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Leadership by Design: How a Team Experience Shaped Teachers' Views of Themselves as Leaders

Elizabeth Gil

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> "Teachers cannot restrict their attention to the classroom alone, leaving the larger setting and purposes of schooling to be determined by others. They must take active responsibility for the goals to which they are committed, and for the social setting in which these goals may prosper. If they are not to be mere agents of others…they need to determine their own agency through a critical and continual evaluation of the purposes, the consequences, and the social context of their calling" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, as cited in Day, 1999).

QUESTION

When I began to consider what I felt was an important question about my school environment, I turned to my thoughts on leadership in my school building. I wanted to know: "How does a teacher's level of involvement in planning or facilitating professional development impact his/her view of him/herself as a teacher/leader in a school?" As time passed and I refined my question, I specifically considered one group of teachers in my school. I wondered: How have teachers' perceptions of themselves as leaders evolved over the course of their membership on the school's Design Team. The Design Team is a body within the school charged with furthering the goals of the school's improvement initiatives through the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant awarded the school.

RATIONALE FOR STUDY

If professional development is to be meaningful and valuable to teachers, it is necessary to know what teachers want to learn, from whom /how they want to learn it and give them a part

in creating it. When teachers see themselves as active participants (from advisors, to planners, all the way to facilitators), they are more likely to buy into professional development activities, strategies, implementation, etc. Teachers want to be heard. By getting input from them and planning around their needs, professional development becomes more meaningful to teachers. When the teachers feel more invested, they will also be more likely to take on leadership roles in the school and to take ownership of improvement initiatives.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

The Region 2 school at which I work serves approximately 690 students in pre-kindergarten through eight. Located in the Bronx, the majority, about 84%, of the population is Latino, with many students being immigrants from the Caribbean and Latin America. About 16% of the students at the school are African American and about .4% of students are Caucasian and "others." Approximately 20% of the students receive full-or part time special education. The school is comprised of monolingual and bilingual classes in both general and special education. About 27% of the students at my school are English Language Learners (ELLs), with Spanish as the dominant language among the ELL population. The majority of students are from low-income families, and approximately 90% of students qualify for free lunch. The school shares the school building and all of its facilities with two other schools.

There are approximately 60 teachers, including classroom and cluster teachers, service providers, and coaches, lead teachers, and grant facilitators. There are also 13 paraprofessionals in the school. Historically, the 36-year-old school has experienced little teacher turnover. Several teachers have served the school for over 30 years. However, in recent years, due to

several retirements, the school has seen a rise in the number of new teachers in the building as well as teachers who have been in the profession for less than five years.

Over the last three years, school has been implementing a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant. The goal of the CSR Program is to ultimately raise student achievement in the school by making changes and improvements in the way certain aspects of the school are organized. Among the reforms implemented to positively affect student achievement and school improvement has been to "distribute educational leadership" within the school building. This strand of school improvement would include having teachers take on more active leadership roles regardless of having or not having specific, official "leadership" titles within the school building.

Using grant funding and consultant support, the school established a Design Team comprised of faculty and administration. The Design Team concept is part of a model proposed by Co-nect, a company that was selected as the school's CSR program partner. This team helped to set goals within the school in terms of school-wide student activities and professional development planning. In its charter, developed in year two of the CSR Program's implementation, the Team put down on paper its purpose:

> "The Design Team will move the school in a positive direction by being an advocate for all stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, community and administrators). We will take action and responsibility for improvement by working together with all groups to achieve concrete results."

Additionally, the team's goals included a focus on school environment, motivation and connections between the school community and the surrounding neighborhood.

Prior to the school's receiving the CSR grant, professional development was conducted by those whose job descriptions explicitly stated that conducting professional development was a

job responsibility. Among a major goal of professional development planning under the CSR grant throughout the last three years has been teacher and staff choice and self-selection in professional development and greater direct involvement in the planning of professional development. Our rationale for this approach was that when a someone takes a personal interest in what he is learning and sees relevance in it, he is more likely to become engaged and active in that learning process. For teachers, this means working more closely with relevant topics and encountering more personally meaningful professional development. With effective professional development, teachers are more likely to implement and benefit from learning about effective practices. In turn, student achievement is impacted because the teacher brings a useful bag of tools to meet student needs and help them reach standards and goals.

Conversely, when professional development is dictated, especially in a blanket manner, it may be/is less effective. Under this approach, teachers do not have a voice or a choice in the topics they are being "developed" in. They may have sessions that they feel do not meet their needs and are therefore, not relevant to themselves or their teaching practice. This context opens or widens a gap between teachers' goals and those being mandated, which the teachers are expected to implement. There is sometimes a gap between what those setting the mandates feel is a priority and what the teachers themselves feel they need. As a result, teachers feel that those setting the guidelines for professional development are not event familiar with teaching, learning and school needs.

RESEARCH (THE BIG IDEAS)

Among the themes discussed in the literature I studied in my research were community and professional growth, change agents in schools, adult learning, and systems of professional development.

In *Improving Schools From Within: Teachers, Parents, And Principals Can Make The Difference*, Roland S. Barth looks at how different players in a school view their roles and each other, how schools may become places of collegiality, and building communities of learners and leaders. Barth also discusses how people in school communities learn to lead. The author stresses the notion that lasting improvements in public education must come from schools themselves. Teachers, those closest to students, are best qualified to promote change. The principal has the opportunity to empower teachers by making them part of the decision-making process. Barth also believes that without teachers' professional growth, students in school will not be able to grow either (p. 50).

Guiding School Change: The Role and Work of Change Agents (Rust and Friedus, 2001) is comprised of writings that address how those in the position of facilitating change navigate their contexts, how they prepare to meet their needs, and the partnerships formed in the course of promoting reform.

Zemke and Zemke's "Adult Learning: What Do We Know For Sure?" (1995) discusses what has been studied about this subgroup of learners. They write about the characteristics of adult learners, as established by learning theory, motivation to learn, and how curriculum for adult learners can be designed for effective training experiences. Among the recommendations include relevance to the learner's personal goals and an understanding of participants' entry level

knowledge. Learning should be integrated with what learners already know and take into consideration learning-style differences.

In "The Looming Danger Of A Two-Tiered Professional Development System," Dennis Sparks (2004) describes how two different systems of professional development can impact a school environment. Establishing a professional development system that "relies on scripts and mandates rather than on learning communities and continuous improvement" (p. 304) is detrimental to teacher growth. Sparks calls for a "system that advocates the development of professional communities and exercise professional judgement" (p. 304). Sparks states that in this type of system, there are collective goals, use of data and other evidence in decision-making, discussions of educational issues and institutional policies as well as "supportive collegial interactions" (p. 304). The result of a professional development system based on professional community results in "growth in professional judgement and skills" (p. 304). Teachers "see improvements in student learning and feel the increased confidence and motivation" that improvements produce. Sparks fear that the scripted, mandated tier of professional development is often at play in schools with the neediest of students.

Just as Barth believes that teacher growth affects student growth, so Sparks believes that "Students' deep understanding…is based on teachers' deep understanding of what they teach. Students' abilities to [innovate] solutions…are linked to the opportunities that their teachers have to approach their work in the same way," (p. 305).

Finally, in Thomas Guskey's (2003) "What Makes Professional Development Effective?", the author examines 13 lists of "effective" professional development. He finds that while the lists vary and are somewhat inconsistent, there are characteristics that appear on many of the lists. These include the need for time, and "collegiality and collaborative exchange" (p. 749). Most of

the lists also call for evaluation processes. Guskey concludes that "the characteristics that influence the effectiveness of professional development are multiple and highly complex" (p. 750). Finally, the author states that "a single list of characteristics and guidelines" may never emerge, but that developing criteria with clear descriptions for "effectiveness" will guarantee progress in the efforts to improve professional development endeavors.

TOOLS

Several tools were used in the research process to answer my questions about the possible connections between teachers' levels of involvement in planning or facilitating professional development and their perceptions of themselves as leaders. The tools I chose helped me to gain insight into happenings during the research period, to refine my question, and to be able to see any trends that might arise. I kept a log over several months. There was a survey about leadership and professional development given to teachers and paraprofessionals at the school. Additionally, members of the school's Design Team were interviewed in order to find out how they viewed themselves as leaders in the school. Some staff members who are not Design Team members were asked about their perceptions of the Design Team. Data collected from CSR Summer Training feedback forms in spring of 2004 and spring of 2005 were also used.

Throughout the research period, I recorded my reflections and observations as they pertained to leadership, our school's reform efforts, and my role as a facilitator in the reform initiatives. Reviewing the log's entries, I would be able to see what themes and ideas were recurring and which came to the forefront in relation to my observations about leadership. The log was kept for a period of four months, from February until June of 2005.

In order to see how teachers perceive leadership and professional development in my school, I developed a survey. After looking at the survey format, I made some changes that I

believed would make data analysis easier as well as make responding less time-consuming. The survey was then shared with the school principal who offered feedback in writing on the survey. The survey and principal feedback were then shared with the Design Team. During a meeting the Team made decisions about wording and about questions that might be added in order to gauge what teachers felt were their beliefs on leadership and involvement. During the meeting discussion about leadership and professional development took place to ensure that questions did not imply one type of response or another. Once the survey suggestions had been updated once more, the latest revision of the survey was discussed with the principal on behalf of the Design Team. The final decisions made, the survey was given to the school's teachers during a faculty conference.

Surveying and collecting data from as much of the staff as possible offered some insight into possible links between professional development and leadership. However, in order better to hone in on these possible links, Design Team members themselves were interviewed and asked more directly about their role on the Design Team.

Interviews of Design Team members served as a follow-up to the leadership survey and addressed the question about the members' perceptions of themselves as leaders throughout the CSR Grant period. and through their Design Team experience. This information also offered insight into how members perceived our work on the Team.

Finally, comparing CSR Summer Training feedback forms from spring 2004 and spring 2005 offered data regarding staff members' willingness to take lead roles in the summer professional development program. Along with responding to their availability and in what topics and workshops interested them, respondents were asked if they would be willing to help plan or facilitate workshops in the program.

DATA

In reviewing the entries in the log I kept over the research period, I noted several recurring themes. On several occasions, I wrote about the need for support in any endeavors that are initiated. I wrote about administrative support in terms of funding resources, recommendations made, and in finding opportunities to encourage growth and leadership, and aiding in expansion of one's role from the classroom. I also expressed concern over "bringing it [the leadership survey] out the right way" (February 17, 2005), referring to planning for how best to get feedback from as much staff as possible. In other entries, I referred to planning in terms of how we set up professional development, for offering teachers and paraprofessionals more options, and for having a vision in planning. In further writing about having a vision, I wrote about the importance of communicating this vision and tone- and culture-setting in a school environment.

Collaboration also stood out as I read through the log. On several occasions, I wrote about the positive feelings I had when I was able to collaborate with the Design Team. I wrote about getting "input" from the Team. I "literally had five sets of eyes looking at the survey...it was a great feeling and a reminder about how good working with others can be" (March 11, 2005). In relation to the dissemination and collection of completed leadership surveys, I wrote "The Design Team backed up the initiative and that was great" (March 28, 2005).

Throughout my writings, I also reflected upon how I wanted to proceed in terms of data collection, and my wonderings about what kinds of results the leadership survey and Design Team interview would hold. Twice, I also wrote about where and how I might see the link between professional development and leadership.

Staff surveys consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Initial information requested by the survey dealt with staff member's years of experience, what populations they worked with and what role they played in the school. Of the 40 surveys returned, 34 were completed by teachers, and three were completed by paraprofessionals. Three respondents checked "other" or did not specify their role in the school. One of those three specified the role of coach. No survey respondents identified themselves as administrators.

Respondents were asked, "Who could have leadership roles in your school building?" and were asked to mark all of the roles that could apply. Teachers, coaches, School Leadership Team members, Design Team members, and the Parent Coordinator received the most responses. Table 1 specifies the exact responses on this question.

Table 1	
Who could have leadership roles in your school building? ($n = 40$)	
Teachers	81%
Coaches	74%
School Leadership Team Members	69%
Design Team Members	67%
Parent Coordinator	60%
Parents	55%
Paraprofessionals	40%
Security Officers	40%
Custodians	31%
Other	17%
No response	2%

The survey addressed questions about characteristics of leaders. Respondents were asked to select the five characteristics that they felt were "most important for leaders to have." Several of the respondents selected more than five qualities, feeling that it was too difficult to limit their responses to five. Thirty-two of the respondents selected "respect for all community members," while "good communication skills" garnered 26 responses and 20 people selected "good

listening skills." Motivating others was checked 19 times, and "expertise in their field,"

"interpersonal skills," and "instructional knowledge" all received 18 responses. Table 2

illustrates the exact ranking of qualities as marked by the respondents.

Table 2	
Characteristics You Feel Are Most Important for Leaders to Have ($n = 40$)	
Respect for all community members	32
Good communication skills	26
Good listening skills	19
Ability to motivate others	18
Interpersonal skills	18
Instructional knowledge	18
Flexibility	17
Approachability	16
Friendliness	15
Sense Of Humor	13
Firmness	9
Ability To Assign Tasks	8
Authority	7
Strong Organizational Skills	3
Decisiveness	3
Strong Opinions	1
Other: *Life-Long Learner*	1

Three-fourths of respondents felt that they had opportunities to "exercise leadership in the

school." The majority felt they did this "in the classroom." The Design Team was the second

most chosen response, with 14 responses. Selecting curriculum materials and serving on

committees both garnered 13 responses.

Half of the respondents had participated in planning professional development while a

little less that fifty percent had facilitated professional development. The most popular response

for why respondents had agreed to participate in either of these manners was "being encouraged"

to do so. One-fourth of respondents thought they had "something to offer" and one-fourth "felt

[their] involvement would be positively received." Nine respondents felt that who invited them

to participate was a deciding factor. The format of the professional development and the planning time available followed with seven responses each.

Thirty-five respondents (87.5%) liked seeing a variety of presenters in professional development. Twenty-five thought that sharing would lead to "more collaboration." Fifteen felt that seeing "a colleague other than an administrator, coach, or consultant facilitating professional development" made them think "I can suggest topics for future training."

When asked when they felt that their leadership skills had "flourished most in the school," there were some telling answers about what people felt. One respondent said "When I feel validated as a person and as a professional in my field. That is when I feel encouraged take on more of a leadership role." Others referred to their voices being heard. "When we have been able to express ourselves, be heard, and action taken based on our input" and "When we were allowed to be open and honest!" Two others expressed that their leadership skills flourished when they felt utilized: "when my abilities were put to use" and "as the math test time was approaching…teachers were more interested…and I was able to plan PD that really addressed the teachers' needs ..." The final open ended response was "when the topic or content is related to interest group." Interest groups were an initiative proposed by the Design Team in the second year of the CSR Grant award period. Staff members self selected into either the family support for learning group, the technology integration group, or the project-based learning group. Facilitators for each group were Design Team members and non-Design Team members. Table 3 shows all of the checked off responses.

Respondents were asked when they felt their engagement had been the greatest and were asked to mark all choices that applied. People were most engaged in professional development outside the building, followed by "interest groups." This question also received some of the

greatest amount of open-ended responses. The respondents expressed that their engagement was

highest when "my input was valued," when creativity was allowed, and when "the presentation

offered something I could actually use in the classroom."

Table 3	
When Has Your Engagement Been The Greatest? (*n* = 40)	
Professional development out of the building	17
Interest groups	16
Grade meetings	15
School Teams	8
Committee meetings	5
Other (specify):	4

Higher levels of engagement were influenced by "the topic or content of the session" (20

of the 40 responses). Personal choice was second with 13 responses and "who was presenting"

received 10 responses. Personal energy level also had an impact on higher engagement. In

terms of format, "having hands-on activities" and working in small groups each received 24

responses. "Opportunities for discussion" received 23 responses.

When asked what would motivate them to introduce outside activities or resources, half

of respondents selected "knowing what kind of time frame would be allotted to me for activity

implementation and planning." Eighteen respondents selected "being directly involved in the

planning." In open-ended responses, two couple of respondents pointed to knowing that the

"information would be welcomed by colleagues," another respondent noted that "administrative

support and encouragement" would motivate them.

Interviews helped me to look deeper at teachers' perceptions of themselves as leaders.

Four of the eight Design Team members were interviewed. They were asked about their

teaching background, whether or not they saw themselves as leaders, and what they felt the successes and greatest challenges of the Team had been.

The membership's teaching experience ranges from five years to 28 years. The team is comprised of elementary and middle school teachers, general and special education teachers and teachers of bilingual classes and monolingual classes. Classroom and out-of-classroom teachers are represented as well. The school's principal is also a member of the Design Team.

Three out of 4 members interviewed saw themselves as leaders. A couple of members said that just in being a teacher there was leadership involved. One commented that she does not consider herself a leader. The 28-year veteran said she is "getting closer to becoming one." All four members who were interviewed joined the Design Team because they wanted to become more "involved" in the school. Two mentioned being encouraged or being asked.

None of the four Design Team members had facilitated or planned professional development in their current school prior to joining the Design Team. Two of the respondents mentioned being very nervous prior to facilitating, but feeling invigorated by the experience of working with their interest group. One of the Design Team members had not been a member when she first facilitated with an interest group. Interestingly enough, two of the members referred to the support they received from their co-facilitators when they talked about their first experience of this kind with professional development. They were referring to "leaning on" each other. Those who felt their talents were being tapped felt that the Design Team was a major vehicle for this.

Successes named by the Team members included that the "relationship with (the school's parents) opened up," "camaraderie" with colleagues; and "the way we work as partners giving suggestions." The fact that there was always a chance that our suggestions would "actually

happen, a chance that we could do something" was a success. Another member noted that the summer workshops in the CSR Summer training program were built on teacher input and "they (teachers) actually showed up, excited…(they) wanted to learn." She added that "sometimes (they just) want to be asked." She also referred to the Earth Day Celebration that came out of project-based learning interest group. While last year was the first time this celebration had been organized, this year one of the Assistant Principal's in the school called it an "annual" event. This member felt that the Assistant Principal's own bringing it up was significant.

One of the members, who has been a teacher for nine years and is now a coach, found her involvement to be "a boost to people, including myself, to do more in the school…(the Team has been) a very positive constant." The Team had a presence over the last several years, even while other elements in the school might have come and gone. Another teacher felt that surveys conducted by the Design Team to get staff feedback and the communication venues that were opened were successful. She and one of the other interviewed members also thought back to the first year of the CSR grant implementation when a curriculum showcase to share student work school-wide was organized.

When asked if their level of leadership would remain after the grant period was over, the response was an overwhelming "yes." One of the member felt if the "right people are in place" the good work begun would continue. She added "I'm not there for the grant, I am here for the school." Another answered "I hope so. I hope it increases." The third responded "I hope it does…I'm hoping to remain involved if the Team continues." The member with the most teaching experience answered "Yes. I am motivated to see things change for the better for students and teachers." This last response came from a teacher who, while a teacher for 28 years, had not participated in her schools as much as

she has in the last few years with the Design Team. She has seen some involvement through the

special education unit, but not as much otherwise during her career.

In summer of 2004 and of 2005, the Comprehensive School Reform program sponsored a

series of workshops for teachers and parents over the summer. The forms were used to gather

data regarding staff interests and perceived need as well as facilitator involvement. In 2004,

there were five staff members who volunteered and expressed interest in planning or facilitating

workshops. As the CSR Facilitator, I facilitated the majority of workshops. This year's forms

yielded eight responses from staff members willing to lead and facilitate workshops. Of the 16

different workshops offered, I am facilitating or co-facilitating five. The other workshops have

been or will be facilitated by other teachers, both Design Team members and those who are not

Design Team members.

ANALYSIS

The recurring themes found in the analysis of my log entries reflect the literature I

studied in the course of my research. Several of the authors whose work I read wrote about

ongoing support for change efforts, for fostering vision, and for nurturing professionalism and

growth in leadership.

The information gathered through Design Team interviews and through reading my personal

log indicates that the collaborative work and planning that took place motivated each of us and spurred

us on to want to collaborate more and to do more to be involved in the school. The leadership survey

also reinforced this notion, since staff members noted that seeing a variety of presenters made them

feel that the sharing would lead to more collaboration. Barth writes that there is evidence that "when

workers participate in decision-making, satisfaction and quality of work rise" (p. 130)

The information shared by my school's staff through the leadership survey supports what Malcolm Knowles established as his four assumption about adult learning in 1973 (Knowles as cited in Zemke and Zemke, 1995). Adults tend to prefer self-direction, adults learn more effectively through experiential techniques, and adults want to learn a skill or acquire knowledge that they can apply to their immediate circumstances. More than half of survey respondents felt most highly engaged when they selected the topic of their professional development session. They favored hands-on presentations and opportunities for discussion, and felt their leadership skills flourished when they addressed the needs of the teachers with whom they work.

Attendance in the Comprehensive School Reform Summer Training Program was voluntary and the program was designed around staff feedback. The program received extremely positive feedback. By May of 2005, teachers and paraprofessionals were asking when the 2005 CSR Training Program catalogue would be coming out. One part of the success of this program may be that "with the choice of attending comes an openness to learn" (Barth p. 79). Furthermore, another key to the positive reaction to the summer training program is that people's voices are being heard and responded to almost directly. As Rust, Ely, Krasnow and Miller write, "It is well-documented that if change is to be effective, attention must be paid to teachers' voices, their concerns, beliefs, and experiences…" (p. 16). The environment is also less pressured than it is during the school year.

Over time, the CSR program has been able to "widen the circles of people who understand how to design and conduct program appropriate to their own settings" (McCallister, p. 37). The elements discussed above regarding the summer training program have facilitated this widening, The facilitation and collaboration of the Design Team over the three years of the CSR grant have helped those who have participated in the initiative and taken advantage of

training and teamwork involved have moved into, even if only once or twice, roles where they have become more willing to share of their talents and who can speak to the purpose of the reform initiative.

Furthermore, Design Team feedback was aligned with general survey data regarding how staff might be engaged participation and leadership widened by doing the following: addressing topics people feel "passionate about," tapping into people's talents and pulling those who are good at something to do that thing, and offering useful and applicable information. People were motivated by the topics being offered, and through getting more feedback as topics were discussed.

In writing about effective professional development, Guskey (2003) writes that ":the characteristics that influence the effectiveness of professional development are multiple and complex." As a Design Team, we not only planned, but we reflected. We used our own discussions as well as feedback from colleagues as to what kinds of programming we would want to pursue. We also talked about how we might be able to "fit" these plans into the sometimes competing mandates and school-based initiatives (McCallister, p. 43). Through our work together, we on the team were able to support and give a voice to the kind of professional development we felt would be the best for reaching our colleagues and being meaningful. In the process, we were able to engage in what Sparks calls the "first tier" of professional development (2004). As Design Team members indicated in their interview responses, they felt their professional judgment was utilized in their work on the Design Team. As a result, we "experienced growth in professional judgment and skills…Professional learning of this type engages the intellect, involves…action and reflection, and builds relationships, all of which lead to continuous improvements in teaching and learning for all students" (Sparks, 2003). As my

conversations with the Design Team members told me, the knowledge gained by members seeped into their personal and in their teaching practice as well.

WHAT I LEARNED

Looking at the responses regarding leadership characteristics caused me to think about what I should strive to do as I continue to develop as a leader or should I decide to take on the formal leadership role as administrator. It also offered a framework for what kinds of structure I would need to put into place in order to help my colleagues grow professionally. In speaking to my colleagues, I learned that while we were developing strategies for, and planning professional development, the team experience itself was a professional growth opportunity.

As I read the literature and saw in it what I strongly believed and agreed with, I knew that many, many administrators and leaders would also agree with the concepts and ideas presented about community. I think that most people would. The issue, however, is not to leave these ideas and this vision of collaborative professional community and the development of leadership on a surface level or just pay it lip service. How do you REALLY make it happen? I decided that the way to make community building and distributed leadership a reality for more people is to make structures that cause teachers to have positive experiences which they will value for a long time. Encourage these teachers to become leaders and decision-makers who can then build structures like those they have worked under. Having experienced productive, positive and genuine shared leadership, and valuing these experiences, those leaders will prioritize the structures that need to be in place and make these a part of their vision as they lead.

Finally, my experience with this project shows that what seems like a negative happening can actually be serendipitous. As I was getting set to complete my data tallying and analysis, I

found all of my surveys missing. After all the work of putting the survey together, working with

my administration and Team to revise the survey, give staff the survey and conduct initial

reviews of the information, my data was gone. While this was quite disappointing and

potentially disastrous, the final outcome was actually just the opposite. The missing data caused

me to have to think about how I would gather data relevant to my study in a short time. The

result was that I had to refocus and target where I might be able to find further, richer data. This

is when I decided to focus on the Design Team. The unexpected and ill-timed turn of events

actually injected new life into my action research.

SUMMARY OF DATA

The literature regarding adult learning, school improvement and change agents and

effective professional development points to a need to plan carefully and to respond to the needs

of the learner in an appropriate manner for his context. Through the use of a leadership survey,

interviews with my school's Design Team members, keeping a log of my own experiences as a

facilitator and comparing two years' response forms, I have been able to pull out certain key

pieces of data regarding leadership.

- **Educators recognize that they can play a leadership role in their school.** The majority of teachers and paraprofessionals (81%) in the school who responded to the survey (40), felt that teachers could have leadership roles in the building. Two-thirds of the respondents selected "Design Team Members" as potential leaders.

- **There are recurring themes concerning educators' views on why they participate actively or lead.** Some themes emerged regarding why teachers and paraprofessionals agreed to participate in the facilitation or planning of professional development, when they felt most engaged in professional development, or when felt their leadership skills flourished most in the school. These were when teachers felt valued and encouraged, when they felt the topics being presented were relevant to their practice, when they were allowed to express themselves honestly, and when they were able to be creative.

- **The Design Team served as a vehicle for professional growth.** No members of the Design Team had ever facilitated professional development in their current school until they became members of the Design Team. Members felt that positive outcomes came from the partnerships they formed with each other on the team whether for discussion at meetings, presenting during professional development sessions, or planning school activities.

IMPLICATIONS

- Educators see potential for leadership in their roles as teachers and paraprofessionals. Time and other supports must be provided to develop a true team atmosphere where educators trust and work together for common goals that they have helped to develop.

- Get to know teachers and recognize their areas of strengths and their talents. Students will not grow in schools where the adults do not grow, so making this a priority is essential.

- Establish professional development that addresses the needs of educators in the building. Educators will respond to learning more about topics they are passionate about or feel they need to learn.

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APPENDIX

Leadership Survey

Design Team Interview Questions

Design Team Charter

Dear Staff:

*As part of our Comprehensive School Reform Program and our needs assessment for planning in the upcoming year, we have developed this leadership survey. The survey reflects our CSR strand related to distributed school leadership. In order to gain the most accurate picture of our needs, it is essential that all respondents answer questions as candidly as possible. Your responses will be kept **completely confidential.** Any findings summarized will **not** include any respondent's personal information. Thank you for completing this survey and helping make out reform efforts more successful.*

Role in the school: ☐ Teacher ☐ Paraprofessional ☐ Administrator ☐ Other _____
Number of years in this role: ☐ 0-5 ☐ 6-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ more than 20
Mark which grades you work with: ☐ Grades Pre-K to 2 ☐ Grades 3-5 ☐ Grades 6-8
☐ **Do you work with special populations (If Yes, specify):** ☐ Yes ☐ No
☐ ELLs ☐ Special education

Who could have leadership roles in your school building? Mark all that apply.

☐ Coaches
☐ Teachers
☐ School Leadership Team Members
☐ Design Team Members
☐ Parent Coordinator
☐ Other (specify) _____

☐ Parents
☐ Paraprofessionals
☐ Custodians
☐ Security Officers

Please check off the <u>five (5)</u> characteristics you feel are most important for leaders to have.

☐ friendliness
☐ respect for all community members
☐ firmness
☐ good listening skills
☐ interpersonal skills
☐ instructional knowledge
☐ flexibility
☐ decisiveness
☐ strong opinions

☐ authority
☐ sense of humor
☐ ability to motivate others
☐ good communication skills
☐ expertise in their field
☐ strong organizational skills
☐ ability to assign tasks
☐ approachability
☐ other

Do you feel that there are opportunities for you to exercise leadership in the school? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If you answered "Yes," mark all that apply.

☐ In the classroom
☐ Grant/proposal writing
☐ Design Team
☐ School Leadership Team
☐ Being a group reporter at a professional development session
☐ Committees (e.g. RIF, interest groups, curriculum planning to structure grades)
☐ Proposing activities to be implemented in the school building (e.g. Earth Day, motivational activities, workshop ideas)

☐ Selecting curriculum materials
☐ Facilitating professional development
☐ Planning professional development

Have you ever participated in either of the following?

Planning professional development   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Facilitating professional development   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If you marked "Yes," did you agree to participate? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If you marked "Yes," please indicate below all that apply. Feel free to add any comments.

☐ Being encouraged   ☐ Being encouraged more than once
☐ Who invited me to participate   ☐ Time (availability)
☐ Felt compelled to do it   ☐ The planning time available
☐ I thought I had something to offer
☐ Felt my involvement would be positively received
☐ Format of presentation was appealing
☐ Other (specify): _____

What do you think of when you see a colleague other than an administrator, coach or consultant facilitating professional development? Mark all that apply.

☐ It's good to see a variety of presenters.   ☐ I would like to be asked to facilitate.
☐ The sharing will lead to more collaboration.   ☐ The facilitator is perceived to be an expert.
☐ Perhaps I can help facilitate something too.   ☐ The facilitator/colleague is a positive
☐ I can suggest topics for future training.   influence in the building.
☐ Other (specify): _____

Have you seen a difference in your level of engagement over the last three years? (This refers to professional development you have attended, planned or facilitated.)

☐ Yes   ☐ No   If "Yes": Engagement level is   ☐ greater   ☐ lesser

When has your engagement been the greatest? Mark all that apply.
☐ Interest groups   ☐ Committee meetings   ☐ Professional development out of the building

☐ School Teams   ☐ Grade meetings   ☐ Other (specify):_____

To what do you attribute the times you have experienced a higher level of engagement?

      ☐ I chose the topic of my session.
      ☐ The topic or content of the session
      ☐ Who was presenting
      ☐ My personal energy level
      ☐ Other (specify):_____
      ☐ Format of the session (mark all that apply from the items below)
          ☐ Being able simply to take in information
          ☐ Opportunity for discussion
          ☐ Having hands-on activities, movement
          ☐ Small group size
          ☐ Large group size
          ☐ Other (specify): _____

When do you feel your leadership skills have flourished most in the school?

What would motivate you to share or introduce outside activities or resources that you know about within the school? (e.g. interesting books, materials, activities, people)
- ☐ Knowing how the event or activity would be scheduled or programmed
- ☐ Being directly involved in the planning
- ☐ Knowing what kind of time frame would be allotted to me for activity implementation and planning
- ☐ Other (specify): _____

Are you involved in any other type of professional development outside of your school building?
Mark all that apply.
- ☐ Graduate courses
- ☐ Informal visitations to other classrooms or schools
- ☐ Conferences and workshops: How do you know about these? _____
- ☐ Educational organizations: Name(s) of organization(s) _____
- ☐ Personal professional reading: Example(s) _____
- ☐ Other (specify): _____

Would you like to share what you've discussed/learned through the opportunities above?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No

(If yes, please provide your name below.)

If "Yes," what format(s) most interest(s) you?   Mark all that apply.
- ☐ One-on-one to inform and have someone else share the information
- ☐ 100-minute professional development block
- ☐ Grade meeting
- ☐ Study group
- ☐ Share time/lunch 'n learn
- ☐ Workshop time other than during the school day: When? _____
- ☐ Other (specify): _____

Please feel free to add any additional comments.

Name (optional): _____

THANK YOU!!

Leadership by Design:
How a Team Experience Shaped Teachers' Views of Themselves as Leaders

<u>Design Team Interview Questions</u>

How many years have you been teaching?

What kinds of schools (grades, demographics, public/private)?

Do you see yourself as a leader in the school/? How?

Do you feel your talents are being tapped here in your work environment? Through which means?

Why did you join the Design Team?

Did you see yourself as a leader prior to DT?

How would you characterize your own involvement as a leader over the course of your career? (More or less at certain times, more/less opportunities, variety of opportunities, types of involvement)

Had you facilitated any PD previous to joining the DT? How did you feel when you were facilitating/why did you do it?

In what ways might PD foster leadership?

What do you think the biggest success of the DT has been? Why did you choose this?

What do you think the least successful endeavor of the DT has been?/What goal has not been met? Why did you choose this?

What has been the DT's biggest challenge?

Do you think there has been any connection between how often you've been able to attend meetings and how engaged you/motivated you are in DT activity? (specify)

Did the kind of work you have done with the DT have any impact outside of the school/classroom? (make you interested in any areas of education, research, social issues overall)

Do you think your role on the DT has had any impact on others (colleagues)? Have colleagues or administrators turned to you as a leader?

What do you believe would widen the school's core of participants/leaders?

How do you meet your needs when there is something you feel you need to learn?

When have you felt that you were being encouraged to use your "professional judgment the most"?

Do you think your level of leadership will remain after the CSR grant period is completed?

Design Team Charter

Ground Rules
1. We will meet twice a month
2. Start and end meetings on time. Notify the team of expected lateness or absence
3. Everyone is encouraged to participate
4. All ideas are held up for consideration, reflection and/or inquiry
5. All participants are considered equal
6. Strive for results by advocating the best ideas that emerge from the group
7. It's okay to have fun

Purpose

The Design Team will move the school in a positive direction by being an advocate for all stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, community and administrators). We will take action and responsibility for improvement by working together with all groups to achieve concrete results.

Goals
Create actions plans that will:
- Create an environment where students strive for excellence in meeting the academic standards
- Motivate and inspire a culture of learning
- Integrate and weave a fabric between the school community and the surrounding neighborhood

Roles
- The Design Team facilitator will prepare meeting agendas and times
- The Design Team Recorder will take notes and send minutes to all participants
- The Design Team will be assessing and communicating progress of our action plans

Procedures
- Hold meetings on a regular basis
- Follow ground rules to maximize meeting times
- Communicate meeting results in timely fashion (Meetings minutes provided to staff within 1 week)
- Make informed decisions based on data when applicable