year students who were not proficient on their state assessments were placed into basic skills classes and considered at-risk. The administration intended for these students to be remediated in order to pass the following year’s state assessment. In addition, the administration established the summer Students Questioning and Understanding through Active Relevant Education (SQUARE) program in hopes of assisting at-risk students during the summer. As the coordinator of the program, I implemented integrated thematic instruction in 2004.

The SQUARE classes were orchestrated as a team teaching, learner-centered, group-oriented environment, with a thematic approach to instruction. Each year the
SQUARE program refined and tweaked the curriculum to meet the needs of the learners. The staff found that integrated thematic instruction helped students make connections with their learning. In the spring of 2007, I observed four students who had participated in the 2006 SQUARE program in their eighth grade math and language arts classrooms to understand their experiences during the school year. The students were in each of the three academic levels available at Henry Catherine Middle School: honors, for the accelerated student; level one, for the above average student; and level two, for the average student (Curriculum Handbook, 2007). I observed to see whether students were engaging in the lesson, asking or answering questions, and completing teacher assigned tasks. The learning environment was in stark contrast to what I observed in the SQUARE classes during the previous summer. For the most part, the SQUARE learning environment was active and connected with few distractions.

However, the eighth grade class setting was a tale of two worlds: those with distractions and those free of distractions. The level one and honors classrooms were free of many distractions, yet lacked a focus on learning due to a fast-paced environment, while the level two classroom was filled with behavioral problems, students consistently off-task, and “in-class support” as opposed to team teaching. Since the district had implemented several programs during the past few years, I was surprised to see such disconnected teaching. I actually felt that the students who went through the summer SQUARE program were discouraged from learning during eighth grade. Following the observations, I began to consider working with teachers in implementing integrated thematic instruction during the school year to see whether it could have been a missing link to improved school year learning. Thus, this dissertation focused on my attempt to
implement integrated thematic instruction and on my leadership of these efforts as a way to improve the educational opportunities for at-risk students.

The centerpiece to the problem as I saw it at Henry Catherine Middle School was the lack of focus on curriculum integration and relevance for at-risk students. The students who needed the most quality instruction were in environments that were not conducive to learning. At-risk students have generally received less literature and more skill based instruction than their counterparts (Kohn, 1999). I felt that if teachers used integrated thematic instruction, at-risk students would make deeper connections with their learning, and therefore increase their achievement.

This study was important to me because I felt that allowing students to make connections to their learning was crucial for their achievement, and the achievement of the school as a whole. Recent studies have reported that integrated thematic instruction aided student achievement (Barab & Landa, 1997; Burton, 2001; Henderson, & Landesman, 1995; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; McGehee, 2001; Mulholland, 2005; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan et al., 1995). As a leader, I attempted to help teachers link the existing curriculum in an integrated thematic approach for at-risk students because understanding previous research on this topic and understanding my leadership were critical to the study. Subsequent chapters review my leadership theories, related literature, methodology, and discoveries from the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the perceptions of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School?
2. How did integrated thematic instruction impact the classroom setting?

3. How did teachers report their professional growth during an integrated thematic instruction based unit?

4. How did my leadership impact the infusion of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School?

5. How did the knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process® assist my leadership and the impact of the implementation of integrated thematic instruction?
CHAPTER II.

ESPOUSED THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

During this dissertation process, there were three main theories that guided me as a leader: servant, transformational, and social justice. The story of my leadership platform was one of constant self-reflection and analysis. During the first section, I focused on the three leadership theories that best described my leadership style. Intertwined with the theories were leadership stories and examples that connected the theories together. The second section of the platform focused on how I used reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002) to connect the three main theories of my platform. These concepts were not traditional leadership theories, but they have helped me understand myself and those I lead. The third section of this chapter focused on my conceptual framework of change for implementing integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School.

Servant Leadership

Leadership has been about service to others (Greenleaf, 1998). Robert Greenleaf coined the phrase “servant as leader” in 1970 as a way to explain the leadership paradigm that has been used for thousands of years. Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1997) provided a framework for ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary goals through serving others. Since then, various authors and researchers have used the tenets of servant leadership to assist leaders in answering the call. Servant leaders, according to Blanchard (2007) created a vision, and once the vision was clear, the leader became a servant in order to implement the vision. Servant leaders wanted to make a difference in the lives of those they lead and create a motivating environment (Blanchard, 2007).
Servant leadership has been the building block for my leadership platform. I operated as a servant leader because I felt a responsibility to those I led. Servant leaders, according to Greenleaf (1977) assisted those they lead by ultimately making them leaders. This has been accomplished by building trusting relationships, providing an opportunity for personal and professional growth, and promoting a collaborative environment in which everyone becomes a stakeholder (Greenleaf, 2002).

During SQUARE staff training I worked hard to create a trusting environment. One of the reasons for this hard work was to model the environment I envision for the SQUARE classroom. The other part was to make staff feel comfortable and free from the anxiety of what others may think. This trusting environment was accomplished through sharing activities that ranged from family and personal revelations to goals and remembrances of childhood. Throughout the years I witnessed how the sharing allowed teachers to make connections with me and others. In fact, during the summer of 2008 several staff members shared their passion for running. After work they began running with each other, and even signed up together to participate in an area race to benefit a cause near and dear to another staff member.

As the coordinator of the SQUARE program, I made it a point to provide an opportunity for the staff to grow and learn as professionals. I felt that creating this environment benefited both the students and teachers. For instance, teachers often complained that during the school year they did not have time for hands-on activities, learning awareness, or trying new lessons. In contrast, at SQUARE, teachers were encouraged to explore these ideas for the betterment of their teaching with real students who benefited from something different. Each year teachers reported that participating in
SQUARE helped them become more creative teachers during the school year. In a sense, SQUARE became a learning laboratory for both students and teachers.

Collaboration in the summer SQUARE program occurred anywhere from a moment-to-moment basis or through daily and weekly meetings. As the leader, I operated from the assumption that each teacher was an expert in his or her area, and that I could learn from him or her and vice versa. In addition, each staff member was encouraged to attempt new and innovative techniques with the help of others. This collaboration led to the staff developing greater respect for each other and accomplishing amazing lessons for the students. Oftentimes, the collaboration occurred throughout the disciplines. It was common to have a few staff members assembled with one beginning with the phrase, “I have this idea and I wanted to see what you all thought about it.” As a servant leader, I encouraged the staff to collaborate with each other, especially when I was not involved.

Servant leadership played an important role in my leadership platform. It was my hope that I created an environment in which trusting relationships were built, professional and personal development was encouraged, and collaboration occurred. Decisions made at all levels during the summer SQUARE program were firmly cemented in what was best for the learners (Blanchard, 2007). Therefore, each staff member and student benefited from servant leadership. I often said to the staff, “As long as we are doing what is best for the learners, you have my blessing.” This did not happen instantaneously or over night. It took years for me to understand what my vision for the program was and how I communicated that with the staff. I also knew that with the vision, I needed to have passion for what the program could become. This was why my second aspect to my leadership platform was transformational leadership.
Transformational Leadership

The concept of the transformational leader has been attributed to James MacGregor Burns who wrote the seminal piece *Transforming Leadership* in 1978. The transformational leader has been described as one who has been able to develop a vision, sell it to others, and ensure that the vision has been carried out (Burns, 2003). The vision, depending on the leader, has been developed collaboratively or individually. Communicating the vision, or selling it, has been a continual process for transformational leaders. As the leader of the change, the transformational leader has always been visible while inspiring a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

I believed that transformational leadership was an effective way to lead a change. According to Burns (2003) transformational leaders raised the bar and assisted others with seeing the importance of their vision. Similar to servant leaders, transformational leaders encouraged collaboration rather than individual work. Transformational leaders invigorated their followers by being charismatic and excited about the vision of the organization. In addition, transformational leaders raised people to new levels of commitment to the organization (Burns, 2003). In my experiences as the leader of the SQUARE program I have used the attributes of a transformational leader such as developing a vision, raising the bar, and using charisma in order to create a successful program.

The initial vision for the summer SQUARE program was a collaborative effort involving administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and parents. The vision for the program was an attempt to capture the importance of home and school partnerships (Epstein, 2001). In the second year, the vision for the program transcended the school and
home partnership and became a learner-centered program that helped students make connections. I developed this new vision for the program collaboratively with the teachers in the program. As a team, with me as the leader, we were able to articulately communicate the purpose and vision of the summer SQUARE program. In my opinion, we were able to raise the expectations after the first year through a combination of reflecting on the first year and developing a vision for the future.

Each summer the SQUARE program has been able to improve. As a staff we challenged the status quo and attempted to provide a great product for the students and parents (Collins, 2001). We achieved this through working collaboratively and maintaining our focus on making the summer a truly learner-centered experience for the students. As the program has developed, students who had attended the previous year began to volunteer to return to help the program (Greenleaf, 2002). As a result of their experience, students became servant leaders for the next cohort of the program. The students were also able to continue the emphasis on the vision of the SQUARE program.

Transformational leaders, according to Burns (2003), display charismatic traits. In the summer program we had weekly awards ceremonies for the students. In the beginning I was the one out in front of the students encouraging them and getting them excited about the program. In order to develop a team environment, I created a chant for students to recite their theme while clapping and yelling together. As the program developed, I saw other staff members create similar inspirational presentations to get the kids excited about attending school in the summer. We laughed at each other and often remarked, “Whatever it takes to get their attention.” I very rarely knew what I was going to say before speaking in front of the kids and I used a great deal of spontaneity. The staff
enjoyed this because it kept the students on their toes. I believed that communicating the vision of the program needed to be done in a fun and exciting environment.

This type of communication was in keeping with transformational leadership because transformational leaders communicated a compelling vision that strengthened the culture of an organization (Blanchard, 2007). In my humble opinion the vision communicated to the district regarding the summer program has been working well. When positions were vacated, there were many people drawn to working with the program. Some of those who have applied shared with me that they did because they have heard positive stories from the current staff. I have not taken credit for the positive aspects to the program because I have truly felt it has been a combination of the students, parents, teachers, and community members involved with carrying out the vision. I think the SQUARE program has developed a significant purpose that created excitement and commitment to learning during the summer (Blanchard, 2007). In addition, the SQUARE program challenged the current educational experience for the at-risk learner in school.

Social Justice Leader

If servant and transformational described the type of leader I espoused to be, then social justice leadership would explain why I have advocated for the at-risk learner in school. There are many researchers who have argued that the educational environment for students has not been level (Apple, 2000, 2004; Kohn, 1999; Kumashiro, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In my opinion, at-risk students have not needed more of the same education: they needed something relevant and connected. For my dissertation, social justice leadership was about advocating for learning in school, providing teachers with
alternate ways to instruct, and assisting at-risk students with strategies to overcome the barriers of the system.

The social justice leader in education has been responsible for challenging oppression in schools (Kumashiro, 2004). Leaders who promote equity and justice for students establish school climates in which these patterns of discrimination have been challenged and negated (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). This has not been an easy task for the social justice leader because the patterns of discrimination in schools have been deeply embedded (Kumashiro, 2004). To achieve equity and justice, Kumashiro (2004) recommended four approaches to challenge the status quo: improving experiences for those who have been mistreated, changing the way students and teachers viewed stereotypes, challenging the invisible dynamics in society that have favored some groups over others, and addressing reasons why education has been difficult to practice. However, addressing these concerns for the social justice leader has not been a one size fits all solution. I believe that the structure of the education system created an environment in which every student can not learn, and therefore those who can not operate in the system have been doomed to failure.

Most educators have operated from a behaviorist approach to curriculum in which information has been presented to all students in small incremental steps with immediate feedback, and self pacing steps (Campbell & Harris, 2001). It became obvious to me that this structure did not work for all students because if it did, there would have been no at-risk students. In contrast to the behaviorist structure of learning, Dewey (1933) advocated for a more integrated approach to education. He felt that learning needed to be focused in the real world in order to be relevant. In addition, Friere (1970)
challenged the notion of students being empty banks in which teachers make deposits. It appeared though, for the most part, students, teachers, and administrators have been acculturated in the United States to accept passive and fragmented learning, viewing students as empty banks (Kohn, 1996).

The cleanest tie to social justice leadership in this dissertation has been my focus on the at-risk learner who has been viewed as a passive, empty bank for teachers to fill. Very little focus in education has been associated with learning or understanding learning. Most college programs in education have focused on teaching and teaching methods while relegating learning to the psychology department (Kumashiro, 2004).

Why is this? It was not until I went through the advanced certification process of the Let Me Learn Process® that I realized how I learned and began to think about learning rather than teaching. In addition, the process forced me to confront long suppressed non-declarative memories about my childhood education (Johnston, 2005) that have assisted me in advocating for learning in school.

The Let Me Learn Process was developed as an advanced learning system that has revealed how individuals learn and how they can develop strategies to maximize their own learning potential (Johnston, 2005). The process has been centered on the brain-mind connection and how stimuli have passed from the brain to the mind and become filtered (Johnston, 2005). The filtering action has occurred as the stimuli become translated into symbolic representation and passed through four distinct mental patters: sequence, precision, technical, and confluent. People who learned through sequence used organization, lists, and step by step instructions (Johnston, 2005). People using the second pattern, precision, focused on details, questions, and exactness when learning
(Johnston, 2005). Technical was the third pattern, and focused on hands on learning, real world relevance, and problem solving (Johnston, 2005). Confluence was the fourth pattern and learners who used this pattern utilized outside the box thinking, risk taking, and improvising (Johnston, 2005). Each learner used a combination of the learning patterns, and therefore perceived tasks in different ways.

Through my servant, transformational, and social justice leadership, I assisted teachers with instructional strategies that integrated content and focused on students’ learning. Teachers who were brave enough to attempt integrated units or learning awareness for the students generally reported that those strategies were effective. Because the teachers who attempted something different have been quickly reminded that they must cover the curriculum and prepare students for the state assessments, I expended considerable effort in encouraging and assisting them. I believed these efforts were part of my social justice leadership.

The educational social justice leader has been the person who was willing to step out of the comfort zone and advocated for those who did not have the same opportunities as others (Kumashiro, 2004). This has not been an easy task in education because the system has been powerful and social justice leadership led to troubling knowledge that disrupted the common understanding of schooling (Kumashiro, 2004). In addition, there were severe consequences on a federal, state, and local level for those school districts that did not adhere to rules set for by NCLB. Therefore, whether or not administrators or teachers believed in what they are doing, the bottom line has been that they must produce students who were proficient on the state assessments. I have felt that the standards for
NCLB can be met, but that educators have to remain focused on the fact that the system itself could be a cause contributing to why at-risk students have not been succeeding.

Reflective Practice- Connecting the theories for practice

Reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) has helped me balance my leadership theories. Using reflection I have become more enlightened about the role of the educational leader and how I created leaders, fulfilled my vision of a learner centered school, and advocated for the learner (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) through this dissertation. The concept of double-loop learning, (Argyris, 1982, 1993; Argyris & Schon, 1974, 1978) provided me with the knowledge of how to become an effective reflective practitioner. Double loop learning helped me get beyond asking, “What is the next thing for me to get involved with?” to ask “What am I doing now?” and more importantly “Why?” (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p.13). My natural tendency has been to jump from one project to another without much reflection or revisiting. I realized that leaders wear many different hats, and that has been difficult for me. For instance, as a servant leader, I felt the need to focus only on collaborating and seeking input. Yet, as a transformational leader I tended to only be concerned with the vision. As a social justice leader in education, I struggled with the inequalities in instruction. Reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) allowed me to view my three leadership theories, and also required me to work with others to ensure I met my objectives.

One aspect of reflective practice has been the ability to value the input of others in decision making (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). This has been similar to the way servant leaders seek to develop a trusting environment and develop leaders (Blanchard, 2007). Yet, I often asked myself if I always needed to seek input from others. Perhaps there have
been decisions that could have been made on my own, but if I truly wanted to create a reflective environment I must have the trust that, even if I revealed myself as vulnerable, my staff would have provided feedback (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). If someone betrayed my trust, then I used strategies to have a deeper understanding. For instance, by using double loop learning, I constantly evaluated and re-evaluated the issue of trust so as not to make the same mistakes over and over (Argyris, 1990). Reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) also suggested that people can change. Therefore, in issues involving my servant leadership such as trust, collaboration, and feedback, I had faith that people could change and improve (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

The transformational leader, either individually or collaboratively, developed vision. According to Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) vision has been central to reflective practice. The process of developing a leadership platform, for instance, involved both vision and reflective practice. Throughout this writing process I have been forced to remain steadfast in my vision of who I was as a leader. Along the way, however, I have had to ask myself tough, reflective questions such as where did this begin and end? What were the implications of writing about my leadership? How would this make me a better leader? “Through articulating a platform, the individual begins to see the self in a different perspective” (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p.184).

Reflective practice required advocacy (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Social justice leaders advocated, and reflective practice has allowed me to soften the reaction to my advocacy. Respecting others’ perspectives, pedagogy, and socialization has been crucial to my approach as a change agent. I realized that some in education have become cultured to believe that there has been only one way to provide schooling. I chose not to
march up and down the halls with signs, or schedule protests for the at-risk learner in school because I knew that would not be received well. Yet, when the opportunity presented itself, I was able to present research-based information to colleagues about instructional methods and learning awareness that challenged the current methods in education.

I took a reflective approach when I analyzed my leadership, and it made such a difference in my work products as well as how others viewed me. I understood how the theories I espoused connected with each other in a reflective web (Figure 2.1). Using double-loop learning, and asking myself tough questions has forced me to confront my leadership platform as a mirror that reflected my espoused theories of who I was or wanted to be as a leader. I used my understanding of emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002) to help achieve my goals while not losing my focus on my well being and harmony in my life and the lives of those around me.
Figure 2.1 Leadership Framework

Figure 2.1. Leadership Framework: This framework was developed with the triangle representing the three main leadership theories I espoused. The interconnections were my sub theories Reflective Practice and Emotional Intelligence which represented how I tied the theories together. The core of the framework was my dissertation topic.

*Emotional Intelligence- Connecting the theories to my well being*

Emotional intelligence has been defined as the ability to recognize how leaders understand themselves and others (Goleman, et al., 2002). Leaders, myself included, have been prime candidates for stress, weight issues, and health issues (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006). Using the concept of emotional intelligence, Boyatzis and McKee (2006) proposed that leaders utilize a process of renewal to deal with the sacrifices that have
been inherent in today’s world of work. When leaders did not renew themselves, they ran the risk of becoming dissonant, and therefore, ineffective or burnt out (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006).

I truly felt that none of what I have said so far about leadership would be complete without discussing emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002). I believed this because whether I was serving, transforming, or advocating, if I was not healthy then I was not be able to communicate properly or be effective. For me, emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002) was the piece of the leadership puzzle that operated in many ways. It could have been a certain way someone looked at me, or commented about how I appeared, or it could have been my inner energy. Ironically, this dissertation has caused stress and anxiety, but I found that using emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002) liberated me from the Sacrifice Syndrome, and prepared me for longevity (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006).

Through much reflection, I have found that I was a potential candidate for the Sacrifice Syndrome (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006). I tended to volunteer for activities even when my plate was full. I have had a tough time declining opportunities in the past because I felt that everything I did had the potential for me to obtain an advanced leadership position. In the process, I became stressed out, and the volunteering, as I have experienced it, became more detrimental to my well being than the assumed benefit. If I was not resonating with others, then I created dissonance (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006).

When I was feeling well, I tended to be more charismatic and full of energy. I realized this because others pointed it out to me. On the other hand, when I was stressed out, I had people tell me that I look tired, asked me if am okay, or asked what was wrong.
I have been the kind of person who wore my emotions on my sleeve. As a leader I knew that I must be awake, aware, and attentive (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006). In order to achieve this, I needed to adhere to a Cycle of Renewal (Boyatis & McKee, 2005) or risk not accomplishing my objective with this dissertation (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006).

Maintaining a Cycle of Renewal (Boyatis & McKee, 2005) became more difficult as I grew older and added more responsibilities. I used to run marathons, triathlons, and hike mountains. Recently I have been lucky if I had time to walk around the block, and it showed. Since beginning the doctoral program I gained close to 30 pounds. With two children, a wife, a full time job, and a full time research project, I had little time for myself. In the last five years there has never been a stretch of more than one week where I have not worked on something relating to graduate study. I have developed strategies for my Cycle of Renewal (Boyatis & McKee, 2005). I enjoyed spending time with my children, and attempted to make those experiences as close to a work out as possible. As a family, we tried to go on walks at least three days a week. I also have begun to understand my threshold. Once I felt I was reaching my threshold I took a step back and reflected.

My leadership platform has been comprised of my espoused theories on leadership. The theories I have connected with have always been part of me; it was just that someone else was able to describe them more articulately than I could. I did not have to learn the theories, in my opinion; they simply emerged as I was exposed to them. I felt that my platform has not been static; rather, it was ever changing as I grew in experience and knowledge. The platform provided me a mirror to view my espoused theories to see if they connected with my theories-in-use.
Conceptual framework for change

The ultimate goal for this action research-based dissertation was to change the way teachers provided instruction to at-risk students. According to Kohn (1999) teachers have provided at-risk students with a more isolated skill approach with less creativity to learning objectives. Often times these students tuned out, and passively accepted this approach and did not achieve the desired goal of better test scores or high school completion. In order to raise at-risk students’ achievement, faculty should have presented a more creative and integrative approach to learning (Drake, 1998; 2007). It was my hope to change this type of basic skills instruction and not to continue the cycle of short changing our at-risk students. I felt that working collaboratively with teachers using an integrative thematic approach would change the way the teachers teach at-risk students. In order to achieve this change, I utilized a conceptual framework of re-culturing (Fullan, 2007) and systems thinking (Senge, 1999; 2006) that were intertwined with my espoused leadership theories.

Some have seen change in education as a difficult task. According to Tyack and Cuban (1995) the American educational system has changed little over the past 100 years. Yet, Fullan (2007) acknowledged that educators felt bombarded by constant change. Whether or not education has been perceived as stagnant or changing, exactly how to implement a change initiative depended on the model a leader chose. As a leader who espoused servant, transformational, and social justice approaches I saw the change process through different lenses. As a servant leader, I wanted to develop teachers as leaders of long lasting initiatives aimed at increasing at-risk student achievement. As a transformational leader, my vision was that at-risk students should be receiving a
challenging, relevant curriculum that was based on learning and connections to the real world. As a social justice leader, I advocated for at-risk students in education because I felt they were not receiving adequate opportunities for learning in school. With my leadership theories as anchors in this process, I felt that this change process would re-culture the manner in which teachers presented information to at-risk students as well as allow students and teachers to see the connections and relevance in all their lessons, thereby creating a systems thinking approach to their curriculum.

Change initiatives in education should not be viewed as restructuring projects but rather re-culturing projects (Fullan, 2007). The difference between restructuring and re-culturing has been that restructuring can be done at any time by administrators, state agencies, or even the federal government, whereas re-culturing deals with how teachers have understood their beliefs and habits (Fullan, 2007). Within the change process, Fullan (2007) suggested that leaders understand, “… the multidimensional nature in implementing a new program: 1). the possible use of new materials, 2). the possible use of new teaching approaches, and 3). the possible alteration of beliefs,” (p.30). For this project I used the concept of integrated thematic instruction as a new teaching approach and an opportunity to alter beliefs of basic skills teachers.

Integrated thematic instruction has existed and has been used by teachers in schools for over 100 years. If implemented properly, integrated thematic instruction allowed teachers to help students make connections and to make the learning relevant (Beane, 1993). Ideally, once implemented, the teachers would collaborate, brainstorm, and develop professionally in order to meet the needs of the at-risk learners at Henry Catherine Middle School. The concept of re-culturing, however, was not able to produce
the intended changes alone (Fullan, 2007). That was why I also felt committed to using a systems thinking approach with this change initiative.

According to Senge (2006), “Without systems thinking, the seed of vision falls on harsh soil,” (p.12). As a transformational leader, my vision was paramount to this change process. Clearly, I wanted to change the approaches and beliefs of teachers who were responsible for at-risk students. Yet, I did not want my seed of vision to fall on harsh soil. Systems thinking has been a framework for understanding the whole, the interrelationships, and the interdependence of the world (Senge, 2006). I felt that integrated thematic instruction lent itself to the philosophy of systems thinking because the curriculum has been presented with the understanding that the learning has been connected, that teachers needed to work collaboratively to solve the problems plaguing the at-risk student, and that the educational system needed to become much more in tune with learning.

The concept of learning and learning organizations was crucial to carrying out the idea of systems thinking (Senge, 2006). Unfortunately, the learning to which most people have become accustomed has been passive learning because that has been what they experienced in school. Schools have been organized in such a way that students were in rows and the teacher tended to be the sole proprietor of information. Students have been required to sit and behave in a passive manner in order to learn. On the same note, teacher professional development has been organized in similar fashion. However in this study, through the process of change using integrated thematic instruction, learning became center stage. Teachers, with the assistance of the Let Me Learn Process, were encouraged to understand themselves as learners and understand their students as
learners. They were encouraged to set their classrooms up differently and to foster an active learning environment.

Throughout this change process, teachers were asked to change classroom practices, which then could lead to a change in attitudes and beliefs, which in turn could lead to a change in student outcomes (Guskey, 2002). If the teachers did not see the connection between what happened in their classrooms and what happened in the school, systems thinking was not able to exist. This cause and effect relationship has been critical in developing a systems thinking mindset for organizations (Senge, 2006).

As leader of this change process, I needed to use all of the aspects of my leadership platform to be successful. As a servant leader, I needed to build an environment in which the teachers felt that they were key stakeholders (Greenleaf, 2002). If I espoused to be a transformational leader, I needed to continue to inspire teachers to fulfill the vision of a better learning environment for the at-risk students (Burns, 2003). As a social justice leader, I knew that I must continue to advocate on all levels for the at-risk students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In addition, I knew that it was critical to understand the teachers as learners. Each teacher needed an individual approach to the change process. Those who were first use sequence needed to see examples of what I was talking about, teachers who were first use precision needed specific details, the technical learners needed to experience the change, and the confluent learners needed to see the connections (Johnston, 2005). Throughout the process, I made sure that I was constantly being reflective in my approach to the change process, and adapted it where necessary. Finally, I believed that using emotional intelligence to build resonance with the teacher helped me avoid the Sacrifice Syndrome (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006).
Conclusion

My leadership platform served as scaffolding with which to work with others in my organization and lead the change process. In a sense, my espoused theories fit together like puzzle pieces that revealed my leadership potential. My theories-in-use revealed the spectrum of images created by the puzzle of espoused theories. There were certain aspects of the platform that I was always striving toward such as creating resonance with others and being clear in my vision. Other parts of my leadership puzzle fit nicely together because I used reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) to constantly evaluate my actions.

The change process helped me as a leader because I was not always able to show the relevancy to my ideas or I may not have been able to provide details, but I saw the big picture clearly. Sometimes the big picture was so clear to me that I needed to step back and reflect before attempting to explain it to others. Using integrated thematic instruction allowed me to use an established educational philosophy that, when implemented properly, transformed basic skills education into an exciting environment for at-risk students.
CHAPTER III
REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The integrated thematic approach to instruction that was the focus of this dissertation has had a long history of successes and criticisms within K-12 education. According to Sowell (2000), the history of American education has always been organized in disciplines. Little has changed over the past 100 years in that schools still divided time, curriculum, space, and students as well as awarded grades as evidence of learning (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Other theorists such as Dewey (1916, 1933) and Hopkins (1937) have called for reform because they felt that curriculum should be relevant to life. This call for reform in the 1920’s and 1930’s began a debate that has yet to be resolved. Should curriculum be presented through subjects or integrated around real life themes or both?

Knowledge and skill have been unified in integrated thematic instruction within the context of themes and activities (Beane, 1993). Furthermore, curriculum integration dissolved and transcended the disciplines of knowledge and has been shown to be a valuable tool in providing an alternate form of education (Aschbacher, 1991; Barab & Landa, 1997; Bolak, Bialach & Dunphy, 2005; Bragaw, Bragaw & Smith, 1995; Burton, 2001; Greenhawk, 1997; Hill, 2004; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; McGehee, 2001; Mulholland, 2005; Ross & Olsen, 1993; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan et al., 1995; Weir, 1996; Yorks & Follo, 1993; Zambo & Cleland, 2005). By connecting learning throughout the school curriculum, a deeper understanding of disciplinary content occurred (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998; Beane, 1993; Campbell & Harris, 2001; Wood & Jones, 1994). An integrated curriculum approach, according to Johnston (1996) made a profound step...
towards addressing the relevance and purpose in education. However, George (1993) argued that little research supported the case for curriculum integration and Kysilka (1998) believed there was more rhetoric about integration than happened in actual practice. Yet, there were many researchers who provided examples of tools that assisted with curriculum integration.

There have been several developed tools that have assisted with the implementation and sustainability of integrated thematic instruction (Adams & Bushman, 2006; Cook & Martinello, 1994; Drake, 2007; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; Palmer, 1991; Smith & Johnson, 1993; Werederich, 2008). These tools attempted to provide meaningful examples for implementation, sustainability, and connections to standards. Concepts such as narrative texts, young adult literature, profiles, common interest, journals, planning wheels, and webbing have assisted educators in developing, implementing, and chronicling the connections made for an integrated curriculum (Adams & Bushman, 2006; Cook & Martinello, 1994; Drake, 2007; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; Palmer, 1991; Smith & Johnson, 1993; Werederich, 2008). However, even with the examples of tools to create curriculum integration, there were drawbacks.

The acknowledged drawbacks to using an integrated curriculum prevented some educators from attempting integrated units. Drawbacks included the fact that implementation required common planning time, avenues for teachers to work in collaboration, and an understanding of how to implement the approach (Bintz, Moore, Hayhurst, Jones & Tuttle, 2006; Brandt, 1991; Beane, 1993; Drake, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2007; George, 1996; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan, Robinson et al., 1995). Another drawback was the argument that curriculum integration was less rigorous, did not provide
adequate instruction, and units did not cover basic skills (Brodzik, MacPhee & Shanahan, 1996; Drake, 1998; George, 1996; Pena, Brown-Adams & Decker, 1999). Although I did not agree with that argument, balancing drawbacks with the tools necessary to integrate the curriculum has been challenging in the current standards-based educational environment (Drake & Burns, 2004).

Operational Definitions

In order to focus on integrated thematic instruction throughout this dissertation, an operational definition was necessary. Integrated Thematic Instruction is, “The name given to a brain-compatible, fully integrated instructional model, developed by Susan Kovalik of Susan Kovalik & Associates. The integrated model consisted of a central theme with yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily topics, key points, and political/social action,” (Ross & Olsen, 1993, p. 105). There were three types of thematic units. Multidisciplinary units were separate disciplines that address the same issues (Drake, 1993). Interdisciplinary units consisted of themes that were generic enough to cross between various disciplines (Drake, 1993). Finally, transdisciplinary curriculum transcended the disciplines and boundaries, which mirrored true integration (Drake, 1993). For purposes of this literature review, the terms integration, curriculum integration, integrated thematic instruction, and integrated units were synonymous. This literature review focused on at-risk students, student achievement, and instructional strategies, as well as obstacles to implementing integrated thematic instruction.

At-Risk Students

Students deemed at-risk have been defined in many ways and the definitions have changed throughout the years. Hall’s (1904) research on adolescence was a seminal piece
in describing the age range of 14 – 18. The research conducted since that publication has focused on social and psychological resilience of students who were in high risk situations (Galambos & Leadbeter, 2000). What constituted an at-risk student in today’s educational world has been attributed many factors. Students who came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, had one parent, were behind peers in either reading or math, displayed little interest in school, acquired high numbers of discipline referrals, and maintained poor attendance have been categorized as being at-risk (Galambos & Leadbeter, 2000; Nunn & Nunn, 1993). Under NCLB, students who were partially proficient on the state mandated assessments have also been deemed at-risk.

No matter the definition of at-risk students, it was clear that their future may be bleak. According to William T. Grant Foundation (Beilke & Peoples, 1997), students who were in the bottom fifth of their class were 8.8 times more likely to drop out of school, 8.6 times more likely to have a child before they were married, five times more likely to be below the poverty line, and 2.2 times more likely to commit a crime. Fortunately, with early intervention programs and unique curriculum offerings, hope existed for at-risk students.

Various early interventions have been established for at-risk students. Stevens and Pihl (1982) studied 48 beginning high school students who were identified by their sixth grade teachers as likely to fail seventh grade, and found that at-risk students performed better when given counselor intervention focused on locus of control and self image. Successful programs for at-risk students must not only improve basic skills but also address affective and cognitive deficiencies as well (Nunn, 1995; Nunn & Nunn, 1993; Stevens & Pihl, 1982). A learning style strategy needed to be aimed at the individual
ways in which students learned new information. The strategy can provide a tool to better prepare the at-risk students for their academics (Nunn, 1995; Nunn & Nunn, 1993). Moreover, researchers have found that at-risk students’ locus of control improved along with their grade point averages as a result of participating in an intervention program (Nunn, 1995; Nunn & Nunn, 1993). In a similar finding, Schroth et al. (1994) found that self esteem increased when at-risk students were in an environment that developed a personal interest in them, focused on teaming, and provided flexible scheduling and self esteem awareness. Early interventions that differed from the traditional form of education provided the at-risk student with another opportunity to be successful.

One such intervention has been curricular integration. The main goal of curriculum integration has been to assist students who were not making the connection to what they were learning in each subject. When students were not connected to what they were learning, the likelihood of dropping out increased (Brandt, 1991; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Drake, 1993; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). To that end, at-risk students have been identified early in elementary school and if no intervention was set in place, these students had an increased likelihood of dropping out (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). In their report on the “Silent Epidemic,” Bridgeland et al. (2006) found that students who dropped out of school often think about leaving over time rather than doing so impulsively. Students who dropped out of school reported being bored and disconnected from school and felt that if the curriculum was more relevant and engaging, they would have remained in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Innovative and relevant approaches to the curriculum were central to making connections for students who normally would have failed to see the connection between
what they are learning in various subjects (Drake, 1998). Unfortunately, the majority of at-risk students in American classrooms received fewer innovative techniques, less literature, and more drill and skill, basic skill oriented instruction (Kohn, 1999). In order to address this concern, several researchers recommended infusing action research as a tool to explore the effectiveness of the integrated unit with an ongoing evaluative approach to developing future thematic units (Arnold, 1998; McGehee, 2001). Multidisciplinary teams, integrated curriculum, and active projects in a sensitive, caring atmosphere raised the self esteem of at-risk students (Weir, 1996). Self esteem increased while absences and discipline issues declined when teachers took a personal interest, engaged in teaming, and provided flexible schedules for at-risk students (Schroth et al., 1994). Developing these innovative programs have been challenging for the teachers, but rewarding for the students.

Although the term at-risk can be defined many ways, what was clear from the literature was that not all students were on equal ground in education (Kohn, 1999) and educators must do something. Yet, educators were not alone in this venture. According to Epstein (2001), an important intervention with at-risk students was a bridge between the home, school, and community. Clearly, all students, including at-risk students needed challenging and relevant education in order to be successful, as opposed to the common skill and drill currently employed in basic skills settings (Kohn, 1999). A challenging curriculum delivery for at-risk students has been integrated thematic instruction.

Curriculum Foundation

Curriculum integration has been challenging for both educators and students because it required higher order thinking and real world connection. The essence of the
curriculum source should be problems that occurred and can be related to real life events (Beane, 1993). Curriculum planning should begin by mapping backwards from the goal and focused on what students needed to learn (Wiggans & McTighe, 2005). Within the implementation of the curriculum, Reisberg (1998) suggested that by using an integrated model, teachers infused skills from other areas into their own discipline. However, George (1996) argued that most teachers did not understand curricular integration nor did they feel comfortable with various subjects. In order to implement curriculum integration effectively, teachers have been encouraged to work collaboratively in creating higher level thinking in the classroom and solving relevant problems (Beane, 1996; Drake, 1998; Guskey, 2002; Kovalik, 1993; Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Teacher collaboration has been one of the keys to successfully integrating the curriculum (Aschbacher, 1991). Additionally, teachers have been less exhausted after teaching all day when they collaborated and used an integrated curriculum model (Drake, 1998). However, changing traditional teaching methods to implement a collaborative, integrated model has caused anxiety and resistance (Drake, 1993). Professional development focused on changing classroom practices reduced teacher resistance attitudes and beliefs, which has in turn changed learning outcomes (Guskey, 2002).

Another key element in implementing the integrated curriculum model has been having teachers understand themselves as learners and understand their students as learners (Burton, 2001; Caine, 2000; Caine & Caine, 1995; Caine & Caine, 2006; Olsen, 2004; Ross & Olsen, 1993). Teachers need to understand learning in order to develop a meaningful curriculum and connect with students (Johnston, 1996; Olsen, 2004). Learning, if viewed as a two-step process, allowed the brain to make meaning by seeking
patterns and developing mental programs (Olsen, 2004). Similar to the research by Olsen (2004), Caine and Caine (1995) pointed out that the brain used patterning to naturally integrate information needed. On the other hand, information that has not been integrated through the patterning process was resisted (Caine & Caine, 1995). Learners have been patterning all the time (Caine & Caine, 1990). Daydreaming, problem solving, and critical thinking have been found to be legitimate ways in which learners developed patterns (Caine & Caine, 1990). For integration to be effective, learners must be able to have meaningful and relevant patterns (Caine, 2000; Caine & Caine, 2006).

There were several brain based models that have been used in curricular integration. One brain based model that has not been used in curricular integration is the Let Me Learn Process®. An advanced learning system, the Let Me Learn Process has been used to understand learning patterns, which were the mental configurations that allowed learners to perceive and respond to various stimuli (Johnston, 1998). Using the Let Me Learn Process has allowed people to understand learning patterns through individual learning processes which began with the learner taking an inventory to determine the use first, use-as-needed, and avoid range of the four learning processes (Johnston, 2005; Johnston, 1998). Based on the results from the Learning Connections Inventory (LCI), learners were able to see the combination of their use of use of sequence, precision, technical, and confluent reasoning. The results of the LCI provided the first stage in awareness of learning.

Multiple Intelligences were identified to highlight eight different intelligences that captured a broad spectrum of methods to capture human potential (Gardner, 1983). Effective integrated classrooms used a combination of the intelligences in order to inspire
higher order thinking (Hoerr, 2004; Kovalik, 1993; Ross & Olsen, 1993; Vialle, 1997). In addition, using self directed learning assisted in developing and strengthening emotional intelligence, which was how people view themselves and their relationships (Goleman et al., 2002).

There were several existing models to achieve curriculum integration (Beane, 1993; Drake, 1993, Ross & Olsen, 1993; Cena & Mitchell, 1998). Each theorist agreed that integration, in order to be successful, required a brain based approach, collaboration, and student-centered instruction. The range of integration was wide. Some authors believed true integration was void of subjects and the education was based solely on real world problems (Beane, 1993; Smith & Johnson, 1993). Drake (1993), Ross and Olsen (1993) and Cena and Mitchell (1998) took a less dramatic approach, and acknowledged the continuum of integration and subject specification.

One option for the beginning stages of implementing an integrated thematic unit was the single subject model. One teacher and subject integrate a relevant theme and used it to address basic skills (Ross & Olsen, 1993). Another option was the coordinated model, which can be used for two, three, four, or more teachers from varying departments who wish to integrate their disciplines together. The coordinated model can be implemented either by having no change to the discipline structure or by changing the discipline structure (Ross & Olsen, 1993). There were several levels of implementation depending on the flexibility and structure of the school’s schedule. Once established, the coordinated model allowed a theme to co-exist across disciplines. Through planning and coordination with the teachers and the students, the unit lasted for as little as a few weeks or as much as an entire school year.
In terms of thematic units, there were a range of integration possibilities through multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches to the curriculum (Drake, 1993). The ultimate in integration was the transdisciplinary because it transcended the subject boundaries (Drake, 1993). In addition to the three types of thematic units, there was also an anchored approach to curriculum integration. The anchor built on prior knowledge and allowed students to become better problem solvers (Cena & Mitchell, 1998). The better the students were at solving problems and connecting with their learning inside and outside of the classroom, the more successful they were in education.

**Student Achievement**

Although George (1996) believed that curriculum integration showed little evidence of results, many research studies suggested it raised student achievement. Dating back to Aiken (1942) through Kerry (2007), curriculum integration has been a successful method in education. Integration attempts that have failed have been linked to teacher resistance, lack of planning, poor quality of themes, and structural barriers inherent within the organization (Drake, 1998).

The seminal study focusing on curriculum integration was conducted in 1930 and was referred to as the eight-year study (Aiken, 1942). Thirty high schools were given the choice to decide how to present curriculum. They were able to present the curriculum in a traditional manner with subjects, or they were able to present the curriculum in an integrated setting. The study found that students in the integrated group outperformed students in the traditional group when they entered higher education (Aiken, 1942). This
study paved the way for the legitimacy of curriculum integration as an alternative to the disciplined centered traditional education.

Educators who worked the Nizhoni Academy summer program, a summer remediation program for at-risk students, realized that students did not understand why they needed to learn math and language arts (McGehee, 2001). Through action research, the educators found that “meta-curricular” knowledge resulted in a better understanding of the final projects (McGehee, 2001). The findings from the Nizhoni program were similar to Mulholland (2005) who studied a team of math, social studies, and vocational teachers who implemented an interdisciplinary unit to teach children about Anne Frank and found that student participation increased throughout each of the classes (Mulholland, 2005). Students reported being more involved in integrated units, and once teachers successfully implemented thematic instruction they were more apt to continue using it (Arnold, 1998; Bragaw et al., 1995; Mulholland, 2005; Yorks & Follo, 1993). Teachers who have taught integrated units have reported that thematic units were fun, improved research skills, provided learning for all, and were easy to integrate (Post, Ellis, Humphreys, & Bugghey, 1997). Once the teachers found success with integrated units, the trickle down effect impacted students’ perceptions.

Students’ learning was found to be deeper and more effective in the integrated subjects and higher order task demand rose (Kerry, 2007). Students who participated in integrated units improved their standardized assessment scores (Bolak, Bialach, & Dunphy, 2005; Greenhawk, 1997; Hill, 2004). When compared with students in a control setting, Henderson and Landesman (1995) found that integrated students gained over the non-integrated students in math achievement. In addition to increase on standardized
assessments, students who participated in integrated thematic units had higher attendance rates (Aschbacher, 1991; Weir, 1996). However, in order to ensure that integrated thematic integration met the needs of students, instructional strategies must be utilized to create the desired learning environment.

**Instructional Strategies**

Knowing instructional strategies assisted in planning and implementing curricular integration (Adams & Bushman, 2006; Barab & Landa, 1997; Barton & Smith, 2000; Cook & Martinello, 1994; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; Palmer, 1991; Smith & Johnson, 1993; Werederich, 2006). Some tools such as anchors, hubs, and planning webs enabled students to make connections during an integrated unit as well as tracked the development of the unit (Barab & Landa, 1997; Barton & Smith, 2000; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; Palmer, 1991). Tools such as narrative texts, use of young adult literature, profiles, and student common interest were found to keep the units interesting and relevant for students (Adams & Bushman, 2006; Cook & Martinello, 1994; Smith & Johnson, 1993; Werederich, 2008).

Examples of potential starting points that teachers have used were webs and curricular maps. Webs were used to identify a theme and connect it with the various content requirements. Students developed curricular maps to track specific activities for the theme (McDonald & Czerniak, 1994). Teachers also used planning wheels to implement interdisciplinary units (Palmer, 1991). Yet another strategy for teachers to use was organizing hubs and curriculum anchors to demonstrate the relevance of student learning (Barab & Landa, 1997). The hub was a focused problem that both teachers and students mutually agree to study (Barab & Landa, 1997). The curriculum anchor was the
complex problem the student was interested in studying (Cena & Mitchell, 1998). Anchored instruction allowed for inquiry learning that built on prior knowledge and experience (Cena & Mitchell, 1998). The interdisciplinary units mirrored daily life because no matter what strategy was utilized, the learning became cohesive and integrated rather than segmented into various parts as in the traditional approach to curriculum (Barab & Landa, 1997; Beane, 1996; Drake, 2007, 1998, 1993; Kovalik, 1993; Ross & Olsen, 1993).

Teachers who used interdisciplinary units were able to make the learning environment more personal (Barton & Smith, 2000). Students who were allowed to utilize a self-directed approach to making connections with the actual topic they studied reported an increase in confidence with the material (Barton & Smith, 2000; Cook & Martinello, 1994). It was crucial that students felt they were partners in the learning experience so that they were able to connect to the real world. One way students were able connect to the real world was by being exposed to literature that heightened their curiosity.

Literature has been used to enhance, guide, and connect integrated curriculum to real world problems (Adams & Bushman, 2006; Cook & Marinello, 1994; Smith & Johnson, 1993; Werederich, 2008). Using narrative texts to tell the story of an integrated unit assisted educators attempting to make real world connections (Smith & Johnson, 1993). The growing young adult literature genre helped students and teachers make connections to real world problems adolescents were facing (Adams & Bushman, 2006). Profiles of famous people or student developed profiles assisted with integrated units because they incorporated reading, writing, and careers (Werederich, 2008). Allowing
students to brainstorm and develop big ideas helped to develop integrated themes (Cook & Marinello, 1994). The common interests that were developed using literature in the theme were integrated through books that connected to the real world.

Obstacles to Implementing Thematic Integration

There were many acknowledged obstacles that limit integrated units from being implemented. Philosophically, most schools and school districts subscribed to the disciplinary knowledge approach to curriculum (Beane, 1993; Gardner & Boix-Marsilla, 1994, George, 1996; Hirsch, 1996). Teacher resistance and subject centered certification created anxiety when teachers attempted integration (Brodzik, MacPhee & Shanahan, 1996; Drake, 1998; George, 1996). Because the educational system has not been set up to foster curricular integration, issues such as poor implementation, classroom space, student grouping, and planning time severely limited the opportunity for curricular integration (Bintz et al., 2006; Kysilka, 1998; Shanahan et al., 1995).

Although Beane (1996, 1995, 1993a, 1993b) wrote extensively on the subject of integration, he recognized the obstacles that most educators face when attempting integration; traditional education has been based around the disciplines of knowledge. The disciplines of knowledge have been the standard for good educational reasoning (Gardner & Boix-Marsilla, 1994; George, 1996; Hirsch, 1996). Disciplines of knowledge have been a powerful tool that allows students and teachers to scaffold instruction and focus on higher level thinking (Gardner & Boix-Marsilla, 1994; George, 1996; Hirsch, 1996). Another criticism leveled by Brodzik et al. (1996) was that integrated units did not provide enough instruction for students to become proficient in math, reading, and writing. Beane (1993) countered this notion by stating that since knowledge has been
subjective, and the lack of basic skills present in integration was more a case of teachers wanting to dominate the learning in the classroom than their willingness to attempt it.

For over a hundred years, teachers have dominated the classroom and have been the main knowledge source (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), but with the advent of technology and brain based education, the tides have been turning slowly. Teacher resistance to change has been documented by many educational researchers (Fullan, 2007; George, 1996). Teachers have been resistant to curricular integration and change because they have not understood the concepts and already had enough to be concerned with in covering their curriculum (George, 1996). Teachers tended to identify themselves through their subjects and were hesitant about teaching outside of their comfort zones because they were unfamiliar with the material and they feared their students would learn less (Beane, 1993). Thus, if done improperly, curricular integration and most interdisciplinary units have been no better than traditional textbooks (Shanahan et al., 1995). Based upon their research, Shanahan et al. (1995) encouraged teachers to get beyond topics and create a dynamic theme that was dependent on each area and believed that while thematic units may unify the curriculum, most actual units were categorized as motifs, which served as a symbol for the unit. Thus, teachers set themselves up for success rather than failure.

Curriculum integration most often failed because of poor implementation strategies (Brandt, 1991). Without acknowledging brain research, instructional strategies, and curriculum deliverance, integration was in jeopardy (Drake, 1998; Kovalik, 1993; Ross & Olsen, 1993). Brandt interviewed one of the leading proponents of interdisciplinary curriculum, Heidi Hayes Jacobs. Jacobs felt that students who were not
connecting to their learning often asked, “Why are we learning this?” (Brandt, 1991, p.24). Students who were not connecting to their learning or seeing the relevancy were less likely to participate, achieve, or retain the information presented (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998; Campbell & Harris, 2001; Hootstein, 1994; Wood & Jones, 1994). Teachers and administrators needed to acknowledge that there has been too much repetition in the lessons being taught in grade levels and throughout subjects (Brandt, 1991).

One reason for the perceived repetition and lack of coordination with the curriculum has been that teachers in the United States have less than half of the planning time compared to teachers in Japan (George, 1996). One of the essential tenets of curriculum integration has been planning (Drake, 1998). With severely limited planning time, teachers have experienced difficulties in effectively planning integrated curriculum (Bintz et al., 2006). In the ideal setting for true integration, students would be teamed, and would have flexibility in their schedule, block scheduling, extended classes, space for collaboration, and access to resources (Beane, 1993; Drake, 1998; Kovalik, 1993; Ross & Olsen, 1993). Therefore, teachers would have common preparation periods, the same cohort of students, and extended time to implement an effective integrated curriculum (Drake, 1998).

Summary of the Literature Review

Implementing integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School was challenging. The literature provided guidelines as well as cautions to consider in planning and implementation. Integrated learning and the cultural change that were necessary for implementation took much more time than expected (Senge et al., 1999). A
preliminary analysis of the teachers’ opinions of thematic instruction provided a baseline assessment. Teachers at Henry Catherine Middle School were interested in integrated thematic instruction, but were cautious due to the limitations of the current curriculum model. Many teachers wanted to know if students would achieve a deeper, richer learning through an integrated curriculum.

The literature was rich with many examples of how integrated thematic instruction provided an alternate to traditional education (Aschbacher, 1991; Barab & Landa, 1997; Bolak et al., 2005; Bragaw et al., 1995; Burton, 2001; Greenhawk, 1997; Hill, 2004; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; McGehee, 2001; Mulholland, 2005; Ross & Olsen, 1993; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan et al., 1995; Weir, 1996; Yorks & Follo, 1993; Zambo & Cleland, 2005). These examples, although criticized by some theorists, were a testament to the unique nature of curricular integration and its place in assisting students by providing relevancy to their learning. Curricular integration has been found to be successful if it emphasized meaningful learning, used a variety of approaches, and was both rigorous and critically oriented (Darlington & Dake, 1994).

There were various articles that provided useful instructional strategies for educators implementing thematic instruction (Adams & Bushman, 2006; Barab & Landa, 1997; Barton & Smith, 2000; Cook & Martinello, 1994; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; Palmer, 1991; Smith & Johnson, 1993; Werederich, 2006). The instructional strategies assisted teachers and students with tools that allowed integration to be effective. According to Elmore and associates (1990), instruction improved when teachers have been given greater flexibility and the freedom to determine their classroom setting.
Even though research on curricular integration suggested positive benefits to student achievement, there were several theorists who pointed out the limitations and obstacles (Beane, 1993; Bintz et al., 2006; Brodzik et al., 1996; Drake, 1998; Gardner & Boix-Marsilla, 1994; George, 1996; Hirsch, 1996; Kysilka, 1998; Shanahan, et al., 1995). In addition, prior to this dissertation, there were no studies that focused on connecting the Let Me Learn Process with integrated thematic instruction. Thus, I conducted research to better understand how teachers who are responsible for at-risk student at Henry Catherine Middle School viewed the development and implementation of integrated thematic instruction in their classrooms during the summer and the school year.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Action research provided the foundation for my mixed methods study on the teachers’ perceptions of integrated thematic instruction as a curricular tool for at-risk students. The action research paradigm allowed me to build, expand, and reflect throughout the various cycles (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) in order to implement integrated thematic instruction to assist teachers responsible for at-risk students. In addition to implementing integrated thematic instruction, I was able to explore how my espoused theories of leadership matched my theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). By using action research, I was able to develop a framework for change that was grounded in both the literature and my leadership theories.

Action research developed through the research of Lewin (1946) in social psychology. At first, action research was criticized because it strayed away from the traditional quantitative methods that were the norm (Kincheloe, 1995). During the 1970’s, action research re-emerged in the United Kingdom and has gained credibility as a research method (Kincheloe, 1995). Currently, Henry Catherine Middle School required all staff to use action research by investigating an issue and then developing a yearly action research project. I saw this as a positive step in developing a culture of learning at Henry Catherine Middle School (Senge et al., 1999). Since our district has utilized action research, the teachers were familiar with the format, which made the study much easier to conduct. The goal of the research was to lead a change process that utilized integrated
thematic instruction to help teachers of at-risk students make connections with their teaching and student learning.

Although there are various forms of action research paradigms, I chose to use a participatory action research paradigm employing applied mixed methods (Anderson, 1998). I chose this method because it allowed me to investigate, implement, act, and reflect throughout each cycle (Anderson, 1998). As a participant, I was able to experience the entire study as both a leader and participant (Anderson, 1998).

Action research has been built on qualitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). My interest in my topic developed from reflecting on a qualitative study I conducted. During my qualitative methods course, I realized students and teachers at Henry Catherine Middle School were not making connections with the various subjects. The learning in each subject appeared disconnected from each other. I explored integrated thematic instruction as an emerging concept to help students make the connections between the subjects, and then, using McLean’s (1995) action research process, I conceptualized, implemented, and interpreted the process I felt was necessary. During the process I used Fullan’s (2007) re-culturing framework for change, and Senge’s (2006) systems thinking concept. Since action research was a process not a product (Patton, 2002), I was able to examine what I felt was a priority and build a conceptual framework for change at my school district (Creswell, 2003).

The data collected from each cycle served as a foundation for each successive cycle. I began the process with a survey to understand the current teachers’ perceptions about integrated curriculum as well as their use of the Let Me Learn Process®. As the cycles evolved, each led me to experiment with strategies that were effective in the
integrated classroom. Each cycle also presented leadership challenges, and opportunities
to compare my espoused theories with my theories-in-use.

This action research based dissertation was comprised of four unique cycles that
varied in length and subject population. In Cycle I, I surveyed the faculty at Henry
Catherine Middle School about their perceptions of integrated thematic instruction, and
use of Let Me Learn Process as a learning theory. Cycle I lasted from September 2007
through December 2007. In Cycle II, I implemented an integrated thematic unit with one
teacher in three basic skills language arts sections from January 2008 through June 2008.
Cycle III was conducted throughout the 2008 summer SQUARE program. I worked with
10 teachers during this cycle which lasted from June 2008 through August 2008. The
culminating cycle in my action research dissertation took place from August 2008
through December 2008. In Cycle IV, I worked collaboratively with one teacher on an
integrated thematic unit for both 7th and 8th grade students in her self contained
classroom.

Although the data collected during the cycles varied, I utilized a reflective journal
throughout each cycle. Reflective journals have been closely associated with the
reflective practice model (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). I journaled after the activities I
was involved in such as meetings, presentations, conversations, and observations as well
as critical incidents that arose. The journal was also used as a daily log of the accounts in
the research setting, or it was used to create a narrative reflection about the critical
incidents I experienced during the research (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). I felt that
using a combination of the reflective journal as a log and of critical incidents allowed me
the best possibility to collect rich and descriptive data.
The reliability and validity of research was crucial to this study. During my action research study, I took specific steps to ensure reliability and validity of the data I collected and analyzed. I used Glesne’s (2006) suggestions on validity through persistent observations, triangulation, clarification of research bias, and used a rich, thick description of the data. Throughout each of the cycles, I made sure to be aware of my emotional attachment to the research, and therefore took calculated steps to allow the data to emerge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I also maintained an ethical stance during this research process. I discussed my research prior to implementation with the principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent of Henry Catherine School District. The Henry Catherine Board of Education approved the research in September 2007. I was approved by Rowan University’s Institutional Review Board on October 18, 2007. Throughout each cycle I informed participants about their role in the research and had each read and sign an informed consent (Appendix B). I kept all documents I collected locked and secured during the action research cycles. I also adhered to the Educational Leadership’s code of ethics found in the doctoral handbook.

Context of the Study

Henry Catherine Regional High School District has been comprised of Henry Catherine High School and Henry Catherine Middle School serving the residents of two townships. It was located in the southern region of New Jersey. According to the curriculum and student handbook, the two communities have been generally rural with 70% of the combined 76 square miles of land undeveloped. The high school had approximately 1200 students in grades nine through twelve, with about 100 faculty and
staff. The middle school had approximately 620 students in seventh and eighth grade, with about 60 faculty and staff. All full time faculty members were highly qualified in their area of expertise under the guidelines set forth under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation of 2001.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the perceptions of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School?
2. How did integrated thematic instruction enhance the classroom setting?
3. How did teachers report their professional growth during an integrated thematic instruction based unit?
4. How did my leadership impact the infusion of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School?
5. How did knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process® assist my leadership and the impact of the implementation of integrated thematic instruction?

**Cycle I “Perception of Integrated Thematic Instruction”**

The initial cycle in my research occurred from September 2007 through December 2007. My interest in Cycle I was to obtain an understanding of teachers’ perceptions about integrated thematic instruction. Since our district was using the Let Me Learn Process as our brain-based learning theory, I also wanted to explore how the teachers reported infusing the Let Me Learn Process in their classes. Based on my literature review I knew it was critical to have a brain-based learning component for integrated thematic instruction to be effective (Drake, 1998; Ross & Olsen, 1993). Since
our district has embraced Let Me Learn Process and the information about learning patterns was readily available, I felt this information would be helpful.

In order to investigate integrated thematic instruction in Cycle I, I decided to use a survey approach because understanding the current perceptions of organizational members has been critical in implementing change (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Fullan, 2007). In developing the survey used in the study, I built and piloted a version of it during the summer of 2007. The results from the pilot survey assisted me in further clarifying my questions and statements to yield more accurate results (Patton, 2001). I framed the problem of student achievement in reference to integrated thematic instruction. I then expanded my literature search to include similar facets of integrated thematic instruction such as an interdisciplinary approach, integrated curriculum, and thematic units. This allowed me to ask questions in the survey directly related to the existing literature. In addition, I found that an emphasis on learning, and a willingness for teachers to collaborate with those outside their department necessary in implementing integrated thematic instruction (Ross & Olsen, 1993).

Population and Sample Selection

The study population was all teachers in the Henry Catherine Middle School. I distributed 61 surveys to our full time teaching staff. There were 41 surveys returned, a 66% return rate. The respondents were 85% female and 15% male. The highest representation in the survey was from the Language Arts department which comprised 26.8% of those surveyed. I felt strongly that each demographic was reached through this survey, which added to the confidence of the results.
Instrumentation

I developed the survey instrument used in this study strictly adhering to the protocols set forth in Patton’s (2001) text. The survey (Appendix A) consisted of three parts. The first part was comprised of five background information items including educational experience, professional experience, highest degree level, subject area taught, and grade level. The second part of the survey was based on the main themes and concepts found in the literature review (Barab & Landa, 1997; Brandt, 1991; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Johnston, 2005; Palmer, 1991; Shanahan, 1997). There were 12 statements that required the subjects to indicate their agreement with five point Likert scale statements. The third part of the survey consisted of three open-ended questions that I intended to allow the participants to share personal opinions regarding how thematic instruction could raise achievement, how they used the Let Me Learn Process, and their interest in developing cross-curricular themes with other teachers.

Data Collection Procedures

I sent an email out to 61 teaching staff at Henry Catherine Middle School on October 29, 2007. The email informed the staff of the intended research and contained directions for filling out and returning the completed surveys. I then placed the surveys in each mail box with a date of return needed. There was a box kept with the school secretary in the middle school. On a daily basis, I collected the data from the secretary and locked it in my office. Each participant received a random (double) ticket when they returned the survey. This ticket entered participants into a drawing to win a $25.00 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble. The deadline for the return of the survey was November 2, 2007. No surveys were accepted after that date.
Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS computer software to calculate descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (Patton, 2001). The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions was analyzed using a mixed method content analysis procedure to determine common themes (Glesne, 2006). A mixed method approach to analyzing the open-ended responses allowed for the qualitative data to be displayed showing the frequency of the similar responses. The results from the Cycle I survey led to an implementation of integrated thematic instruction in Cycle II.

Cycle II “Know yourself; Know your place!”

I implemented Cycle II utilizing the information acquired through Cycle I and the literature review. I conducted Cycle II research during January through June 2008. I originally planned to work with a basic skills math teacher and a basic skills language arts teacher from the middle school who were interested in piloting a coordinated approach to integrated thematic instruction. In early February, however, the math teacher informed me of a new district program that was being implemented in the basic skills math program, leaving little time for curriculum integration activities. When I met with the Assistant Superintendent to discuss how this would impact my study, we decided to pursue a single subject model (Ross & Olsen, 1993) through each of the eighth grade remedial language arts classes.

Population and Sample Selection

I chose the participating teacher with purpose, based on the assumption that he could provide insight into the impact of integrated thematic instruction (Glesne, 2006).
He had a cursory knowledge of integrated thematic instruction and Let Me Learn Process. Throughout my tenure at Henry Catherine Middle School I had developed a great rapport with him, which in turn made it easier to gain permission to conduct this research. During Cycle I, he informed me that he would be interested in helping in any way he could.

FM was in his 22nd year of teaching at Henry Catherine Middle School. During that time, he has taught seventh and eighth grade honors, level one, level two, and now remedial language arts literacy. For two years (2003-2005), he took a sabbatical to pursue the priesthood. He returned to Henry Catherine Middle School because he felt that his heart was in teaching, not in the ministry. He has been the advisor to the Peer Mediator/Natural Helpers organization while at Henry Catherine Middle School.

*Data Collection*

During the research period, I collected a range of documents. I took calculated steps to be flexible in the observation continuum, as well as to tether my emotional attachment (Glesne, 2006) by keeping a journal. The majority of the time, I was a participant observer in the thematic instruction. I was well aware that my presence impacted the data because it was backyard research (Glesne, 2006).

Conducting participant observations in an applied setting (Anderson, 1998) also allowed me to connect my espoused theories of leadership to my study. For instance, as a participant, I was able explore the notion of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2006) with FM. The integrated project itself, a departure from the current pedagogy at Henry Catherine Middle School, allowed me to explore the vision set forth in my transformational leadership (Burns, 2003). As an advocate for the learner in school
(Johnston, 2005), my professional development workshops with the teacher afforded me the opportunity to convey the need for understanding each individual learning need.

During a three week period in January 2008, I trained FM on integrated thematic instruction and the Let Me Learn Process. We met weekly to discuss potential themes and coordination of the two month project. This time allowed us to become familiar with the objectives of the project and to resonate with each other (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). We used the single subject model to develop the integrated unit (Ross & Olsen, 1993). According to Ross and Olsen (1993), the single subject coordinated model was appropriate for teachers who wanted to integrate various subjects and themes directly into their classrooms. There were three sections of basic skills language arts taught by FM and each section participated in the integrated unit.

From mid February through April 4th, I observed and co-taught each Friday with FM. I attempted to observe as much as possible during the team teaching opportunities, but I found it difficult because I was an integral part of the classroom activities. I recorded notes during class and wrote up the field notes Fridays after school because I wanted to capture as much as I could from the day’s experience. At the conclusion of the research, I interviewed FM about his perceptions of and experience with the integrated thematic unit.

Prior to the interview process, I developed semi-structured questions based on the readings from Glesne (2006), the emerging themes from my observations and meetings as well as my reflective journal. I had the questions reviewed by my advisor and a critical friend from my cohort to ensure that I was not leading or presupposing (Appendix C). During the interview, I started with a grand tour, used a tape recorder, attempted to be a
learner, and used a combination of both structured and unstructured questions (Glesne, 2006). I understood that my role in this study was to learn about the experiences of the teacher who implemented the integrated thematic unit.

Based on the findings from the first part of Cycle II, FM and I decided to continue the integrated unit past the original April 4, 2008 time line until the end of the school year. FM felt that the students were so interested in the unit that we could benefit from additional research time. After we reflected, we decided to ask the students to determine which weekly theme they would like to continue and what they would enjoy as their culminating project for the unit. During the time from April 4th through June 2nd, the students continued to work on their integrated project and I continued to record notes and keep a journal.

Data Analysis

In order to ensure validity, when I analyzed the data, I used a triangulation approach through multiple data collection methods including observations, interviews, and document collection (Glesne, 2006). Using a triangulation approach increased the confidence and trustworthiness of the study. In working with the subject in the study, I conducted periodic peer reviews and member checking to further ensure trustworthiness.

I used a methodical approach to organizing and coding the data (Glesne, 2006). I took the raw field notes and typed them each week. I read and re-read each observation looking for emerging themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I performed a similar approach with the interview process. I compared the observation notes with the interview transcripts to reveal themes that emerged from the data (Glesne, 2006). After this was complete, I coded the interview transcripts and the typed field notes using a system of
highlighters to make it easier to reference the themes. I used a table format to chart direct quotes that supported the emerging themes. After this was complete, I focused on the emerging themes. I used this thematic analysis approach to analyze the data because, according to Glesne (2006), it helped me “…make sense of what I have learned,” (p. 147).

This study was conducted in a participatory, action research paradigm employing applied qualitative methods (Anderson, 1998). I used Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) as a guide in the hope of avoiding the pitfalls of single-loop learning. According to Argyris and Schon (1974), single-loop learning has been categorized as changes that deal only with the symptoms of a problem. I also used Argyris and Schon (1974) as a basis to align my espoused theories of leadership with my theories-in-use. The ultimate goal of the project was to implement an integrated thematic unit approach to remedial language arts literacy. Cycle III began in the summer of 2008 based on what I learned in Cycle II to improve the process.

Cycle III “A summer program that makes connections”

From the beginning of the doctoral program, I had been studying the summer SQUARE program. With the knowledge and experience from Cycle II, I decided to utilize the 2008 SQUARE program as my third cycle. I felt this would also assist me with exploring my leadership theories because I supervised ten staff members for five weeks, all with varied perspectives on integrated thematic instruction and learning theories.

I have been the coordinator of the SQUARE program since its inception in 2004. SQUARE has been a five-week summer program designed to strengthen the basic skills of the at-risk middle school students at Henry Catherine Middle School. The summer
enrichment program has been theme based, and utilized hands-on activities and strategies aimed at strengthening academic skills in Language Arts and Mathematics. All academic classes have been co-taught, and students have been intentionally grouped utilizing the Let Me Learn Process. Students have participated in a hands-on building project tied into service-learning and team building. Another goal of the program was to recapture enthusiasm for education, expand students’ horizons through local field trips, and to actively engage students in the process of learning.

I was originally exposed to integrated thematic instruction through the SQUARE program, and I felt that applying what I had learned through the previous cycles would improve the summer program. In addition, the constraints that had impacted the project in the spring were lessened because SQUARE was a summer program. As the coordinator of the program, I had a more direct control over the curriculum delivery.

Population and Sample Selection

The participating teachers were chosen out of convenience because of their employment in the summer SQUARE program (Glesne, 2006). Each had varying exposure to integrated thematic instruction and Let Me Learn Process. Each teacher was excited to participate in both the summer program and the research cycle so it was easier to gain permission to conduct the research.

There were 10 staff members who participated in the SQUARE program in various capacities. DB and CF taught the 7th grade math section. This was the first year they had taught in SQUARE but they had a combined 30 years of experience at Henry Catherine High School. LB and CJ taught the 7th grade language arts section. LB, a veteran teacher of 25 years, had worked in the SQUARE program for three years but took
off in 2007 due to a family situation. CJ, who had just completed her first year at Henry Catherine Middle School, was in her first year in SQUARE. LM and HM have been working together as the 8th grade math teachers in SQUARE for the past four years. Both teachers have been at Henry Catherine School District for five years. FM and DO have been working together for two years as language arts teachers in the SQUARE program. FM has been at Henry Catherine Middle School for 22 years, while DO has been there for three years. TR and RR were both responsible for the building component and the Let Me Learn Process component of the SQUARE program. TR has worked the SQUARE program for the past three years and has been teaching at Henry Catherine Middle School for eight years. RR has worked at the Henry Catherine High School for two years and this was his first year as a teacher in SQUARE.

Data Collection

In this cycle, I used a methodology similar to that used in Cycle II. This study was conducted in a participatory, action research paradigm employing applied qualitative methods (Anderson, 1998). I used Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) as a guide in the hope of avoiding the pitfalls of single-looped learning. I also used Argyris and Schon (1974) as a basis to align my espoused theories of leadership and my theories-in-use. The ultimate goal of the project was to implement an integrated thematic unit approach throughout a five-week summer program in language arts and math with a supplemental construction curriculum with ten staff members.

Conducting participant observations in an applied setting (Anderson, 1998) allowed me to connect my espoused theories of leadership to my study. For instance, as a participant, I was able explore the notion of servant leadership with the staff members
(Greenleaf, 2006). The integrated project itself, a departure from the current pedagogy at Henry Catherine Middle School, but one that has developed in the summer, allowed me to explore the vision set forth in my transformational leadership (Burns, 2003). As an advocate for the learner in school (Johnston, 2005), my professional development workshops with the teachers afforded me the opportunity to convey the need for understanding each individual learning need.

We utilized the three subject integration for the seventh and eighth grade SQUARE themes (Ross & Olsen, 1993). According to Ross and Olsen (1993), coordinating three subjects requires a larger team and collaboration throughout the various subjects. As a staff, we had several meetings prior to the training in July. These meetings allowed us to become familiar with each other and the mission of the SQUARE program. During these meetings I took copious notes and observed the interactions of the staff. The first week of July we spent three days of intensive training.

The overall themes for the integrated unit were established by the administration prior to the beginning of the program. The weekly themes, which were developed by the staff, provided an anchor for the entire summer unit (Barab & Landa, 1997). Our weekly staff meetings were focused on the integration of the subjects within each grade level, student concerns, and field trip execution. I led the meetings and observed the staff connections to the integrated unit. Throughout the program, I observed each section of language arts and math classes, and conducted a 45 minute interview with each faculty member. In addition, during this cycle I used the Learning Connections Instrument (LCI) and the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) in an attempt to understand my role as the leader of the project.
I used the LCI and the LPI with permission. The LCI has been determined to be reliable tool in determining individual learning patterns (Johnston, 2005). The LCI was administered in two sections. The first section was comprised of 28 statements on a five point Likert scale, and the second section had three open ended responses that determined the learner’s use of the four learning patterns which were sequence, precision, technical, and confluence. The results revealed a score that indicated to what extent the learner avoided, used as needed, or used a pattern first. Prior to the beginning of the research cycle I collected this data from the staff, and charted the results for use during training. At the conclusion of the research project I administered the LPI in order to receive feedback on my leadership. The LPI had 30 statements on a 10 point Likert scale to measure the use of the five leadership practices, which were modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). The results from the LPI have helped leaders compare how they viewed their leadership style with how their staff viewed their leadership style.

Data Analysis

In order to ensure validity, when I analyzed the data, I used a triangulation approach through multiple data collection methods including observations, interviews, and document collection (Glesne, 2006). Using a triangulation approach increased the confidence and trustworthiness of the study. In working with the subjects in the study, I conducted periodic peer reviews and member checking to further ensure trustworthiness.

I used a methodical approach to organizing and coding the data (Glesne, 2006). I took the raw field notes and typed them each week. I read and re-read each observation looking for emerging themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I performed a similar
approach with the interview process. I compared the observation notes with the interview transcripts to reveal themes that emerged from the data (Glesne, 2006). After this was completed, I coded the interview transcripts and the typed field notes using a system of highlighters to make it easier to reference the themes. I used a table format to chart direct quotes that supported the emerging themes. After this was completed, I focused on the emerging themes. I used this thematic analysis approach to analyze the data because, according to Glesne (2006), it helped me “…make sense of what I have learned,” (p. 147). The findings from Cycle III provided me the opportunity to expand the concept of integrated thematic instruction during the 2008-2009 school year in a self-contained, high motivation program.

*Cycle IV “Who am I?”*

The final cycle in my action research project was implementing an integrated thematic unit in a self-contained, high motivation program during the 2008-2009 school year. In a sense, this cycle was an extension of both Cycle II and III because I continued to focus on the teachers of at-risk students in a basic skills setting. CJ, who participated in the summer SQUARE program, agreed to assist me with her students.

Through this cycle, I expanded the concept of integrated thematic instruction in a seventh and eighth grade program for students deemed at-risk at Henry Catherine Middle School. In Cycle II, FM, and I worked on an integrated unit titled “Know Yourself; Know Your Place” in the three eighth grade Language Arts basic skills classes. The fall, which has been ordinarily a transition to a new school or grade level was an opportunity to implement a theme titled, “Who am I?” CJ wanted to make sure that she started the year
off by understanding her students as learners, and that they understood themes and learning.

Population and Sample Selection

I chose CJ with purpose, based on the assumption that she could provide insight into the impact of integrated thematic instruction during the academic year (Glesne, 2006). She was familiar with integrated thematic instruction and the Let Me Learn Process because of her experience in the SQUARE program, but had not attempted to use it during the academic school year. Throughout the SQUARE program, I developed a great rapport with her, which in turn made it easier to gain permission to conduct this research.

CJ was a second year teacher who has been responsible for being the lead teacher in the Finding Learning In Education (FLIE) program. The FLIE program has been an academic self-contained, high motivation classroom designed for both at-risk regular and special education students. During the research cycle, she taught two seventh grade special education students and three at-risk eighth grade students.

Data Collection

The methodology I used during Cycle IV was similar to Cycle II and III. This study was conducted in a participatory, action research paradigm employing applied qualitative methods (Anderson, 1998). I used Osterman and Kottkamp’s (2004) as a guide in the hopes of avoiding the pitfalls of single-looped learning. I used Argyris and Schon’s (1974) work as a basis to align my espoused theories of leadership and my theories-in-use. The ultimate goal of the project was to implement an integrated thematic
unit approach in the self contained, high motivation program the first marking period of
the 2008-2009 school year.

Conducting participant observations in an applied setting (Anderson, 1998)
allowed me to connect my espoused theories of leadership to my study. For instance, as a
participant, I was able explore the notion of servant leadership with CJ (Greenleaf, 2006).
The integrated project itself, a departure from the current pedagogy at Henry Catherine
Middle School, allowed me to explore the vision set forth in my transformational
leadership (Burns, 2003). As an advocate for the learner in school (Johnston, 2005), my
professional development workshops with CJ afforded me the opportunity to convey the
need for understanding each individual learning need.

We used a combination of the single subject model and the coordinated subject
model to develop the integrated unit (Ross & Olsen, 1993). According to Ross and Olsen
(1993) the single subject coordinated model has been appropriate for teachers who want
to integrate various subjects and themes directly into their classrooms. Since CJ was
responsible for math, language arts, science, social students, and remediation of language
arts and math for both 7th and 8th graders, we integrated the theme wherever possible. We
had several meetings prior to the beginning of school in September. These meetings
allowed us to become familiar with each other and the integrated thematic approach.
During these meetings I took copious notes and observed the flow of the meetings with
CJ.

The overall theme for the integrated unit was established prior to the beginning of
the school year. Our weekly meetings focused on the integration of the subjects within
each grade level. Throughout the integrated unit, I was a participant observer each Friday
and conducted 45 minute interviews with the participant at the conclusion of the research cycle.

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**Data Analysis**

In order to ensure validity, when I analyzed the data, I used a triangulation approach through multiple data collection methods including observations, interviews, and document collection (Glesne, 2006). Using a triangulation approach increased the confidence and trustworthiness of the study. In working with the subject in the study, I conducted periodic peer reviews and member checking to further ensure trustworthiness.

I used a methodical approach to organizing and coding the data (Glesne, 2006). I took the raw field notes and typed them each week. I read and re-read each observation looking for emerging themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I performed a similar approach with the interview process. I compared the observation notes with the interview transcripts to reveal themes that emerged from the data (Glesne, 2006). After this was completed, I coded the interview transcripts and the typed field notes using a system of highlighters to make it easier to reference the themes. I used a table format to chart direct quotes that supported the emerging themes. After this was completed, I focused on the emerging themes. I used this thematic analysis approach to analyze the data because, according to Glesne (2006), it helped me “…make sense of what I have learned,” (p. 147). The findings from Cycle IV provided me with the necessary data to conclude my action research based dissertation.
CHAPTER V.

CYCLE I FINDINGS

Overview

The main objective of Cycle I was to understand teachers’ perceptions of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School. I felt the survey was the proper instrument to understand the various opinions of integrated thematic instruction (Patton, 2001). For instance, I was curious to know how many teachers had prior knowledge of integrated thematic instruction, its impact on student learning, and their willingness to attempt an integrated unit with a colleague. The secondary objective of the survey was to understand the teachers’ use of the Let Me Learn Process®. As the districts’ brain-based learning theory, the Let Me Learn Process served as an important piece in my leadership theory as well as a strategy for learning in the integrated classroom.

Profile of the Sample

The first section of the survey focused on the demographics of the subjects. Subjects were asked to respond to questions about their gender, professional experience, level of education, subject area, and grade level responsibility. The results provided me with a background description of the subjects. Eighty five percent of the respondents were female and 14.6% were male. The subjects identified their years of professional experience through six option ranges. Sixty-three percent of the respondents had more than 10 years of professional experience. Table 5.1 provides a detailed representation of the entire breakdown of years of experience.
Table 5.1

*Years of Professional Experience (N=41)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 19 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 or more years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subjects identified their highest level of education. The most prominent level of education was a masters degree or higher. Seventeen out 41 respondents (41%) indicated having at least a masters degree. The second most prominent level of education was a bachelor’s degree with 36.6%. Table 5.2 provided a detailed breakdown of the education levels for the respondents.

Table 5.2

*Highest level of education (N=41)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors plus 15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters plus 15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters plus 30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were eight potential subject areas in which the respondents worked. The highest representation was from the Language Arts department which comprised 26.8% of those surveyed. Nineteen and a half percent of the respondents indicated “other” meaning that they were not currently teaching. These subjects identified themselves as
guidance, child study team, or administration. Table 5.3 provides a detailed account of the subject areas.

Table 5.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Languages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine or Performing Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second and third sections of the survey were designed to understand the teacher’s perceptions of integrated thematic instruction. This was accomplished through both Likert-type scale statements and open-ended responses. There were 12 statements that required the subjects to respond within the context of a five point Likert-type scale. Out of the 12 statements, five were linked to student learning, six were connected to instruction, and one specifically asked respondents whether they thought thematic units raised student achievement. There were three open-ended questions that allowed the subjects to express opinions on learning, cross curricular themes with other teachers, and whether an integrated approach could help student achievement.

According to the results of the thematic instruction survey, the respondents overwhelmingly agreed that students learn in different ways, with over 80% of respondents strongly agreeing. However, there was more variability in the data in terms
of the statements linked to instruction. A detailed overview of the survey results can be found in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

*Survey of Teacher’s Attitudes Toward Thematic Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly agree %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Unsure %</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>Strongly disagree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students learn in different ways</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.582 M=1.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for students to see a common thread through various subjects</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.602 M=1.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grade level curriculum should have a unifying purpose</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=40 SD=.698 M=1.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic units can raise student achievement</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.755 M=1.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers would benefit from grade level meetings</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=40 SD=.554 M=1.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will have a deeper grasp of the material if they connect it with other subjects</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.502 M=1.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are connections between LAL and Math</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=40 SD=.677 M=2.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to have grade level curriculum coordination</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.805 M=2.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross curricular teaching adds meaning to learning</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.728 M=1.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for students to make connections with their learning</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.449 M=1.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be interested in co-teaching with someone from another department</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=41 SD=.959 M=2.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students make connections between my class and other subjects</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=40 SD=.842 M=2.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Strongly agree = 1, Agree = 2, Unsure = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5

In the open ended section, the respondents were asked if they felt that an integrated approach to the curriculum could help student achievement. Twenty eight
respondents indicated that an integrated approach to curriculum could help student achievement. Of those who indicated it would help, respondents mentioned the relevancy it would provide, connections to deeper learning, and a better chance to retain the material. There was one person who did not feel that an integrated approach would aid in student achievement. This respondent claimed that, “Students need more structured classrooms. There is already too much chaos in their lives.” There were eight respondents who were not sure if it would aid in student achievement and four who did not answer.

Exactly 90% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that grade level curriculum should have a unifying purpose. Ninety seven percent felt that grade level meetings would benefit teachers, but only 70% agreed that they would like to have grade level curriculum coordination. They also agreed or strongly agreed (90%) that cross-curricular teaching adds meaning to learning. Yet in terms of connections between math and language arts, only 75% agreed or strongly agreed that there was a connection.

Almost half of the respondents agreed that they would be interested in co-teaching with someone from another department. Thirty nine percent of the respondents were unsure if they would be interested in teaching with someone from another department. There were an additional 10% who either strongly disagreed or disagreed that they would be interested in teaching with someone from another department. Twenty five percent of the respondents were unsure if there was a connection between language arts and math curriculum.

When asked in the open ended section if they were interested in developing cross-curricular themes with other teachers, 27 respondents indicated that they would. Those who responded positively felt that this would help students with relevancy, would get
students more excited to learn, and would benefit students. Six respondents were not
interested in developing cross curricular themes with other teachers. They felt that they
had tried it before and it did not work, believed each teacher should be on their own, did
not see how their subject would mesh with others, or did not want their curriculum
watered down. There were five respondents who were unsure and three who did not
answer.

One of the key elements to effectively implementing the integrated curriculum
model has been to have teachers understand themselves as learners and understand their
students as learners (Burton, 2001; Caine & Caine, 1995; Olsen, 2004; Ross & Olsen,
1993). According to Olsen (2004), teachers need to understand learning in order to
develop a meaningful curriculum. For purposes of this study, and since the Let Me Learn
Process has been the district’s learning theory, respondents were asked if they currently
use the process. Twenty six respondents indicated that they use the Let Me Learn Process
in their class. Of those 26 respondents, six used it with projects, seven with assessments
and six with teaming or grouping. There were three respondents who used the Let Me
Learn Process as a way to get insight into their learners. There were two respondents who
used the Let Me Learn Process as a tool. One respondent used it in planning and one used
it to develop skills.

Discussion

The findings from the study indicated that the respondents shared similar opinions
to what was found in the literature (Barab & Landa, 1997; Burton, 2001; McDonald &
Czerniak, 1994; McGehee, 2001; Mulholland, 2005; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan &
Robinson, 1995). The findings from Cycle I assisted me in formulating a next step for
Cycle II. For the most part, teachers at Henry Catherine thought that an integrated thematic approach to the curriculum would aid in student achievement, and at least 63% were willing to attempt working with another colleague in developing a cross-curriculum theme. In addition, 63% of the respondents were currently using the Let Me Learn Process in the classroom, albeit at different levels of integration.

There were five statements on the survey linked with thematic instruction and student learning. The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that student learning could be enhanced by thematic instruction or simply creating relevancy to learning. These findings were similar to the study on drop-outs (Bridgeland et al., 2006) and the Nizhoni Academy (McGehee, 2001). In the open ended responses, many of those surveyed said that thematic units could create relevancy, which has been shown to help students learn information more effectively. Johnston (2005) pointed out that the relevancy sought after in learning has been derived from the technical learning pattern. Learners who are high in technical reasoning need to connect their learning to relevance in order to remain interested and engaged (Johnston, 2005).

Fifty percent of the respondents agreed that co-teaching with someone outside their department could benefit student learning. The other 50% were either unsure about teaching with someone from another department or disagreed with the idea. Co-teaching has been a by product of integrated thematic instruction, not a requirement, and only one model out of a possible five models of integrated thematic instruction required another teacher (Ross & Olsen, 1993). However, co-teaching has been a good idea because Mulholland (2005) found that students were involved and engaged in lessons co-taught by the woodshop teacher and the reading teacher.
According to Shanahan and Robinson (1995), thematic instruction can aid in student achievement, but has been difficult to implement. Although there was not a specific question asked in the survey, several teachers indicated concerns similar to those raised in the literature (Brodzik, MacPhee & Shanahan, 1996; Drake, 1998; George, 1996; Pena, Brown-Adams & Decker, 1999). The findings confirmed what the literature revealed about the pitfalls of integrated thematic instruction (Bintz, Moore, Hayhurst, Jones & Tuttle, 2006; Brandt, 1991; Beane, 1993; Drake, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2007; George, 1996; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan et al., 1995). According to Brandt (1991), the reasons thematic instruction has not worked were because of poor implementation, teachers who were trained in subject specific areas, departmental cultures that were different, and the necessity of common planning time. The respondents who expressed concern in the survey about integrated thematic instruction echoed the idea that teachers needed a common planning time, staff buy-in, similarly grouped students, and the ability to work with others that would take time away from their curriculum.

**Conclusions and Recommendations – Cycle I**

The results of the survey at Henry Catherine Middle School suggested that teachers believed integrated thematic instruction would aid in student achievement. Seventy percent of those surveyed agreed that thematic instruction would raise student achievement. This finding provided data to help answer the question of whether teachers felt integrated thematic instruction would benefit student learning. In addition, I was interested in understanding whether teachers were willing to develop cross curricular themes, and 27 out of 41 respondents (66%) indicated that they would be interested in developing cross-curricular themes with other teachers outside their departments.
Respondents felt that convincing teachers to change, providing adequate time to prepare, structuring common planning within the grade level, and obtaining 100% staff buy-in were some of the major obstacles in implementing thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School. I also was interested in the extent to which teachers were currently using the Let Me Learn Process at Henry Catherine Middle School. I was surprised to find that 66% of those surveyed claimed to be using the Let Me Learn Process in their classrooms.

This study extended previous research into the integrated thematic instruction, and represented the first cycle in expanding the concept of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School. The results of this study provided a sound foundation for further research into integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School. At the same time, the results from this study raised serious questions that needed to be addressed prior to implementing an integrated approach to curriculum delivery. For instance, there has been no current planning time established for teachers, the students have not been teamed together, and some teachers have felt overwhelmed with the other responsibilities such as state assessments and getting through their own curriculum. The next step in this research was Cycle II, in which I worked collaboratively with the language arts basic skills teacher to determine whether an integrated thematic unit would enhance the classroom setting. During Cycle II, I encouraged other teachers and administrators to take the opportunity to observe the concepts of integrated thematic instruction at work in the classroom.
CHAPTER VI.
CYCLE II FINDINGS

Introduction

Cycle II occurred between January and June of 2008. The goal of this cycle was to begin the process of curriculum integration in basic skills classes at Henry Catherine Middle School and to explore my leadership. Based on the discoveries from Cycle I, and my background experience from the SQUARE program, I set out to work collaboratively within the math and language arts basic skills setting to create a coordinated, integrated unit. I wanted to, and was encouraged to start small. I spent a great deal of time and effort planning this cycle from September through December of 2007. This preparation time allowed me to feel confident about leading an initiative that would involve various phases of curricular integration.

During the planning phase, I made an effort to build resonance with the two individuals who taught basic skills math and language arts. Resonance has been a term used by Boyatis and McKee (2005) to describe the leaders who inspire, create hope, and are aware of themselves and others in their environment which was similar to my understanding of transformational as well. For me, practicing resonance required a constant reflection on the importance of building a trusting relationship with the participants. This was consistent with my understanding of resonant leadership, which was the ability to build lasting relationships (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). I had many informal conversations with the teachers during the time leading up to the implementation of the cycle. I very rarely discussed my research; rather I wanted to develop a friendly relationship in which we were able to learn about each other’s
families, opinions on world events, and personal hobbies. I was fortunate to have this extensive planning time and I reflected in my journal about why leaders should utilize resonance before embarking on a project with others. Therefore, when I commenced the research phase of Cycle II, I felt comfortable with each individual, and I felt that it was reciprocated.

During the month of January 2008, I met with FM and BS three times to train them in the use of curricular integration. These weekly meetings also served as planning sessions for the actual integrated unit. At the first meeting, I showed them my proposal for research, and provided them with several different types of integrated options. After reviewing the different types of models, we decided, collaboratively, that we would implement a coordinated model (Ross & Olsen, 1993) between two periods of basic skills math and language arts. FM felt that this was similar to the model used in the SQUARE program, and commented, “We are able to do this in the summer, so I think it will work.” We brainstormed connections between the subjects that would allow the students to understand the interconnectedness. The formal meetings took place during their common prep time, but there were numerous informal meetings with FM and BS throughout the first few weeks of the cycle. After the meetings, I felt confident that we had laid the foundation for a successful integrated unit.

All of the research I had completed on integrated thematic instruction during the fall of 2007 assisted me when the scope of the cycle took a dramatic shift. Three weeks into the cycle it was announced, rather abruptly, that the language arts and math departments would be switching the focus of basic skills instruction to a formulated program, Worldly Instruction (a pseudonym). My immediate reaction was one of fear and
trepidation. I discussed this change with BS, the math teacher, and he informed me that the new program was very prescriptive and would leave little time for curricular integration. He was disappointed that the district was going in this direction, and even said to me, “Every time I try to do something fun and worthwhile for the kids, it always gets taken from me.” I met with FM and he continued to support the integrated unit, and said, “I think the Worldly Instruction program for language arts still leaves room for integration.” I feared that my entire research project would be forced to cease because of the decision to implement Worldly Instruction program.

I met with the principal of Henry Catherine Middle School who assured me that this decision was in the best interest of the district and was an attempt to raise assessment results to avoid being reviewed by the state CAPA team. She said that she supported my research and would do anything to allow me to continue. She recommended that I speak with the assistant superintendent to determine a new course for action.

Entering the meeting with the assistant superintendent, I prepared myself for what I felt was the inevitable; a project shift. She assured me that my research was important, and helped me brainstorm another way to continue without the basic skills math component. She suggested I focus on the basic skills language arts classes. After the meeting, I felt rejuvenated. I contacted my dissertation advisor to determine if switching the focus from two subjects and two teachers to one subject with one teacher would suffice. My advisor encouraged me to continue with the one subject model. I met with the supervisor of the language arts department and worked with her to plan the integrated unit within the scope of the Worldly Instruction program. FM and I delayed the first
session of the curricular integration unit by two weeks, and we spent additional time reorganizing and planning for the single subject model.

The main sources of data collection during this cycle were journals, observations, artifact collection, and an interview at the conclusion of the project (Glesne, 2006). I took extensive notes during the meetings and observations throughout this cycle. I spent time in the classroom as a participant observer and took great care in documenting the classroom setting as well as the implementation of the curricular integration (Glesne, 2006). FM provided me with a copy of all of the documents he distributed to the students and the written work from each integrated assignment.

Data Analysis

The integrated thematic unit titled, “Know yourself; Know your place” emerged from FM during one of our weekly meetings after the focus switch to a single subject model. He felt that the theme would allow a broad enough scope to develop connections between the existing basic skills curriculum he was required to cover and the proposed integrated unit. “I find that students need to know themselves and their place in this world,” he commented at one of our planning meetings, “Because they are both the center of their world, and just a small part of the world.” FM and I decided on six sub themes that connected the overall theme, “Know yourself; Know your place.” We created a planning web (Palmer, 1991) that would serve as guide during the unit (see figure 6.1). We converted a bulletin board in the back of his room to display the theme and planning web.
Figure 6.1 “Integrated planning web”

Figure 6.1. Integrated planning web: This web was developed with the center piece representing the main theme and the sub themes, or weekly themes around the outside.

Observations

Each Tuesday throughout the integrated unit, FM and I developed the agenda for the Friday sessions. At the meetings, we discussed how the sub themes would guide our Friday sessions and connect both to the overall theme and the standards he was required to follow for basic skills language arts. On Friday we implemented activities that were a result of our vision of the integrated unit. We intended to have the concepts experienced
in the Friday sessions carry over into the next week. There were three sections of basic
to skills language arts and we used the same agenda for each section.

*Week one - “Know your place?”*

FM and I used the first week of the unit to introduce the concept of curriculum integration and set the ground rules for how the Friday session was to be organized. As an ice breaker, I had the students introduce themselves and recount one thing they learned that day in school. As they introduced themselves and shared they were required to hold onto a piece of yarn and throw it to the next person. By the time everyone introduced themselves and shared one thing they learned, the ball of yarn went throughout the entire classroom, connecting each person like a web. Instead of lecturing the students about curriculum integration, FM used the web analogy to show the students how each student was connected and each subject was connected. As a participant observer, I was able to learn about the students and at the same time watch their interactions. This web activity ended up being used throughout the cycles as a way to explain curricular integration.

After the ice breaker, I reviewed the ground rules for the integrated classroom. The rules were simple but important to the success of the unit. We used the classroom rules to lessen the chance for learning anxiety and to promote collaboration (Ross & Olsen, 1993). FM had the students do a free writing assignment in which they described their friends. When they completed the writing assignment, they shared their stories with the class. This activity allowed me to learn even more about the students. I participated in this activity and shared my story of my good friend, Charlie. I felt that by sharing my story that the students would learn more about me and that it would have made them feel
more comfortable about sharing. FM and I concluded the class by reiterating the connections that were made throughout the period between the students and the teachers.

_Week two - “How do I learn?”_

An important aspect of the integrated classroom has been an emphasis on learning (Drake, 1998; Ross & Olsen, 1993). Since our district has utilized the Let Me Learn Process®, I gathered the learning profiles from our online data system. Based on their learning patterns, FM and I assigned the students to intentional groups (Johnston, 2005) for the activity. Intentional grouping using the Let Me Learn Process scores allowed all types of learners to work in a collaborative group setting (Johnston, 2005). We took a few minutes and described why we chose to intentionally group the students. We emphasized that learning, rather than popularity, personality, or random selection was the impetus behind the grouping.

For the activity, the students were required to invent something that could be used in the future. Each group was given a bag that had the same items in it. As the groups worked, FM and I watched and observed the interactions. FM and I provided very little directions for the students, and when asked we would refer them to the directions. FM would also add, “You need to talk to your group members about what you think you should build.” In each of the sections, FM and I noticed that most groups were able to work through the assignment. There was only one group who was not able to complete the project. FM mentioned that he had experienced problems with those students before the activity. At the conclusion of the activity, each intentional group presented to the large group. We talked to each other about the activity and reflected on the learning as we
were observing. As the research cycle developed, this became a weekly ritual for FM and me.

*Week three - “How do I communicate?”*

Building off of the previous week’s activity, the students were placed in their intentional groups again, and were required to build something that will help people communicate without words. The caveat to the lesson was that the students could not use words during the building period. Students immediately expressed concern when the lesson was introduced because they were unsure how they could communicate.

During the period, FM and I went around the classroom and we reflected on the activity together. This was a tough lesson for me because I had to let go of the control of the learning and allow students to develop their own way of communicating. FM and I communicated with words when we spoke to each other, but when the students attempted to talk to us we only used hand gestures. As I reflected on this activity I realized that FM and I were operating out of a constructivist philosophy of learning (Dewey, 1916; Kohn, 1999). By not allowing the students to communicate with words, we were requiring them to construct their own meaning to the learning.

*Week four “Living in the past”*

I did most of the preparation for this week’s activity because FM became ill during this week and was not available for planning. Since the theme was “Living in the past,” I attempted to recreate a traditional lesson from the 19th century. I researched traditional modes of education, and gathered props from a few colleagues. I greeted the students at the door in a very formal manner. I spent the first 10 minutes of the class as
“Mr. Classic” and had the students write down vocabulary words similar to the way a teacher would have in the 19th century.

Upon completion of the vocabulary assignment, I brought the students to the other side of the classroom and showed them a clip from the movie *Dead Poets Society*. We then developed a Venn diagram and compared the integrated classroom with the traditional classroom. There was a substitute teacher in the room that day and she commented how interesting the activity was to observe. During one of the breaks, she and I discussed traditional vs. integrated education. She felt that students were more prepared in the traditional setting, but that the kids of today needed a lot of technology to learn.

*Week five - “Living in the future”*

When FM and I were planning this session, we reflected on the first few weeks. I felt that the students were beginning to predict the classroom setting. In fact, the previous week, a few students remarked, “We always work in groups in this class. Are we building again?” We wanted to connect to the future in a way that would be surprising to the students. Earlier in the unit I received an email from a staff member about the integrated unit. She recommended that we show the students the video “Shift Happens.”

FM and I screened the video, and came up with questions for the students to discuss in a large group. The video was developed by two teachers who wanted to illustrate the changing nature of our society and to highlight the need to adapt to change. In the activity and discussion the students reported feeling blown away. FM said he observed each student watching intently. “I never saw them so engrossed in something before,” he commented. I sat in the front of the room and scanned the room every few minutes. The ensuing discussion allowed FM and me to process the video with the
students. We talked about the future and the role technology would play in their lives.

This session turned out to be one of the most important sessions for both FM and myself.

*Week six and seven - “Becoming Globally Aware”*

According to FM, the session on the future had a deep impact on the students. Building off of the success of the session on the future, we planned to once again take a risk. We screened the children’s movie “The Lorax” by Dr. Seuss. The reason we chose this movie was because it related to the sub theme, and our overall theme. In the movie the Lorax warned anyone who would listen to him about why they should have protected the very important and fragile Truffula Trees. Some students said that they had read the book before when they were younger.

Most students had not seen the movie before so it was new to them. As they watched the movie they were not as engrossed as they were the previous week, but it still held their attention. We were not able to accomplish everything on our agenda due to time, so we decided to extend the global awareness session into the following week. During the second session (week seven) the students were grouped together and given an open-ended question about the Lorax. FM and I went around the classroom and helped the students make connections with the Lorax and the theme. It was obvious to FM and I that the students were beginning to see the connection to their actions and the world around them. At the end of the session the students were required to write a response and present it to the class. FM felt that the responses were appropriate for the classes. He also felt that the students had an easier time writing the responses, and that they provided more details than usual.
FM and I decided to bring in a speaker for the culminating activity. The speaker was a doctoral candidate from a local university. Prior to his arrival, we sent him an update on the project and filed him in on the weekly themes. He mentioned to us that he had been doing some work with college students and their perception of what was important to them. He felt that he could tailor the presentation for the middle school students, and ensured us that it would be interactive and hands on.

He presented to the students on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The students participated in the discussion. As he was answering questions, FM and I discussed with each other that it might be over the students’ heads. The speaker then split the students into three groups and had them assemble a pyramid using magnetic beams. Since the students had done a lot of group work together, they were able to work collaboratively to complete the pyramid. At the conclusion of the activity he showed the students how the pyramids connect together just like the integrated unit connected their learning. One student remarked, “This is deep.” As we processed the day with each other, FM was really proud of the students. He said, “I was not sure how that was going to work, but it did. They got it. I can’t believe that [JO] actually said something was deep.”

Interview

I interviewed FM the week following the culminating activity for the integrated unit. We met at a local restaurant near the Henry Catherine Middle School. I wanted to reward FM for participating in the research, and interview him outside of Henry Catherine Middle School. Prior to the interview, I had the questions reviewed by several colleagues in order to ensure they were not leading or presupposing (Glesne, 2006). The
The emerging themes related to the observations as well as to the literature on integrated thematic instruction. I constructed a table to keep the data organized. The interview provided insight into his perspective of an integrated unit during the school year as well as during the summer SQUARE program. There were four themes that emerged from the interview data. The four themes were student connections, teacher connections, the Let Me Learn Process, and my leadership.

**Student connections**

As a veteran of 31 years, FM has seen his share of initiatives in education. He shared with me that he signed onto this project because it sounded like a great idea. Prior to this project, FM was not very familiar with curriculum integration. He had a friend who was the principal of a school that utilized integration, but he never observed the school. When asked about student learning, he said, “I think kids innately need connections.” He shared with me that he naturally makes connections with whatever he reads, and tries to show the kids the connections. He told me an example of how students began to make connections on their own as a result of the integrated unit. He said:

For example, today we were reading a story in the NJASK 8 work book about manatees the sea cows that are in Florida. There are boats that are destroying them and they are now an endangered species. And [DH] said, “[FM] that is what we are talking about that has to do with all this Mr. Cook stuff.” And I said, “why do you think we read it and I am really glad you got this connection. Talk to me
more about this” and he says, “c’mon [FM] it’s like, you know we need the manatee just like they need us and we are hurting them.” The open ended question was – Why should someone in a cold water environment like we live in care about some underwater creature 1000 miles away from us? ....So they are getting it. That has been a tremendous positive to me.

FM felt that the students were beginning to make the connections on their own because of the integrated unit and how each of the themes built on one another. He said that once he saw the students making their own connections, “I didn’t need to remind them that there were connections to be made.”

Teacher connections

FM made many connections during the integrated unit. He shared with me that he would love to see the concept expanded to the other subjects and teachers. “I would love to see integrated all the time,” he said in response to how he could see this project expanding. He also felt that the video Shift Happens, “Made me see that kids could think of something beyond themselves.”

One of the major connections for FM was that he began to view the basic skills kids in a different light. After the interview was over, he asked if he could add more. I agreed and turned the recorder back on. It was at that point he said:

What I learned about myself, I think I had preconceived notions of what basic skills kids were going to be like and were not going to be able to understand. And it blew me away and I have to take closer look at my own preconceptions, my own coming in, you know. I don’t think any teacher wants to come in and admit … well they are basic skills kids. You know and when they ask me to teach basic
skills, you know what I thought in my head? I didn’t ask it but I thought it, why?

What did I do wrong?

This revelation was something that FM had not shared with me until the interview. In fact, I thought, because of his openness and willingness to help students, that he enjoyed teaching basic skills students. Yet, somehow he felt that he was assigned to them because he had done something wrong.

*The Let Me Learn Process*

FM had been involved with the Let Me Learn Process since its inception at Henry Catherine Middle School in 2000. Yet, he readily admitted that he was not able to understand the process or how the process would help students until he began working in the SQUARE program three years ago. “I like being able to put kids into groups based on their learning patterns because they are more successful,” he commented on using the Let Me Learn Process to formulate student grouping. In addition, by learning more about how the students learn, he was able to see why some students struggled in school. “You knew who the totally technical kids were when we had them build something. The LML just flowed. You still managed to make those connections with the kids.”

*Leadership in Practice*

In our interview I asked FM to provide feedback on my leadership. He mentioned that he noticed it was difficult for me at times because, “This is hard for some people and I know you struggle with this. You did a great job and we got to the point where we laughed a lot and had informal discussions.” He was referring to my sequential pattern. I always need things organized and planned out, but there were many times when we had to shift gears. For me it was the ability to give up control and allow the students to
construct their own learning. He said that I was able to change rather than, “Doing things to get them done for the sake of getting them done.”

**Leadership Application**

As the leader of the integrated unit, albeit with a limited number of participants, I was exposed to many of the same challenges as if I were leading a project with 100 people. Early in the research cycle, I dealt with a union issue because the Henry Catherine Teachers Association did not have a contract. The teachers’ association specifically stated at a meeting that no one in the union was to volunteer. For the sake of the teachers in my research cycle, I made sure to clarify the project with the union president. She assured me that this would not be viewed as volunteering because I was technically a union member. At another point early on in the research cycle, I dealt with a swift change of curriculum that could have easily ended my research. The district changed basic skills math program, and I was sure that I was going to be required to conclude my project.

For the majority of this cycle I journaled about my leadership in a very personal manner, and I did not feel comfortable in sharing this with FM. I considered the experience with FM to be more of a collaborative, servant venture in my leadership. I rarely referred to myself as the leader; rather I focused on how we could transform basic skills language arts. It was not until the conclusion of the project that I actually asked FM to provide feedback on my leadership.

Based on my leadership platform as described in Chapter Two, I espoused to be servant, social justice, and transformational. In addition, I also espoused to use combinations of theories that are integral to my platform such as: Emotional Intelligence
(Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002) and Reflective Practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). In viewing the data that I collected in my journal and interview, I felt that servant, Resonant Leadership, Reflective Practice, and transformational leadership emerged as my theories-in-use (Argyris, 1990).

*Resonant Leadership – “Building resonance”*

During the fall of 2007 while working on my proposal for Cycle II, I made it a point to identify the participants for the integration project and develop resonance with them. According to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), effective leaders need to, “…cultivate mindfulness and seek resonance in themselves and with others,” (p.74). This became my mantra as I worked to build resonance with FM and BS during the planning phase. I made conscious efforts to visit them in their classrooms during their preparation periods to just talk.

In one of the conversations, FM revealed to me that he would be out for a few days because his mother was going to the doctor to have some tests. Upon his return I talked with him about the experience and listened as he shared the story. It was also during this time that I learned BS was going to be a grandfather. He and his wife, who was a teacher in an urban school setting, took in a young lady who was without a home. It turned out that she was pregnant, and BS and his wife decided that they needed to do everything they could to make her feel part of their family. BS beamed when he talked about his “granddaughter.” Even though BS was a participant in my research only for a short time, I made sure to continue building resonance throughout the cycle. He would often ask how the project was going and at one time admitted that he was a little jealous that his kids were not having as much fun as FM’s kids.
During our weekly meetings, FM and I spent usually the first ten minutes catching up on each other’s lives. I attributed that to the resonance that was built during the planning phase. FM shared with me that he and other teachers felt overwhelmed with the amount of work they had to do during the year. He mentioned specifically the action research projects and the sudden change to Worldly Instruction. This information was crucial to me because I knew that I could not push this project too much or he might feel that it was another chore. I assured FM that I would be there every step of the way because I wanted to see the integration in action. He appreciated that I agreed to participate every Friday because as he said, “Having both of us will be better for the students.” After the Worldly Instruction change and BS having to back out, my first meeting with FM proved to be the most fruitful. I wrote in my journal on February 11, 2008:

I don’t think I could have picked a better person for this experience. FM and I met today to review the new model for the project. He started the meeting by sharing an anecdote about his sister and then we talked about ethics in the presidential race. Then we came up with the theme, “Know yourself; Know your place!” Everything fit together so perfectly!

On February 26, 2008 I wrote in my journal, “I was so excited today by the synergy and brainstorming with FM. Every week we are able to develop ideas that connect to the unit, his class and the overall theme.” There were many journal entries when I mentioned that FM and I laughed a lot during our weekly planning sessions. We really became a team united to develop curricular integration because, in my opinion, we had resonance with each other.
Servant Leadership – “How can I help?”

Greenleaf (2002) used the example of Leo, the main character from Hermann Hesse’s *Journey to the East*, to describe the essence of servant leadership. Leo was literally a servant who ensured that all of the tasks were taken care of and also kept up the group’s spirits by singing. Although I did not sing for FM, or the students for that matter, I felt that I made sure that I took care of the little things to ensure the project would be a success. Each week I typed up the agenda for our Friday sessions. I took it upon myself to develop, publish, and distribute the weekly newsletter that was sent home to the parents. I secured all of the materials needed for our hands-on projects, and made sure that our technology was capable of viewing the videos. I was present and an active participant for each Friday session. I did these things not only because I espoused to be a servant leader, or because it was a way to ensure success, but more because I wanted FM to view me as a resource.

As I stated earlier, FM felt the district continued to impose initiative after initiative without considering the feelings of the teachers. I did not want this research project be viewed in that light, and I did not want to add to the existing concern of being overwhelmed that FM shared with me at one of our meetings. Therefore I used his concern for feeling overwhelmed and allowed my servant leadership to blossom. I additionally stayed true to vision of the project, which was an example of my espoused transformational leadership. I knew that I had to keep pushing my vision of an integrated unit further, but I was cognizant of FM’s concerns as well.
Reflective Practice – “How can we make this better?”

FM embodied the traits of a reflective teacher. He exhibited, as Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) recommend, “The ability to see events and actions in new and different ways,” (p.29). As I worked with him during this cycle it became clear to me that he wanted to make the learning more relevant for the students. In order to explore the relevancy, he used a combination of intuition, observation, and reflection with me to determine if an activity had impact. An admitted “non-planner,” he had the wherewithal to change a lesson or activity at the drop of a hat. This non-planning and change was difficult for me because I tend to stick to my plans. Yet, I was able to learn from him how important it has been for educators to be able to switch gears.

Our activity in communication was a challenging lesson for me. I was supportive of the idea when we planned and even excited for the students who would have to communicate without words. Yet, a few minutes into the session I was worried that the students were not getting it and I was unsure of what to do. It was FM who told me that I needed to let go and, as he said, “Allow the students to struggle a bit and let them understand their own learning. If this doesn’t work, we can always change it for the next class.” As the activity developed he was correct, and the students were able to create really amazing things without communicating with words.

Throughout the Friday sessions, FM and I spent a lot of time talking to each other while the kids participated in the activity. We always watched the students, and at first I thought the conversations were going to take away from the research. In fact, what we were engaging in was reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). FM pointed out students for me to watch, asked questions to me about the activity, or thought of different
strategies for the reflection. He was attuned to the needs of the students as well as my needs as a researcher. Oftentimes he would just bounce ideas off of me that he wanted to try with his other classes. As I observed, he was engaged in the thematic unit. In addition, as the cycle continued I was able to engage with him in reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) while the activities were happening.

At our weekly meeting, FM and I processed the previous Friday session and he would bring me the reflections from the students. Originally, I wanted the students to write reflections at the conclusion of the activity while it was still fresh in their mind. FM felt that it was important for the students to reflect on the Monday following the integrated session to capture what they learned. Since I viewed FM as the expert in this area, I allowed him to have the students write the reflections on Monday. As we reviewed the reflections, we also planned our upcoming Friday session. We maintained this format, either in the classroom or at our weekly meeting of planning, acting and reflecting (Osterman & Kottamp, 2004) throughout the cycle of research.

*Transformational Leadership – “Transforming basic skills education”*

Since arriving at Henry Catherine Middle School I had been interested in changing the curriculum and classroom setting for basic skills students. As a guidance counselor, I listened to the frustrations of students year after year who shared their frustration with the basic skills classes. Most reported that the classes were boring, disconnected from what they were learning, and not helpful in remediating their skills. Since starting the SQUARE program I tried to take those suggestions and develop a program that was fun, connected, and helpful. It was the SQUARE model that served as
the backdrop to the integrated unit for this cycle. In the meetings with FM, we made sure to stay true to our intentions for the students.

Through their vision, transformational leaders have been able to see beyond the tried and true methods and create a different paradigm (Burns, 2003). Although I felt I had accomplished much though the summer SQUARE program, I had not yet transformed basic skills during the school year. In our first Friday session with the students, FM and I made sure to set the stage that the next few weeks would be different. The students’ faces lit up when we said that we would have fun while learning.

FM and I made sure to take chances, which is why we created new settings such as a classroom without words, a 19th century classroom, a futuristic classroom, along with many hands-on activities that had students walking around and actively learning. As a transformational leader, I was excited to see how FM and the students responded to my vision. Yet we also asked each other tough questions about what we were accomplishing, which I attributed to my social justice leadership. For instance, at our meeting on March 13, 2008, I asked FM if the students were as prepared now as they had been in the past. He felt that there are some things lacking such as their writing and reading habits, but that they were far more advanced with the advent of technology. Asking these types of questions allowed me to gauge whether I was trying to transform for the sake of transforming or whether my ideas could actually assist students and teachers with basic skills delivery.

**Critical Incidents – “Adapting to change and maintaining my vision”**

There were two critical incidents in this cycle that tested my resolve both as a researcher and as a leader. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) suggested journaling about
critical incidents by using the case record format. This format allowed reflective practitioners to document the experience using six prompts to create a structured narrative. The six prompts were defining the problem, outcome or objective desired, alternatives considered, strategies implemented, results, and assessment (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). I utilized this format as a way to understand and make sense of the data that I collected (Glesne, 2006).

A few minutes before our first formal meeting, the local union leaders announced that contract talks had stalled and therefore we would be required to work bell to bell. Since I was part of the union, I wanted to respect their wishes, but I also felt compelled to continue with my research. I made sure to check with both FM and BS regarding the union issue. They both assured me that the research could continue, but that they felt more comfortable with meeting during their prep period instead of after school. My assessment, utilizing the Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) model, revealed that the plan worked out as intended because I allowed alternatives to the original plan. In fact, it was FM and BS who were able to solve the problem of the union issue by shifting the time of the meetings to during the school day. The other critical issue in this research cycle was the instituting of Worldly Instruction. Once again, as in the union issue, I allowed others to assist me in recognizing alternatives to my solution. Had it not been for the objective and collaborative way I viewed these critical issues, I would not have achieved my objectives.

Conclusion

Cycle II was an important step in my research of integrated thematic instruction. The experience was rich with leadership challenges, curricular implementation, and
patience on my part as a researcher. I felt that the success of the integrated unit was a direct result of the resonance that I created with FM in the planning phase. I also think that the support of my administration and advisor assisted me in being able to continue with the research in the face of adversity. As Fullan (2007) stated, change has not been easy. I learned that I needed to be prepared for and adapt to change. This cycle allowed me to experience the essence of action research, which built on itself (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I attempted to be a learner in this process (Glesne, 2006) and in doing so I was able to plan, act, and reflect throughout the cycle (Anderson, 1998).

The findings from Cycle II led to Cycle III. Although the summer SQUARE program had experimented in the past with integrated thematic instruction, Cycle II provided me with an opportunity to observe the intricacies such as planning, coordination, and execution. In a sense, Cycle II was a time that both FM and I became better versed in integrated thematic instruction which led perfectly into the summer SQUARE program. I looked to FM to help train the summer staff, and report on his findings at the beginning of Cycle III.
CHAPTER VII.

CYCLE III FINDINGS

“SQUARE: A summer program that makes connections”

Introduction

Cycle III, which lasted from June through August of 2008, built upon the discoveries I made in Cycle II. Working with FM in the basic skills setting in Cycle II provided a unique transition to expand integrated thematic instruction as a curricular tool to assist at-risk students during the summer SQUARE program. For the previous four years the SQUARE program had one grade with 5 teachers and about 40 students. In 2008, the program expanded to 10 teachers and 90 students. I set out to improve the existing program (8th grade) as well as develop the new program (7th grade). This was a unique opportunity for me because six of the staff members had some understanding of integrated thematic instruction and four of the new staff had little or no understanding of integrated thematic instruction.

Cycle III was by far the most challenging cycle of the dissertation, and at the same time it provided the greatest opportunity for studying my leadership through implementing integrated thematic instruction. Although the cycle was exhausting at times, the unprecedented access to implementing integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School was unsurpassed. I was able to work collaboratively in the planning stages of the 2008 program with the administration of Henry Catherine School District.

With the support of the Henry Catherine administration and Board of Education, I was charged with building upon the existing SQUARE program. During the spring of
2008, I developed a budget for the program, met with the three sending districts’ principals, hired five new staff members, and designed the thematic concepts. The meetings with the various stakeholders took place as an effort to build the foundation of the new grade level as well as strengthen the existing program. The administration encouraged me to design the staff training as well as to observe the teachers in the classroom as I felt necessary. As a leader, this support provided me with the confidence needed to successfully expand the summer program.

This cycle differed from the previous cycle because I implemented a three subject coordinated model for the integration (Ross & Olsen, 1994). The three subject coordinated model was used as an attempt to achieve true integration, in which the subjects were structured to provide a seamless learning (Ross & Olsen, 1994). The 7th grade theme was “Finding the treasure of learning.” The 8th grade continued with the 2007 theme “Taking a ride on the carnival of learning.” Each grade level was comprised of five staff members including two math teachers, two language arts teachers, and a construction/Let Me Learn Process® facilitator. Since 2004, SQUARE had used a combination of construction and the Let Me Learn Process as a tool to engage students in hands-on, relevant learning. Four of the five teachers in the 8th grade team had worked in the SQUARE program for at least two years. Two of the five 7th grade teachers had previously worked in the program. There were 36 students in the 7th grade program and 54 in the 8th grade.

The main sources of data collection during this cycle were my reflective journal, classroom observations, artifact collection, and interviews at the conclusion of the summer program (Glesne, 2006). I took extensive notes during the staff training, held
weekly formal and informal meetings, as well as during classroom observations throughout the cycle. In addition, I collected lesson plans from each grade level and subject and any handouts or supplemental material used.

Profile of the staff

The 7th grade staff consisted of five staff members. In language arts and math two teachers were assigned to co-teach approximately 36 students split into three groups. The additional staff member was responsible for exposing the students to the Let Me Learn Process, and assisted the students with their building project. The staff was provided an hour preparation each day that was divided into a half hour in the morning before the students arrived, and a half hour after the students departed.

LB taught in the 7th grade language arts class with CJ. LB was responsible for selecting the novel and assisting the other staff on her team because she had taught in the SQUARE program from 2004-2006. LB had been teaching 8th grade language arts literacy at Henry Catherine Middle School for 25 years. She was the advisor of the Language Arts Club, had been the teacher of the year, served on the professional development committee, and had been a board of education member in her home district.

This was CJ’s first year in the SQUARE program. CJ had been teaching for two years. Prior to teaching at Henry Catherine Middle School she taught in an alternative school. At the time of the study, she taught all subjects: language arts, math, science, social studies, and supplemental NJASK instruction. The reason she taught all subjects was because CJ was in a self-contained program designed for at-risk 7th and 8th grade students.
CF and DB co-taught in the 7th grade math program. Both taught at the high school, which was important to the administration because they could provide a different approach to learning math. CF was in her sixth year at Henry Catherine High School. She taught high school math with classes such as Algebra I, Interactive Algebra I, and Interactive Geometry. Before coming to Henry Catherine High School she taught at Sboro (a pseudonym) Elementary. She was an instructional aide, and taught a fifth and sixth grade self-contained class. Prior to getting into education she worked in business for sixteen years.

DB had just finished his 34th year at Henry Catherine High School. DB had taught honors pre-calculus and trigonometry for the previous 15 years. In addition, DB has had several sections of the HSPA 11 remediation classes. He coached football for 19 years and was the baseball coach for 26 years. He has been the math club advisor, head negotiator of the union, and has coordinated the math competition team since 1994.

TR had worked the SQUARE program for the past two years. She started out as a language arts teacher but then switched to focusing on Let Me Learn because she had recently gone through the advanced certification program. TR also assisted with the building project. TR had been at Henry Catherine Middle School since 2000, and had been teaching since 1998. At the time of the study, she taught Media and Study Skills, which was part of the English department and the NJASK writing class. TR had coached field hockey and basketball for both the middle and high school.

The 8th grade staff was comprised of five staff members. In language arts and math two teachers were assigned to co-teach approximately 54 students split into three groups. The additional staff member was responsible for instructing the building project.
As with the 7th grade staff, they were provided an hour preparation that was divided into a half hour in the morning before the students arrived and a half hour after the students departed. Both the language arts and math teachers had worked together in the SQUARE program. This was the building instructor’s first year in the SQUARE program.

LM and HM had been teaching together in the 8th grade SQUARE math program since 2005. LM was the only staff member to work in each summer program since 2004. She was viewed as a leader with the staff because of her experience. LM had been teaching for six years at Henry Catherine High School. She started her career teaching Algebra I and a few sections of the HSPA classes. As she gained experience, she gradually moved on to teaching Geometry, Algebra II, and trigonometry. She had been influential in implementing the Core Plus curriculum.

HM had been teaching in the SQUARE program since 2005, and had been teaching at Henry Catherine Middle School since 2004. She taught 7th grade connected math and honors pre-algebra. HM had been a co-coordinator of the anti-bullying campaign, class advisor, and tutor for students struggling with math.

DO and FM had taught language arts literacy together in the 8th grade SQUARE program since 2007. DO was in her third year of teaching language arts at Henry Catherine Middle School. She had taught both special education and regular education students. At Henry Catherine Middle School, she had been the assistant play director, organizational management facilitator, and tutor. Previous to Henry Catherine Middle School, she completed her practicum experience in elementary education.

FM had taught in the SQUARE program since 2005. Prior to teaching language arts in SQUARE, he was the building instructor and Let Me Learn facilitator. FM just
finished his 23rd year of teaching at Henry Catherine Middle School. During that time, he
had taught seventh and eighth grade honors, level one, level two, and remedial language
arts literacy. For two years (2003-2005), he took a sabbatical to pursue the priesthood. He
returned to Henry Catherine Middle School because he felt that his heart was in teaching,
not in the ministry. He had also been the advisor to the Peer Mediator/Natural Helpers
organization at Henry Catherine Middle School.

RR was the building instructor for SQUARE. He had been teaching science at
Henry Catherine High School since 2007. Prior to teaching at Henry Catherine High
School, RR served in the military. In addition to teaching, RR had been an assistant
football coach, and weightlifting advisor.

Data Analysis

In reviewing and analyzing the data from Cycle III, several themes emerged. In
order to organize the data, I chose to analyze the cycle through five distinct events such
as staff training, week by week review of the actual program, interviews, formal and
informal meetings, and lesson plans. I felt this style allowed me to better understand, and
organize the data.

Staff Training: Building the foundation

The entire staff met together for two days prior to the beginning of the SQUARE
program. The goals of the training were to build a learning community, learn about the
concept of integrated thematic instruction, and to understand what made the SQUARE
program effective. Prior to the staff training, I sent the staff a welcome letter and a
request to bring in something (an object, picture, heirloom, etc.) that described an
important time in their life, a personal goal that they wanted to pursue, and a completed
personal history sheet that they would feel comfortable sharing with the group. The two
days of training were grouped in themes. The first day’s theme was the “Five
dysfunctions of a team,” and the second day was, “Taking a ride on the carnival of
learning while looking for the treasure of learning.”

During the first day of staff training, I facilitated a discussion from the personal
history sheet. Each person was asked to share items from the sheet. We sat in a circle and
I began the sharing portion. On the second round of sharing, several staff members
became emotional when one staff member revealed her mother-in-law was ill. The
sharing took a different turn, and other staff members talked about their experiences, and
provided words of encouragement. In my journal I wrote, “When this happened I felt that
the staff was beginning to build trust with one another. I was surprised it happened so
early on in the process.” After the personal history activity, the staff broke off into the
grade level teams to work on their curriculum. During this time I observed the staff
sharing ideas, and making connections with their grade level theme. We concluded the
first day of training with a ball of yarn activity. I asked the staff to share one thing they
learned from the day, and afterwards they were to pass it on to another person. By the end
of the activity we had developed a web that connected each of the staff together. “This,” I
said, “is the concept of integrated thematic instruction. We are all connected together by
what we learned.”

Although the first day of training went well, I journaled about the doubts I was
having in regards to my leadership. I doubted that I could lead the entire staff, students,
volunteers, and parents in the 2008 summer SQUARE program. I stayed up late that
night, which I saw as a necessity, in order to be prepared for the second day of staff
training. As I analyzed my journal, after the cycle’s conclusion and saw that I was
beginning to display the signs of the Sacrifice Syndrome (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

The second day of training was focused on what made the SQUARE program
effective. As I stated earlier, I had stayed up late the previous night perfecting the
presentation. I felt comfortable with the staff who had worked the program before, but I
was unsure of how well I could communicate my vision with the new staff members.

I reviewed how SQUARE had been based on research that students need three
key concepts to have: self-efficacy, knowledge of who they were as learners, and a
unique classroom experience. Self-efficacy has been known as the sense of how students
perceive their success (Bandura, 1994). Those with high self-efficacy about school
achieved success and those with low self-efficacy about school avoided or did not
achieve success. I used math as an example to illustrate the concept. For instance, I told
the staff, if a student had been doing poorly in math they were most likely to have a low
self-efficacy towards math. My question to the staff was, ‘How will this impact their self
esteem in school?’

Next I discussed with the staff the importance of the students having a learning
awareness. I pointed out that research suggested all learners were unique and that no one
learned the same way (Johnston, 1998; Gardner, 1983, Ross & Olsen, 1993). Using the
Let Me Learn Process, I gave the staff a brief introduction to the brain-mind connection
(Figure 7.1).
According to Johnston (2008), “Stimuli enter the brain in the form of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. The stimuli are processed by the brain’s neuro-receptors and pass through an interface of patterns (systems) and enter our human consciousness (the mind) where they are translated by the working memory and stored for retrieval and use at an appropriate time” (p.8).

After I reviewed the brain/mind connection (Johnston, 2008), I reviewed the importance of the classroom learning environment. According to Kovalik (1993) integration has been more powerful when the following components were implemented with staff and students:

“Absence of threat – Trustworthiness

Meaningful content – Higher order thinking, rigorous

Choices – Options in questions, processes
Time – Not all on the same pace

Collaboration – With each other, the teachers, volunteers

Feedback – Close to immediate

Mastery – Success in something” (p.10)

I stressed to the staff that putting all of this together would result in more authentic student learning.

The staff spent the remainder of the training working in teams developing activities for the first week of the program. The staff continued to work collaboratively and only asked for assistance when they were stuck or needed input. I saw, through the observations, that LB was viewed as the leader of the 7th grade program and LM was the leader for the 8th grade program. As I informally observed both groups, I noticed that LB and LM were the ones who were able to take other teachers’ ideas and coordinated the various responsibilities. After making those observations, I reflected in my journal that my servant leadership was emerging because staff members besides me were viewed as leaders (Greenleaf, 1977). After the staff left for the weekend my anxiety was heightened because I felt I had so much to do before the first day of the program. I was not able to articulate exactly what I needed to do, so I wrote, “I wish we had another day for training,” before leaving for the day.

Week One: Crazy and busy

“I felt chaos as I entered the building this morning because teachers and students were already there. Now I know why principals try to be the first one to reach school,” I reflected in my journal regarding the first morning. Once all the students arrived that first day I spoke about the importance of the SQUARE program. I wanted to alleviate any
type of anxiety the students or the staff for that matter, so I gathered 94 students, 10 staff members and 10 peer staffers in a large circle. I saw this opportunity as a great way to begin the process of teambuilding and to have the students think this program was special. I had the entire cafeteria chanting a call and response drill that I learned from working with Home Depot. “Gimme an S!” I shouted, and everyone would reply, “S!” until SQUARE was completely spelled out. During this time, the students and staff were encouraged to clap together as loud as they could. As the leader, I thought it was important to be an example of how the program would be a truly worthwhile experience.

 Much of the first week was devoted to pre-testing and teambuilding activities. One activity that each grade level created was the one room school house concept. The grade levels assembled in their respective areas, and the teachers taught a lesson integrating math, language arts, and a hands-on activity. I observed the 7th grade team. They chose to do an activity that would serve as a starting place for Thirteen Little Blue Envelopes, the novel that was required reading for all 7th grade students, as well as an opportunity for math skills. LB, the language arts teacher, and DB, the math teacher facilitated the discussion on Ribena, an ingredient discussed in the book. Each student had the opportunity to taste the Ribena while they solved relevant math equations. As I observed the students in the room, they were actively engaged in the lesson. When they tasted the Ribena, some turned their face away and said, “Yuck” while others enjoyed the taste. LB went around the classroom as if she were an actor from the novel, ensuring that everyone was experiencing their learning.

 I observed the 7th grade students while they were given an introduction to the Let Me Learn process by TR. None of the students were aware of how they learned or what
their learning patterns meant. Once the students received their results, many made immediate connections such as, “I love to build” or “I hate to write.” TR utilized many hands on activities to help the students gain a deeper understanding of the learning process. CJ came in to observe while TR was working with the students in order to gain more knowledge. This type of collaboration had been encouraged in SQUARE in order to adhere to the philosophy of integration.

I noticed that the 7th grade staff spent time with each other while the students pre-tested. Each area supported one another whether it was math, language arts, or the Let Me Learn Process. In contrast, the 8th grade team was short two team members during pre-testing because LM’s mother-in-law became ill, and RR was working with local building contractors to receive donations for the program. That, coupled with the additional 15 students, made the 8th grade teachers frustrated. I stepped in a few times to help assist with the activities and pre-testing. During this time, I reflected on the number of students accepted for the 8th grade program. I had no one to blame but myself. At the time, I felt that we could accommodate the extra students, and since most students who were identified ended up participating, I felt obligated to keep them. Some of the 8th grade staff who had worked the program before joked that, “You have too big of a heart, and you want to accept everyone.”

The academic classes began on the fourth day of the program. Since RR did not have a strong knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process, I agreed to team teach with him for a few days. The 8th grade students had a cursory knowledge of Let Me Learn, but depending on their 7th grade teachers, they may have had little exposure during the school year. RR and I worked together to create a learning community similar to the one I
outlined in staff training. We did several teambuilding activities as well as learning awareness activities. I noticed that RR picked up on the Let Me Learn terminology rather quickly. He admitted to me that he had no prior knowledge of Let Me Learn because he missed the awareness workshop the past year. As we went through awareness for the students, he said he would love to use Let Me Learn in his high school science labs as a strategy to keep students on task. As RR’s confidence in Let Me Learn increased, I was able to break away for a few minutes and visit the other classrooms.

As I visited the classrooms during the first few days of instruction, I was pleasantly surprised at the level of integration and learning occurring. For instance, I went to see the 8th grade math teachers in their classroom but they were not there. I asked around and found that the teachers took the students outside to do an activity to ensure the learning was more realistic. When I found them outside the students and teachers were smiling as they completed the activity. One of the students said to me, “Mr. Cook, why can’t school be like this?” I laughed because I had gotten that comment so often from the SQUARE students since our first program in 2004. Another student commented, “I didn’t know math could be fun.”

I knew that the first week of the program was going to be hectic because of the additional staff and students, but what I did not realize was the toll it was taking on my leadership and my well-being. I felt obligated to assist with RR, and I was able to leave the class from time to time, but eventually problematic situations began finding their way to me in the classroom. I had a difficult time balancing the number of issues as the coordinator while teaching the students. Not to mention that I always had at the forefront of my thinking that I was researching the program on top of all the other responsibilities
as the coordinator. When I saw non-SQUARE staff members in my travels, they would ask how the SQUARE program was going, and I always replied, “Crazy and busy.”

*Week two: Spread too thin*

I started the second week eager to begin the process of being a leader. In reflecting on the first week, I felt I was too overwhelmed with being in the classroom to be effective. I planned on transitioning out of the classroom midway through the second week. As RR and I went through the Let Me Learn Process with the students, I found that we were not covering the material as quickly as we had planned. I decided to stay in the classroom an extra day so that the students would meet the objectives of the Let Me Learn Process, which was for them to develop an understanding of their learning patterns; strategies to intensify, forge, and tether their patterns; as well as how to work in an intentional group (Johnston, 2005). By Thursday of the second week, each student had a grasp of their learning patterns, and the strategies, but they were unable to understand how to work in intentional groups. I knew that Friday was a field trip and I was not looking forward to being in the classroom during week three.

I talked with TR and RR about how we would be able to get the 8th graders into successful intentional groups and begin the building process during week three. TR, who was able to achieve her goals for the 7th grade students, agreed to work with the 8th graders on Let Me Learn while RR helped the 7th graders plan their building projects. This solution alleviated my issue of being in the classroom during week three. I felt confident about the solution because it was developed collaboratively with all three of the key stakeholders. I also felt relieved that I would be able to begin observations as well as deal with day to day issues of the program.
During week two, I was able to visit some of the other classes. In the 7th grade language arts class, CJ and LB had the students sewing buttons on fabric. When I entered the room the students were so proud to show me what they accomplished. A few of the boys remarked that their skills were just as good as the girls. LB pulled me aside as I was leaving the classroom. She took me in the hall, and almost in tears told me that this program made a difference in the lives of the children. She thanked me and encouraged me to keep doing whatever I could for the SQUARE students.

After leaving that heartfelt conversation with LB I went to the 8th grade math class to visit with HM and LM. They were frustrated with the students. Once again, the issue of the number of students came up. They both expressed to me that they would do their best but the additional five to six children in the classroom was impacting the learning environment. LM said, “We are spending a lot of time disciplining the students, instead of having fun activities.” In years past, most SQUARE classrooms had no more than 14 students per two teachers. This year some classes had 18 or 19 students. I told LM that she and the other staff should start focusing on the students who were causing the most distraction. “Tomorrow,” I said, “is my last day in the classroom. But if you give me the names today, I will stay after and call parents. I will meet with the students first thing tomorrow.” I could sense her frustration, and having worked with LM since the beginning of SQUARE, I knew she was reaching the end of her rope.

Later on that day, LM had talked with the 8th grade staff and then she provided me with three names. In addition, she provided me with specific concerns that I could relate to the parents. When I called the three parents, I was surprised by what each said when I relayed the concerns of the staff. Each parent told me that their son loved the SQUARE
program, and they were always willing to attend. When I talked with one of the parents, I explained that we did not have time for discipline problems in SQUARE and that any further discipline would require me to dismiss the student, she replied:

    Mr. Cook, your program is designed for my son. I know he has problems. I see the problems every day. But this is different. You say you have a learner-centered program, you give awards and do all this stuff for the kids, and it is great. I know because my daughter went through your first program. But my son is different, and I thought, if anyone there could help him it would be you. He loves you Mr. Cook, and he loves your program. Please take him under your wing and show the staff how to love this child. He is just crying out.

After I got off the phone with that parent, I realized that she was right. While it was true that I may have accepted too many students in the 8th grade program, the ones who were the most problems loved the program.

    Before the students arrived the next morning, I called a meeting with the 8th grade staff. I relayed to the staff the conversation I had with the parent, and how she was right. I told the staff that we have the right students this year, albeit maybe too many, but this was our business. I reminded them of the staff training and how the student’s self-efficacy or lack thereof, played a huge part in their success in the program. The staff nodded as I talked. It was almost as if they too were reminded of SQUARE’s place in the lives of the children. RR said, “I will make him my personal project for the rest of the summer. I know he loves building so I will do whatever I can to keep him motivated.”

This meeting was great for the 8th grade team for many reasons. In retrospect I believe it
also served as a turning point for the summer. After that point the 8th grade team came to
terms with the enrollment and the neediness of the students.

*Week Three: Rebuilding the fabric of learning*

I started week three with the intention of visiting as many classes as I could and
working with the staff as much as possible. Although the goals of the week were simple, I
was beginning to feel burnt out. For the past few weeks I had been working day and night
on the SQUARE program, my dissertation proposal, and trying to be a father. I felt the
summer falling through my hands like sand on the beach.

I felt the change in the 8th grade program immediately. There was a different
classroom setting as I walked through during week three. The students who were the
concerns the week before seemed to have a different attitude towards SQUARE. As the
week progressed, I noted that the staff was reporting fewer issues to me. It seemed that
the teachers were trying new strategies with the students, and for the most part they
worked.

On Thursday, I had the pleasure of hosting a visitor from a school district in
Central New Jersey. He had seen my presentation on the SQUARE program in May at a
state conference on at-risk students. Considering all of the issues we had been
experiencing with the 8th grade program, I was a bit nervous when we walked through the
classes. He was amazed that the SQUARE program was everything he had heard it was.
Touring him around allowed me to observe the program in a more detached way. I
wanted to feel like I was seeing it for the first time. I wrote the following notes after our
visitor left:
As I walked through with the visitor today the students were engaged in learning. No classrooms had rows, some were doing group work, and the teachers were facilitating the learning. I saw colored markers on the windows instead of chalk on the board. The visitor remarked to me that it did not feel like school. The 8th grade math students were playing basketball and recording data to take back to their classroom. In the building class, the students were in groups working on their projects. The 7th grade language arts class smelled like a coffee shop because the teachers were trying to create ambiance for the book. The 7th grade language arts class was discussing the book, and when someone made a connection, they went to the body cut out of their character and wrote the connection.

That experience was a very proud moment for me. I felt that even though this summer had tested my leadership, the core essence of the summer program was alive and well for all to see.

The next day I visited the 7th grade math room. I observed how integrated the learning was with the theme. CF and DB were working with the students on measurement. After the lesson, the students were able to measure squares on fabric. CF told the students that this fabric would be used in the language arts room the next day for their activity. She also asked the students about the fabric pieces, and why they would be making a quilt. One student answered, “Because that is what Aunt Peg has on each of the beds in the story.”

*Week four: Team work*

In years past, the fourth week of the SQUARE program was usually more settled down. However, I never felt that the 2008 program ever settled, and this stressed me out.
The week before, I had spent a lot of extra time after SQUARE helping RR cut wood for the building projects. Even though the program was over at 1:00 PM, I rarely had been home before 4:00 PM. I usually spent time with my family from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM and then I started work on my dissertation for the rest of the evening. When anyone would ask how the program was going, I continued to answer, “Crazy and busy.” Usually, however, their response was something like, “You look tired.”

When I arrived each morning during week four, I observed that the staff was still collaborating with each other. The 8th grade team usually met together in the Media Center and the 7th grade team in their language arts room. Most of the conversations were cross disciplinary. They were talking about the novel, math, Let Me Learn, and building project. In my journal I wrote:

The 7th grade team was busy working on the concept of the culminating activity. They were trying to figure out the best way to display the student learning to the parents and community members. The 8th grade team was in the midst of planning an integrated lesson connecting math and language arts. RR was involved as well because he was making the boxes for their voyage to Mars.

It was obvious to me that they really embodied the spirit of thematic instruction, teacher collaboration, and student learning.

Although I was not teaching during the fourth week, I did spend a great deal of time in the building room. By this week both 7th and 8th graders were busy working on their culminating projects. Since TR was pregnant, she asked if I could help her by distributing paint to the students. When I distributed the paint, I was able to talk with the students about their experiences in SQUARE and about the projects they were building.
There was one instance when I was busy doling out paint and LB showed up with a 7th grade student. I immediately thought she was bringing me the girl because something was wrong. LB said that nothing was wrong but rather the girl needed to tell me something. I thought that she wanted to go home on someone else’s bus, and she forgot her note. It was noisy in the building room so the little girl leaned towards me and said, “I think school should be like this all the time.” I gave her a high five, and LB took her back to class. The other students who were standing around waiting for paint agreed with the little girl. I was never more thankful to be distributing paint than I was at that instance.

I observed the 7th grade math program during week four. The students were learning about order of operations. As they were working on problems, I overheard a student mention that she was struggling with the assignment. CF asked how the student used her sequential pattern from Let Me Learn. The student replied that she used it as needed. “Well,” CF said, “We are going to have to intensify your sequence for this lesson,” and they continued to work together. After the students completed their assignment, DB handed out dry erase boards for the next activity. I requested one because I wanted to be part of the lesson. DB asked us to show him and CF the boards when we were finished with the problem. I could see that DB was checking for understanding when he asked everyone to show their boards. I was trying really hard on this assignment but I was never the first one finished. There was a girl on the other side of the classroom who would finish, and then help someone next to her. DB joked that I was getting beat by a 7th grader, so he turned the activity into a healthy competition. With only a few minutes left in class, he put the hardest problems on the board. The other girl and I raced to finish the problems as the other students cheered for me to lose. It was a great way to be
involved in the lesson as I was observing. I only ended up beating her on two of the five problems, so the class felt they had won.

I observed the 8th grade language arts class on a day that they were mostly reading the novel. I assisted the teachers by taking several parts of the book and reading it to the students. The classroom felt more like a college English class than an 8th grade language arts class. We were in the Media Center, and the students sat around a large table. Some had their shoes off, and others were sitting a few feet back off of the table. As I listened to DO or FM read the novel, I scanned the students’ eyes to see if they were tracking. I did this three times during the period and each time they were all engaged in reading along. About half way through the class, the teachers had the students take a break. They brought them over to the windows, which served as their chalkboard in the summer, for a word activity. The students sat around as DO wrote clues on the window with a brightly colored window marker. I watched as one of the students I had previously called home about was able to solve the word puzzle. DO told me that he could probably be the first person each day to solve the puzzle. FM and DO ended the class on a cliff hanger. As they finished the chapter, FM slammed his book shut and said, “See you tomorrow.” “No!” I heard a few students grumble, “I want to know what happens next.” FM laughed and said, “That is why you have to come back tomorrow.”

I went to observe the 8th grade math class and once again I could not find them. Finally, after searching for a few minutes I located them in another classroom. I remembered that they said they would be using another classroom this week when they needed technology. The classroom that they were using inexplicably had no electric power. I went to see the maintenance worker who took me to the breaker box. We saw
that there were many buttons turned off. He said it was probably one of the SQUARE kids playing a joke. I thought about it and I said, “I really doubt that it was a SQUARE student.” He turned the breaker on and I went to see the math class. On my way there I reflected on his comment. I reflected on the way that the SQUARE students were perceived at Henry Catherine Middle School. I told LM and HM about the story and said that I would come back later so I could observe the entire lesson. As I was walking back to my office, I saw another maintenance worker who appeared to have electrical supplies in his hands. I stopped him and asked if was doing electrical work in the building. “Yes I am,” he said, “And I just got shocked in the classroom I was working in. I guess [Ben] didn’t know I was in there. That really woke me up.” Later on, when I saw Ben, he apologized for assuming that a SQUARE student was involved.

When I arrived at the 8th grade math class, LM was introducing the lesson for the day. She said that they were going to be reading the children’s book, *Spaghetti and Meatballs*. Some of the students giggled. The book, which was accompanied by a power point, was about a family who was hosting friends for dinner. I helped her read the book, and participated in the activity. The goal of the activity was to determine how many chairs and tables the family would need as the guests arrived. It was confusing to me, but most of the students were able to understand and apply the concepts. The lesson was further connected when LM reminded the students of a previous activity when the students learned how to calculate the bill at a restaurant. I ended up playing a similar role as I did in the 7th grade math class, although this time I was not as well prepared. The students enjoyed showing me how to answer the questions, and LM joked, “Maybe Mr. Cook needs to go back to 8th grade.”
Week five: Culminating the learning

This week was stressful because I had to finish two observations, assist with the culminating activities, and ensure that everything was completed by Friday. In my journal I chronicled many examples of the stress and how it impacted me. I was having more difficulty getting to work this week. I would oversleep, which caused a ripple effect on my wife and children. Everyone’s schedule at home was affected by me. The later I arrived at work, the more stress I felt when I arrived. Oftentimes, I felt ambushed by questions and problems that needed solutions. I was simply trying to hold on because I knew the end of the program was near.

I started out week five by focusing on the observations. I realized that there was not another week and I could not push them off anymore. I observed TR in the 7th grade Let Me Learn class. Her students had already completed their treasure chests, and she decided to create an activity that complemented the treasure chests. She had the students working in their intentional groups. They were required to design a flag and a story about their treasure chests. Some of the students were very creative with their story. They talked about the different adventures the treasure chest had been through and why they designed the flag a certain way. TR assisted the students as they connected their stories to the novel. This helped the students who were struggling develop ideas. As I walked around, the students were engaged in the activity and appeared to have understood each other’s learning patterns. One group told me their learning patterns and how each other worked together. “[Bill] is high in technical so he helped design our flag. [Julie] is high in sequence and precision so she is able to keep us on the plan, and [Robbie] comes up with
the ideas because he is high in confluence.” There were no arguments or discipline problems as the students completed their task.

My final observation of the program was in the 7th grade language arts class. The objective was for the students to make connections to two chapters in preparation for finishing the novel. The first part of the lesson dealt with highlighting the artwork the main character experienced on her adventure. LB brought in her mother’s paintings to show the students. The students were encouraged to get out of their seats and view the artwork up close. One student remarked, “Your mom is an awesome painter.” As we read the novel out loud to the students, they were encouraged to begin thinking about how they would decode their character. Each student picked a character out of a small treasure box that LB decorated for the students. As we read there were some students on the floor, others on top of their desks. LB and CJ made sure to tell them to be comfortable. There was a smell of coffee in the room because several of the scenes took place in a coffee shop. Although the kids did not drink the coffee, they told me that they had tried it before when LB made espresso. I enjoyed the coffee and read the book to the students with the teachers.

The last day of the program was designed to culminate the learning during SQUARE. The 7th graders and their parents went on a treasure hunt for learning. Teamed together, the parents and students had to answer clues from the staff. Each staff member was assigned a different letter that when decoded would answer a riddle. Even though I was busy helping the 8th graders set up their carnival games, the parents and students sought me out because I had a bandanna. The bandanna was a sign to the participants that I had a clue for the treasure chest. When approached, I asked the students to tell me about
their learning patterns, define what SQAURE meant, or I had them do the SQUARE cheer. When they were successful I gave them a letter for their riddle. Other teachers asked them to solve equations, or recall character traits from the novel. This was a great experience for the parents because they could see first hand what the students learned during the summer. The winning team who solved the riddle and found the treasure was treated to $150 worth of gift certificates, coins, and money all supplied by the teachers in the program.

The culminating event for the 8th graders was the carnival of learning. Each intentional group designed, built, and tested out their unique carnival game. They awarded tickets to those who successfully played their games. In creating a carnival atmosphere, they connected to the novel which took place on the boardwalk in the summer. Similar to the characters in the novel known as barkers, the students were encouraged to try to get people to play their game. There were about 200 people at the carnival and treasure hunt. Following the carnival and treasure hunt, parents and students attended the awards ceremony. Each SQAURE student received a certificate of completion. Each program awarded the most improved and most embodiment of the program. Parents who participated were very thankful of everything the SQAURE program did for their children. Countless parents and grandparents thanked the staff at the conclusion of the ceremony.

Staff interviews

The staff interviews took place at Henry Catherine Middle School on the Monday following the culminating event. This was technically the third day of training because the superintendent wanted the staff to be able to reflect on the program, plan for future
programs, and complete the pre/post test data. Although I felt like I could have used the third day before the program began, having a day after was a very productive decision. In years past, after the SQUARE program concluded, the staff did not get back together until the following year. During this time I was able to interview eight of the ten staff members. Two did not participate because they were uncomfortable being taped.

The emerging themes from the interviews were similar to those found in Cycle II. For the most part, both new teachers and veteran teachers felt as though they benefited from participating in the thematic unit. Teachers reported that the integrated thematic instruction model used during the SQUARE program provided relevance, student learning, professional growth, increased knowledge of Let Me Learn, and enhanced the classroom setting.

Relevance

Each staff member who was interviewed felt that the integrated thematic instruction approach provided relevance for the students. LM said, “Everything is realistic. It is all related to real life concepts.” DO felt that the integrated approach was able to answer a question that she received on a regular basis during the school year, ‘Why do we have to learn this?’ She said, “Not once this summer did one student ask ‘why are we learning this?’ They went from language arts to building to math and it was all connected to a central theme.” CJ felt that the integrated approach helped students’ self esteem. She said, “I really think they used the connections as a positive way to boost their self esteem.”

For many of the staff members, the novel provided both a connection to the other subjects but also relevance. Both LM and LB commented that the novel provided the
backbone for the program. DO felt that the main character in the 8th grade novel was closely associated with the students. “Chad just got out of school for the summer and was not looking forward to going back much like the students. He is also the same age as they are, and they can relate to boardwalk and the shore.” As math teachers, both LM and DB reported that they read the book and took notes to see how they could tie it into math. FM saw the novel as the core of the program because, “If we didn’t do the book, the other activities would not make sense and the book wouldn’t make sense.”

**Student learning**

The concept of student learning has been central to both integrated thematic instruction and the SQUARE program. The staff spent a great deal of time making sure that the students were learning the concepts. LM attributed the learning to the hands on activities, “We did a whole lesson on probability and discussed games of chance and skill. Then when they went to [RR’s] class they knew the difference and it made him realize that these kids understood the purpose of carnival games.” CJ saw the learning as more desirable with the connections, and that, “They can take meaning from what they are learning.” According to LB most of the students at the beginning of the program did not want to show their learning because it was not seen as cool, “Yet,” she said, “as they accepted the learning, there was only discussion of improvement. I think the learning just happened and it wasn’t forced.”

TR, who spent most of the summer focused on helping students understand how they learned, felt that the integrated approach appealed to all types of learners. In terms of what the students learned, TR said:
I see how kids are making more connections, and having a deeper level of comprehension. As they begin thinking more outside the box they gain a deeper level of comprehension. I think the kids’ connections came through when they were learning the same book in LAL and math and in building.

Ironically, one of the ways that learning has been measured during the regular school year has been assessments and grades. None of the teachers mentioned assessments or grades other than LB, who said she was thankful that, “There was no pressure from grades.”

Teacher professional growth

In their own ways, all staff members reported that they had grown as professionals from the integrated thematic unit. They most often reported growth in the area of working with others. All staff members mentioned that they grew from working with others. They saw one another as a team. This concept was foreign to most of the teachers because they tended to work in their own areas during the school year. For instance, DB said, “Professionally, it gave me another look because in high school I am a loner because I am the only one teaching these classes.” CF commented that the 7th grade team was the best group she has ever worked in. In terms of the collaboration she said, “Everybody came up with ideas. But what ever we did, we did it with language arts. So it was always a team between math and language arts which I have never seen before.”

Three of the staff members mentioned that the novel provided the opportunity for professional growth. DB and LM, who both admitted to not reading many novels, read the book. They both alluded to the fact that this experience forced them to read a book.
LB said of the novel, “The novel set me free in many ways. It made me think differently about myself.”

The Let Me Learn Process

According to Ross and Olsen (1993) an emphasis on the different ways students learn has been crucial to creating an integrated thematic unit. Henry Catherine Middle School already utilized the Let Me Learn Process which was why SQUARE used it in the summer. In Cycle I, teachers reported that they had a cursory knowledge of Let Me Learn, but many felt they did not have the time to invest fully. Therefore, prior to the summer SQUARE program most teachers only used it sparingly. After the summer, the teachers were at least able to vocalize how they learned using the Let Me Learn terminology. All of the teachers who were in a team teaching environment were able to not only talk about how they learned, but also how their partner learned as well. The staff was also able to identify the differences between them, and what they had to do to complement each other.

For instance, DO and FM were opposite learners. DO said this about FM, “He knows how sequential I am and I know how confluent he is. I think my sequential keeps him grounded and his confluence gives me a chance to not be so uptight.” CJ and LB discussed their learning differences as well. CJ commented, “Our scores are so different in that she is so confluent and I am so sequential.” DB and CF both recognized they were strong willed learners. Yet, despite that, CF was able to learn from DB. CF, referring to DB said, “My partner was so sequential. He was a God send. I can’t wait to work with him next year.” DB in referring to CF said this, “When we were in the middle of instruction … she would offer another way.”
Let Me Learn, however, did more than help the team teaching atmosphere. Several staff members commented about the students’ growth and development as learners. LB and CJ used Let Me Learn to help decode characters in the novel. FM and DO made it a point to inform the students about the activities. DO said, “We would tell the students that we were going to do sequential, precise, technical, and confluent activities throughout the program.” The staff also recognized the part Let Me Learn played in student grouping. The intentional groups were organized by TR. An intentional group was formed with the intention of balancing learning patterns among three or four people (Johnston, 2005). TR also had the students develop learning profiles both individually and as a group. She felt that this knowledge would, “Allow the learners to worry less about personalities and focus on the task and who was going to do what part of it.” LM felt that the students needed to be intentionally grouped, “Especially when you give them a task.” CJ saw how the intentional groups interacted and said, “They worked so much better in their intentional groups.”

As the leader of the program, the Let Me Learn Process was invaluable to me in understanding the staff. Since we charted the scores during training, they were readily available throughout the summer. I knew that some teachers needed organization because of their use of sequence, or that others needed details because of their precision. Therefore, when I was asked questions, I did not become defensive because I realized that the staff was operating out of their patterns.

Enhanced classroom setting

In my observations and visits to the classroom, I noted that the students were not in rows, and rarely did I see someone teaching up at the chalkboard. In discussing the
classroom setting with the teachers, they felt that integrated thematic instruction allowed them to take chances with their teaching. The most emphasized aspect to the classroom setting was the team teaching environment. SQUARE veterans such as DO and FM as well as HM and LM mentioned the value of team teaching. LM said, “I am a big advocate of team teaching because if I can’t address a student’s need, then I know [HM] can.” In much the same vein, FM felt that, “I trust [DO] implicitly. We work hand in hand on all of the lessons and I think the students benefit from it.”

A few of the staff members in the 7th grade program mentioned smaller classes as an attribute to the enhanced classroom setting. LB said, “Somehow we were able to bring a sense of community to our groups. Smaller instruction is really important.” Even though there was a hands-on component to both grade levels, the teachers continued to infuse hands-on into their classroom. CJ felt that students would not learn about currency from reading the novel. So, “[LB] would bring in money and we would check to see if they covered it in math.” In math, CF and DB attempted to recreate Harrod’s, a store in the novel. DB said, “We related some of the things that Ginny and her Aunt did mathematically. We were able to recreate Harrod’s discount buying.”

**Leadership application**

During the interview, I asked the staff about the impact my leadership had on the integrated thematic unit. Although the results from this could be questionable, I trusted that the staff would be honest with me and not tell me what I wanted to hear. Most of the staff felt that I was the backbone of the SQUARE program, and as CF said, ‘Without you there would be no [SQUARE] program.’
Both DO and LM told me that I was accessible and that I listened to the staff. CJ felt that my leadership style was collaborative, “You take everyone’s suggestions and comments. Then you come up with a collaboration of what everyone said for the best interest for the kids.” CJ and DB commented on my presence in the classroom. Both referenced how I participated in the lesson and it reinforced the student learning. DB said, “I like when you get involved with the kids.” TR felt that my leadership style allowed for fun, and that it was encouraged.

In contrast, FM felt that this year was different for me. He said. “This year you were more of an administrator then an integrator. This year I didn’t find you as accessible.” I was surprised that I did not receive as many comments from the other staff members as I did from FM. As I referenced earlier, as a leader this cycle was extremely stressful, and filled with doubts. Sometimes, I think it was a wonder I survived.

**Conclusion**

Cycle III provided me an opportunity to examine both my leadership style and the integrated thematic unit on a larger scale. Compared to Cycle II, I had many more staff members, subjects, and students. Yet, for me, Cycle III had a cloud over it because of the amount of stress I put on myself to accomplish as much as I could. For the previous four years, the SQUARE program had been a great opportunity to test out my leadership on a small scale. In Cycle III, I doubled everything and in six weeks was able to push the limits of integrated thematic instruction as well as my leadership capacity. The lessons I learned in Cycle III provided the knowledge to move forward to Cycle IV.
CHAPTER VIII.

CYCLE IV FINDINGS

“Who am I?”

Introduction

I originally intended Cycle IV to serve as an opportunity to explore the impact of integrated thematic instruction in the entire basic skills language arts classes for both 7th and 8th grades. However, there were several factors that contributed to a change in my plans. Ironically, both 7th grade basic skills language arts teachers were out on maternity leave. I did not feel comfortable incorporating long term substitutes in my research. I considered this development, coupled with a curricular change in the 8th grade basic skills language arts classes, as an opportunity to re-focus my efforts for Cycle IV. During our final interview, CJ indicated that she would be interested in implementing an integrated thematic unit in her Finding Learning In Education (FLIE) class for at-risk students. After her interview I sought the advice of my advisor, and several trusted critical friends at Henry Catherine Middle School. Each felt that implementing an integrated unit was appropriate within my action research framework. I felt similar to the way I did at the beginning of Cycle II, so I used this change as an opportunity to re-build consensus among the key stakeholders of the project (Senge, 2006).

The last two weeks of August I spent meeting with various stakeholders in the FLIE program. Since the FLIE program has been grant funded I began with the grant director of the project who felt that the integrated thematic approach would enhance the program and provide valuable learning opportunities for the students. I then met with the director of the Child Study Team who, upon hearing my request, gave her 100% support.
She felt that working with CJ on a thematic approach to the curriculum was a perfect match. I met with my principal and superintendent who both supported me as well. This experience taught me the importance of consensus building and collaboration as a key to effective leadership (Senge, 2006).

CJ and I met several times during the last week of August to plan out the integrated thematic unit. During the meetings it was apparent to me that CJ had a vested interest in the success of my project as well as the FLIE program. I shared with her my findings throughout the cycles and ideas about curricular integration. Since CJ participated in the summer SQUARE program, she was well versed in the concept, but was unsure how it would be implemented during the academic year. She made it clear that she wanted the integrated thematic unit to help her students transition into her class, get to know each other, and for her to get to know them. We decided to maintain a similar model that I used in Cycle II, wherein I would assist with the thematic activities each Friday and CJ would work with the students the following week on concepts related to the theme. CJ came up with the theme “Who am I?” because she felt that the novel, *Touching Spirit Bear*, leant itself to self discovery. We decided to begin the first week of school and to continue throughout the next 10 weeks until the first marking period was completed.

*Profile of the staff*

This was CJ’s second year in the FLIE program at Henry Catherine Middle School. Prior to teaching at Henry Catherine she taught in an alternative school. At the time of the study she taught all core subjects: language arts, math, science, social studies,
and supplemental NJASK instruction in one self-contained classroom with at-risk students.

_Data Analysis_

In reviewing and analyzing the data from Cycle IV, several themes emerged. In order to organize the data I chose to analyze the cycle through the weekly sub themes that were composed of observations, correspondence, and journal entries. I then chose to analyze the interview which I conducted after the conclusion of the data collection period. From the interview five themes emerged: student connections, professional growth, use of the Let Me Learn Process®, difficulties with integrated thematic instruction, and classroom setting. Finally, I included the application of my leadership through this project.

_Week One: Who am I?_

It was the first Friday of the school year. When I arrived at 9:04 AM, one of the students reminded me that I was supposed to have been there at 9:00 AM. I quickly responded that I was told by CJ to be there at 9:04 AM on the dot. The class laughed, and the boy who made the original comment, smirked as if to say “you got me this time.” We used the ball of yarn activity that was used to introduce the past two cycles. The students were asked to share three things they did over the summer. At the conclusion of the activity, I made the connection to the thematic approach, and described how our unit would progress.

The next activity was adapted from the novel _Touching Spirit Bear_. Each student was blindfolded and asked to taste the various ingredients in a cake. Separately, the ingredients did not taste good and each student either frowned or said, “Yuck” when
asked about it. I then explained that the purpose of the lesson was to show the students that individually concepts in school may not make sense, but integrated together they tasted much different. CJ then brought out a cake that she made using each of the ingredients the students previously tasted. CJ and I also pointed out that in the FLIE class, teamwork was very important to the success of their academic year.

*Week Two: How do I learn?*

CJ and I both agreed that the students needed an exposure to the Let Me Learn Process. The 8th graders had received a slight exposure the previous year in 7th grade, but the 7th grade students had never taken the LCI or been made aware of the four learning patterns, so I administered the LCI on Thursday so we would have all of the student learning patterns. When CJ and I planned this sub theme she was very excited to observe the students in the activity. She felt that as the students went through the four learning pattern stations, she would be able to learn about what they enjoyed and what they disliked about learning.

We set up four stations that corresponded to the four learning patterns. Each station had an individual activity that connected to both the learning pattern and the novel. For instance, the students had to follow specific directions (sequence) and assemble a totem kabob of fruit. The students had to write a five paragraph detailed essay (precision) about the conditions of the island when the main character arrived. Then students had to build a shelter (technical) out of the limited supplies provided. Finally, they had to perform (confluence) a commercial chronicling why someone would want to take a risk and visit the island. As I observed the students, each struggled with the precision station and enjoyed the technical station. Afterwards, CJ and I had the students
reflect on the activity and why they struggled with some stations and not others. I explained that people learn to avoid the tasks in life that they struggle with and focus on the tasks that come easy to them. CJ was so appreciative of the activity because she shared with me that it allowed her to observe her students as learners beyond their LCI numbers, and that it would help her throughout the year. She invited me back before the next Friday to work with the students on developing their own learner profiles.

The principal observed CJ and I during this activity. She had been supportive of my dissertation research as well as the FLIE program. As the students went through the stations, she asked questions of both CJ and I. Some of the students who had developed rapport with her as 7th graders made sure to show her their work products. Later on that day, she sent CJ and I this email:

Loved what was happening in [FLIE] today! Really is amazing to see those kids at such varying degrees of capabilities working like that. Making Let Me Learn traits so clear and relevant will have an impact on their learning as they slowly begin to internalize it! Thanks for working together for the benefit of these kids.

*Week Three: How are we a team?*

Since most of the previous two weeks were individual activities, CJ and I decided to accomplish two themes from the novel: getting along with others and the importance of nature. The day we went outside was a marvelously beautiful September day. There was not a cloud in the sky and the temperature was comfortable. The students were excited to leave the school and venture outside. As we walked to the woods I noticed that they were sensory overloaded. I thought this was curious because it was not as if we were
at a busy mall or amusement park. Later on, CJ commented that the students were excited to go outside because they associate school with desks and tests.

We had four stations in the woods. At the first station the students and teachers had to untangle each other out of a hand held web. CJ and I let the students take the lead on solving the problem. Although it took a few tries, we eventually were able to untangle each other. The next two stations dealt specifically with trust. At the second station, the students had to pair up. One of the students was blindfolded and the other could see. The person who could see was instructed to take the other student to a tree. At the tree the blindfolded student was encouraged to hug or pat the tree in hopes of remembering where it was. The blindfolded student was led back to the group, and then with their blindfold off, had to find the tree. Each student eventually found his or her tree.

The next station was a moving station where CJ and I took a group of blindfolded students from one place to another. This was modified trust walk because there were times when we jogged with the students. As we were jogging one of the students said to me, “Mr. Cook, this is the most I have ever trusted anybody.” When we arrived at our last station, the students took their blindfolds off and each was given a clipboard with paper and pencils. The purpose of this station was to recreate the silence that the main character of the book had to endure on the island by himself. Although it was only five minutes of silence, the students reported how difficult it was because they never seemed to take quiet time. The students were instructed that during the silence, they could draw whatever came to their mind. Each student, ironically, drew similar pictures instead of writing. The drawings all were stick figures with blindfolds on their heads except for CJ and I. When asked about this, the students said they just drew what was in their minds.
**Week four and five: The circle of life**

CJ and I planned a two week focus on the circle of life that connected to the book. The main character, who was stranded on an island, came close to dying and as he lay on the ground he observed a mother bird trying to feed her little chicks. For the first week, CJ and I attempted to recreate the various bills birds use for eating. Based on the design, the birds only eat certain types of foods. We set up eight different stations and the students were able to go through them individually. One student made a connection with the activity that impressed both CJ and I. He said, “You can’t use the same tools for all of your problems.” Although this was not a planned outcome it did tie into Let Me Learn because we talked to them about different tasks and how different strategies are needed.

We took the students outside to observe nature during the second part of the circle of life theme. Prepared with clipboards for observation notes, cameras to document, and binoculars to see trees and birds, the students went on an adventure to observe the stages of life. Students were required to observe something growing, something dying, and any type of bird. CJ and I split the students into two teams. I took the 7th graders and she took the 8th graders. My group was very task oriented, but they still took time to take in the nice autumn day. We had difficulty spotting a bird with the binoculars, but we were able to document something growing and dying. Once back inside, CJ had the students reflect on the activity. They seemed to have enjoyed it. One student said to me, “Now I saw what Cole saw on the island, and I felt like Cole did too.” I asked him how he felt like Cole, and he said, “It was when we were reading with [CJ]. She had us lie on our backs without moving a muscle as she read that part.” I was unaware that CJ had done that activity with the students, but it showed me that she was making the learning come alive.
It was during this time that my children began to get sick and I missed several days of work. I took advantage of that time to rest and spend time as a father. I knew that I needed a time for the Cycle of Renewal (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005), so any chance I was offered I accepted. I researched acupuncture because of the stress relieving aspects it might provide. I signed up for my first session in hopes of lessening the stress of the dissertation, work, and family. I saw this as the beginning of my Cycle of Renewal (Boyatis & McKee, 2005), but unfortunately I caught whatever virus my children had and I spent two days at home sick.

*Week six and seven: Your personal memory box*

When we decided to have the students make a memory box for the integrated unit, CJ suggested that we allow them to build it on their own. She was curious to observe how their technical pattern would emerge as they were given a kit to assemble. When I arrived at class the students were excited to see me. I felt that they looked forward to the integrated activities. I told the students that we were going to be making memory boxes and each had a station set up outside with a hammer, nails, and a kit. The students went right outside and began to tear into the kits. There was only one student who bothered to look at the directions, and that was the only student who used sequence first. The student in the class who was the most technical assembled the memory box in about three minutes. He was so proud of himself, and all of the other students asked him to help which he gladly did. By the end of the activity, each student had assembled and sanded their memory box.

The following week the students designed and painted their memory boxes. As I was handing out paint, I felt similarly to how I felt this past summer in Cycle III. I
thought again about my leadership and how I continued to hand out paint. It was during memory box painting that CJ and I observed the students’ lack of attention to details. The students did not take their time painting the boxes even though we suggested that these would be part of the culminating activity for parents and administrators to see. After their memory boxes were painted, CJ and I had the students write about them. The students were required to write about the outside and why they designed it they way they did. They also had to write about the inside of the box and five items they would place in the box. Students were encouraged to bring in family pictures, something they had success with, a goal for the future, favorite music, or a family heirloom.

As I reviewed the requirements of the memory box, the students became easily disengaged. CJ kept reinforcing the theme and the book connections as I reviewed, but they seemed to be unhappy with us. It turned out that they saw this part of the assignment as boring, and they wanted to do something fun. CJ and I reflected on this after the class. She was disappointed that they behaved the way they did. We concluded that one of the downsides of doing hands on and fun activities is that the students associated me with that every week. Later on we talked about the fact that memories for the students might not have been pleasant, and therefore something they chose not to re-visit.

*Week eight and nine: Your personal totem*

We set the memory boxes aside temporarily because we wanted to focus on the culminating activity: the totem poles. At the conclusion of the story, the main character was required to build a totem pole that described himself and his surroundings. CJ and I wanted to have the students carve real wood similar to how the main character did it in the story, but we were unable to find a suitable plan. It was also during this time that I
sensed CJ was getting overwhelmed with the project. There were only a few weeks remaining in the marking period and she expressed concern at the amount of time the totem construction would take. Sensing this in one of our meetings I suggested that we slow down and finish on a good note without being overwhelmed. She agreed with me, but she still wanted the kids to build a totem pole. I came up with an idea:

What if we have the students research a totem animal? Then they could draw and color it on nice paper. Next we could have the students tape it to the bottom of their memory box. At the culminating activity we would stack up all the boxes which would give us the totem pole. That way we could connect the two projects, and surprise them at the culminating activity. They will not even realize they built a class totem pole.

CJ loved the idea because it served the purpose but it would not require the class, or us for that matter, to stress out to finish the project.

With this new plan in place, we spent a week helping the students identify and write about an animal that had similar characteristics as them. The students enjoyed this because they felt it was exactly what the main character of the book did. CJ and I showed them examples of modern day totems, as well as Native American totems. They enjoyed going through the packet that CJ developed with animals that corresponded to birth months. All of the students felt their birth month animal described their personality. They had trouble drawing the animal, and attempted to complete the task as quickly as they could. I talked with CJ about this and she felt that they were using the rewards system as a way to get out of doing precise work.
The ninth week of the cycle the students put together their entire memory box/personal totem. Reluctantly, they wrote about the various items they brought from home. CJ and I also had the students practice their presentation on “Who am I?” in front of the class. CJ pointed out that they were disappointing her on the conclusion to the project because, once again, she felt they were not putting enough effort into the final product. I agreed with her, and we both tried to do everything we could to assist the students with finishing the project.

*Week Ten: Culminating activity*

We planned to have the culminating activity on October 31 since our original meeting back in August. To us it made perfect sense because it was the last day of the marking period, it was the last day before a week’s vacation, and we felt that parents would have enough time to attend. What CJ and I were not able to plan for was the Philadelphia Phillies winning the world series of baseball and having a parade on October 31. When CJ and I found out the parade was scheduled the same day we decided to continue and hope for the best.

Unfortunately, half the class was at the parade and not at the culminating activity. Nevertheless, the culminating activity went well. Each student who was present had a parent attend. Their presentations were excellent, and it was obvious they internalized the theme. One student, in presenting his memory box, almost had the participants crying because it was so touching. CJ did a great job explaining the integrated unit and how much impact it had on her class. After CJ explained the role of the novel, one of the mothers said, “This is how books should be taught. It made it come alive for these kids and they will never forget it.” At the end of the culminating activity, CJ and I built the
class totem, and explained to them that all their hard work and effort truly made them one team.

Interview

The interview CJ took place on November 12, 2008 in her classroom. Since a week and a half had passed since the culminating activity, I felt CJ had enough time to reflect on the cycle but it was also fresh in her mind. I used a semi-structured (Glesne, 2006) approach to the interview since CJ had participated in an interview for Cycle III. The emerging themes were student connections, professional growth, use of Let Me Learn, difficulties with integrated thematic instruction, and classroom setting.

Connections

Integrated thematic instruction encouraged students to make connections with their learning through use of a central theme. CJ felt that the FLIE students made many connections through the ‘Who am I?’ unit. When asked how the students made connections she said, “I think that the excitement really allowed them to make connections with the book.” The FLIE students, in her opinion, enjoyed the thematic approach because it was fun and different than their usual school experience. In addition to the connections, CJ felt that the unit provided relevance for their learning.

The FLIE students all used technical reasoning as their first pattern when learning. Realizing this, CJ placed a great deal of emphasis on providing relevance in her teaching, as well as the thematic activities. For instance, CJ commented, “I always made the prompts relevant to something we read or an activity we did. A lot of it dealt with the theme ‘Who am I?’” The students, according to CJ made connections with the main character of the book because of his age, experience in school, and his hands-on approach
to learning. In addition, CJ felt the integrated unit brought the main character alive in the classroom because of the various activities that allowed the students a chance to experience what he was going through in the book.

*Professional growth*

CJ reported that she grew as a professional in the previous cycle as a SQUARE teacher. She discussed the amount of information she learned about the Let Me Learn Process as well as integrated thematic instruction. She made it clear after the Cycle III interview that she intended to implement a similar model during the school year. Based on that, she was an excited and willing participant in Cycle IV. CJ commented that this experience had allowed her to learn more about her students and to map out her year, and she also believed it had the students increase their writing skills.

CJ was able to observe the students during the first two weeks of activities and in turn learned a great deal about them. “Integrated thematic instruction helped me to understand how the students work individually and in team,” she said in reference to the beginning of the unit. She used that information throughout the remainder of the unit when she assessed the students, and allowed them to do alternate assignments. The integrated unit served CJ’s need for the students to understand what they were learning. She said, “The students knew what to expect for the first marking period. Everything was planned out. They knew you would be coming in every Friday and that the unit would be over on October 31.” In addition, CJ noted that this experience helped her assist the students with writing. Throughout the unit, CJ did not give one multiple choice assessment. She felt that the integrated unit was structured for the students’ growth, and
therefore she was comfortable with them communicating their knowledge through discussion and participation.

*Let Me Learn*

The understanding and use of Let Me Learn throughout this cycle was critical according to CJ. From the beginning, the unit required students to focus on who they were. Understanding who they were included who they were as learners. To accomplish this, CJ said:

*We took time to focus on them and we were really focusing individually to understand how they learn. The Let Me Learn scores also helped us understand why they hated writing. They had low precision.*

CJ felt that Let Me Learn was a big part of the success of the integrated unit. The students reported to CJ that they felt more confident in their classes as a result of their knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process. For instance, CJ said, “The students used their Let Me Learn knowledge in all subjects. Several times a day they would refer back to their patterns.” Interestingly, having the students make connections with the theme was one of the overarching goals of this cycle, and as CJ pointed out, “More so then the theme, these students attached to Let Me Learn when we were doing the activities.”

*Difficulties with Integrated Thematic Instruction*

Although CJ was extremely pleased with the implementation of the integrated thematic unit, she did express how difficult it was because of the amount of planning time, the need to work with more than one person’s ideas, and the integration into all the subjects. In addition to the weekly planning sessions with me, CJ was still required to plan for all of the different levels in the classroom as well as different subjects. There
were a few times when we rescheduled a planning meeting because she was busy tending to other things. CJ also mentioned that she was used to doing all of the planning for the class herself, and that, “Having more than one person’s ideas was good, but hard at the same time.” CJ understood that to effectively integrate all of the subjects using the theme was a monumental task in the short amount of time. “It was very hard getting all of the subjects included in the theme,” she said. CJ felt that there were more positives than difficulties with the unit, and the major positive impact was in the classroom

**Classroom setting**

The best example of integrated thematic instruction, according to CJ was the impact it had on the classroom setting. CJ felt that the activities on Fridays were engaging to the students, and that her classroom was transformed by the focus on the theme. Since the beginning of the program last year, the FLIE classroom was purposely designed to not seem like a regular classroom. This classroom design helped when we did the integrated activities because of the flexibility of the tables, technology, and space in the classroom. CJ pointed out that the integrated lessons helped the students by expanding their horizons. For instance she said:

Even though the 8th graders read the book last year they never complained this year because we allowed them to use their learning patterns and by having them go outside and do hands on activities. Through the activities, they were able to demonstrate how they learned and the way they learned.

CJ and I considered the outside activities as an extension of the FLIE classroom because it tied into the learning in the traditional classroom. CJ and I discussed how the students were excited when we took them outside because as CJ pointed out, “The
students associate school with desks and taking notes.” In addition to going outside, the students were able to communicate with each other, which CJ felt had a positive impact on the classroom climate. CJ was appreciative of having the integrated unit at the beginning of the year because it, “Started out the year with having them work as a team I and I think that built the morale of the classroom.”

Leadership application

I learned a lot about myself as a leader through the fourth cycle of this dissertation. Through the majority of this cycle I was very close to becoming dissonant (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005) with myself and others. I was juggling two sick children, my own sickness, work, and researching for the dissertation. I felt that it was CJ who kept me motivated throughout the process because she became such a staunch believer in the concept of integrated thematic instruction and the Let Me Learn Process.

Thanks to CJ’s support and the rest of the FLIE team, I was able to lead the thematic unit in a collaborative manner. There were many times CJ made me realize my servant leadership development because she developed ideas regarding the theme on her own. I felt she transformed her classroom into a learner-centered, integrated environment and that I was merely her co-collaborator. Because of her experience, I expected that she would continue to develop integrated themes and utilize the Let Me Learn Process in the future.

Conclusion

The fourth and final cycle in my action research based dissertation was an appropriate setting to explore my leadership through implementing an integrated thematic unit in collaboration with a teacher who was responsible for the most at-risk students at
Henry Catherine Middle School. This experience assisted me in working collaboratively with a teacher who grew tremendously as a result of participating. CJ made sure that each week the students were making connections with their learning through the theme. Many of these students had not been motivated in an educational classroom in years. As the leader of this project, I was rewarded each time I entered the classroom and the students became so excited and asked about the next activity. Working with CJ was a fitting conclusion to my research because I was able to see how far she had developed since the summer, and at the same time she inspired me to believe in the importance of this process. I was also able to reflect on how much I had grown as a leader since Cycle II the first implementation cycle.
CHAPTER IX

DISCOVERIES

Introduction

In this dissertation I implemented integrated thematic instruction as a curricular tool to assist teachers working with at-risk students. The basis of this change initiative emerged from the extensive literature pointing toward integrated thematic instruction as a viable option when educating students (Aschbacher, 1991; Barab & Landa, 1997; Bolak, Bialach & Dunphy, 2005; Bragaw, Bragaw & Smith, 1995; Burton, 2001; Greenhawk, 1997; Hill, 2004; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; McGhee, 2001; Mulholland, 2005; Ross & Olsen, 1993; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan et al., 1995; Weir, 1996; Yorks & Follo, 1993; Zambo & Cleland, 2005). I utilized an action research based approach that evolved into four distinct cycles. Throughout the cycles I employed mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative measures in order to understand the change process I implemented (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Within each cycle I used several frameworks to ensure that the change process was effective. I focused on re-culturing teachers’ approach to at-risk students as opposed to restructuring their curriculum (Fullan, 2007). I also focused on providing a systems thinking (Senge, 2006) awareness that the educational system must be looked at as a whole instead of individual parts.

When I began the dissertation research, Henry Catherine Middle School was on the brink of undergoing a Collaborative Assessment for Planning and Achievement (CAPA) review, which would have had a devastating impact on the school culture. Thankfully, I found out in November of 2008 that the middle school achieved a safe harbor rating, and therefore would not be reviewed by the state CAPA team. There were
many factors that led to the improvement in the assessment results. According to an 
administrator who worked closely with the process, the summer SQUARE program was 
one of the factors that raised student achievement. Although this was not the intent of the 
dissertation, the unintended results ensured that the summer program and integrated 
thematic instruction would continue at Henry Catherine Middle School for years to come.

In this chapter, I focused on the discoveries I made throughout the four cycles of 
action research. I then tied the discoveries to the literature review, as well as my 
conceptual frame work for change. I specifically covered numbers one, two, and three of 
my original research questions in this chapter, and questions four and five have been 
addressed in chapter 10.

1. What were the perceptions of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine 
   Middle School?
2. How did integrated thematic instruction enhance the classroom setting?
3. How did teachers report their professional growth during an integrated thematic 
   instruction based unit?
4. How did my leadership impact the infusion of integrated thematic instruction at 
   Henry Catherine Middle School?
5. How did knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process® assist my leadership and the 
   impact of the implementation of integrated thematic instruction?

Perceptions of integrated thematic instruction

Throughout the dissertation, I was able to collect data on the perception of 
integrated thematic instruction from a majority of the Henry Catherine Middle School 
staff. Yet, it was the ten teachers I worked with in Cycles II, III, and IV that provided the
deepest perceptions about integrated thematic instruction. The perceptions I discovered through the dissertation were obtained in various ways including surveys, interviews, formal and informal discussions, and meetings.

The discoveries from Cycle I were very encouraging to my dissertation and there were many links between what the teachers perceived and what the literature suggested for implementing integrated thematic instruction. True integration required collaboration, learning awareness, and themes set in the real world (Beane, 1993; Drake, 1993, Olsen, 2004; Ross & Olsen, 1993). In analyzing the data, a majority of the teachers were willing to implement integrated thematic instruction, and specifically, 63% were willing to attempt it by working with another colleague. Effectively implementing integrated thematic instruction required a collaborative environment (Beane, 1996; Drake, 1998; Guskey, 2002; Kovalik, 1993; Hmelo-Silver, 2004). In the open ended responses, many respondents wrote that integrated thematic instruction could create relevancy for learning, which would appeal to students who required a relevant learning environment. This was similar to Nunn (1995) who pointed out that providing relevance for student learning can have positive influence. With the many links to the literature, the results of the survey provided insight into the possibilities of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School.

When I analyzed the data it appeared that a majority of the teachers were not only interested in implementing integrated thematic instruction, but they also felt it would aid student achievement. At the time of the survey, the middle school was in year three of not meeting adequate yearly progress as determined by the New Jersey State Department of Education. I was under the impression that the administration and staff were willing to
attempt research-based initiatives that could raise assessment results. In fact, 63% of the respondents felt that integrated thematic instruction aided student achievement. This was similar to Kerry (2007) who found that learning was deeper and more effective in an integrated setting compared to a traditional setting. The links between my survey and the literature pointed toward integrated thematic instruction as a viable option in raising student achievement at Henry Catherine Middle School. In addition, the survey uncovered similar links found in the literature regarding the potential roadblocks of integrated thematic instruction.

According to Shanahan and Robinson (1995) integrated thematic instruction has been difficult to implement. Brandt (1991) indicated the factors that inhibited integrated thematic instruction were poor implementation, discipline-trained teachers, departmental cultures, non-teamed students, and lack of common planning time. At Henry Catherine Middle School, the teachers echoed Brandt’s (1991) factors inhibiting implementation by stating that a lack of: teacher’s willingness to change, adequate planning time, common preparation time with interested colleagues, and staff buy in would make it difficult to attempt integrating the curriculum. However, despite the fact that teachers wrote these responses on Cycle I survey, it was not until Cycle II that I realized how these factors contributed to the implementation at Henry Catherine Middle School.

Each staff member I worked with throughout Cycles II, III, and IV had their own perspectives of integrated thematic instruction, but there were many similarities as well. The main differences were among those staff members who participated in the study during the school year and those who participated in the summer. For instance, FB and CJ who participated during the school year and the summer, both felt that integrated
thematic instruction required a lot of planning time in order to be effective. Planning the unit required weekly meetings, and sometimes with all of their other responsibilities it became difficult to find adequate time. This was different than those staff members who participated in the summer. Since the setting was different, and structurally lent itself to integration, the staff found the planning time to be another opportunity to work collaboratively.

All of the staff, regardless of the cycle they participated in, felt that integrated thematic instruction was an effective tool in assisting students with their learning. With the understanding that the brain required connections and patterns in order to learn (Johnston, 1998; Ross & Olsen, 1993), the teachers were able to experience first hand the benefits of an integrated approach. With that said, each of the teachers spoke cautiously of the ability to implement the model during the school year because of state assessments, preparation time, course load, and space.

*Enhancing the classroom setting*

I was able to develop a better understanding of the role integrated thematic instruction played in enhancing the classroom setting during Cycles II, III, and IV. Each cycle presented a unique opportunity to explore the classroom setting as well as enhance it with the integrated thematic unit. Throughout the cycles, I played the role of the participant observer as I was both a change agent in the setting as well as an observer of the process.

In the second and fourth cycles of my action research, I implemented a single subject integrated unit. The single subject model (Ross & Olsen, 1993) was used as a basis for implementing the integrated thematic instruction. Using a single subject
integrated model allowed the teacher and I to integrate other subjects within the subject they taught (Ross & Olsen, 1993). We spent a great deal of time planning the units for Cycle II and IV, which was similar to the previous research (Barab & Landa, 1997; Barton & Smith, 2000; McDonald & Czerniak, 1994; Palmer, 1991). The teachers and I met weekly and talked daily about the various activities relating to the integrated unit. In Cycle II, FB and I created a planning wheel (Figure 6.1) that provided a framework for our weekly sub-themes (Palmer, 1991). CJ and I, however, did not feel the planning wheel was necessary in Cycle IV although we did use sub-themes. It was my hope that the weekly sub-themes and activities enhanced the classroom setting, and provided the opportunity for the teachers to grow as professionals.

During the research for Cycle II and IV, I paid particular attention to the role integration played in the classroom setting. The thematic unit and the sub-themes occurred in the classroom through various hands-on activities, the Let Me Learn Process, and writing strategies. The students were exposed to a theme or sub-theme on a Friday and then were encouraged to connect it to the overall theme during the following week of instruction. Both FB and CJ reported that the classroom setting was enhanced as a result of the integrated activities. They both reported that the students appeared to be more engaged during the integrated activities, that they had more opportunity to make connections to their learning, and that it was fun. I can attest to the fact that we had fun with each other and the students during the integrated activities. There were many opportunities to laugh. In addition, both recognized how the integrated unit enhanced the classroom setting beyond the Friday sessions. By the end of the unit, FB said that his students were making connections on their own between the required material in the
remedial language arts class, their other subjects, and the overall theme. CJ said that her students were using the Let Me Learn Process and connecting it back to the main theme.

In the interview, both FB and CJ were pleasantly surprised by the connections the students made on their own. For years FB felt it was his responsibility to make the connections for the students. After the students went through the integrated unit, he found that they made the connections on their own. In our interview, CJ talked about how the students would remind her of their learning patterns when she was teaching other subjects. Sometimes the students told her that a particular assignment was going to require a lot of precision, or they would ask if there were any hands-on opportunities so they could be technical. These findings impressed CJ and encouraged her to continue with the process.

During Cycle IV, I had the opportunity to host both the principal and school psychologist to observe the classroom setting. The principal sent an email to both CJ and I after visiting the integrated activity on the Let Me Learn Process. She pointed out that she observed how the integrated theme kept all the learners engaged throughout the lesson. This email encouraged and motivated CJ and I that our efforts were being valued and recognized. The school psychologist was impressed with the hands-on learning opportunities when she visited during the construction of the memory boxes. She said, “It was amazing to see the students engaged in the learning with their hands because they probably didn’t get many opportunities to do this in school before.”

Utilizing the summer SQUARE program was an important step in my dissertation project. Unlike Cycle II and IV, I met with very few structural roadblocks during Cycle III, and I enjoyed the freedom to determine the philosophy of the staff training and
curriculum delivery. The teachers had common planning times, the same group of students for their grade, and each class was set up in a collaborative manner. According to previous research these factors were important in the overall success of the integrated unit (Bintz, Moore, Hayhurst, Jones & Tuttle, 2006; Brandt, 1991; Beane, 1993; Drake, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2007; George, 1996; Shanahan, 1997; Shanahan, Robinson et al., 1995). The goals for Cycle III were similar to the other cycles in that I was interested in understanding the role curriculum integration played in the classroom, and whether teachers felt they grew from the experience. However, Cycle III was different from the other cycles in that there were 10 staff members, two grades, and five weeks in the summer.

The classroom setting during the summer SQUARE program was a learner-centered, hands-on environment. Many visitors commented on the setting. Some felt it did not feel like school and others remarked at how engaged the students appeared to be. In my observations I found that the teachers used bright colors in their decorations, student work was prominently displayed, and real life connections were made with various activities that emphasized learning. The teachers facilitated the classrooms as a team, and each collaborated with the students to enhance learning. According to Bridgeland et al. (2006) students have been shown to be more likely to drop out when they felt that school was boring and disconnected. In reflecting on this connection, perhaps the SQUARE program became a model setting for drop out prevention. The classroom setting in the summer SQUARE program was not boring for the students, and the learning was connected through the use of the integrated theme.
The 7th grade staff reported that having smaller class sizes made the integrated theme and learning possible. They said that the classroom promoted a sense of community because the students were required to use each other as resources. The 8th grade staff attributed the hands-on building project and the relevance throughout each subject as major factors in the classroom setting. Unfortunately, the majority of at-risk students in American classrooms tend to receive fewer innovative techniques, less literature, and more drill and skill, basic skill oriented instruction (Kohn, 1999). With the findings from the first three cycles, I felt empowered to expand the concept of curricular integration to the teachers of the students who needed it most.

In viewing the wide range of participants in the dissertation process, their perceptions of integrated thematic instruction were mostly similar. Philosophically, most teachers at Henry Catherine Middle School, regardless of their participating level in the study, felt that integrated thematic instruction assisted students in learning. Ironically, whether or not they participated in the implementation cycles, most teachers felt that truly integrating Henry Catherine Middle School would be extremely difficult due to the current structure of the school day. Obviously, the perceptions of those who participated in the implementation cycles were deeper than those who did not participate. I felt that those teachers who were able to participate in the implementation cycles were not only able to experience the positive impact of integrated thematic instruction, but that they also grew as a professional from the experience.

**Professional growth**

The ten staff members who participated in the implementation cycles of the dissertation cycle all reported that they grew as professionals from the experience, albeit
in different ways. It was interesting to discover that the professional growth impacted both veteran and non-veteran teachers alike. The professional growth went beyond curriculum lines of language arts and math as well as those in traditional settings and those in non-traditional settings. These discoveries impacted me as the leader of the project because I felt confident that the experience was mutually beneficial.

During Cycle II, I worked with FB who has been teaching at Henry Catherine Middle School for 27 years. Entering the cycle I doubted that a teacher with that much experience could grow from working with me and the integrated theme. At the conclusion of the project, FB told me that he grew in his understanding of the practical implementation of the Let Me Learn Process and the role integrated thematic instruction played in assisting students making connections. Prior to participating in the research project, FB told me that he usually provided the connections for the students in the classroom. He felt that he would utilize some of the activities we did in Cycle II with his students in the future to provide the opportunity for making connections. In my opinion, FM developed insights into students’ abilities and his ability to work with them which in turn allowed him to grow as a professional.

During Cycle III, each staff member reported that he or she grew and changed from the experience. Three of the staff members indicated that reading and integrating the summer novel provided the opportunity for professional growth. All staff members mentioned that by working in a collaborative environment they were able to develop as a team. Apparently, this experience in the summer SQUARE program differed from their experience during the regular school year. In my opinion this was accomplished by using a re-culturing approach as opposed to a re-structuring approach (Fullan, 2007). From the
staff training through the final day of the program, team work and collaboration were valued, reinforced, and encouraged. The teachers also reported that understanding each other as learners through the Let Me Learn Process provided the necessary tools needed to work as a team (Johnston, 2005). The basic premise to the summer SQUARE program was that a systems thinking (Senge, 2006) mindset would not only provide support among the staff, but would also transform the classroom learning experience for the students. In viewing the system, teachers were encouraged to look at learning through the entire educational experience for the students.

During the interview at the conclusion of Cycle IV, CJ revealed to me that she continued to grow as a professional throughout Cycle III and into IV. In Cycle III she was able to see how the integrated unit brought the student learning alive, and how the Let Me Learn Process enhanced the relationship between the teacher and student. She admitted this was what intrigued her to continue participating with the research project. She felt that the integrated unit in Cycle IV allowed her to plan out the entire first marking period, learn how her students learn, and have her students increase their writing skills.

I felt confident that the participating teachers grew as professionals as a result of the research project. As I stated before, I felt that this experience was mutually beneficial for both the teachers and me. They were able to learn something new about learning, and curriculum integration, and I was able to implement a change project for use in my dissertation. In addition, I grew in my understanding myself as a leader using a unique approach to remediating at-risk students.
Additional discoveries

CJ felt that the Let Me Learn Process was a key factor in the effectiveness of the integrated unit. She shared in the interview that by focusing on the students as learners she was able to identify their individual traits as well as their group traits. “The Let Me Learn scores also helped us understand why they hated writing. They had low precision.”

In analyzing their Let Me Learn scores, CJ and I realized that her class’s precision average was a 17, which indicated that they avoided using details (Johnston, 1998). With this knowledge, we targeted their precision with the integrated activities in order for the students to develop strategies that would help them provide more details when they spoke and wrote. This also translated into a focus on writing which CJ felt desperately needed attention.

By focusing on the students’ natural avoidance of precision, CJ found that their writing improved. Although the students felt that the writing we did in the integrated unit was the least fun aspect of the experience, CJ saw some of the students make leaps and bounds with their writing. She attributed this to the relevant and connected aspect of the integrated unit. The growth in the writing with the FLIE students was similar to what Kerry (2007) found when students were given higher order tasks in an integrated setting.

Implications of change and organizational dynamics

I felt confident that the discoveries from the four cycles adequately addressed the first three research questions posed prior to the research. These discoveries were connected to what I found in the literature for organizational culture, change theories, and integrated thematic instruction. In viewing the entire dissertation as a process of discovery, I learned how the complexity of the organization provided both challenges and
opportunities that, through the action research model, allowed me persist no matter the conditions.

With the advent of the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) school districts’ curriculum and budget have become tightly regulated. These tight regulations have caused schools to go into an over bounded system (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Henry Catherine Middle School has been no different, and this was obvious as I attempted the change initiative. Throughout two of the cycles, organizational roadblocks had a major impact on the overall project. Ultimately, this project was implemented as a result of bargaining and negotiating because I was not in a position of authority, but rather possessed an expertise form of power (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Understanding the shared basic assumption of learning was important to implementing the integrated model into the culture of Henry Catherine Middle School (Schein, 2004). Even in the tight regulations the administration supported the dissertation research because they truly believed that learning was central to education. Structurally, it may not have made sense for a guidance director to be leading an action research project on integrated thematic instruction, but symbolically it made perfect sense (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Since student learning has been, and will continue to be an espoused theory of the Henry Catherine Middle School, I felt that anyone in the district could participate in projects that addressed student achievement. With that being said, it would have been naïve to have thought that this change initiative did not produce organizational defensiveness (Argyris, 1990).

My position of Middle School Guidance Director has had very little to do with curriculum. Since I chose to focus on the curriculum for at-risk students, there were some
staff members who questioned why I was allowed to be in the classroom researching and observing teachers for my dissertation. I felt that this was an example of the organizational defenses (Argyris, 1990) that affected some staff members. There have been those at Henry Catherine Middle School who have viewed the organization through the traditional roles and structure (Bolman & Deal, 2003) without taking into consideration that the shared vision (Senge, 2006) of the organization was student learning. Thankfully, the administration understood that the purpose of this research project was to explore another avenue for improving student learning for at-risk students.

In chapter II I developed a conceptual framework for the change aspect to this dissertation. I espoused that I would use Fullan’s (2007) re-culturing as opposed to re-structuring model, and Senge’s (2006) systems thinking approach. As I reflected on the process of change at Henry Catherine Middle School, I felt I was able to, within the framework of the dissertation, begin the process of re-culturing and systems thinking.

I tried to convey to the staff that the concept of integrated thematic instruction was not a quick fix solution for the achievement gap. I wanted the staff to experience the integrated thematic unit and reflect on how it made them feel and how the students felt. For some of the staff this was difficult. In fact, DB, who identified himself as a traditional teacher, was able to see the positive impact it had on the students, but admitted that he would continue to approach his upper level math courses at the high school in the same way he had before. He was also able to see, however, that the integrated unit made sense for the SQUARE kids because they had not previously been successful with math. DB hoped that he could continue with the summer program in the future because it was fun and rewarding. Each of the staff was able to make the connection that integrated thematic
instruction would benefit all students and teachers in the district if the schedule was changed. Until that happened, I felt confident that the staff were able to experience the concept without being forced into it by some type of re-structuring program.

For me the bigger question became did the staff develop a systems thinking (Senge, 2006) approach to remediation? According to Senge (2006) in order for a systems thinking approach to take root individuals need to understand how interconnected they are to rest of the other staff, problems can not be solved in isolation, and opportunities to learn must be fostered at all levels of the organization. I felt that the best example of systems thinking came through Cycles II and IV. It was during these cycles that FM and CJ were able to see how their roles were part of an interconnected web of influences on the students. If the integration was done properly, the students reported their own connections to FM and CJ. For instance, when FM and I were implementing the integrated unit, his students began to talk to other teachers about the unit, which lead to further conversations about how disconnected the learning really was at Henry Catherine Middle School. FM felt this was because teachers had become so subject specific, and ultra-focused on their curriculum that no one had time for each other anymore. He said in his interview that he would love to participate in an integrated unit with others in his grade level because he had no idea what was even covered in Social Studies. CJ was able to see that the FLIE students ended up in her classroom because they were unable to see the big picture of middle school. Even if she never integrated, she felt that the students were lost because of the subject specific nature of post elementary school teaching.
The perceptions of the teachers at Henry Catherine Middle School, although a first step in the process, laid the foundation for the conversation to begin. As I stated before, there were many factors that contributed to fact that integrated thematic instruction could not progress school wide. Structural limits such as limited planning time, grouping of students, and adequate classroom time were factors that until changed, severely limited the scope of curricular integration at Henry Catherine Middle School (Bintz et al., 2006; Kysilka, 1998; Shanahan et al., 1995).

I was not surprised that the teachers involved in Cycles II, III, and IV reported that the integrated unit enhanced their classroom setting and provided for professional growth because of what was presented in the literature review. Fortunately, the teachers involved with this study welcomed tools such as the Let Me Learn Process (Johnston, 2005), and planning webs (Palmer, 1991) to enhance their classroom setting. Many of the teachers found new ways to bring the learning alive in the classroom through the use of a novel. They began to view the importance of connecting the real world learning with the daily objectives in the classroom (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998; Campbell & Harris, 2001; Hootstein, 1994; Wood & Jones, 1994). They also learned the importance of developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with each other (Aschbacher, 1991; Drake, 1998; Kovalik, 1993).

When given the opportunity to collaborate with their peers, the teachers reported a new sense of understanding the importance of working with others. Most teachers felt that it was difficult to collaborate with their peers during the school year because of time constraints and their schedule. For integrated thematic instruction to blossom, there must be a time and place for teacher collaboration. In their own way, each staff used the
knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process to understand how they learned, how the other staff learned, and more importantly how the students learned (Johnston, 2005). This aspect of the research project aided the teachers, the students, and me. With learning at the core of the project we were all able to use the Let Me Learn vocabulary to describe the phenomenon that connected us as a team.

*Topics for further research*

There were many topics for further research that this dissertation uncovered. These topics could provide more data that would support integrated thematic instruction as an instructional tool to assist teachers and students. If given more time would be interesting to consider the ideas. Since my research focused on teachers I thought it would be interesting to study students’ perspectives of a comparative study with an integrated unit as opposed to a traditional unit. Another option that was mentioned by FM in our interview was a pilot study that grouped core teachers at Henry Catherine Middle School into a team with common planning times, the same students, and adequate resources for integrated events and activities. One of the ideas that I had about a future study would be to compare how the core content curriculum standards and state assessment preparation were covered through an integrated thematic unit.
CHAPTER X.

LEADERSHIP THEORIES-IN-USE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to conclude my dissertation with what I discovered as leader throughout the process. To accomplish this I used a similar framework as I did in Chapter II by focusing on my espoused theories of servant, transformational, and social justice leadership. In addition to my three main theories, I also espoused to use reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) and emotional intelligence (Boyatis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, et al, 2002) as grand theories to connect my entire leadership platform. In order to make sense of my journey, I utilized data from interviews, journals, the Let Me Learn Process®, and the results of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Appendix D) to explore my leadership during this action research-based dissertation (Glesne, 2006).

Espoused theories of leadership

In researching theories for Chapter II, I gravitated to servant, transformational, and social justice. Each of the theories provided a framework for me to operate from as a leader. However, putting these theories into practice ended up being one of the more challenging aspects to my dissertation. Throughout each of the cycles I was not only attempting to implement integrated thematic instruction, I was also exploring myself as a leader and how my leadership shaped the change project and was shaped by it. In their own way, the theories provided the basis for how I was going to answer research questions four and five:
4. How did my leadership impact the infusion of integrated thematic instruction at
   Henry Catherine Middle School?

5. How did knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process® assist my leadership and the
   impact of the implementation of integrated thematic instruction?

**Theory-in-use: Servant Leadership**

My connection to servant leadership stemmed from the responsibility I felt to
those I led. The ultimate goal of a servant leader has been to create leadership in those
whom they lead (Greenleaf, 1977). In Chapter II, I espoused to accomplish this task of
creating leaders by building trust, providing opportunities for growth, and promoting a
collaborative environment (Greenleaf, 2002). As I reviewed my leadership data, it
became obvious to me that servant leadership themes emerged during my dissertation.

During the second cycle of my action research project, the concept of servant
leadership was evident in my leadership journal, observations, and interview. Until that
point of my dissertation, I was only theorizing that integrated curriculum would benefit
students, but FB and I began to experience the concept in the classroom. Greenleaf
(2002) referred to this as searching for a better way that will emerge when one serves. I
had a belief that curriculum integration would help students make connections, and it
took the experience of being in the classroom as a servant to learn first hand the effect it
had on students. Greenleaf (2002) encouraged leaders to listen more and talk less. I
accomplished this throughout the dissertation in meetings, informal conversations, and in
the classroom with the teachers throughout each of the cycles. I journaled that I needed
to, “give up my control issues” in order to allow the teachers to grow with their use of
integrated thematic instruction. I think this stemmed from wanting to ensure that the
project was completed, and that I was ultimately responsible. This was difficult for me, but it was made much easier by focusing my leadership as a servant. I learned more, controlled less, and allowed teachers and students to construct their own knowledge of integrated thematic instruction (Dewey, 1916).

Throughout the third cycle I wrestled with the concept of servant leadership being the reason I was so stressed out. As the students’ building projects evolved it became clear that there were too many students who needed RR’s attention. During this time I felt called to assist in the building classroom any way I could. I journaled:

Today I was needed to cut wood. My plan was to do observations. [RR] needed me again because he was overwhelmed. As I cut the wood I thought “Is leadership cutting wood?” Then I came to the realization that this is what I should be doing this moment because it is of importance for the overall [SQUARE] program.

It was also during this time that I began to feel burnt out. Yet, I chose not to be transactional with RR because I understood that he was trying to help the students. In a conversation with my principal after Cycle III, we reflected on this time period. She attempted to provide another lens through which to view my dilemma, and said:

If I took such a hands-on approach during the school year I would never get anything accomplished. Perhaps you should have taken a step back and allowed others to figure out the solutions to that problem.

Is it possible that my use or overuse of servant leadership led to my feeling overwhelmed and burnt out?
I reviewed the results of the LPI to further understand how the teachers observed my servant leadership. In the “Model the Way” section, Kouzes and Posner (2002) developed a series of six statements that tied into the concept of servant leadership. The score ranged from a low of 6 to a high of 60. My self scored average for the section was 52 while my participants’ average for me was 55.9. This was the biggest difference in results from the entire LPI (Appendix D). I felt that the results revealed to me that I not only utilized servant leadership in this dissertation, but that others felt I embodied the qualities of a servant leader much more then I did for myself.

After further reflection, I believed that being a servant leader did not cause my feeling of being overwhelmed and burnt out during this dissertation. Unlike my principal, I did not have the luxury of hiring an aide, or the time to allow a staff member to figure out a different solution. In Cycle III, I had to do what was needed because it was only a five week program with a limited budget. In addition, the time in the building classroom ended up accomplishing a few things for the betterment of the cycle.

The staff observed me during the time spent in the building classroom, and felt that I was modeling the spirit of the SQUARE program. For instance, LB brought a student to me while I was distributing paint. She was so excited because the student told her that school should be like the SQUARE program. In reviewing the data from the LPI the staff felt strongly (9.4 out of 10) that I set a personal example of what was to be expected. Secondly, when the SQUARE program was in its infancy, I facilitated the building project while coordinating the program, and I can attest that SQUARE has never had enough support for the building projects. Lastly, the time spent in the building classroom allowed me to build a closer relationship with RR and the students. If the staff
needed to find me, as I was told to me by LM, “We knew we could find you cutting wood or handing out paint.” Being a servant leader enabled me to build resonance with the staff as each of the cycles unfolded. Servant leadership became my core philosophy, but it also blended well with the transformative nature of my leadership philosophy. Wherever I was throughout this dissertation, I attempted to maintain a focus on the big picture of this change project, and it was the transformational piece of my leadership that kept me going.

Theory-in-use: Transformational Leadership

In chapter two, I espoused to use transformational leadership to create a vision for my change project, build commitment to that vision, while also using my charisma (Burns, 2003). To this end, a transformational leader has been responsible for understanding the big picture approach to change. In reviewing the data on my leadership throughout the cycles, I was able to identify aspects of my espoused transformational leadership style. The data also revealed that I was able to not only possess the big picture for remediating at-risk students, but that I communicated it clearly (Blanchard, 2007).

In order to successfully complete this dissertation I had to develop and maintain my vision. My vision, which changed and adapted periodically throughout the dissertation, was to assist teachers of at-risk students in understanding themselves and their students as learners while providing an integrated approach to instruction. I learned many lessons through the project about how to implement my vision. In order to inspire the vision, I had to first understand the organizational dynamics of the Henry Catherine Middle School (Bolman & Deal, 2003).
The original vision for my dissertation was to change the entire mode of instruction at the middle school. As a dreamer, I thought I found the missing link between learning and teaching and that it was feasible to implement my vision in a year or two. I started out in Cycle I by surveying the teaching staff at Henry Catherine Middle School, and the results supported my idea. I figured I should start small, so in Cycle II I intended to focus on basic skills math and language arts. I found out early on in the cycle that the organizational needs were different from my personal needs. This frustrated me and I considered giving up out of frustration. Yet, it was my assistant superintendent who encouraged me to maintain my vision, but to implement it on an even smaller scale. This was one of the first lessons I learned about the difference between being flexible regarding my vision and being unable to adapt to the organizational dynamics (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In the structural frame, according to Bolman and Deal (2003), “Organizations exist to achieve goals and objectives,” (p.45) whereas, in the human resource frame, “Organizations exist to serve human needs,” (p. 115). I also realized that similar to servant leadership, transformational leaders needed to be collaborative. Thankfully, Cycle II ended up being a tremendous success for the teacher, students, and administration to experience. FM, in the final interview commented, “You were able to change it [the entire project] rather than doing it for the sake of getting it done.”

The third cycle built directly off of the second cycle, and for the sake of this dissertation it allowed me the opportunity to be a transformational leader for more teachers. Although I spent a great deal of the third cycle stressed out, my transformative approach provided the opportunity to clearly communicate my vision (Blanchard, 2007). For instance, LM, in her interview commented, “I didn’t know much about integrated
thematic instruction until you trained and showed us how it worked. Now I see it as a
great way to motivate our kids to learn.” CJ, who participated in cycles three and four
said:

You are in a great position that you are in because you are so easy going and take
everyone’s suggestion. You then come up with a collaboration of what everyone
said for the best interest of the kids.

In reviewing the data from the LPI, the staff rated me very high in the inspire a shared
vision category (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The highest average I had for that section was
the statement “Paints ‘big picture’ of group aspirations,” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). I
received an average of 10 on a 10 point scale from the seven teachers who participated in
the study. Ironically, when I entered the fourth cycle and my inspiration waned, it was CJ
who became my inspiration because she embodied the vision. In my journal I wrote about
my exhaustion with everything and how stressed out I had become. There were many
times I had to dig deep to unearth my transformational leadership.

Transformational leaders have been able to raise people to new levels of
commitment to the organization (Burns, 2003). Without knowing it, many of the teachers
who were a part of this dissertation rose to new levels of commitment to their students.
FM, after the first cycle, finally understood why he was a basic skills teacher. At first, he
thought it was punitive, but after participating in Cycle II, he said

Well they are basic skills kids. You know and when they ask me to teach basic
skills, you know what I thought in my head? I didn’t ask it but I thought it, why
what did I do wrong? … But what a privilege it has been to watch them and I have
asked for all basic skills next year because I actually love them. I have learned a
lot and I have learned about myself and things after all these years. These kids can learn anything they want. It was wild, when we first started this, I thought that they were never going to get any of this. They got it all.

Having FM become more committed to his classroom and teaching was part of his own professional grow and his story reiterated how important the power of transformational leadership was in raising people to new levels of commitment. To me, this was similar to the staff’s reaction to how I enabled others to act on the LPI. The staff rated me a 56.2 out of 60 which was the highest average on the LPI (Appendix, D). In Cycle IV, CJ had similar comments as FM about her growth and development as a teacher. She said:

Last year I didn’t take that [Let Me Learn Process and integrated thematic instruction] into consideration so much. Now I am trying to be more aware and I am trying to have them do different activities rather than just writing. I am trying to have them come up with alternative assignments. I think it is really helping them get engaged more in the lessons.

Both CJ and FM participated in two cycles, and were able to take something more away from their experience. I felt this was because of the extended time we spent working collaboratively in their classroom with their students as opposed to the summer SQUARE program when they only had their students for five weeks. They were both able to observe me in their classroom setting for a longer period of time then those who participated in SQUARE. Yet, throughout all three of the implementation cycles, I was able to inspire the vision not only through collaboration, but through my charismatic approaches.
Ever since I was a young child I have been a performer. Whether it is out of my confluence (Johnston, 2006) or because I was youngest child, I have always been willing to take risks in front of people. As a transformational leader, my charisma had a profound impact on the dissertation project. I believed it was my charisma that affected my administration to even allow me to do this project. I think they could see my excitement and thought that I had many good ideas. In each of the implementation cycles I was able to shine in the spotlight for the betterment of the students. In Cycle II, I became “Mr. Classic” in order to illustrate the popular way of schooling in the 1800’s and the students felt it was so accurate that they did not want me to stop. In Cycle III, during my first address to the students and staff I assembled them in a large circle in the cafeteria and had the entire program repeat the SQUARE chant. In Cycle IV, I took the students outside to experience what the main character of the book experienced while he was alone on the island. LB, in reflecting on my charisma said this in her interview, “I think you have such a great understanding of possibilities. Your leadership style is capable of anything.”

I believe that the combination of being a transformational and servant leader had a profound impact on the infusion of integrated thematic instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School. Both styles allowed me to inspire the staff, build commitment to the project, and complete the project. These revelations emerged from the data I collected on my leadership throughout the cycles. However, I did not think the vision I developed, and the focus of the project would have been possible without my third leadership theory social justice.
Theory-in-use: Social Justice

In chapter two I made it clear that I identified with theorists who viewed the American Public school system as flawed. The social justice leader has been responsible for challenging oppression in schools as well as for promoting equity and justice for all students (Kumashiro, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). As a social justice leader, I espoused that at-risk students did not need more of the same education, so I focused on advocating an alternate way to instruct, and then assisting at-risk students with strategies to overcome the barriers of the system.

The concept of integrated thematic instruction has not been a new concept in education (Drake, 1998; 2007). However, the common mode of instruction in the United States has been based on behaviorists’ approaches such as incremental teaching steps coupled with immediate feedback (Campbell & Harris, 2001). The student, in this setting, has been viewed as a passive, empty bank that the teacher was responsible for filling. As a social justice leader, I gravitated to integrated thematic instruction and the Let Me Learn Process because I believed both challenged the popular understanding of instruction in the public school system.

Taking this non-conventional approach to instruction was a challenging task during the dissertation. I also believed that it was even harder considering No Child Left Behind Legislation, which has had a limiting effect on what administrators can implement. Often times, superintendents attend meetings with the State Department of Education to learn about the latest mandates. They return to their districts armed with the latest mandate and immediately begin to develop their implementation strategies. I knew that if I was going to get the project approved I must be familiar with the current research
supporting the integrative approach. I had to rely on my social justice leadership and challenge the process. In fact on the LPI the staff felt I sought challenging opportunities to test my skills and rated me a 9.3 out of 10 (Appendix D). I also recognized that my superintendent and assistant superintendent had to have a trusting relationship with me considering all of the pressure they had to endure from the State Department of Education. The data supporting my espoused theories on social justice emerged from these experiences and continued throughout the remainder of the project.

In developing the survey for the first cycle I made sure to include items that challenged the current mode of instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School. For instance, I included the statement “Students make connections between my class and other subjects,” (Appendix A). My intent was to challenge the silo effect in which many educators operate (Lencioni, 2006). I was hoping to determine teachers’ perceptions about how often this happens, but also to have the teachers reflect on the fact that there were other subjects in the school besides theirs. I was not surprised to see that 23.7% were unsure and 7.9% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Hopefully, the teachers at least became aware that a philosophy exists that promoted connections throughout the disciplines.

In Cycle II, FM and I developed the integrated unit to challenge the students’ awareness on global awareness. We created a series of activities that included viewing *The Lorax, Shift Happens*, and future of technology. The activities challenged the students to think outside of their comfort zones. During our interview FM reflected on a conversation in class after one of the integrated activities:
For example, today we were reading a story in the NJASK 8 work book about manatees the sea cows that are in Florida. There are boats that are destroying them and they are now an endangered species. And [one student], said, “[FM] that is what we are talking about that has to do with all this Mr. Cook stuff.” And I said, “Why do you think we read it? …Talk to me more about this,” and he says, “C’mon [FM] it’s like, you know, we need the manatee just like they need us and we are hurting them.

FM was impressed with the student’s grasp of something global because he felt that most of the lessons taught in school did not require the students to think critically or challenge anything.

Prior to Cycle III a teacher approached me with a question. She prefaced it by stating that some of the teachers had been talking and wondered, “Why do you reward the students with the [SQUARE] program in the summer when they didn’t do anything during the year?” At first I was taken aback by this question, and I then responded:

First of all what do you mean by doing nothing? Many of these students have struggled with school since they walked in the door as kindergartners. In some cases they have totally shut down. We are trying to provide a bridge program for these students to view school as something more than what they do now.

This conversation prompted me to email the entire staff to inform them of the goals of the summer SQUARE program because I knew that this teacher was not the only one with this misconception. I also shared the positive data that had been collected about the SQUARE students after they attended the summer program. I attributed this advocating and challenging to my social justice leadership. I also realized that the entire SQUARE
program was based in social justice. The fact that the students attended school in the summer; were given the most excited and caring teachers; were in small class settings; were presented with frequent rewards and acknowledgements; were instructed in a learner-centered, integrated fashion; and were taught how to advocate for their own learning all exemplified ways in which the SQUARE program challenged the mode of instruction at Henry Catherine Middle School. As I began to consider options for the fourth cycle of research, and the FLIE program became an option, I was excited to continue working with a social justice based program.

I was impressed with the mission of the FLIE program because it took the most “at-risk” students at Henry Catherine Middle School and provided them with an alternative setting for learning. CJ, who was also a part of cycle three, shared my sentiment for at-risk students. During our meetings, we often discussed that the traditional form of instruction was not applicable to all students, which was why they ended up in her classroom. I liked how she saw education as a system and questioned the one size fits all philosophy.

In one of our discussions mentioned that the novel, *Touching Spirit Bear*, could illustrate the theme for her students. It was important for her to have the unit address the students’ perception of themselves, and what happened to them along their educational journey to be placed in the FLIE classroom. CJ and I created the theme “Who am I?” to allow the students an opportunity to reflect on their educational experience. Throughout the unit, the activities we designed served my social justice philosophy of education. Similarly to my conversation with the teacher prior to Cycle III, I was once again faced with the question of why I gave “those” students the chance to go outside, eat during
class, or build things. I remember thinking that no matter what I do there were people
who were critical of the FLIE students. CJ and I were both approached with these types
of questions from other teachers. These conversations further solidified the fact that we
were advocating for the students who have had a difficult experience in education. In
addition, we were doing it in a transactional (Burns, 2003) environment that valued
rewards and punishments as the norm.

I found other data that supported my social justice leadership. As much as I felt I
took risks during the dissertation, results from the LPI required me to reflect that perhaps
the staff felt I took more risks than I thought I did. Overall I rated myself a 54 out of 60,
and the staff rated me a 55.6 out of 60 (Appendix D). This difference of almost two
points difference between I saw myself and how the staff saw me. This data made me
think that maybe I held back and was not as vocal about my social justice leadership as I
had originally thought.

Each of the main theories in my leadership platform had an important place in
implementing integrated thematic instruction into the curriculum for at-risk students at
Henry Catherine Middle School. I did not think that any of the theories by themselves
could have allowed me the wherewithal to complete the project. Yet, as a leader, I
realized that there was more to my leadership besides the three main theories. I believed
that the combination of reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) and emotional
intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002) aided my leadership during the dissertation because
they filled in the gaps that I was faced with.
Reflective practice and Emotional Intelligence

Using the combination of reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002) allowed me to become more enlightened about my role as an educational leader. Throughout this dissertation I struggled with the stress and sacrifice inherent in the daunting task of completing the project. Reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al., 2002) became the balance I needed to counteract the stress and sacrifice.

During the first two cycles I balanced taking classes, research, work, and family while implementing the initial stages of the change project. I found myself displaying the typical characteristics of stress such as weight gain, lack of energy, and dissonance (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006). At the time, I refused to look into the reflective mirror at what was happening to me (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). What I failed to recognize was that I had not engaging in any type of renewal to counteract the stress (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006). In my reflective journal I wrote about the balance I needed, but I also wrote that I felt that I needed to push myself in order to finish the dissertation. I wrote, “I want to get as much out of this dissertation as I can, and I need to make the most of it.” It was not until Cycle III that the stress and sacrifice became so apparent that others began to notice and comment on my emotional and physical changes.

Soon after each cycle was completed, I began to plan for the next cycle. I had very little down time in between any of the cycles. To me it was clear that if I kept going I would finish sooner. I also realized that the SQUARE program would serve as the most crucial cycle my dissertation. During Cycle III my journal became filled with my growing awareness of my sacrifice. Most people suggested to me that I should take the
summer to relax and re-charge my batteries. I wrote this entry early in the program,

“After SQUARE I spent a lot of time working on the dissertation proposal. I didn’t get to
bed until 1:00 AM. No wonder I struggle to wake in the morning.” I was at least
becoming more aware of the stress, but it was difficult to integrate the Cycle of Renewal
(Boyatzis & McKee, 2006) because I pushed myself so hard. I kept saying to myself that
I just have to get this done.

As Cycle III ended, I was already planning for Cycle IV. During this time I went
on vacation for a week with my family. I thought that the vacation would be enough
renewal to hold me over until Cycle IV would be completed. I remember telling my wife,
“I just have to get through until November and then the research will be over.” During
the first part of Cycle IV I became ill due to my lowered immune system that was a result
of the constant stress (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006). More and more people began to
comment to me that I was not the same, and I looked tired. Finally, during the first week
of October I made an appointment with an acupuncturist. For the next few weeks I spent
45 minutes in his office twice a week focusing on my well being. In addition, I signed up
with a personal trainer who specialized in nutrition. When I finished Cycle IV on October
31, I was well on my way to the Cycle of Renewal (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006). I know I
waited too long to begin the Cycle of Renewal (Boyatis & McKee, 2005), and I realized
that I should have been doing this all along.

As I reflected on the entire dissertation experience I felt I could not have
completed my research without experiencing the stress and sacrifice. However, I
acknowledged that the awareness of double loop learning (Argyris, 1982, 1993; Argyris
& Schon, 1974, 1978) ensured that I would not make the same mistakes again in the
future. First, I know that when I have many things to balance in my life I have to be engaged in the Cycle of Renewal (Boyatis & McKee, 2005) whether it is exercise, meditation, or nutrition. Even though I survived the dissertation experience I do not want to revisit the Sacrifice Syndrome (Boyatis & McKee, 2005) again. This dissertation has been a learning experience. I have grown as a person, professional, and a leader because I became more aware of the importance of my well being.

Leadership and change

The dissertation experience required me to take a risk by implementing a new curricular approach for teachers of at-risk students. As I stated before I was not in a position of power, so I had to rely on my expert power to prove I knew what I was doing (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The effects of the change to the organization from the project may never be fully known. The teachers I worked with all reported me that in some way they changed as a result of this experience. Fullan (2007) acknowledged that change in education was difficult because of the long history of failed initiatives. I felt that since I was very involved in the change process, and modeled the classroom implementation in a collaborative manner with the teachers, that the change would be long lasting (Guskey, 2002).

As for me, I believed that through this dissertation my personal developmental needs (Maslow, 1943) were met and it cemented my belief that I was valued as an employee of Henry Catherine Middle School (Bolman & Deal, 2003). By allowing me to lead this research, the administration at Henry Catherine Middle School displayed trust in my judgment knowing that the results of the project and my leadership were long term (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In essence, the administration needed to ensure that the
appropriateness of the curriculum was maintained, but beyond that it was clear that this project was also about my leadership within the context of this change initiative.

At the conclusion of the dissertation, the concept of integrated thematic instruction was only in the beginning stages of organizational change (Fullan, 2007). According to phase I of Fullan’s (2007) scheme, I spent a great deal of time during this dissertation mobilizing everyone and everything about the proposed change. Since I used a fidelity approach (Fullan, 2007) to change, I had to become familiar with the existing literature on integrated thematic instruction. This was made easier because I was able to utilize examples of best practices in the literature to become an expert (Drake, 1993; Kovalik, 1993; Ross & Olsen, 1993). I was then able to put the concept of integrated thematic instruction into practice through the three implementation cycles. The reflective nature of action research allowed me to plan, implement, and reflect (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) throughout and after each cycle making the process more effective.

The Let Me Learn Process was the conduit for the integrated thematic instruction. Each teacher I worked with was able to grow in his or her use of the Let Me Learn Process. During Cycle II, FM reported that the Let Me Learn Process enlightened him to why some learners are turned off by certain projects and excited by others. During Cycle III the staff used the Let Me Learn Process to understand each other and the students they taught. The Let Me Learn Process has been known to take two to three years to fully understand (Johnston, 2005). Therefore, I believe the personal journey for the staff will continue past the conclusion of my dissertation.

The teachers in math and language arts have been teamed together during SQUARE. Each of the teams mentioned that the Let Me Learn Process allowed them to
understand each other when working together. For instance, FM said, “The Let Me Learn Process affects the way [DO] and I deal with each other because I am so different than her.” CJ, who has worked with LB, realized that, “Our scores were so different in that she is confluent and I am very, very sequential.” Sometimes, the way that the scores complemented them, according to CF, made them more effective. “My partner was a God send. He was very sequential, and I needed that. I can’t wait to work with him again.”

CJ, who was the teacher for the FLIE program, realized during Cycle III that her students learned differently from her. She said, “I know that my students’ scores are different from mine, and now I know where to help them.” At the conclusion of the SQUARE program, DO became aware of why the students struggled during the school year. She said, “So many kids in SQUARE are not traditional learners. Their sequential and precise scores are not high.” These types of examples regarding staff collaboration and understanding of each other have been shown to create a learning organization (Senge, 2006).

As the leader of this project, the Let Me Learn Process helped me balance my ideas and my plan to accomplish my goal of finishing. During the dissertation, my use of confluence provided ideas, risks, and connections (Johnston, 2005) needed to implement the change. In a sense I was very fortunate to recognize the need for new ideas, and if I was unable to develop the ideas, then I knew someone on the staff would. My use of sequence was what kept me grounded to the project. In order to keep the project moving forward, I made lists, kept myself organized, and followed the timelines I planned (Johnston, 2005).
New leadership discoveries

Since the establishment of my leadership platform in 2007 there were a few indications of something different in my leadership data. One area that did surface was the ethic of care. Noddings (2002) defined education as “a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation” (p. 283). I felt that my ethic of care developed out of my leadership theories as a way to justify my project. At first I thought I was simply developing resonance (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005) with the staff. Yet, I felt that it became more than resonance, because I truly appreciated their participation in the project. I knew I could not have accomplished this task without their help.

I realized through this experience that in the future it is imperative for me to understand the importance of reflective practice and resonant leadership. In fact, I redesigned my leadership framework to represent my new understanding of the ethic of care and the importance of being mindful of reflective practice and resonant leadership. The new configuration (Figure 10.1) was developed to represent a fuller understanding of my leadership.
In retrospect, I think that the staff, students, and administration would not have been so accommodating if they felt I did not care about them. When I viewed the results of the LPI I was convinced that I displayed care throughout the dissertation. In four out of the six categories of encourage the heart data summary the staff rated me higher than I rated myself. In addition, the staff scored me 9.9 out of 10 for recognizing people for commitment to shared values (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). This data not only surprised me but also helped me understand my emerging ethic of care with the staff. It also required me to reflect on the organization as a whole, and wonder whether teachers felt administration cared about them. I went back to what FM said in his interview regarding the past few years and how each year there was a different initiative. Maybe teachers have been resistant to change because they have lost the trust that the administration cared for them. I felt that this dissertation process helped me uncover the ethic of care,
and also helped me realize the importance of a sense of interconnectedness to others in the workplace (Noddings, 2002).

Conclusion

There were many aspects to this dissertation. In a sense, it became three projects in one. The first aspect to the project was to study, research, and implement integrated thematic instruction as a tool to assist teachers of at-risk students. Although I was unable to reach every teacher who was responsible for at-risk students, the ones I was able to collaborate with grew in their understanding of integrated thematic instruction and the importance of learning awareness. The second aspect of this dissertation was to study change at Henry Catherine. As I have stated throughout the dissertation, I had extremely high hopes that this topic would revolutionize curriculum delivery at Henry Catherine. As a result of this dissertation I realized that change at the school level was affected by the district, county, state, and federal government. In this era of No Child Left Behind, implementing change that has not been the sanctioned initiative can be almost impossible. In fact, I think that the future of K-12 education will continue to be more regulated in the future with little room to attempt change. This will require me to rely on my ability to advocate for the underrepresented and to enlighten educators to alternate ways of implementing curriculum. The third aspect of this dissertation was the reflection of my leadership. Similar to my literature review, and conceptual framework for change, my leadership platform in chapter two served as the basis for how I led this project.

For the most part I felt that my leadership platform was connected through my espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974). The use of reflective practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, et al.,
2002) allowed me to take a step back view myself as a leader. This knowledge, along with all of my findings from this dissertation enabled me to be a more effective leader of change. I know that my next leadership experience will be balanced with a constant Cycle of Renewal (Boyatis & McKee, 2005) and that I must be collaborative in fulfilling my vision.
REFERENCES


Ross, A. & Olsen, K. (1993). The way we were...the way we can be: A vision for the middle school through integrated thematic instruction. Kent, WA: Susan Kovalik & Associates.


APPENDIX A

Integrated Thematic Instruction Survey
Integrated Thematic Instruction Survey

While your participation in this survey is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions herein, your cooperation and participation are important to the success of thematic instruction and are greatly appreciated. If you choose to participate, please understand that all responses are strictly confidential. Your completion of this survey constitutes informed consent and your willingness to participate.

The purpose of this survey is to understand your attitude toward the concept of Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI). Integrated Thematic Instruction is defined as, a model that promotes cross curriculum articulation and learning awareness.

Part One: Background information.
Indicate your choice by marking the appropriate response

1. What is your gender?
   □ female    □ male

2. How many years of professional experience do you have in the field of education? (Mark only one)
   □ 1-3 years    □ 7-10 years    □ 16-19 years
   □ 4-6 years    □ 11-15 years    □ 20 years or more

3. What is your highest level degree? (Mark only one)
   □ Bachelors    □ Masters    □ Masters plus 30
   □ Bachelors plus 15    □ Masters plus 15    □ Doctorate

4. What subject area do you teach? (Mark only one)
   □ Language arts    □ World Languages    □ Social studies
   □ Math    □ Fine or performing arts    □ Science
   □ Physical education or health
   □ Other _____________________________________________

5. What grade level are you responsible for? (Mark all that apply)
   □ Seventh Grade    □ Eighth Grade
Part Two: Attitudes Toward Integrated Thematic Instruction

*Directions: Please respond to each of the following statements by indicating the degree to which you agree with the statement.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students learn in different ways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important for students to see a common thread through various subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The grade level curriculum should have a unifying purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thematic units can raise student achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teachers would benefit from grade level meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Students will have a deeper grasp of the material if they can connect it to other subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. There are connections between language arts and math curricula</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I would like to have grade level curriculum coordination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Cross-curricular teaching adds meaning to learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. It is important for students to make connections with their learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I would be interested in co-teaching with someone from another department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Students make connections between my class and other subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part Three: Open ended

1. Do you currently use the Let Me Learn Process® process in class? If yes, please describe how.
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

2. Would you be interested in developing cross-curricular themes with other teachers?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. Do you feel that an integrated approach to the curriculum could help student achievement? Explain.
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time and participation.
Return the completed questionnaire in the front office. All returned surveys will be eligible for a gift certificate.
Appendix B

Informed Consent for Research
Teacher Perception of Integrated Thematic Instruction

Dear FM,

My name is Spike Cook and I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Rowan University. Over the course of the next few months I will be studying teacher perception of integrated thematic instruction. The purpose of this research project is to gain a better understanding of integrated thematic instruction as well as measuring my leadership during the process.

By agreeing to participate in the study, I will be observing your Language Arts course. At the end of the observation period, I will conduct an interview lasting about 45 minutes. The interview will be audio taped, and transcribed. It is my hope that the information provided will help teachers who are responsible for basic skills students.

Being involved with this study is completely voluntary and your participation can be stopped at any time.

All of the data that I will collect during this study will remain confidential. All names will be changed and the materials from the study will be kept in a secure location in my office. The transcripts (with identities and sites disguised) will be kept secure until my dissertation is complete. Once the dissertation is complete, I will discard the data.

Sincerely,

Spike Cook
Middle School Guidance Director
856-694-0100 ext. 235
scook@delsearegional.us

I have been fully informed of the study, and I give my permission to participate in this study.

_________________________ ____________________________ _________
Signature of Participant  Name  of Participant (print) Date

__________________________ ____________________________ _________
Signature of Project Director  Name of Project Director (print) Date
Appendix C

Cycle II, III, and IV interview questions
1. Tell me a little about yourself – How long have you been teaching, subject areas, etc.

2. Why did you agree to participate in this research study?

3. What did you know about integrated thematic instruction before participating in the study?

4. How do you feel that integrated thematic instruction has enhanced student learning?

5. How do you feel you have grown as a professional as a result of participating in the integrated thematic instruction based unit?

6. How did my leadership impact the project?

7. Can you tell me how the knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process affected this project?

8. One of the emphasis we placed on the students was in the area of connections – How do you feel the students made connections through the project?

9. How do you feel the Friday sessions impacted students learning?

10. Can you tell me what role integration played during the week after Friday’s activity?

11. If there was more time, where would you see this project going?

12. What was the most memorable event during this project?
Appendix D

Results of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)
Contents

The Five Practices Data Summary
The Five Practices Bar Graphs
Leadership Behavior Ranking
Model the Way Data Summary
Model the Way Bar Graphs
Inspire a Shared Vision Data Summary
Inspire a Shared Vision Bar Graphs
Challenge the Process Data Summary
Challenge the Process Bar Graphs
Enable Others to Act Data Summary
Enable Others to Act Bar Graphs
Encourage the Heart Data Summary
Encourage the Heart Bar Graphs
Percentile Graph
The Five Practices Data Summary

This page summarizes your LPI scores for each Practice. The Self column shows the total of your own responses to the six statements about each Practice. The AVG column shows the averages of all your Observers' ratings. The Individual Observers columns show the total of each Observer's rating. Scores can range from 6 to 60.

Manager Direct Report Co-Worker Other
AVG Average of all LPI Observer Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>Individual Observers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model the Way</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Others to Act</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the Heart</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Five Practices Bar Graphs

These bar graphs, one set for each Practice, provide a graphic presentation of the numerical data recorded on The Five Practices Data Summary page. By Practice, it shows the total score for Self and the average total for each category of Observer. Scores can range from 0 to 60.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Direct Report</th>
<th>Co-Worker</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model the Way</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Others to Act</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the Heart</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Leadership Behaviors Ranking

This page shows the ranking, from most frequent ("high") to least frequent ("low") of all 30 leadership behaviors based on the average Observers' score. A horizontal line separates the 10 least frequent behaviors from the others. An asterisk (*) next to the Observer score indicates that the Observer score and the Self score differ by more than plus or minus 1.5.

#### High

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Observers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Low

* Difference between Observer's and Self rating was greater than 1.5
# Leadership Practices Inventory

The rating scale runs from 1 to 10:
- 1 - Almost Never
- 2 - Rarely
- 3 - Seldom
- 4 - Once in a While
- 5 - Occasionally
- 6 - Sometimes
- 7 - Fairly Often
- 8 - Usually
- 9 - Very Frequently
- 10 - Almost Always

## Model the Way Data Summary
- Find your voice by clarifying your personal values
- Set the example by aligning actions with shared values

This page shows the scores for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice. The **Self** column shows the scores you gave yourself for each behavior. The **AVG** column shows the averages of all the Observers’ ratings. The **Individual Observers** columns show each Observer’s rating for each behavioral item. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

### Observer Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>M1</th>
<th>M2</th>
<th>D1</th>
<th>D2</th>
<th>D3</th>
<th>D4</th>
<th>D5</th>
<th>D6</th>
<th>D7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sets a personal example of what is expected</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes certain that people adhere to agreed-on standards</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows through on promises and commitments</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people’s performance</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds consensus around organization’s values</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Profile for Spike Cook
Integrated Thematic Project
October 20, 2008

Leadership Practices Inventory

The rating scale runs from 1 to 10
1 - Almost Never
2 - Rarely
3 - Sometimes
4 - Once in a While
5 - Occasionally
6 - Occasionally
7 - Fairly Often
8 - Usually
9 - Very Frequently
10 - Almost Always

Model the Way Bar Graphs

- Find your voice by clarifying your personal values
- Set the example by aligning actions with shared values

The set of bar graphs for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice provides a graphic representation of your and your Observers' average ratings for that behavior. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

1. Sets a personal example of what is expected

6. Makes certain that people adhere to agreed-on standards

11. Follows through on promises and commitments

16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance

21. Builds consensus around organization's values

26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership

Self | Manager | Direct Report | Co-Worker | Other

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### Leadership Practices Inventory

**Inspire a Shared Vision Data Summary**

- Envision the future by imagining exciting and enabling possibilities
- Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations

This page shows the scores for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice. The Self column shows the scores you gave yourself for each behavior. The AVG column shows the averages of all the Observers’ ratings. The Individual Observers columns show each Observer’s rating for each behavioral item. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>Individual Observers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Talks about future trends influencing our work</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Describes a compelling image of the future</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Appeals to others to share dream of the future</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Shows others how their interests can be realized</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Paints &quot;big picture&quot; of group aspirations</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Speaks with conviction about meaning of work</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Leadership Practices Inventory

**Profile for Spike Cook**  
Integrated Thematic Project  
October 20, 2008

### The rating scale runs from 1 to 10
- 1: Almost Never  
- 2: Rarely  
- 3: Seldom  
- 4: Once in a while  
- 5: Occasionally  
- 6: Sometimes  
- 7: Fairly Often  
- 8: Usually  
- 9: Very Frequently  
- 10: Almost Always

### Inspire a Shared Vision Bar Graphs
- Envision the future by imagining exciting and enabling possibilities  
- Enlist others to a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations

The set of bar graphs for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice provides a graphic representation of your and your Observers’ average ratings for that behavior. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Talks about future trends influencing our work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. Describes a compelling image of the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12. Appeals to others to share dream of the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>17. Shows others how their interests can be realized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>22. Paints &quot;big picture&quot; of group aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>27. Speaks with conviction about meaning of work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Leadership Practices Inventory**

The rating scale runs from 1 to 10:
1. Almost Never
2. Rarely
3. Rarely
4. Once in a While
5. Occasionally
6. Sometimes
7. Fairly Often
8. Usually
9. Very Frequently
10. Almost Always

---

**Challenge the Process Data Summary**
- Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.
- Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.

This page shows the scores for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice. The Self column shows the scores you gave yourself for each behavior. The AVG column shows the averages of all the Observers' ratings. The Individual Observers columns show each Observer's rating for each behavioral item. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

Manager Direct Report Co-Worker Other
AVG Average of all LPI Observer Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>Individual Observers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Seeks challenging opportunities to test skills</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3 9 9 8 9 10 10 10 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Challenges people to try new approaches</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.3 9 8 9 10 10 10 10 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Searches outside organization for innovative ways to improve</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3 10 10 6 9 10 10 10 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Asks &quot;What can we learn?&quot;</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3 8 10 8 10 10 9 10 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.3 9 7 8 10 10 10 10 10 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Experiments and takes risks</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.9 8 10 6 9 10 10 10 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Leadership Practices Inventory

The rating scale runs from 1 to 10:
- 1 - Almost Never
- 2 - Rarely
- 3 - Sometimes
- 4 - Usually
- 5 - Very Frequently
- 6 - Occasionally
- 7 - Fairly Often
- 8 - Almost Always

### Challenge the Process Bar Graphs

- **Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.**
- **Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.**

The set of bar graphs for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice provides a graphic representation of your and your Observers' average ratings for that behavior. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Direct Report</th>
<th>Co-Worker</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Seeks challenging opportunities to test skills</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Challenges people to try new approaches</td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image8" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image10" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Searches outside organization for innovative ways to improve</td>
<td><img src="image11" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image12" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image13" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image14" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image15" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Asks &quot;What can we learn?&quot;</td>
<td><img src="image16" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image17" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image18" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image19" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image20" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set</td>
<td><img src="image21" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image22" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image23" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image24" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image25" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Experiments and takes risks</td>
<td><img src="image26" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image27" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image28" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image29" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image30" alt="Bar Graph" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Leadership Practices Inventory

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- 5 - Occasionally
- 6 - Sometimes
- 7 - Fairly Often
- 8 - Usually
- 9 - Very Frequently
- 10 - Almost Always

#### Enable Others to Act Data Summary

- Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust
- Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion

This page shows the scores for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice. The Self column shows the scores you gave yourself for each behavior. The AVG column shows the averages of all the Observers’ ratings. The Individual Observers column shows each Observer’s rating for each behavioral item. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>M2</th>
<th>D1</th>
<th>D2</th>
<th>D3</th>
<th>D4</th>
<th>D5</th>
<th>D6</th>
<th>D7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Develops cooperative relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Actively listens to diverse points of view</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Treats people with dignity and respect</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Supports decisions other people make</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Gives people choice about how to do their work</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enable Others to Act Bar Graphs

- Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust
- Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion

The set of bar graphs for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice provides a graphic representation of your and your Observer's average ratings for that behavior. Scores can range from 1 to 10.
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6. Sometimes
7. Fairly Often
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## Encourage the Heart Data Summary
- Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence
- Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community

This page shows the scores for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice. The Self column shows the scores you gave yourself for each behavior. The AVG column shows the averages of all the Observers' ratings. The Individual Observers columns show each Observer's rating for each behavioral item. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>Individual Observers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M M2 D1 D2 D3 D4 D5 D6 D7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 9.3 8 9 10 10 10 10 10 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 9.1 8 8 10 10 10 10 8 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 8.8 8 8 8 10 9 10 9 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 9.4 8 8 10 10 10 10 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 9.1 8 7 8 10 10 9 10 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 9.0 9 7 8 10 10 10 10 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Encourage the Heart Bar Graphs

- Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
- Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

The set of bar graphs for each of the six leadership behaviors related to this Practice provides a graphic representation of your and your Observers’ average ratings for that behavior. Scores can range from 1 to 10.

5. Praises people for a job well done

10. Expresses confidence in people’s abilities

15. Creatively rewards people for their contributions

20. Recognizes people for commitment to shared values

25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments

30. Gives team members appreciation and support
Percentile Ranking

This page compares your Self scores and those of your Observers to the scores of several thousand people who have taken this version of the LPI. The horizontal lines at the 30th and 70th percentiles divide the graph into three segments, roughly approximating a normal distribution of scores.