

Running Head: Creating Change: Introduction of a Junior High Flex Model

Creating Change: Introduction of a Junior High Flex Model

by

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Bachelor of Education, University of Alberta, 1990

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Supervisory Committee

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Dr. Todd Milford (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)
Supervisor

Abstract

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This project identifies the challenges, opportunities, and requirements for change to occur in a school environment and describes this around the implementation of a Flexible learning schedule into a junior high school. By examining the essentials of teacher inquiry, curriculum change, and instructional leadership, we use these qualities to describe the reasons for methods used to implement a Flexible learning environment. The discussion here identifies the need to create the implementation of such whole changes as teacher based action research projects, supported by distributed leadership models. In a narrative approach, supported by a number of literature reviews, a discussion of failures and potential success of an implementation of a Flex schedule within a Junior High school is presented. This presents the reader with important characteristics of change and some justification for them.

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Dedication

To my wife, for putting up with my whining about completing this project for what seemed like an eternity, and still willing to keep me after it was done. To my kids for allowing me to take time during our summer, and for telling everyone that daddy couldn't make dinner tonight again because he was frustrated working on his paper. To Dr. Todd Milford who dragged me through this process, always with a smile and a pat on the back. To my mom for showing me an occupation that has always been more than a job.

Chapter 1: A Journey

In June of 2013 I finished my 22nd year as a teacher in the school I attended as a student; all of my teaching experiences had occurred in this one building. I moved through the school culture from a beginning teaching in the junior high to holding a department head position in the high school, a position most of my mentors had held during their time. A position that had long been a professional goal and a place I had failed to think beyond.

My entire teaching career was as a Physical Education and Social Studies teacher. The structure of my delivery and topics within my class changed over the years; technology had become embedded in most learning experiences in my class, even in the physical education ones. I reacted well with new curriculums and found it easy to introduce changes like these into my classroom; but I am not sure my teaching changed to meet the transformations in education or in my students. I heeded the news of innovative trends in education like ‘assessment for learning’ and ‘flipped classrooms’; I understood the movement to using both formative and summative assessments in my class. I saw changes that others around me were experiencing and experimenting with; however those new experiences failed to enter into my teaching. In fact I had become consumed by the day-to-day struggle of teaching and coaching and felt like I failed to learn for a very long time; and I saw this same response in many of the teachers around me. Day (1999) shares that “growth involves learning which is sometimes natural and evolutionary, sometimes opportunistic and sometimes the result of planning.” (p.15). My growth as a teacher failed to encompass any of these characteristics. The idea of life long learning was very distant; in fact it became a real source of resentment for me. I could see

some of my peers moving on in their careers to greater challenges, experiencing growth in their teaching profession and engaging new changes in education. I was not.

I started to see the hours spent coaching and in athletics as the cause of failure in my career. I had spent years working with student athletes making them into leaders, teaching them to be good citizens, showing them the value a good work ethic creates in one's life, creating opportunities for them to set and achieve goals; but, I had failed to identify the importance of this growth in my own career. I started to dismiss any value in what I did on a daily basis for my students and began to focus only the need for change in my life and in my learning. I thirsted for an opportunity to become an engaged, excited, and passionate learner again.

I made a very bold choice for someone so entrenched in a school and seemingly so afraid of change. Resigning my position of Physical Education Department Head and Athletic Director, a position I had loved and was very proud to hold, and applying to another school was a shocking decision. I had spent my entire professional career working towards this position. I held an important position of leadership in a school that I was deeply embedded in. It was the only place I had taught at, and in fact it was really the only place I had experienced learning and school culture. Most of my friends, my wife, and many of my mentors were all apart of this schools history and culture. And yet I still knew it was time to leave. I was granted a position in administration at a junior high school. As concerning as this thought of change was it also came with great excitement and relief. My greatest fear was whether I could learn and change again. In an attempt to support this I also applied to start my Masters in Instructional Leadership at the University of Victoria. Both of these choices were very divergent from my past. They

forced me to evaluate my teaching, my learning, and my leadership skills in much greater detail.

A Summer of Learning

The first summer of my Master's in Instructional Leadership occurred before I started my new job. It was an alarming yet invigorating experience. It was the first time in twenty years I was asked to write anything that someone else would read that did not relate to basketball or a staff memo. My written work and thoughts were edited and sent back to me, not with a sarcastic e-mail about my spelling, but with reflective thoughts on my ideas, where to search for other answers and expectations that I would in fact change what I had written to reflect new learnings. It was an extremely difficult and yet energizing experience.

Maybe the most important element was identifying what encourages change in education. How do we create positive change in how teachers teach and how the business of education supports this? An investigation of Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) discussion of practitioner inquiry quickly resonated with me. Not only because they discuss evident and logical process for teacher learning, but also because it related well to my own impression of how I could see my own teaching change. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) share that "(O)ne of the most important ideas underlying both practitioner inquiry and professional learning communities is that they recognize the central role of teachers and other practitioners in shaping the life of schools and as agents in transforming the work of schools." (p. 40) For me this is a foundational statement. It recognizes not only that effective educational research must be contextual, but also that the role of the practitioner is to drive the change within your own class, the school, and

fundamental the greater educational system. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) further suggest it is clear teachers “participate in the inquiry process as researchers, working from the inside out.” (p.41) The most important feature here is that practitioners drive research questions in the context of their own experiences. My own change would be best done within my own context, driven by my experiences and moved forward by lived practices.

As a teacher I had seen waves of change and a number of new educational trends, yet they failed to make a change in most of the classrooms. Changes always seem to come with a cloud of suspicion and resentment. Change was often layered between multiple steps of new policies that failed to meet the expectations of our society or resulted in better measurable learning of students. Most importantly these changes were driven in a top down delivery model. Leaders outside of my classroom and outside of my building were representing and requiring changes in my classroom without knowing the context within which I taught. More over my peers and I had become resistant to change because we had seen or lived through previous changes that had failed before. Apprehension is often created for those involved because we have failed to invest in the discussion as to why these new programs maybe different from previous attempts or even if they are similar in name only and not in characteristic.

Instructional Leadership

The following September was also the beginning of a new chapter in my professional career. The role of assistant principal challenged my abilities as a leader and redefined my understanding of instructional leadership. Leadership asks of us to make guided movements towards change and to facilitate the growth in others. Fullan (2011)

explained “(Thus,) exhorting people to have greater moral commitment is often less effective than helping them get new experiences that activate their moral purpose. The establishment of new practices and experiences galvanizes passion. This is the essence of the change leader: the capacity to generate energy and passion in others through action.” (p.23). Instructional leadership continues this need for change and the supporting of growth in others yet it also asks of us to be leaders in instructional knowledge and experts in pedagogical change. Great instructional leaders recognize the need to foster inquiry-based research among their staff; they understand the importance of distributed leadership and that change will include teachers as leaders of instructional transformation; and that instructional leadership must deal with the management of resources and staff, but must move past that role.

Within the first weeks as an Assistant Principal it became extremely clear that the management of resources, planning, scheduling, discipline and staffing issues would consume most of my time. Cuban (1988) asserted that there is a focus deeply embedded in the principal ship that inexorably draws principals away from a focus on teaching and learning. Marshall (2003) described, “a force field that sometimes kept me out of the classroom” (p.710) and constantly changes a principal’s focus from instructional leader to manager of resources. In the 21st century of education we see the managerially load of administrators grow yearly, yet it is clear that the expected role of the principal includes that of ‘principal teacher’, the leader of pedagogy and instruction. Hoerr (2007) shares that although “much has changed in the schooling enterprise, but our expectations for the principal remain the same: He or she needs to be the educational visionary, offering direction and expertise to ensure that students learn.” (p.84)

Educational leadership has become complex, and this complexity forces the principal to change their role to be less of the expert and more of a champion of the many bands that effect greater student learning. Brazer and Bauer (2013) offer a definition that clearly describes the complete and required role of instructional leaders: “Instructional leadership is the effort to improve teaching and learning for PK-12 students by managing effectively, addressing the challenges of diversity, guiding teacher learning, and fostering organizational learning.” (p.6) No longer can we expect a principal to fulfill all the roles they once directed; rather they must build capacity in those around them and be the champion for teachers as leaders of instructional transformation.

In this investigation and during my short administrative experience it has become clear that much of the real work done as an instructional leader is done indirectly. Supporting the staff by making sure the school resources, staffing requirements, school vision and managerial elements are in place to allow teachers to change and improve the learning that goes on in their classes. By creating the leadership opportunities for staff in both defined and undefined roles to be instructional models. Creating a prophecy that supports teachers as leaders and a comfort level to share with their peers. Finally to provide the resources, professional development, and encouragement for teachers to engage in practitioner led research.

Another Change

In the 2009 the Alberta government produce the Inspiring Education Steering Committee Report (2009). The report described the discussions that the Province had with its citizens; information gathered both in person and through online survey's. This document described a need for change in education and shed light on the direction for instructional change in the province of Alberta. As a result of this public discussion and

further educational research the Alberta Government introduced an initiative called Alberta Education Curriculum Redesign Strategy (2011). Its goal was to provide an opportunity to review Alberta's provincial curriculum to ensure it is engaging, relevant and meets the needs of 21st century learners. It would reveal more than just new concepts to be covered, but describe a real change in how classrooms would look. It encourages a whole array of new learning opportunities for students; both in how they would receive instruction and also changes in when and where this instruction could occur. Classrooms will be where and when students most effectively learn. Adaptive scheduling and student centered approaches will be the focus.

Edmonton Catholic School District responded to this initiative and the Ministerial Order (#001, 2013) that supported it by implementing their Transform project. (myECSD – Transform, 2013). They identified ten pedagogical shifts that would move the teaching and learning practices in their schools from what they saw as traditional practices to those more student-centered. In 2013 they began the professional development and school projects that they believed would help to move these ideas forward.

How I see change

These calls from Alberta Education and the Edmonton Catholic School District require great educational change and the implementation of them into the classroom corresponded with my introduction into a leadership role within a new school. My new role would not just be one of a leader but also a leader of change. The idea of this role is very exciting but challenges me to identify my own thoughts on how change is best achieved; my experiences had told me that change to the classroom was difficult. Fullan

(2011) clarified that teachers lose sight of why they change practices because, over more than the last decade in Canada, the United States and other Western countries, teachers have been bombarded with too many different directions for how to change classroom practices. As a teacher, I often failed to understand the why of educational change; thinking it should create visible and measurable results in the classroom and most importantly in the students. Hargreaves (2010) emphasized that practices (new ways of teaching) travel well, but the reasons for changing practices (pedagogies) do not. How then does an instructional leader effect change in the classrooms of the teachers he charge to support? How do I use my new position to be an agent of change in those I lead? I find myself acting as the link between those above me who require change to be made and those I lead who are being asked to change their teaching. Teachers are often not heard in the process of the educational change and my leadership must also give a voice to those actually implementing the change.

Project Goal

This project will then explore how educational change occurs the most effectively. In Chapter 2, I will identify the important characteristics of effective large-scale educational change. Identify what factors seemed to have that greatest impact in moving change forward. Additionally in chapter two we will identify how teacher lead action research and professional learning communities are important in creating real change in the context of classrooms. Further more I will explore the importance of instructional leadership in making change and the significance that distributed leadership plays. I will take some time to define curriculum and identifying the importance that pedagogical change takes on within curriculum, that in fact on going change may be an

important quality of a robust curriculum. Chapter 2 will then guide us into chapter 3 by identifying some 21st century curriculum changes that are ongoing in Alberta and in fact within my own context. Subsequently, in Chapter 3, I will then take these learnings, my own experiences and look at a plan to introduce a flexible learning program at the junior high level and the instructional leadership qualities that would allow this to be the most effective. By then exploring this project we will develop some implications for the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As touched on in chapter one there are a number of important factors which can support and drive educational change and also some that can be seen as hindrances. Fullan shares that “ we are at the very early stages of appreciating the nature and complexity of educational reform on a large scale” (1999, p. 66). Senge (in Fullan, 2010) explains that, “at no time in history has there been a more powerful need for a new vision of the purpose of education,” (p. x). In 2015 it seems as though change is occurring in every facet of educational transformation and that often the alteration of our school systems maybe be absorbing all of the resources and energies of our educational systems and leaving very little for the teaching, teachers and students that are living in this system. This is not the first time that we have seen attempts to make massive reforms of educational systems. Fullan (2000) shares that in the 1960’s with the advancement of the individual freedoms that occurred most identifiably in North American society, we also saw attempts to change schools systems. He explains that these attempts had little success as they failed to understand the complexity of change within schools systems. At the heart of the problem was a belief that great ideas will simple affect change and that by providing the funds and advanced curriculums change would occur. Fullan labels

...this the ‘adoption era’ of reform because the goal was to get innovations out there, as if flooding the system with external ideas would bring about desired improvements. Huge sums of money were poured into major curriculum reforms like PSSC Physics, BSCC Biology, and MACOS Social Sciences, and organizational innovations such as open plan schools, flexible scheduling, and team teaching. (p. 6)

This belief not only failed to make reform, but it also created an aversion to change in our school systems. Even if change had been affective, the longevity of it was hindered because the provisions and methodologies were not in place to support its long-term adoption. These failed attempts clarified the complexity of affecting change in educational systems; whether they be whole school, whole divisions or in fact throughout the whole of the educational system. School systems throughout the world are recognizing the need to reform the educating process to meet the needs of the 21st century. In fact, the identification of the skills, competencies and knowledge creation proficiencies of students has been explored and advanced (Fullan 2010). The concern maybe how we create the change or reform in our system, as it exists today? The history of educational reforms identifies that change is complex and sheds light on many failures. The literature can also share some of the characteristics of successful change movements and allow us to make the most positive advances in the changes we need to make. We will look at change, how it is best achieved and see if we can incorporate some of the best elements that encourage change and in chapter 3 use them to help support the development of a Flexible learning program in a Junior High setting.

Change

One of the most important features of enduring and successful educational reform is having the change be directed from both a top down and a bottom up approach. More specifically Fullan (1999) states that “... neither top-down nor bottom-up strategies work. What is needed is simultaneous and interrelated top-down/bottom-up coordination.” (p.18). Schools then must create implementation programs that are specific to their own context. Further that teachers have a true function on the production

of not only their context specific changes, but also as agents of change across the curriculum reform.

It is within an individual schools' and teachers' context that change must occur, therefore it seems logical that change cannot be brought forward only from the hierarchy of the institution. For change to resonate within the classroom there must be a link to the what and why of change, and that which occurs between teachers and their students. Thus teachers and even their students need to be apart of the planning of change and the creation of curriculum. "The notion of partnership seems to promise a fusion or integration of 'top-down' and bottom-up' strategies for reform in education, bringing together as it does a range of stakeholders who each have an interest in the nature of change in schools." (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001, p. 553) This however is a much more complex problem than can be easily defined or unraveled.

This idea of curriculum development and implementation through the whole community has examples of success. The Getty Education Institute for the Arts, and their initiative – discipline-based art education (DBAE) can be seen as an illustration of how the development of change is more successful when there are multi layers of support for change. Wilson (1997) in his study the Quiet Evolution explains that "comprehensive and articulated plans developed within the consortia – plans in which the regional DBAE institute, the school district, the individual school, and teams of teachers within schools all assumed clearly defined roles for both the development and implementation – were tremendously successful." (p.130) Furthermore the literature seems to suggest that not only should change be a purposeful event that the whole system plans and under takes but that teachers, because of where they are situated, need to have specific roles in the

maintenance of educational change; Kirk & MacDonald (2001) believe that teachers hold a certain expertise that should be applied to the maintenance of changes beyond any reform projects. That having mechanisms in place that allow teachers together with administrators to review the ongoing success and growth of changes may increase the long term validity of educational reform. They go further to share that if these reviews continued long after reform projects that we may see a blurring of top-down, bottom-up approaches to change. That in fact change would occur in context with the learning experience of students, and would allow the inquiry of both teachers and students guide the needed changes to the whole of the system. This is of great importance to remember as we attempt to develop a flexible learning program in chapter 3; students and staff must build and then work to maintain the project.

Innovations

Another element that seems to have a great affect on the success of educational change is the scope of the reform and number of reforms that are occurring at the same time. When proposed changes are limited to small portions of the system and relate poorly to other reforms or learning settings they tend to do poorly. Fullan (1999) explains "...the evaluators found that when DBAE is introduced as a separate, additional innovation it fares worse than when it is connected or integrated with other reforms. Multiple unconnected innovations, which are common in district and school reform, result in overload and fragmentation" (p.19). Having experienced a wide range of professional development that seemed to come to teachers from multiple sources, this comment resonates with me. Because of the depth and size of many school districts it often seems as though reforms come to teachers from above with little or no understand

of other activities going on within the district. Fullan (2000) goes further to describe this with an example of a district implementing change; “[i]n this district, ad hoc projects and random professional development are seen as enemies of improvement.” (p. 10)

There appears to be great importance in having reforms have the room and inclusion for the whole of the system. These changes need to identify the entirety of the organization and speak to each constituent with clear and well-defined functions. Wilson (1997) notes that plans which included opportunities for the many stakeholders to embrace; both in the creation and the implementation of change, tend to take on a greater hold. This speaks to the need for change to be both contextual and clear in purpose. Earl and Hannay (2012) in their research shared that when a school district was able to narrow the focus of their reform to targeting an increase on student learning it triggered greater willingness of teachers to begin professional learning discussions. This gave a specific role for teachers that was situated in their classrooms and allowed them to relate other changes suggested by the school board to the context of their own classrooms.

Additionally, when reforms are seen as a group of unconnected movements, they tend to overwhelm and frustrate those asked to implement them. Earl and Hannay (2012) describe these as “unconnected silos” (p. 318). Further they shared that staff wished that these many goals were seen as a single cohesive plan that would move forward, and that additional changes that failed to relate well to the greater movement, be left behind or transformed to mesh with the reformation. Fullan (2000) shares

that the problem is not the absence of reform, but rather the presence of too many ad hoc, uncoordinated innovations and policies. Schools and school systems that are most effective do not take on the sheer most number of innovations – they are

instead selective, integrative and focused. Large-scale reform then, will require units to make connections and to synergize activities around common priorities.

(p.21)

Educational change is complex in its simplest form. Therefore effective reforms must be contained within a clear vision and be limited to that vision. Multiple projects that attempt to move changes forward yet are not linked to a common vision in fact tend to impede the movement. This is an important concept to remember in the creation of my project. How does the creation of a Flexible learning opportunity relate to other reforms going on in our district, or other changes within my school? In the next section I will explore professional learning communities; an example of how great change could be created within the context of the classroom, but seems to have lost its impact because of its implementation and top down driven goals.

My Experiences with Professional Learning Communities

One of the most important feature of educational reform is the who and how of change. As I have discussed, many reforms are placed into action in a top-down approach. However the literature offers that a balanced bottom-up, top-down method may have greater affect (Kirk and MacDonald, 2001). This is because the finish line of reform is in the classroom with teachers acting as the performers of new reforms. In order for teachers and students to provide the bottom-up support and direction of improvement there must be a culture of change within the school. Further, there must be a culture of inquiry for teachers to investigate those practices that prove best in their classroom and then explore new methods. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) are quick to acknowledge there are a large number of inquiry/research versions that can be linked to or fall under

the ‘umbrella of practitioner inquiry’ (p.39). They suggest it is clear teachers “participate in the inquiry process as researchers, working from the inside out.” (p.41) The most important feature here is that practitioners drive research questions in the context of their own experiences. Teacher inquiry (practitioner inquiry, teacher research, practitioner research) happens when teachers reflect on what occurs in their classrooms. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) describe this action as “wondering” about the teaching – learning relationship. Practitioner inquiry asks teachers to collect data, to reflect on it, to take action, and then share their insights with others. This cycle of inquiry continues with the teacher acting as researcher, often with the help of other staff and even formal research leaders. The key to this practice is that the teachers themselves pose the research questions and move the inquiry process in directions they choose. Because teachers take on the role of researchers in the context of their teaching, I believe that teachers find commonalities both personally and professionally between what they are exploring and what occurs in their classes. Krell and Dana (2012) cite Webster-Wright (2009) that “[i]n fact, teacher research provides a reconceptualization of professional development that focus on professional learning as a holistic process rather than as a string of potentially unrelated events.” (p.829). When teachers have opportunities to explore their *wonderings* not only does it make their reflection real, but also makes the changes they prescribe more effective. I would argue that the most important effect is the development of inquiry as a stance that then begins to perpetuate all of teachers dealing with their peers. A culture of inquiry is built on this. It is this culture of inquiry that will be the fuel that drives any educational reform forward and allow it to remain within new contexts.

I experienced first hand the organic nature that professional learning can have. Early in my career my school introduced the formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). The goal was to bring teacher inquiry into the classroom. In addition to features common in practitioner research, PLC's ask teachers to join together and develop a goal or common theme to work on that relates to the context in which they teach. These teacher groups develop norms and expectations that allow them to move change forward. Most importantly the goal of the inquiry is to be developed bottom up, and the cycle of discovery to relate to what was seen in the context of teachers own experiences. With the initial introduction of PLC's a teacher, I saw the value and professional engagement that they could create. We began to "*wonder*" about our classes and used our PLC to develop inquiry stances. For the greater part of the staff it was a relevant and contextual endeavor that seemed to invoke positive discussions and activities throughout the building. Our administration at the time was great in using the needs gleaned out of our PLC to drive our professional development days for the next few years. Most of our professional development for that time was really rewarding, as I believed I was apart of the teaching, the researching, and the professional learning that impacted the whole school community. This would not last. With the introduction of ideas similar to "data wise in action" project (Boudett & Steele, 2007) that Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2009) reference, our PLC became extremely prescriptive in nature. Groupings of teachers became solely based on subject areas. PLC were mandated to base their work exclusively on improvement on district and provincial achievement type exams. PLC became exclusively concerned with the collection, analysis, and evaluation of data. As a staff we lost the excitement that had once flowed through many of our PLC.

It alienated a number of staff whose courses did not have exam driven data to analysis.

They were forced to meet in subject areas that they often did not teach, simply to learn process skills. Other departments were simply ignored, and their PLC simply stopped existing.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) cite a number of authors that describe that PLC have a shared vision and a common commitment to achieving their goals. PLC are also seen as using some form of an inquiry cycle used to frame research, and further investigation. As an administrator I wish to deliver that same feeling of 'teacher as researcher' or 'agent of change' to my staff. Professional learning can then change what occurs in individually classrooms. It can also be the change that can drive the bottom-up portion of department, school and district wide reform. This can occur if reform movements and the professional learning that occurs does not become too prescriptive or top-down driven.

I see how PLC have become simply department meetings where prescriptive professional learning and administrative tasks all but confuses any hope of developing a culture of inquiry. Prescribed professional learning (or professional development) can include any and all activities that are top down in their approach. The development of district or school growth plans, department or school driven learning goals, the development of common assessment tools and exams, and most activities that require the collection, analysis, and reporting of assessment data back to another level of education. All of these have great value in our schools, however I would argue that they tend to place teachers at the receiving end of the knowledge. This fundamentally takes away a teacher's ability or need to be reflective about their practice, and they cease to co-

construct knowledge about their teaching. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2006) in talking about PLC failure share that teachers "... may lose sight of what should be the core emphasis of communities – improving the link between teachers' practice and their students' learning by building trusting relationships and developing norms of shared problem solving". (p.56) Most importantly professional learning of this type fails to develop cultures of inquiry. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), suggest that many PLC create teachers who become very good at collecting data and using this data to increase student scores on very specific tasks or exams (P. 57). The data and reflection is driven directly by the goals of testing, it leaves little room to develop reflections to affect change in any other direction. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) use Hargreaves (2007; 2008) ideas "...that rather than enriching students' learning, some communities become vehicles for simply boosting test scores or for surveillance of teachers and monitoring their compliance with school and district mandates." (p.56)

Assessment based PLC, or PLC that are encouraged to base progress on the assessment of data or are focused on district goals can also have a negative impact in the culture of learning and engagement of teachers involved with the research. PLC become another prescribed activity and teachers loose the local context that should drive their research. Teachers fail to make connections with their research and what occurs within their classes. This often leads to teachers taken part in professional development that fails to change what occurs in their classes. When teachers are left to create their own goals, to select co-researchers, and develop their reflective mechanisms, PLC are at their most valuable. They create the truest sense of the teacher as a researcher and a collaborator. When PLC are used as district and administration tools use to complete tasks and

disseminate new teaching techniques PLC demonstrate their least effective use. In fact when used like this they may act to discourage teachers from being involved in research and application of new ideas. For the most part it removes the reflective nature and fails to allow teachers to be engaged within the context of their classrooms.

Fullan (2000) describes one of the most important features of PLC as being the integrated pressure and support it creates within a school. This can be seen as a function of action research or teacher inquiry as well. Teachers support each other as they inquiry into what occurs in their classes and how they implement new changes. Their discussions and examples allow others to have success and the collaborative strength of the group moves reform forward. Additionally this encourages those within range to move their teaching forward as well. This natural pressure is an important feature as it allows the whole system to change. This pressure however is not top-down driven, and therefore seems to be better received. It appears that the education of individual teachers and the support of their inquiry-based actions would be a very important feature in transforming any educational change. It will be important to identify ways in which teacher inquiry and the integrated pressure that it can create to help move the creation of a flexible schedule forward. Moving into this next section I will investigate what I believe is the most important feature of any educational or instructional change, that being the change leadership.

Instructional Leadership

The literature supports the acceptance that the role of the principal or administrator within a school is one of the most important factors in encouraging educational change and reform. (Leithwood & Louis, 2011) Parsons and Harding (2011) share: “our research

suggests that effective schools are led by wise principals who build and support teacher leadership.” (p.1) Principals are responsible for the whole prophecy of their schools. This includes the administration of many business like tasks that now drive our education system. Further they are accountable for driving forward educational transformations and implementation of new curricular reforms. Instructional leadership theories have been predominantly associated with the role of school administrators; however many have encouraged the diffusion of leadership roles to those staff members directly related to the instructional delivery and creation (Hargreaves, 2007).

It is clear however that for a school to enjoy instructional change, to persist in moving forward and become dynamic places of learning, it must have a great instructional leader. Leadership asks of us to make guided movements towards change. It celebrates our willingness to build relationships and move the collective towards greater challenges. Great change leaders have some common beliefs and actions that direct how they implement change. Although each context demands flexibility in a change leader’s skills, we can find some common approaches among their actions.

Leadership involves working with people; therefore an understanding of individual beliefs makes an immediate impact in a leader’s success. This understanding may involve knowledge of teachers’ strengths and weaknesses, as well as identifying abilities and willingness to affect change in their classrooms. Goleman (2011) refers to this as emotional intelligence and speaks to the “immense practical applications in leadership roles” (p.12). Understanding how these elements affect the collegiality of professional learning, principals are tasked with creating schools with high performing, teachers who are content experts and then support the needs of those teachers (Brazer &

Bauer, 2013). Generating an atmosphere that focuses on the ultimate goal of student learning requires that principals to build a culture of positive and respectful teacher support. This allows teachers to engage in activities that drive inquiry and curriculum change. Reform is only created and supported when teachers act in support of the whole school culture; therefore principals are perfectly situated to drive the vision of reform and foster the capacity of teachers to make change.

As the complexity of administrative role increases it may no longer be realistic to see the principal as the ‘principal teacher’ within the school. However with the strength and probability of educational change that is occurring in our school systems instructional leaders cannot abdicate their roles. The importance of administrators’ presence in the professional learning process cannot be understated. Brazer & Bauer (2013) share that “instructional leadership is most powerful when leaders learn alongside teachers.” (p.4) This seems to suggest that the importance of instructional leadership may not be in the communication of curriculum details and pedagogical changes, but through the creation of a cultural inquiry, a common lived experience and having it embedded in collegiality (Hallinger, 2003). Instructional leaders must then surpass the idea of presenting and implementing change within their school and continue to focus on the application of reform as it is centered on the improvement in student and teacher learning. This can be accomplished through the engagement of teacher leaders to generate unity among teachers with the goal of spreading instructional leadership through a series of shared practices and support, rather than a top-down driven reform (Hallinger, 2003).

It is clear that principals no longer can be the sole curricular leader, however they cannot abdicate their role as experts in experience, whether pedagogical or curricular.

Schulman (1986) confirms the importance of content knowledge and that teacher's experiences over their career increase their expertise in pedagogical and curricular content knowledge. Instructional leaders need to have a diverse experience and with that hopefully a wide range of content knowledge. They may no longer be a content expert, but their experience allows instructional leaders to be in a place to better understand educational reforms and how they affect the whole of the system. Instructional leaders are in a better position to appreciate curricular outcomes, pinpoint student learning concerns, and create comfortable discussions about problems in the implementation of educational reforms (Carver, Steele, & Herber-Eisemann, 2010). Brazer and Bauer (2013) share that "instructional leadership requires knowledge of content and pedagogy broader and deeper than any one teacher's experiences are likely to provide" (p.3). This seems to suggest then that instructional leadership must include the skills and experiences of many teachers and that a culture of inquiry and teacher action that is supported that it may serve best to move reform forward. Further, that a model for instructional leadership is best served through a model of community-teacher based inquiry supported by principals that create sufficient provisions that allow for reforms to take hold and be supported within a culture of learning.

Stein and Nelson (2003) share that the position of administration in instructional leadership cannot be diminished; yet they cannot be the whole source of it. The modern day principal is inundated with a multitude of administrative tasks and roles that fail to allow them to manage the depth and complexity of new curriculums and pedagogical reforms. Hallinger (2010) suggests that this changes the focus of administrators to "ensure that the school has clear, measurable, time-based goals focused on the academic

progress of students.” (p.65) Even if principals have the depth of content knowledge and experience in subject specific curriculum changes, school reform maybe better supported when instructional leadership is shared among those working daily in the classrooms.

Fruitful instructional leadership leverages the knowledge competence of educators and through practice of collaborative communities, revealed around teacher based inquiry research. Moving instructional leadership from directive to distributed leadership with the intent of producing teacher capacity while establishing an atmosphere of growth will sustain educational change. It is the quality and depth of this distributed leadership that seems to signal the strength of a principal’s instructional guidance. Williams (2009) shares that the “reliance on the leadership of the principal alone is no longer viable if schools are to improve and sustain improvement. Leadership capacity is about creating conditions within the school for growth, self-renewal, and the development and distribution of leadership throughout the school organization.” (p.31) Within the literature on school change it becomes clear that schools that effectively move forward with pedagogical change and keep this wave of change moving have built leadership capacity within their organization (Harris & Lambert, 2003). Further more “Distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization rather than seeking this only through formal position or role.” (Harris 2004, p.13) It is clear that this leadership is not simply the principal allowing others to fulfill roles of leadership; rather it is the action of creating leadership activities, actions and tools throughout the school culture. The principal allows others to take part in the “leadership of operational tasks: keeping the school organized and moving towards its goals, through roles such as head of department, action researcher, member of task forces;” (Muijs and Harris 2003, p.438)

Great instructional leaders acknowledge everyone involved in the leadership practice.

They create opportunities for others to contribute even if they are not noted as having a defined leadership role. (Harris & Spillane, 2008) By doing so the principal is not the only leader but rather the “leader of instructional leaders” (Glickman, 1989, p. 6).

This expertise can only be cultivated within a school when a principal chooses to be the advocate of learning not only in their students but also in their staff. Having staff learning situated within the culture of their school as the primary tool for the growth of student learning, principals demonstrate not only their understanding of sound pedagogical practice they also demonstrate a common sense approach to distributed leadership. “Principal leadership had an indirect, positive effect on student proficiency on the English language arts state assessment when the principal fostered collaboration and community around instruction” (Supovitz et al., 2010, p.34). Furthermore it is the development of a culture of inquiry within the school that demonstrates the real strength of an instructional leader. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2009), in their discussion of professional learning communities, share that “one of the most important ideas underlying both practitioner inquiry and professional learning communities is that they recognize the central role of teachers and other practitioners in shaping the life of schools and as agents in transforming the work of schools.” (p. 52) This practitioner inquiry can also be viewed as an important form of teacher based instructional leadership and a way to stimulate the goals of the whole school community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) state, “the concept of teacher research carries with it an enlarged view of the teacher’s role—as decision maker, consultant, curriculum developer, analyst, activist, school leader” (p. 17). It demonstrates not only that inquiry

based research that can drive the school culture but also that the teacher researchers create and initiate the culture of learning. They become the true instructional leaders, leaving the principal to guide and support their inquiries. The goal maybe then to use a more distributed leadership model in developing a flexible learning environment, and allow the staff maintain the development of it through the years. Additionally it will be important to develop an understanding why this change should or would occur.

Curriculum Change

A starting point for educational change maybe a short investigation in curriculum; although an exhaustive discussion of curriculum could in itself be the discussion of ones project or even doctorate, a short investigation may allow us to unpack what it is we are changing. Ralph Tyler produces one of our seminal writings on curriculum in his work “Basic Principals of Curriculum and Instruction” (1949). Tyler provides us a very clear picture of what curriculum is and how it is created. He provides a list of what the educational purposes or goals are, what specific educational experiences the student should experience, and how we would measure the success of this learning (Tyler 1949). Popham furthers this idea by sharing instructional goals should be “stated in terms of *measurable learner behavior*” (1972). Both of these writers seem to mesh with Eisner who sees “the belief in the usefulness of clear and specific educational objectives [that] emerged around the turn of the century with the birth of the scientific movement in education” (1949). Eisner (1995) gives us a fairly clear idea of what curriculum contains. He starts with sharing that schools have explicit curriculum, which are posted, printed, and used by teachers to define the content of what is taught in their classrooms. Cuban (1995) explains that this *official* curriculum is also defined by what is *tested*. It is the

visual part of the curriculum. What is prescribed and then tested to see if it has been received is often seen as the majority of a curriculum. I believe the explicit part of the curriculum is what we intend to be taught in our schools; it is what teachers believe they are to be teaching and what parents and students see as the goals of their classes.

However both Cuban and Eisner share that what is explicit or prescribed by teaching districts, school boards, or even teachers themselves is only a small portion of what is being taught in our schools.

Cuban (1995) also describes *taught* curriculum as what teachers themselves share with their students once the doors to their class are closed. This implies that teachers often fail to understand or intentionally adjust the curriculum. This is an important concept because it shares that teachers are the real keys to what curriculum entails. Any effort to change what is done in the class must include teacher education and contain methods to evaluate what is taught when the doors are closed.

I believe that Eisner's (1995) concept of *implicit* curriculum includes some of the most important elements of what is transferred to children as they move through our educational systems; moreover that the implicit curriculum is larger and greater reaching than most educators give notice to. Eisner (1995) states that "... how schools socialize children to a set of expectations that some argue are profoundly more powerful and longer lasting than what is intentionally taught or [t]hat the explicit curriculum of the school publicly provides." (p.88) Eisner includes a much wider view of what Cuban (1995) describes as the *learned* curriculum by including elements of a student's reaction to the whole school setting. He reasons that schedules, building structure and set up, as

well the time allotted to a subject create learned beliefs or values in the children who attend school there.

Eisner (1995) also refers to the things we omit from our classrooms and the explicit curriculum as the *null* curriculum. What we chose not to discuss and investigate can have great impact on learners. With the increased complexity of skills, competences, and ideas in our world, it will become impossible to have everything contained within our curriculum.

In his article, 'The Four R's – An Alternative to the Tyler Rationale', William Doll (1993) shares not just a model of curriculum design fairly divergent from Tyler's and others very structured, objective, and results driven principles of curriculum development, but Doll maybe sharing with us a model that could be used as a template for 21st century education. Although Doll's writing was originally published in 1993, his thoughts echo clearly in today's educationally movements. He shares four elements of what a modern curriculum must contain in order to provide students with flexible and engaging schooling. Doll's 4 R's describe clearly the needs of an effective curriculum and maybe this 20th century writing is our portrait of 21st century learning and allow us to investigate change in a modern educational setting.

Doll first shares that the functionalism of Tyler's rationale may also be its downfall. In education created with prescribed objectives, experiences, methods and evaluations, we fail to create a greater expanse of student understanding and relation to the greater society. Doll attempts to use four elements to describe the requirements of a post-modern curriculum. He first shares that 'Richness' drives the learning of both students and teachers. Curriculum needs to allow for student wonder, for curiosity and for confusion.

Only through true inquiry and lack of guidance will teachers and their students engage in real learning. Dole seems to suggest that with less ‘rationale’ we find students exploring past the basics of their learning, to a greater depth of understanding.

Doll borrows Bruner’s (1986) idea of ‘Recursion’ to describe the need for education to be reflective in nature. Doll shares that knowledge is gained in greater density when the experience and thought is looped back onto itself to allow us to re-experience and change our understandings. In addition recursion needs to be reflective in nature with purposeful thought on what has been experienced and how this changes our learning and movement to new ideas. Doll also is quick to define the difference between repetition and recursion. Repetition simply being the return to the same idea or process again and again, where recursion is the layered effect that adds to our understanding and experiences. These experiences may be similar but often change with our new understandings.

Doll also identifies ‘Relations’ between and across subject areas as well as the societal context within which the learning occurs as important factors in the success of a curriculum. He shares that the depth of understanding changes when we relate the learning across a greater number of subjects, topics, and relate how they intersect within the curriculum. He also describes that the context of how, where and why education is experienced drives learning. Our context is not just our local and personal condition, but also how it relates to the greater global context. Education must then be in relation to the whole of society and the importance of this interdependence cannot be under estimated.

The final and what Doll describes as maybe the most important criteria of curriculum is that of ‘Rigor’. In simplistic terms it is the quality of a constant belief in

exploration and challenge to what the curriculum is. It is not a change to a new curriculum, but rather a commitment to continuous investigation of new and better ideas, identifying changes in the context around the curriculum, and evaluating how it may cause movements in thought. Rigor seems to mirror the other three criteria in that it asks us to move forward, to be reflective, to see the curriculum in relation to what is already learnt, its context, and how it effects change in our learning and teaching.

Doll does a masterful job of defining the most important elements of 21st century curriculum. The ‘Richness’ that he describes is echoed continuously in recent movements by Alberta Education to find new ways to engage students in their learning. Like Doll, Alberta Education is not the changing of the curriculum per say as much as finding ways to allow teachers and students engage in more meaningful educational experiences. Lee Crockett describes a number of 21st century fluencies in his book *Literacy is not enough*, and all of them contain focused sections of what Doll describes as ‘Recursion’ in them. In fact this reflective nature of education is growing in its importance throughout our world. In Doll’s discussion of ‘Relations’ we see the international mindedness and cross-curricular requirements that are echo throughout most Canadian school systems. It is important to recognize that these relations impact our learning and gives it context. Doll states that the idea of ‘Rigor’ not only drives the improvement of our education, but also gives curriculum development a changing philosophy. Change and the movement toward the ‘new’ is the curriculum. Apart of the learning that should occur in our classrooms is to be aware of new ideas and constantly be moving towards finding greater ‘Richness’ in the curriculum, exploring the new ‘Relations’ and contexts we experience, and being

'Recursive' in nature as we continue to move forward. We do not introduce a new curriculum, but rather change is a part of, maybe the most important, a curriculum.

Doll's thought here meshes well with my perception of 21st century learning. I find many links between his thoughts and the recent changes in education. Doll's article could also be a seminal writing for Alberta Education's Curriculum Redesign. The redesign also describes the how and why of required change without stating what should be learned. It seems to echo my beliefs of how to engross students and teachers in the exploration of their own learning. Change then is not necessarily a one time action with a specific start and ending, rather is may be a state of being for education.

Curriculum Change in Context

In recent years there has been a massive movement to redesign the curriculums of many first world educational system in response to incredible changes in technology and social media. We recognize the need to adapt the skills and attitudes of students that leave our classrooms to meet the 21st century context. Educational systems need to prepare students for a contemporary world that will be defined by global interaction and modern competencies. Alberta Education has taken on the enormous task of a complete investigation and transformation of what learning is, how it is achieved, and what it should look like. Alberta Education's Curriculum Redesign (2011) is an initiative that will ask the educational community to challenge our ideas of education and engage in a complete reform of the system. It will force us to define what we believe curriculum is, investigate the most compelling issues that effect learning, and discuss how to make our schools responsive to the needs of 21st century learners. This is an acknowledgment by the Alberta Government that the system needs to transform to deal with the changes in

both the modern work force and also to utilize the technology that engages our students (Education, Alberta. 2013). In the Ministerial Order #001, the Alberta Government describes a number of the competencies that would change in our classrooms; they included applying multiple literacies to technology, language and media. (Government, Alberta. 2013).

One of the most exciting initiatives that Alberta Education has undertaken is the High School Success initiative. It contains three main components. The creation of a dual credit program that will allow high school students to earn additional training and in fact credit for programs they may attend after high school; programs such as technical schools and universities. Secondly, it contains a multi-focus strategy to increase and number of students who complete high school. Lastly, and most importantly to my project is the High School Redesign component. Alberta Education (2011) describes this as:

Redesigning high school focuses on research and 'next practice' thinking-where schools have implemented strategies and approaches aimed at transforming the high-school experience for students and teachers through changes to school structure, culture, pedagogy or leadership. Redesigning high school focuses on research and 'next practice' thinking-where schools have implemented strategies and approaches aimed at transforming the high-school experience for students and teachers through changes to school structure, culture, pedagogy or leadership.

One of the exciting ideas is to look at where and how students learn best and try to develop systems and schedules that work best for the needs of students. The idea of flexible learning environments have encourage the move to a number of different types of schedules and scheduling alternatives in high schools. This includes the idea of a flexible

learning time for students. That being in some manner students would get the opportunity to choose what, where and how some of their learning occurs; and like engaging teacher inquiry, the plan on how to create this is not prescriptive. There is no map or plan but rather guidelines and an encouragement to investigate how this might look. Although originally planned for high schools, this idea has moved towards the junior schools and the implementation of such a program is the source of much interest for me. However, like any educational change this is a complex task. By being cognitive of the elements we have already identified in chapter two my goal is to develop an implementation plan for a junior high flex program in a junior high school setting.

Chapter 3: Implementation

Introduction

The original motivation for this project was to develop a plan to implement a Flex day schedule in a junior high school setting. In chapter two I discussed a number of factors that affect change (e.g. distributed leadership, teacher inquiry) how I see those essentials playing out at the school level or implementation stage of change, how these elements will guide how I implement the project and set parameters for its creation. In the chapter that follows my intention is: (i) to offer a brief literature review of Flex programming, (ii) contextualize the motivations for Flex in the province and with Edmonton Catholic School District, (iii) offer a series of exemplars on how Flex is enacted in my district, (iv) share how the implementation has occurred in my school, (v) reflect briefly on where it should be going and where others may choose to take it.

Flex Discussion

One of the challenges with moving forward in developing a working Flex schedule is to develop a shared understanding of what the term ‘Flex’ is and therefore what type of a learning situation we are endeavouring to create. Flex in our Junior High school can be seen as a response to the Alberta Education Curriculum Redesign Strategy (2011), and most specifically their High School Flexibility Enhancement Project (2014) in which Alberta Education describe a “Flex Block: a block of time in the school day or school week when students have the opportunity to make decisions to guide their learning in areas of need or interest”. (p. xx) The goal of which is to move away from our traditional

Carnegie unit of instruction¹ and allow for greater mastery of learning. Essentially it is to give opportunity within the schedule for those students who need additional time and support to complete a full understanding, demonstrate that learning and at the same time allow other students to move forward and or received support or engagement in other subjects.

Within the junior high school setting I believe that Flex can allow for students to become engaged in a greater variety of unexplored topics as well to allow them to work in greater detail with subjects that challenge them. Although curriculum redesign in most education boards is taking on a huge number of changes like project based learning, and increased use of formative assessment, I am hoping that through this one initiative we can begin to make some pedagogical transformations. By changing the schedule to allow for student choice I hope that we can increase student responsibility in their own learning, offer different methods of deliver, and allow for a greater mastery of learning. Canady & Rettig (1995) share “[p]erhaps the most critical (and unresolved) time allocation issue that schools face is the indisputable fact that some students need more time to learn than others.” (p. 42).

In many high schools the Flex block is an optional activity that allows students to make decisions on whether they will take part in additional or supplemental learning events. Unfortunately this can also include staying home or going to the mall for lunch. Although this gives them the ultimate in choice it often fails to achieve the educational goals of a flexible learning environment, and fails to support the completion of curricular

¹ Established in 1906, the Carnegie Unit is a strictly time-based measure of educational attainment. It was developed to measure the amount of time a student spent studying a subject; it was originally intended for the purposes of college admission.

outcomes and mastery of learning. Both of which are fundamental to an education system and to the Flex ideal. In our junior high situation we do not have that degree of flexibility. We must be accountable for every student during every portion of his or her schooling day. To that end our students make choices on how they will spend the Flex time based on what is provided by teachers. They are then accountable for attending and participating in those sessions.

Literature. An initial literature search finds a number of previous educational movements that often seem similar to Flex. However they contain a number of characteristics that make them hard to compare with the idea of having time during the day when students are able to make their own educational, organizational and responsive choices. For example, one such movement is block scheduling. Although Flex does revolve around a block of time devoted to student choices, it is not ‘block scheduling’ as described by Goodlad (1984) among others. This previous iteration was focused on changing the timetable to make it blocked into more useful time lengths. The teaching periods were lengthened to allow teachers to be more engaged with their students. In most block scheduling structures additional time was then created for students that needed extra support. However in most situations students were placed in these blocks by teachers. The creation and management of time associated with learning has been at the forefront of educational design and maybe to a fault, as expressed in this message from the National Commission on Time and Learning (1994):

Learning in America is a prisoner of time. For the past 50 years, American public schools have held time constant and let learning vary. The rule, only rarely voiced, is simple: learn what you can in the time made available. It should

surprise no one that some bright, hardworking students do reasonably well.

Everyone else - from typical students to dropouts - run into trouble. Time is learning's warden. (p. 71)

Block scheduling did adjust the structure of the day, but had little effect on the student engagement in class. Perhaps more importantly Staunton (1997) shares that “[b]lock scheduling changes the formal structure of the school day, but does it really force the issue of changing pedagogical practices? (p.74)”. Block scheduling is similar to adding flex time to our schedule as it may allow students a greater time to increase chances of mastery; it differs in that again this was the choice of the teacher and therefore lacked learner responsibility and engagement, seemingly the most valuable goal of our flex scheduling.

Another movement that Flex is often associated with is ‘open education’. It is difficult to find one standard definition of open education. Gianconia and Hedges (1982) share that “[s]ome open education programs emphasize open space as the salient feature of a good open education program; other programs emphasize teaching practices and the role of the child; still other programs emphasize some combination of open space and teaching practices.” (p. 579). Even finding a consistent set of qualities changes among writers and the grade levels they may be describing. Smith and Smith (1974) describe a program that allows students the freedom to chose to attend school, choose a program of studies, to select their teacher, to assess one’s self and in fact play an important part in planning the curriculum. The value of Flex does not include allowing students free area to roam as their feelings and desires change, but rather creating additional learning areas and experiences that they may not find in their classrooms; or in fact simply other

Although several of the elements of block scheduling and open schooling may be identified in curriculum redesign I believe it is how they are implemented into the school that will identify this latest movement as a newer approach. Curriculum redesign will afford us opportunities to take advantage of multiple new technologies that engage our students like never before. Unlike the Open education movement the guidance that students receive will be based less on their feelings and desires, but more on their aptitudes and learning styles. Structures of schedules will be adjusted to make better use of multiple learning environments and experiences and less about the definitive length of teaching blocks. Rather than returning to educational movements long past I see curriculum redesign and maybe our Flex scheduling as an attempt to learn from those past attempts and mesh a number of modern elements to move education forward.

Motivation of the development of Flex

In this next section we will look at the motivation for the development of Flex scheduling models at the provincial government level and then within the Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD). It will include a discussion of some key features that Alberta Education hopes will be achieved by creating Flexible learning environments. It will also show how ECSD may use the creation of Flexible learning to support other elements of curriculum change.

Provincial Motivation. In the initiation of the Alberta Education's High School Redesign Program (2011), an important element that they chose to focus on was examining how the time and place of education and instruction affects the learning and maybe more importantly the mastery of learning that occurs in the classroom. How the

high school structure supports this and how responsive Carnegie unit was to helping students learn and graduate from high schools. They implemented the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project (HSFEP) (2009) to investigate these issues. Alberta Education defines the goals for the project to :

determine whether the requirement of students to have access to 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per high school course credit should be maintained; explore the relationship between hours of face-to-face instruction and student success; and explore various innovative and educationally sound high school redesigns with the purpose of benefiting students learning and success in high school. (Alberta Education, 2009, p.6)

Much of the investigation originally focused on how the funding model used by Alberta Education drove the learning opportunities for students. It identified the problems that time, and funding based on time, creates in education. In the Guide to Education (2009) the Alberta government recognizes that “some students can acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes specified for one credit of studies in less than 25 hours, while others may require more time.” (p. 6).

With this recognition of the effect time has on learners success, the goal within the HSFEP appears to also be the investigation of how changes in time, scheduling and credit structures within the school may have positive affects on learning; and most importantly encouraging administrators and teachers to explore how this might look in their schools. The project fails to describe specific methods they wish schools to undertake; rather they provide the permission to investigate change, literature support for such changes, and the encouragement to explore. This has created a large-scale action

based research project. As we discussed in chapter two, this type of action research, situated within schools and driven by the teachers and administrators may have the greatest long term and permanent effects. The HSFEP cites a number of key features of high schools redesigns that may serve to guide Alberta high schools as they investigate positive change. Below is a short discussion of four of these features and examples they cite as support for their significance in this exploration. I have identified these because they seem to have the greatest relevance or application to the junior high setting and will support the exploration of Flex programs in our next section of this paper.

Mastery learning. One of the main goals of flexible learning environments is to increase the opportunities for students to complete the learning necessary to move forward. This includes opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have mastered the outcomes required in what would be less time than suggested. It also creates opportunities for students who need further time and opportunities to finish the task before being moved on, and are not forced to complete the whole course or level again. The HSFEP cites the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (2006) in sharing "...learning must be organized according to each students needs in mastering academic subjects. A variety of learning environments, not necessarily bound by graduation, time and attendance requirements, should be explored including internships, online instruction, and independent study" (p. 10).

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. The HSFEP also identifies that curriculums must be engaging and relevant to students. That student learning must relate to their desires for career and post secondary elections. Further, that curriculums must identify those elements seen as important to the greater community and work force. The HSFEP

cites both the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the School Redesign Network who both identify a real need for curriculum to hold authentic and relevant learning opportunities that relate well to career and post secondary placements. This again supports the need to have students engrossed in their learning by drawing clear and pertinent connections to their lives after high school. This relates well to all levels of schooling and in fact is one the driving factors in my junior high school setting.

Personalization. The third element identified by the HSFEP that relates very well with my exploration of Flex scheduling is the personalization of learning for each student. With the increased call for the inclusion of students with a variety of learning needs into regular classrooms it appears that providing multiple learning methods and opportunities within a flexible scheduling style may help to support these students. It may allow teachers to present information in a variety of forms and styles, and use small groupings and truly student specific methods to support all students. The HSFEP cites the Learning Environments Consortium International (LECI) and the NCSL when they explain that student learning must be specific to each student and that flexible learning environments may be a true opportunity to provide this within the high school setting.

Flexible learning environments. The fourth element that the HSFEP identifies as important for educational systems trying to redesign their operations is the creation of learning environments that are more flexible and support learning in multiple ways. All of the organizations that HSFEP discusses cite having flexible learning environments in some form as an important feature in redesigning curriculum. In fact I believe that most of the other elements they discuss as important are supported or created by having a schedule that is different from our traditional Carnegie unit of scheduling. This is not to

say that simple block scheduling does not have a place in our educational systems, but rather additionally scheduling options must occur in order to maximise the opportunities and successes of students and teachers. The Canadian Coalition of Self-Directed Learning (CCSDL) (2000) explains that “each student’s schedule is uniquely designed or individualized to the extent that every student, with guidance, has opportunities to explore potential interests and talents ...” (p.10) All students can flourish when their specific needs and interests are pushed more to the forefront of their learning experience.

Edmonton Catholic School District Motivation. As mentioned in chapter one, Edmonton Catholic schools responded to Alberta Education’s call for curriculum redesign by implementing their own Transform project. I see the goal of this project as two fold. The first element focusing on the pedagogical changes the district is wishing to see within classrooms. The district identified ten movements from traditional teaching methods to student-centered styles of teaching.

ECSD Transform Shifts	
Traditional	Student Centered
Content Based	Competencies-based
Student as Knowledge Recipient	Student As Inquirer and Creator
Topic-driven	Cross-curricular themes
Short-term assignments	Project-based Learning
Memorization	Higher-level Thinking
Summative Assessment	Formative Assessment
Competitive Learning	Collaborative Learning
Single Grades	Multi-grades
One-size-fits-all	Personalized, Differentiated
Print-based	Multimodal (print, visual, digital)

Figure 1. Identified district Transform movements

Each one of these changes reflects a change in the methods of teaching, the pedagogy of teaching rather than just the curriculum topics. This requires teachers to change the how of their teaching rather than just the knowledge outcomes. These types of

changes require teachers to be invested in the process at much greater lengths than just a simple change of topics. Because of that the second element of the Transform plan becomes so important.

The second component, the methodology, is to create school based action research activities at each school site. Each school, at different times in the project would undertake the process of Transforming an element of their pedagogy. Using a teacher action research model, schools would identify teachers who are excited about making changes in their practice. These teachers would be supported with district and school funds to spend time planning, teaching, reflecting and then reporting on their success and failures. They receive support from district consultants that can help with technology, practice and even curriculum specific topics. As discussed in chapter two in the discussion of teacher inquiry and PLC development, because the sources of the inquiry are teaching driven, these become real world changes that directly modify what is occurring in these teachers classes. Additionally, we know that these changes tend to infect the teaching of others, and affect greater change across the whole school than top down driven models. This component, although seen as a tool to create the change, is really the important transformation that is occurring. Kemmis (2012) shares that “systematic inquiry and collaborative, critical reflection are the cornerstones of thoughtful changes in teaching practices.” (p. 886) The idea of the teacher as the agent of change is a very profound and might be the most important element at play.

Common Flex Traits

In this section I will share a few examples of junior high school and senior high school Flex implementations that are occurring in ECSD. I will first identify the

following four key features of Flex programming: (i) schedule, (ii) student accountability, (iii) student and teacher choice, (iv) the teacher advisor role. I see all of these elements have important effects on how successful Flex is in increasing student mastery and engagement; and the effects it has on changing teacher pedagogy. The section will continue with brief discussions of the exemplars and how they have responded to some of these features.

Schedule. An important consideration when designing a flexible learning opportunity for students is to decide the structure of how this fits within the day and how students are guided to use the flexible time most effectively. We see two main characteristics of Flex scheduling: the placement or frequency of the Flex blocks, and their connection to the rest of the learning schedule. The exemplars will show examples of schools that have made whole days flexible learning times, and others who have used only small portion of their schedule for this to occur. Some schools have chosen to weave Flex blocks throughout their schedules and others have linked them to specific events in the school day.

Student Accountability. A key element of Flex is making students accountable for their learning. At many high schools they have yet to make attendance in Flex sessions mandatory and are allowing this to be student choice. This has a major impact on student attendance. Those engaged and motivated students still have success, but many fail to take advantage of the benefits of Flex. Some schools have created scheduling and registering systems that foster tracking of student participation and make it attendance mandatory. Although this can appear to take choice away from students it dramatically increases participation, and use of the Flex block.

Student and Teacher Choice. Another important component within a Flex system is student and teacher choice. Not choice to participate as discussed in the previous section, but rather choice of what to engage in. The prime difference between block scheduling of previous generations and today's Flex is that students are encouraged to guide their own learning; they are not directed to sessions based on teacher choice. Students drive what they do during Flex times and this makes them responsible for their own learning. It encourages them to develop time management skills as they are forced to make decisions on what best supports their learning at that time. Even students with poor motivation are encouraged to make decisions, maybe at times with the support of staff, to attend sessions that can improve their success in class. This maybe one of greatest gifts we give students and one of the most important elements of Flex.

Another vital piece is teacher choice. Flex can allow teachers to make choices about what has occurred in their classes, and how to best support portions or the whole of their class without slowing down or changing their unit plans. Flex can be used to support formative assessments that teacher use daily to understand the learning that occurs, or does not within their classes. It encourages teachers to inquire into what is happening in their classes and find additional methods to support student learning. It can also allow teachers to engage students on topics outside of the curriculum, places where teachers and students of common interest can meet.

Teacher Advisor Role. The component that is often the least discussed yet may have the greatest affect on the success of the Flex schedule is the function teachers or councillors play in guiding and managing student choice and participation in Flex. For

some students it may be the connection to their goals that the staff make for them, and for other students it may be the whole reason they continue to function within the program.

Exemplars

This section contains a number of school examples from within the ECSD. Each of these are real world examples, at different points in the development of their Flex programs. Figure 2 shows the commonalities and differences among the group, followed by a small discussion of these. This discussion will support the reasoning for the implementation of the Flex program at St. Edmund.

School	Schedule	Student Accountability	Student and Teacher Choice	Teacher Advisor
Archbishop O’Leary High School	Flex block run during traditional lunch period	Attendance not taken, student choice to attend	Full student choice. Including addition courses, support classes, alternate activities	Little teacher direction.
Louis St. Laurent Junior High School	Full day Thursday Schedule.	Student attendance taken. Students require to self assign through Power school.	Session sections are limited to core subjects. Administration assigns teachers to sessions.	Homeroom block before and after Flex blocks.
Mother Margret Mary High School	Flex block daily, not attached to lunch or start of finish times	Student attendance taken. Students require to self assign through Power school	Student choice is good. Teachers can assign students to needed activities.	Teacher advisory block weekly. Teacher follows student through school career
Father Michael Troy Junior High	Full day Thursday Schedule	Student attendance taken. Students require to self assign through Power school	Student choice is good. Teachers can assign students to needed activities.	Homeroom block before and after Flex blocks

Figure 2. School Flex examples

ArchBishop O’Leary High School. This was the first school in ECSD to introduce Flex into their schedule. They attached Flex sessions to their lunch break and extend the time of the Flex/lunch period by 20 minutes. This allowed the school to create two session times in which students could attend Flex sessions. One of the successes they saw was running additional courses for students motivated to complete the course quicker. One example of this was that students were able to complete Social Studies 10, 20 and 30 within one year. This demonstrated that motivated students could benefit greatly from the choice afforded them. One of the failures they saw was that many students choose to extend their lunch break instead of attending Flex sessions. At times participation during Flex was as low as 30% of the student body (Cusack, personal communication, September, 2010)

Louis St. Laurent Junior High School. Louis St. Laurent Junior High School (LSL) implemented their Junior High school Flex model in September 2013. Student engagement was high, as all students were required to attend. Homeroom blocks before and after the Flex schedule allowed for a teacher advisory role. One of the elements that differentiate their program from others is that the session types were scheduled by the administration. Student choice was limited to core subject offerings on most Flex days; (‘fun flex days’ were run monthly; here more extensive activities were run, dances, dodge ball tournaments). This also limited teacher choice as teachers were assigned to sessions based on subjects and not by their own inquirers.

Mother Margret Mary High School. Mother Margret Mary High School (MMM) opened in 2012. With this new opening the school administration chose to build their

schedule and cultural around Flex opportunities. They choose to weave the Flex schedule throughout the schedule; providing students with one block of student directed scheduling every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. The flex block rotates throughout the schedule so that it backs on to every block of the day at some point during the week. This permits teachers to extend the time of subject specific blocks to accommodate activities or lessons that may need extra time. This offers teachers the ability to create sessions that they believe will guide the learning in their classes; it fosters inquiry into teacher planning. This schedule also allows students to make daily choices on what they need to do during their Flex time. This can make the flex block more effective for students as they can react to learning successes and failures daily, rather than waiting for predetermined days to react. Flex blocks are not optional and attendance is taken daily in each block, creating very high attendance. A teacher advisor role was built into the culture of the school from the start. Each staff member has a cross grade group of students that they mentor. Each week they meet with this group to plan their Flex choices, council students on course issues and continually build the relationship with their students. This feature fosters the use of Flex as a tool of learning for students.

Father Michal Troy Junior High School. Father Michal Troy Junior High School (FMT) was the first junior high in ECSD to run a Flex schedule. Taking direction from the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project (HSFEP) they developed a full day Flex model that is run during their shortened Thursday schedule. The model they created became the template for all ECSD junior high schools that have created Flex programs in their schools. The FMT Flex day includes an advisor role for teachers that occurs in a

homeroom block before and after the Flex day. Student engagement is high as all students must attend, and are required to self assign themselves prior to the Flex day. There is high student and teacher choice that seems to foster inquiry in the teachers and engagement in the students.

St. Edmund Implementation

In the following sections I am going to share the process that was taken to implement the Flex programing at St. Edmund Junior High. It will start, like chapter one, with a narrative of my experiences around this implementation, and then make references to the choices that were made and the reasoning behind them. I will attempt to link these back to the key features of change, teacher based inquiry and distributed leadership, discussed in Chapter two. Each element will be supported by details in the previous exemplars, factors supporting educational change, and personal decisions that have come with successes and failures.

Breaking Ground In the winter of 2013 we started our Flex journey. I was very excited to begin the journey. I had just finished a portion of my Masters that allowed me to explore teacher-based inquiry and distributed leadership. It fit well into the district call for transformative projects within the school, and I felt as though this would be a good application of my leadership skills required in my new role. I wanted this project to be driven by the teachers, and I wanted teachers to take on roles as leaders. I knew it would be relatively easy to just create a schedule that would support Flex scheduling and then force the teachers and students to live it, but I knew this top down method would fail to engage the staff. This type of approach would not make the project an organic process that would change to reflect teacher and students needs as it moved forward. My biggest

concern was this would be another task for teachers to accomplish during the day, rather than making it something that could drive pedagogical change in their classrooms.

Laying the Ground Work. After brief discussions with administrators from schools who had already put Flex programming into place, I knew there were a number of items I needed to do prior to implementing this with the greater staff and student population. To my surprise, none of the administrators suggested the creation of a staff committee to drive its creation. Most had simply built the schedule, explained the task, and delivered it to staff and students. This fails to support teacher inquiry or distributed leadership in any form so I chose another approach. The creation of our Flex started with the creation of a small committee that was interested in undertaking the project. I was excited to find that eight teachers were interesting in participating. One of the main tasks was to get the staff to other school sites to see Flex in action. We sent the entire staff to FMT and the whole committee to LSL to see Flex in action. This gave everyone a wonderful template for us to start. It identified for the committee what things we need to build and put in place, and for staff it gave them a sense of what they could expect for Flex. We saw the functioning parts of a Flex day, how students moved to and from classes, what they did during the classes and how to manage it all.

Committee work. The committee and I met numerous times in the winter of 2014 and planned for the full implementation of a Flex schedule in the fall of 2014. We would run a few practice days in the spring in preparation. We assigned tasks to each member so that they could become experts in some element of the project and then they would be able to share that with the greater staff. Again this was an attempt to distribute the

leadership roles across the group, to allow the staff to own the process, and increase staff engagement.

Schedule. The first item we dealt with was the creation of a working schedule. Our Thursday schedule at this time, like most schools in ECSD was made up of short blocks that made it very difficult use productively. So like FMT and LSL we chose to run Flex on Thursdays as a whole day event. An important feature was to have a homeroom or teacher advisory role, so we created a homeroom block at the beginning of the day, followed by four 45-minute blocks. It was identified during our visits that blocks that were too short failed to allow for activity or project type seminars and that blocks too long would be hard for students to focus on some core activities. This length seemed to balance both issues and still allow the joining of block together to make larger time slots.

8:10 am - 8:37 am	Homeroom Block
8:39 am – 9:22 am	Flex Block #1
9:24 am – 10:09 am	Flex Block #2
10:13 am – 10:58 am	Flex Block #3
11:00 am – 11:45 am	Flex Block #4

Figure 3. St. Edmund Flex Schedule

Attendance. The next major item to deal with was to make students responsible for attending sessions and make them accountable for what they do in sessions. FMT had already piloted a new feature on our district attendance program. Teachers are able to input sessions into the online schedule and then students self registered themselves. They are able to access this from home. Additionally, teachers would use this tool to do attendance during each session and at the end of the day each homeroom teacher is sent a

report on the attendance of their homeroom students. This is a fundamental piece to the administration of our Flex day. I see mandatory attendance as a piece that many of the high schools have choose to ignore, choosing rather to give students complete choice. This does work with students who are self-engaging and motivated but tends to reduce success for those students who need more guidance and support.

Flex Sessions

Flex Session Search

Date: Keyword: Include Description

Teacher: Subject:

Date

Range:



Date	Block	Title	Teachers	Status		
Thursday March 26, 2015	09:24 AM - 10:09 AM in Home Ec	Block 2 - Structured Support	Cleave, D		Attendance	Cancel
Thursday March 26, 2015	10:13 AM - 10:58 AM in Home Ec	Block 3 - structured support	Cleave, D		Attendance	Cancel

Figure 4. Scheduling Mechanism.

Homeroom plan. The committee agreed that a part of the accountability and guidance for students would occur in the morning homeroom block. Here teachers would check the completeness and appropriateness of student selections. Additionally students would complete a goal setting activity designed to prepare them for the day and meeting academic goals. Each Thursday students were to review their success with the previous

week goals, and set new ones. Figure 5 is a portion of a booklet that was created to support student accountability and goal setting in the morning homeroom block. (For a complete version see the Appendix)

Date: _____	
For each Flex Thursday, you must select a minimum of 2 core sessions (ie. math, science, la, social); the third and fourth sessions can be your choice (core, quiet or extension). They can be chosen in any order.	
Please plan out your morning below during your homeroom block.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Core, Quiet or Extension
<input type="checkbox"/> Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Core, Quiet or Extension
<u>Morning Plans:</u>	
Session 1: _____	Session: _____
Required Materials: _____	
Goal or ATL skill for this Session: _____	

Figure 5. Homeroom Goal Setting Sheet

Staff responsibilities. The responsibility of every teacher during the Flex day was an issue brought to my attention by the committee very early on. I was surprised by how important they thought it would be communicate specifically what everyone was required to do. At no time did their concern feel like they felt they would have too much to do, but rather that some staff would fail to fulfil their roles. Below are basic principals that we created to define what each teacher would plan:

- The staff was broken into four equal subject based groups. Some containing staff that did not teach the core subject.
- All staff would be involved in Flex and no staff would have prep time during Flex.

- Flex offerings were broken into 3 types:
 - Core – Seminars based on core subjects and supported curricular outcomes in a regular class
 - Extensions – Seminars offering activities that may extend learning in the class to engage student interest, or activities that were outside core curricular studies that staff wished to offer. Other items might include physical activities, (e.g. yoga, dance, painting).
 - Quiet spaces – Places where students could work either in small groups or individually on projects, homework, reading, or with computers.
- Every member would input their seminars before Friday afternoon each week and the Flex platform would be opened for students on Friday at 3:00 pm.
- Each staff member would run four Flex sessions that would accommodate 25 students each. If they ran a session for a smaller number of students, another staff member in their group would increase their amount.
- Each staff member would run two core based seminars, one extension and one quiet space. Staff could run more core if they chose, and staff could trade within their group to allow staff to run special events.
- Special rooms (gymnasiums, computers labs, Fitness room) were allotted to each department and would be rotated among the groups.

Collaboration time. One of the concerns that the teachers had was when would they have time to plan this new adventure together. I had identified two opportunities for collaboration. First, by including all teaching staff and adding a few staff that did not always teach (counsellors, admin staff, etc.) into the Flex schedule we would have an

abundance of seats for students. I believed we would then have the opportunity to hold department meetings during Flex and still be able to provide a wide range of activities for students. Additionally, it was discussed and agreed to by the staff that we would meet fifteen minutes early before each Thursday afternoon staff meeting and discuss the teaching spaces and grade levels of seminars that each department would offer.

Set Practice days. With these elements created we met with the staff and presented our work. Each member of the committee took turns presenting those elements that they had championed. The discussions we had were rich and I believe the whole of the staff felt they were heard and had been apart of the development. Much of the time during these first meeting was in the planning of what each teacher would offer. We found out early that we would have to account for specialized teaching spaces and who would have access to them. We needed to recognize the need to have enough seminars for specific grade levels during each block. These were observations made during our meetings by the staff and added to their engagement into the task; my belief that an organic teacher based inquiry research project was occurring before my eyes, and I was correct.

Each of the practice days went off with complications and successes. Items that neither the staff nor I had anticipated occurred, (like the whole schedule and attendance program going down during the second practice day), but staff positively found ways to correct these problems and a richness of collaboration seemed to be occurring.

The conclusions from our trial dates left us with a true belief that creating Flex schedule would be a positive transition for the school. It was supported at all levels within the school, and each level seemed to have their own impression why it would be good for them. The students were excited as they saw this an opportunity to try a number

of new activities, and make their choices. Most teachers seemed interested and encouraged, as they could see all of the possibilities that it could hold. However like most events that occur at schools, many teachers were hesitant, as they had lived through many proposed changes. Instead of seeing this as an opportunity to create pedagogical change they only identified this as extra work; and I saw this as my biggest roadblock.

St. Edmund 2014 -2015

In the summer of 2014 I began the groundwork for the start of our Flex day that we would begin the Fall. I would find out quickly that a number of elements that the committee built and had presented to the staff would need to change because of alterations in staff and student population over the previous year. This would also cause changes in the creation of our master timetable. These alterations would have immediate impact in how well Flex was received by staff, and their willingness to engage in the process.

Changes. The first problem I realized during my summer preparation was that breaking the teachers into equal departments would no longer work. Some departments dramatically increased in size because many of our non-core subject teachers were assigned single core subjects; this created departments that varied in size from four to eight teachers. Each teacher would still create at least two core sessions, however the total number of sessions in each subject noticeably changed. A few of the departments decided that they would need to run additional core based sessions; this small change created inequalities in what each teacher offered and would continue to be a source of concern.

Another dramatic change was who was involved in Flex and how many seats we could offer. A number of teachers were assigned their preparation time during Flex. This was against what we have proposed and was an element that administrators from exemplar schools had warned about. This removed a number of seats from our weekly allotment. Although, this was not ideal, it was necessary to make the whole school schedule work efficiently. This made it more difficult to create collaboration time for staff. This was the start of removing staff from the Flex schedule, something that would have negative affects.

Failures. In September we began the first days of the 2014 2015 school year. We also started our Flex program full time. Every Thursday would run a whole day Flex schedule. Teachers planned and scheduled Flex sessions and students would self-assign during the week leading up to Thursday. Student and parent response was overwhelmingly positive. Teacher support however was mixed.

As a new administrator I had failed to estimate how much time I would be given during our non-students days at the beginning of the year to meet with staff. It was not enough. Instead of being able to work through the changes I had identified during the summer and continue to build capacity and support among the staff, I was forced to just present the Flex project and its changes to the staff. This changed the whole dimension of the project. It became a top down driven assignment teachers were to implement. The combination of alterations and a lack of time to collaborate quickly distorted teacher's perception.

Within the first few weeks of the year I realized that other members of the administration group had additional objectives for Flex. Additional staff were removed

from the Flex schedule to take on other activities and receive additional preparation time. This immediately made it difficult to provide enough seats for the student population and still provide opportunities for other staff to meet collaboratively. This became a source of cynicism among the staff and set the project behind before we really began. Additionally, other issues consumed all of our meeting time in the first month; it was October before we had our first Flex working meeting. By then many of the staff had become resentful; I had changed what they had created without allowing them a voice, and I had failed to provide them with the collaboration time that we all believed would make the project a teacher based research inquiry that supported educational change. During this meeting I called for any staff that would be interesting to continue to sit on the Flex steering committee or those who might like to join at this time to send me an e-mail. To my shock only one staff member responded and we failed to create a steering committee.

It was a very difficult time for me as administrator. I felt has though all of the relationships I had created during the previous year where now in question. The goal of creating a project that would be driven by staff had failed. My leadership skills, something that I believed was one of my strengths, were called into question. Maybe most importantly I realized, like most teachers, that changes that I could see and knew would be positive, are often controlled and affected by factors I could not govern.

Year Lived. Whether it was the right thing to do or not, I choose to let the teachers live in the experience. Allow them to identify problems and successes and work through these with little or no direction from me; and to my surprise many good things happened. Those teachers engaged in their practice began to identify problems in Flex and they brought them to me with solutions. I would share the solution at a staff meeting and Flex

improved. Teachers who were trying to make pedagogical changes, the district Transform project encouraged, started to use Flex to support their classroom activities. With many of the staff, the teacher based inquiry I had hoped for occurred. They still voiced their concerns about collaboration time, but they found ways to meet with their like-minded peers and made transformations to what occurred in their classrooms and their Flex sessions.

Some staff did not. They failed to input their sessions in timely manners or created sessions that failed to engage students almost in attempt to drive students away. This created a situation where some staff served 100 to 150 students on a Thursday where other may have only accommodated 20 or 30. This became an interesting divergence among the staff. Some staff had sessions that were filled quickly and full every Thursday, well others fail attain even close to those numbers. Some even failed to offer the core seminars they were supposed to, even with directed comments by their peers and administration. Like every change in a school, this drove some to change and others to revert.

Start Again. In the spring of 2015, six months after we had started I could sense that we were ready to review what had occurred, what changes worked well and what things we could still improve. Most staff had moved past initial concerns and could see Flex for itself above the process used to implement it. We had spent small portions of meetings during these months planning for Flex, but had spent little time discussing how to move forward until then. We had lived it enough that teachers could see the potentials, what things caused them stress, which elements failed to allow them to make changes. The meeting was frank and cathartic. Although we did spend some time identifying

things that were problems and created solutions to fix them, it was the open talk about the involvement of the project that was most important. Staff shared a number of their concerns and disappointments about how the process had worked so far. Common themes emerged; lack of promised collaboration time, lack of control in building Flex, and disparity among staff involvement. I explained many of the reasons behind what had occurred and my feelings about staff choices. I believe this was a very important discussion that will have lasting affects. I sense that for many of the staff we are moving back into that organic nature of change. A place where staff want to feel supported, that they want to be a part of a distributed leadership model that will drive change, and that change will occur guided by teacher and students inquiries into their own inquiries. This will then be the goal of my leadership moving forward in this project.

Conclusion

As identified in chapter two, a robust curriculum engages in change and that only with constant investigation and reflection can we best meet the needs of our students and teachers. Real curriculum development occurs daily in the classrooms with our teachers and students. Teachers and students inquiring into their learning and reflecting on their practices result in the most effective and long lasting sources of change. Alberta Education has initiated curriculum change in their High School Redesign Project (2011). Most importantly they have failed to write the curriculum themselves but rather offered the opportunities for the schools to investigate how change may look.

Edmonton Catholic Schools have asked for further inquiry by their schools in their Transform project. Like Alberta Education they chose not to dictate how the change should occur, but rather laid a template of possible elements of change, provide the

supports for teachers and schools to initiate these changes. I believe that both of these attempts of curriculum change represent action based research projects. They both allow for schools and teachers to envision change, experience the alteration in their own context, reflect on their learnings and engage in a continual practice of transformation.

I believe that this change is best supported with strong leadership, leadership that identifies the importance of allowing others to guide. This distributed leadership supports change most effectively because it places teachers in the position to react to their own inquiries within their specific context. Instructional leaders that see this as the goal in their role, move change with great efficiency, purpose and with longer lasting effects.

The implementation of Flex program requires distributed instructional leadership and model of teacher-based inquiry. Flex has unlimited possibilities, but these possibilities are only realized when teacher and students have choice. Although the focus of Flex has often been the schedule, this is only the mechanism in which Flex operates. If we focus only on the blocks of time devoted to this schedule we fail to allow see its possibilities. Because each school operates in its own context, Flex needs to be reactive to what teachers and students see it to be. It is the flexibility Flex offers combined with the creative thought and inquiries of teachers and students that make this an engaging opportunity.

Chapter 4: Concluding Thoughts

Introduction

The original motivation for this project was to develop a plan to implement a Flex day schedule in a junior high setting, but my learning's from the class and this project are far more expansive. As one reads through my Capstone Project you get the sense that the project changed and transformed as my research and thoughts evolved, and it did. The project altered to relate to my new perceptions of how to implement change, rather than just the execution of a Flex schedule. The investigation of the important elements of educational change, how leadership can drive this, and the role teachers and students play in creating a transformation in what occurs in their classrooms becomes the focus of the project. Although there are some details on how the Flex schedule was created, the greatest value that I acquired was how to better serve educational change moving forward in my career.

Professional Thinking

A profound change in my thinking occurred with a guided investigation of Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) discussion of practitioner inquiry. It supported my perception of the many down falls in much of the professional development I have experienced; and described a methodology for educational improvement that was situated in classrooms. In order to have teachers make changes in their professional actions they must guide the process. The reasons for change, and the research that supports it, must occur in context of teacher and student learning. My new perceptions of how I see the relationship between teaching, researching, and professional development has made an important impact, not only in how my project transformed, but also how I try to

encourage change among the staff I work with. Teacher based action research or practitioner inquiry and its methodology should drive the whole of the educational experience for teachers and students. By situating this within the classroom, we give voice to the teachers and students who must live the changes.

As mentioned in chapter two, my experience with professional learning communities (PLC) began with this type of teacher-based inquiry. I mentioned that it felt organic in its actions and made important changes with my classroom. This however was quickly removed with directives of what was to be done within the PLC by those outside of my teaching context. This removed my inquiry, and made the research a mandate rather than an inquiry.

As I move through my administrative experience I see how important inquiry as a pedagogical stance is. Throughout our professional careers we should be investigating better, not just newer, ways to educate our students. We should be reflecting on our successes and failures and trying to make further changes to our practice to echo new learnings. This model begs for time, support and patience from the school and district administration. Transformation of the learning activity is an extremely personal and contextual experience that teachers must undertake based on their own wonderings and experiences. Top down driven approaches to change have little long lasting affects to what occurs in classrooms. Time and money must be spent on teachers who are engaged in the practice of inquiry; their wonderings tend to encourage others to invest in changing their own practices. This method of educational reform has the greatest impact in a school climate and the most lasting effects.

Curriculum Creation

Dole's (1993) discussion of curriculum design resonated with my perception of change, teacher inquiry, and the transformations that are occurring in Alberta's educational systems. His article 'The Four R's – An Alternative to the Tyler Rational' (1993) allows me to connect curriculum, how it should be created, and what characteristics it should have to the value I see in teacher inquiry. Doll's ideas parallel teacher inquiry and together these have allowed me to see both Alberta Education's Curriculum Redesign Project and Edmonton Catholic School District's Transform initiative in much differently than I would have perceived before. Initial explorations of both projects left me seeing opened ended, unguided projects that failed to have defined outcomes. I now see them as action-based teacher, (or school), research projects with the goal of building curriculums that would support Dole's 4 R's. I believe that both projects are designed to allow teachers, administrators, and school boards to investigate and build the curriculum as they have experienced it; an attempt to make each project as engaging to those living it as possible.

Instructional Leadership

I had many leadership experiences prior to entering administration, but little in being an instructional leader. The Masters program at the University of Victoria has been an important element in my development as a leader of teachers. The program increased my abilities or understandings in two very specific ways.

Firstly, the time spent reading and exploring the literature of educational thought has been very important. Many of the readings and discussions have placed my ideas and beliefs in the context of educational research. I find that now when I share ideas with staff that I feel confident that my ideas are grounded in educational philosophy. Many of

the beliefs about education, and specifically change, that I had prior to the Masters program can now be shared with staff, and even placed into teacher context because of my experience in the cohort. Specifically I believe that I can relate both the Curriculum redesign and Transform projects to staff with greater clarity and confidence because of my understanding of curriculum and teacher inquiry.

Additionally, the exploration of leadership in Fullan's, *Change Leader* (2011) has given me a greater confidence in seeing distributed leadership as an appropriate method of guidance. Leadership is not situated solely in the hands of the principal and that great leaders must find ways to allow others to lead. I believe that teacher inquiry allows for increased distribute the leadership and encourages both effective change and staff engagement. Building the leadership in others around me is not just so that they may lead a staff meeting, but rather that they can help guide changes to pedagogy and curriculum among their peers. Allowing the staff to do this is not an abdication of the leadership responsibility but rather a sign of increased effectiveness.

Professional Change

Because of my Masters experience I now have the background and learnings to support the many tasks that I am ask to under take as an administrator. I feel comfortable in discussions of educational philosophy with my peers, and this gives me a greater standing and voice in meetings. The exploration of a number of recent educational trends allows me to relate my experiences and my school context to those at a district level, making sure that my staff and school are best served. I have a greater understanding of the many provincial and district attempts to change our educational system and can relate this back to my staff.

An important exploration during my project and throughout my time in the Masters cohort was the implementation of change. How this is to be achieved and what elements make the greatest impact. I believe that I am much greater prepared to implement change in my school and to support projects at a district level. My Capstone project has allowed me to build a practical model for a Flex schedule, but more importantly it has forced me to investigate why this change is important and what factors increase the success of education transformation. Maybe most importantly it has increased my willingness to be reflective in the process of building projects and introducing educational change.

Recommendations

In this section I hope to offer three recommendations to anyone involved in developing change in their school or involved specifically in the development of a flexible learning opportunity in their school. The discussion below is supported in greater detail in chapter two, but I hope here to place these suggestions in context more clearly.

Meaningful Change. Introduction of any new school wide project is better served to be a teacher inquiry project if it is to make meaningful change in the classrooms. This is the greatest learning I have taken away from both my time in the masters cohort and during the implementation of Flex at St. Edmund Junior High school. That is not to say that every change in a school needs to be based on teacher inquiry. Many elements in the day-to-day function of schools are administrative in nature can be implemented in fairly top down or bottom up driven mechanisms. Curricular outcomes may have a different origin than the classroom, and they often do, however if a change in how these curricular outcomes are to be delivered is mandated than teacher inquiry serves as our best model for continued and lasting change to what happens in the classroom. I believe if we are

looking to implement change in how learning occurs that teachers and students must create the pedagogical change within their own context. This encourages the engagement of teachers at a higher level and increases the willingness to affect change in their classroom.

Distributed Leadership. Today's schools are growing in complexity. The administrative role has outgrown principal's ability to function solely as the instructional leader. In today's schools administrators must be willing to share the role of instructional leaders among those staff with experience and desires to engage their peers in exploration of their pedagogy. By sharing or distributing this role among the staff, administrators engage in three important activities: they recognise that the context in which teachers work has relevance to pedagogical change; they initiate teacher inquiry, and they build important relationships among their staff. I believe that by creating the capacity in other staff members administrators exhibit concern for their staff and recognize the talents in those around them. Additionally, distributed leadership maximizes the talents of teachers and gives ownership to the teaching staff.

Value of Flex. I believe that the offering of flexible learning environments is a very significant change in our schools, and that it will have meaningful effects on the culture of learning going forward. The most important feature of Flex is the choice that it allows teachers and students to make. By allowing students the choice of how their learning will occur, where it will occur, and what they learn, we engage students in their own learning like never before. In fact we allow the students to help define the pedagogical structure of our schools. In combination with teacher choice, it offers a very powerful tool for educational change. I would suggest that many of the qualities that make teacher inquiry

so powerful are the same elements that make Flex a valuable opportunity. By allowing teachers and students to investigate the opportunities that Flex can afford them, we may see dramatic changes in how learning can occur during the entire school day. An important concern is that Flex does not get distorted to support other administrative tasks or scheduling concerns. It will be important that teacher and student choice is kept at the forefront of the goal in Flex and that its value is not lost to support other educational issues.

All of these recommendations were present at the initial introductions of the Flex day at St. Edmunds Junior High School. However as the project continued all of these important elements were lost at some point. This changed the effectiveness of the implementation and the willingness of teachers to be engaged in the project and their reflectiveness in their practice. Until these elements are purposefully and appropriately returned creating this change will suffer.

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Appendix

Name: _____

Class: _____



Flex Goal Setting

What is Flex?

Flex is a designated block of time during the school week that is student directed learning, supported and supervised by teachers. It is a time in which students can extend their learning, pursue and explore individual interests, work with classmates and seek out extra support.

Your role as a student is to take advantage of this new learning opportunity, to become responsible for your own learning, and be mature in making choices that will help you succeed.

Every Thursday we will start the day with students in their homeroom with an Approaches to Learning class where we will learn about topics such as planning, organization, and study skills. Also during that time teachers will support you in developing a plan for the rest of the day that will best meet your individual needs and interests. It might be working in a quiet collaborative group area on a class project, it might be seeking some individual support in a help session, or it may be exploring a new and exciting activity.

You will have had a chance during the week to select seminars and activities that you want to attend on our Flex Thursdays. All students will select at least two seminars that are core subject based and focused on success in your four core subjects; Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. During the other two blocks you may choose to attend additional core seminars, quiet spaces in which to complete work, or attend other extension classes that are of interest to you.

Our goal is to develop learners who become increasingly self-directed and successful, take ownership for their learning, and become intrinsically motivated and personally responsible. A major part of your responsibility will be make choices that are in your best interests educationally. If you are having a hard time deciding what will help you succeed, ask your teachers. They want to see you be successful. If your decisions or behavior during Flex are failing to allow you to have success, your teachers and the administration will make those choices for you; and then together we build new strategies to make you successful.

Flex Goal Setting

It is of great importance for us to set goals for our personal life and our academic year. Goals allow us to measure how much we have accomplished, how much we need to complete, and how well our methods are working. It would be hard for us to start on a journey without knowing its destination. Likewise, we need to set down goals in order to know what the next step to attaining our goal is. "Today's goals are tomorrow's realities."

You must develop goals and be committed to achieving those goals. The following work sheets will help you to set and attain your goals.

Be **'SMART'** when setting your goals. Set goals that are:

S = Specific: set goals that are precise. Set goals that you can achieve in a given time frame, and that will lead to greater success.

M = Measurable: understand how you are going to evaluate your goals. Apply numbers, times, and amounts to each task and focus on achieving them.

A = Accountable: make your goals your own. Make a commitment to doing your best and share your feelings with others. Remember to always write your goals down.

R = Realistic: set goals that you have to work hard to achieve but are not impossible.

T = Timely: set specific time limits. How much time are you going to dedicate to your goal [daily-weekly], and how long will it take you to accomplish it, how will Flex time help with this.

*Be Committed,
Go After Your Goals.*

MYP APPROACHES TO LEARNING SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

	Approaches to Learning(Transdisciplinary Skills)
Organization	Plan short and long term assignments; meet deadlines
	Create plans to prepare for summative assessments (examinations and performances)
	Keep and use a weekly planner for assignments
	Set goals that are challenging and realistic
	Plan strategies and take action to achieve personal and academic goals
	Bring necessary equipment and supplies to class
	Keep an organized and logical system of information files/notebooks
	Use appropriate strategies for organizing complex information
	Understand and use sensory learning preferences (learning styles)
	Select and use technology effectively and productively.
Collaboration	Use social media networks appropriately to build and develop relationships
	Practice empathy
	Delegate and share responsibility for decision-making
	Help others succeed
	Take responsibility for one's own actions
	Manage and resolve conflict and work collaboratively in teams
	Build consensus
	Make fair and equitable decisions
	Listen actively to other perspectives and ideas
	Negotiate effectively
	Encourage others to contribute
	Exercise leadership and take on a variety of roles within a group
	Give and receive meaningful feedback
Advocate for your own rights and needs	
Communication	Give and receive meaningful feedback
	use intercultural understanding to interpret communication
	use a variety of speaking techniques to communicate with a variety of audiences.
	Use appropriate forms of writing for different purposes and audiences
	Uses a variety of media to communicate with a range of audiences
	Interpret and use effectively modes of non-verbal communication
	Negotiate ideas and knowledge with peers and teachers.
	Participate in, and contribute to, digital social media networks
	Collaborate with peers and experts using a variety of digital environments and media
	Share ideas with multiple audiences using a variety of digital environments and media
	Read critically and for comprehension
	Read a variety of sources for information and for pleasure
	Make inferences and draw conclusions
	Use and interpret a range of discipline-specific terms and symbols
	Write and for different purposes
	Understand and use mathematical notation
	Paraphrase accurately and concisely
	Preview and skim texts to build understanding
	Take effective notes in class
	Make effective summary notes for studying
	Use a variety of organizers for academic writing tasks
	Find information for disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquires, using a variety of media
	Organize and depict information logically
	Structure information in summaries, essays and reports
	Understand and implement intellectual property
Create references and citations, use footnotes/endnotes and construct a bibliography according to recognized conventions	
Identify primary and secondary sources.	

Information literacy	Collect, record and verify data
	Access information to be informed and inform others
	Make connections between various sources of information
	Understand the benefits and limitations of personal sensory learning preferences when accessing, processing and recalling information
	Use memory techniques to develop long term memory
	Present information in a variety of formats and platforms
	Collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions
	Process data and report results
	Evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on their appropriateness to specific tasks
	Understand and use technology systems
	Use critical literacy skills to analyze and interpret media communications
Reflection	Develop new skills, techniques and strategies for effective learning
	Identify strengths and weaknesses of personal learning strategies (self-assessment)
	Demonstrate flexibility in the selection and use of learning strategies
	Try new approaches to learning and evaluate their effectiveness
	Consider content (What did I learn about today? What don't I yet understand? What questions do I have now?)
	Consider ATL skills development (What can I already do? How can I share my skills to help peers who need more practice? What will I work on next?)
	Consider personal learning strategies (How efficiently and effectively am I learning? What can I do to become more efficient and effective learner? How can my understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses help me develop my own strategies for learning?)
	Consider ethical, cultural and environmental implications
Keep a journal to record reflections	
Transfer	Utilize effective learning strategies in subject groups and disciplines
	Apply skills and knowledge in unfamiliar situations
	Inquire in different contexts to gain a different perspective
	Compare conceptual understanding across multiple subject groups and disciplines
	Make connections between subject groups and disciplines
	Combine knowledge, understanding and skills to create products or solutions
	Transfer current knowledge to learning of new technologies
Change the context of an inquiry to gain different perspectives	
Creativity	Use brainstorming and mind mapping to generate new ideas and inquiries
	Consider multiple alternatives, including those that might be unlikely or impossible
	Create novel solutions to complex problems
	Use lateral thinking to make unexpected connections
	Design improvements to existing machines, media and technologies
	Design new machines, media and technologies
	Make guesses and generate testable hypotheses
	Apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products or processes
	Create original works and ideas
	Practice flexible thinking - arguing both sides of an argument
Use visible thinking strategies and techniques	
Propose metaphors and analogies	
Affective	Practice focus and concentration
	Practice strategies to develop mental quiet
	Practice strategies to overcome distractions
	Demonstrates persistence and perseverance
	Practice delaying gratification
	Use memory techniques to develop long term memory
	Present information in a variety of formats and platforms
	Collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions
	Process data and report results
	Evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on their appropriateness to specific tasks.
Understand and use technology systems	
Media Literacy	Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media [including digital media and online networks]
	Demonstrate awareness of media interpretations of events and ideas [including digital social media]
	Make informed choices about personal viewing experiences
	Understand the impact of media representations and modes of presentation
	Seek a range of perspectives from multiple and varied sources
	Communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats
Compare, contrast and draw connections among (multi)media resources	

Critical Thinking	Practice observing carefully in order to recognize problems
	Gather and organize relevant information to formulate an argument
	Recognize unstated assumptions and bias
	Interpret data
	Evaluate evidence and arguments
	Recognize and evaluate propositions
	Draw reasonable conclusions and generalizations
	Test generalizations and conclusions
	Revise understanding based on new information and evidence
	Evaluate and manage risk
	Formulate factual, topical, conceptual and debatable questions
	Consider ideas from multiple perspectives
	Develop contrary or opposing arguments
	Analyze complex concepts and projects into their constituent parts and synthesize them to create new understanding
	Propose and evaluate a variety of solutions
	Identify obstacles and challenges
Use models and simulations to explore complex systems and issues	
Identify trends and forecast possibilities	
Troubleshoot systems and applications	

Goals for September:

Pick one goal to achieve during our first month of school, make it SMART!!! Then pick an Approaches to Learning Skill or another goal to help you meet this goal.

My Goal is _____

(Examples: to have a 75% standing in Math, to have no incomplete homework assignments)

Pick an ATL skill or other goal to help you succeed in meeting your goal _____

(Example: Keep and use a weekly planner for assignments)

Pick an ATL skill or other goal to help you succeed in meeting your goal _____

How well did I do in achieving my goals? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why? _____

Date: _____

For each Flex Thursday, you must select a **minimum of 2 core sessions** (ie. math, science, la, social); the third and fourth sessions can be your choice (core, quiet or extension). They can be chosen in any order.

Please plan out your morning below during your homeroom block.

- Core Core
- Core, Quiet or Extension
- Core, Quiet or Extension

Morning Plans:

Session 1: _____ **Session:** _____

Required Materials: _____

Goal or ATL skill for this Session: _____

Session 2: _____ **Session:** _____

Required Materials: _____

Goal or ATL skill for this Session: _____

Session 3: _____ **Session:** _____

Required Materials: _____

Goal or ATL skill for this Session: _____

Session 4: _____ **Session:** _____

Required Materials: _____

Goal or ATL skill for this Session: _____

Summary of Morning Goals:

I demonstrated (ATL skills) _____

I connected this to my term goal by _____

I plan to _____

