

Instructional Leadership  
for a School-Based Innovation

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## ABSTRACT

This study looked at the leadership style of one public elementary school principal that chose single-gender education as an innovation to manage and improve student behavior and the leadership of the principal during the implementation process. The anticipated outcome was that the researcher would discover that the principal followed steps outlined in professional research, however, what was learned were that some principals do not adhere to those guidelines.

In this study, the principal researched, implemented, and oversaw the implementation, and she strategized a short-term plan for teacher training and support. Outside complexities, such as the simultaneous implementation of the Responsive Classroom® program and looping, influenced the implementation of the innovation as well as the principal's leadership of the program. Another influential factor affecting the principal's leadership was the lack of long-term planning for ongoing training and support of the initiative.

Leading an innovation as unique as single-gender education is a multi-faceted process. Assessment of a principal's leadership of an innovation has multiple layers of complexity as well. These stem from the principal's rationale for the innovation and the methods used to initiate, implement, and sustain it. When leading an innovation, leaders rarely follow a prescribed path as outside factors arise that either enhance or derail the innovation. The leader must have the ability to analyze these factors and make essential alterations while maintaining integrity to the innovation. The leader must also have the ability to analyze individual participant needs during the implementation process and provide re-direction when the innovation deviates from its desired outcome.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated in loving memory of my parents, Jim and Pat Kreber, who passed away as I began my doctoral work. My parents were first generation college graduates in their respective families, and they strongly believed that education was an investment in personal fulfillment and professional success. Their unwavering love and support allowed me to push myself to become the woman that I am. I only wish they could be here to share this accomplishment with me.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### Statement of the Problem

An intense focus on meeting the educational needs of the nation's poorest performing students, such as subgroups defined by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender, have intensified the national debate on school reform and educational leadership (Rothstein, 2004). These students, classically left behind in American classrooms due to a wide and often chronic disparity in skills and achievement, have become the focus of American educational initiatives that incorporate changes into the structure, curriculum, and methodologies used to instruct them. Based on the passage and enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation, public schools are now accountable for the progress of children who are frequently marginalized by ethnicity, poverty, language proficiency, and disability (NCLB, 2001).

The educational researchers, analysts, and policymakers advocating leadership change do so at the behest of national, state, and district leaders who are becoming increasingly anxious over the No Child Left Behind mandate. This mandate, meant to ensure that the lowest performing children meet benchmark proficiencies in reading and math, have left many educators perplexed at just how to raise the academic bar and close the achievement gap between ethnicities and genders (Rothstein, 2004).

Change is not a new concept in the world of education. Since the inception of public schooling, change has been a fundamental tenet of making education for the nation's children more efficient and effective. Rothstein (2004) defined educational change as improved curriculum, better instructional practices, and greater student achievement. This emphasis on increased achievement and closing the achievement gap propelled the call for leadership change

throughout the corridors of public education (Rothstein, 2004). Authors, researchers, and policy makers are weighing in on the processes and practices that will bring about the changes leaders seek (Levine, 2004).

In Brathwaite's 2010 study, she discussed one reform idea that is re-gaining educators' attention. This is the concept of single-gender education. Often viewed as an academic structure more common to private and parochial education, especially at the high school and college level, the idea of single-gender education is gaining ground as a reform strategy in the public school domain (Brathwaite, 2010). The authorization of NCLB granted public schools permission to offer single-gender classes with the caveat that the schools offer the parents and students choice. This means that families must have the option of placing their child in a single-gender or mixed-gender educational environment (Brathwaite, 2010).

#### Rationale for the Study

With accountability stakes at an all-time high, some principals and schools are making significant changes in the delivery of instruction, student groupings, and instructional time allocations to meet the increasing demands for high student performance in reading and math (Hinde, 2003). The purpose of this study was to examine the style of a specific leader when implementing a programmatic change. To be more exact, the study examines the role of leadership in the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of single-gender education.

There is a dearth of research on single-gender education at the elementary level (Brathwaite, 2010). According to Brathwaite's 2010 study, the majority of published research involves students at the high school or post-secondary level who attend private or parochial schools. Therefore, it appears that researchers need to increase the body of research looking at

elementary level single-gender education to assist educational leaders to ensure the efficacy of an initiative; this study will add to this body of research.

The research and results of this study will assist educators in constructing classroom environments that support the strengths and academic needs of males and females. Implementing single-gender education into a school that has traditionally offered only mixed-gender educational classes presents difficulties given the uniqueness of the approach. Such an innovative implementation requires a leader adept in the subtleties and nuances of leadership, for example, relationship building and teacher selection (Howard et al., 2009). Leaders would need to exhibit skill in the art of marketing the innovation, demonstrate mastery in the ability to negotiate the pitfalls that may occur during implementation, and continuously refer to the program's benefits in hopes of sustaining the program (Reeves, 2009). The development of the research questions focused upon this principal's leadership journey; an inquiry into what led to the principal's decision to implement this particular innovation, the obstacles the principal encountered during the implementation phase, and the adaptations the principal made to the program to ensure outcomes favorable to the implementation goals.

### Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What strategies did the principal use to manage the changes resulting from initiation, implementation, and sustainability?
2. How did the faculty and community respond to the manner in which the principal implemented the innovation and how did their perceptions of the principal change over the three years since the inception of the innovation? How did the leader ensure commitment to single-gendered instruction as it unfolded at the school?

3. What challenges has the principal faced and how did she respond?

### Overview of Methodology

This study analyzed a mid-Atlantic suburban elementary school that offered the choice of single-gender education to its students beginning in fall 2007, and examined how the school's principal influenced the school community's journey to initiate, implement, and sustain single-gender classes. Emphasis was placed on the selection of the single-gender class innovation, the view of leadership from the perspective of teachers working in the single-gendered classrooms, as well as from parents whose children have participated in the program, and the challenges the school community faced when implementing the program.

This study includes interviews with the principal, the staff members selected to teach the single-gender classes at designated grade levels, the reading specialist or comparable informant who oversees the program, and parents whose children have participated in the program.

### Research Design

#### *Case Study*

A qualitative case-study methodology was chosen for this study because of the complexities involved in leading an organization through a major innovation.

As Merriam (1998) states, "A qualitative case study examines how everything works together to form a whole" (p. 6). The inquiry into single-gender classrooms lends itself to seeking knowledge by asking probing questions. The information gleaned assisted this researcher in discovering how the principal organized the individuals involved to attempt the instructional innovation. The interview analysis captured the essence of the inquiry while maintaining contextual integrity.

Other characteristics of qualitative case study research include asking open-ended and probing questions, providing rich descriptions of fieldwork, and collecting and analyzing documents (Patton, 2002). The researcher selected to use guiding questions with the participants. The guided interview participants include the principal, the reading specialist, the staff members who teach the single-gender classes, and two parents whose children participated in the program. The rationale for this format was to ensure the exploration of specific issues while allowing the researcher some flexibility to pursue other lines of questioning based on responses given by the interviewees (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher reviewed and analyzed interview data to find common themes that emerged from interviews and became inherent to the study (Creswell, 2009). Analysis revealed the principal's leadership characteristics as she initiated, implemented, and sustained the innovation, as well as the factors leading to the stakeholders' willingness to participate in the innovation.

#### Limitations and Delimitations

The delimitations of this particular study included: the study's sample size, the investigation into one elementary school, and the role of interviewees. In addition, the results of the study will be limited to an elementary perspective on single-gender education.

Additional limiting factors emanated from the type of single-gender education program this school adopted. This included the actual program because not all staff members believed that the single-gender opportunity was developmentally appropriate for students in kindergarten and first grade. Other factors included the amount of teacher training provided to implement the program, the quality and effectiveness of the teachers selected to operate single-gender classrooms, and the assertive leadership style of the principal and other building personnel

responsible for overseeing the program. Secondary schools will not be included in the study because none of them in this district offers an opportunity for single-gender instruction.

The quality and honesty of the responses provided by building and program leadership may be another limitation. In other words, the interviewees may indicate that the program is more effective than it actually is.

A similar limitation will be the leadership style and level of leadership needed from the principal to implement and carry out the program. The building leader may rigidly control the program, whereas another type of leader may delegate program implementation and trust others to adhere to implementation guidelines and sustain the program over time. This principal's control extended to the researcher in that the names of interviewees were provided to the researcher, and the researcher had no input into who would be interviewed.

This study did not investigate the general success of the single-gender classroom implementation or the value of the program as an innovation, but investigated the leadership style of one principal involved with such an innovation. It also did not look at classroom instruction or the merits of one pedagogical practice over another.

#### Definitions

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* – This term Adequate Yearly Progress comes from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and is the measurement that allows the USDOE to determine how every school district in the county is performing based on the results of standardized tests.

*Innovation* – “True educational innovations are those products, processes, strategies, and approaches that improve significantly upon the status quo and reach scale; that is, grow large enough to serve millions of students and teachers or large portions of specific under-served populations.” (Shelton, 2011).

*Looping* – Looping is the practice of keeping the same group of students with a teacher for more than one year (Grant, 1996).

*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* – This act ensures that all have children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (Taylor et al., 2010).

*Responsive Classroom® Model* - An approach to teaching and learning the fosters safe, challenging, and joyful elementary classrooms and schools (Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc., 2007)

*Single-Gender Education* – School settings in which students of one gender are educated separately from the opposite gender (Ferrara, 2010).

### Significance of the Study

Educators became increasingly more interested in innovations such as single-gender schools. The purpose of this study was to examine the style of a specific leader when implementing a programmatic change. To be more exact, the study examines the role of leadership in the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of single-gender education. This study will add to a nascent, but expanding, body of literature by examining the role of the principal in the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of single-gender education.

### Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation investigated the instructional leadership of one elementary school's principal as she initiated, implemented, and sustained the innovation of single-gender classes. The school initiated a rolling implementation schedule, meaning that over a period of three years beginning in 2007, a new grade level offered single-gender classes annually until complete

implementation was achieved. The researcher selected to conduct a case study on this topic, and interviewed the principal, the teachers instructing the single-gender classes, and parents who selected single-gender education as the instructional method of choice for their child.

The case study permitted the researcher to write a rich, detailed description of the information gleaned regarding the principal's style through the interview process. The written description documents the preparation provided to the teachers of the single-gender classes prior to the advent of the program and the professional development associated with the innovation. Triangulation of the data identified themes that emerged from the various data sources. Discussion of these themes provided information to the current bodies of literature available.

Chapter I introduces the study, statement of the problem and significance of the study, the research questions, definition of terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, and an overview of the study. Chapter II includes a review of literature related to leading for change, such as factors related to program implementation, principal leadership, and the stages of leadership. Chapter III describes the methodology used to conduct the study and the steps taken to complete the study. Chapter IV presents the data and an interpretation, while Chapter V contains a summary of the dissertation, a synthesis and discussion of the findings, and the researcher's personal reflections.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the role educational leadership played in promoting an innovative instructional change; in this case, the leadership journey one elementary school principal undertook to bring the innovation of single-gender instruction into the school's academic program. The review includes research on key components of program implementation, how the school principal conveyed leadership to initiate and lead instructional change, promoted the change to staff and community members, and sustained the initiative over time.

This review contains four sections. The first section includes discussion on leading for change, while the second section reviews factors related to program implementation. The third section considers principal leadership, and the final section examines the stages of leadership.

#### Leadership for Change

School systems are struggling to meet state and national mandates for student performance, particularly in reading and math. Currently, many education publications describe the need for transformational school reform, outline a systematic process to lead for change, or lay the groundwork and extol the benefits of change leadership.

Schmoker (2006), Fullan (2008), Reeves (2009), and Durlak and DuPre (2008) have written extensively on the concept of change, highlighting the virtues and pitfalls inherent in the process. Based on decades of national and international education research, Schmoker (2006), Fullan (2008), Reeves (2009), Durlak and DuPre (2008) have found commonalities in the change process faced by many well-intentioned school leaders. While many reformists have initiated, implemented, and sustained innovations with few impediments, research also points to other

reformers whose ideas never moved beyond the initiation stage. These researchers have learned that one or more impediments derailed the change process at some point or prevented the change from ever reaching the starting gate (Reeves, 2009).

### Factors Related to Program Implementation

In meta-analyses of over 500 studies, Durlak and DuPre (2008) examined individuals in a leadership role across different disciplines, the impact of implementation on program outcomes, and the identification of factors affecting the implementation process. Durlak and DuPre (2008) noted that transferring innovations into real world settings “is a complicated, long-term process that requires dealing effectively with the successive, complex phases of program diffusion” (p. 327).

The researchers further stated:

These phases include how well information about a program’s existence and value is supplied to communities (dissemination), whether a local organization or group decides to try the new program (adoption), how well the program is conducted during a trial period (implementation), and whether the program is maintained over time (sustainability) (p. 327).

Dane and Schneider (1998) described five implementation phases. The first is fidelity, and refers to the extent an innovation corresponds to the originally intended program. The second is identified as dosage, and refers to how many of the program components have been implemented. The third phase, quality, describes the level of effectiveness for implemented components. The fourth phase is participant responsiveness and refers to the degree to which the program maintains the participants’ interest. Program differentiation defines the final phase and refers to how the program’s theory and practices are distinguishable from other programs.

Durlak and DuPre (2008) culled three additional phases on implementation from their meta-analysis. Adding onto Dane and Schneider's (1998) original five phases, they determined a sixth phase, monitoring, a seventh, program reach, and an eighth, adaptation. Durlak and DuPre's (2008) monitoring outlines the nature and amount of services received by members of the group. Their seventh phase, program reach, refers to the rate of involvement and representativeness of the program participants. Their eighth and final phase, adaptation, refers to changes made to the original program during implementation.

Wandersman et al. (2008) stated, "understanding capacity is central to addressing the gap between research and practice" (p. 335). Durlak and DuPre (2008) explained, "capacity is often used in reference to the entire process of diffusion and can be defined as the necessary motivation and ability to identify, select, plan, implement, evaluate, and sustain effective interventions" (p. 335). The authors noted that organizational capacity is important because organizations often need support in implementing innovations successfully. This additional support primarily comes from outside parties that provide training and technical assistance. Durlak and DuPre (2008) theorized that implementation is influenced by variables present in five categories. These five categories are communities, providers, innovations, the delivery system, and the support system.

The first of Durlak and DuPre's (2008) categories, is community and relates to community influences on an implementation including politics, funding, and policy. No Child Left Behind legislation is an example of policy that may enhance or impede implementation depending upon how the policy is perceived to impact student achievement.

Dutlak and DuPre's (2008) second category, provider, outlines characteristics related to implementation. These include the need for the innovation, the benefits, self-efficacy, and skill

proficiency. Kallestad and Olweus (2003) found that providers who recognize a need for the innovation, believe it will produce the desired benefits, are confident in doing what is expected, and have the skill set needed are more likely to implement a program at higher levels of dosage and fidelity.

Durlak and DuPre (2008), state that a third category, innovation, discusses characteristics related to implementation, specifically adaptability and compatibility. Adaptability refers to the providers' ability to adapt programs to meet their needs while compatibility suggests that providers and organizations implement new programs that fit with the organization's mission, priorities, and practices.

Durlak and DuPre's (2008) fourth category, delivery system, sets forth that the delivery system for an innovation's implementation falls into one of three categories, general organizational features, specific organizational practices and processes, or specific staffing considerations. The authors state, "Innovative individuals and organizations cultivate an atmosphere conducive to trying new approaches. Effective leadership is crucial to implementation; and the existence of at least one program champion has long been recognized as a valuable resource to encourage innovation" (p. 341). Mihalic et al. (2004) found that when shared-decision making occurs among all stakeholders, there is better implementation of the innovation.

The fifth category for effective implementation of an innovation is training. Training assists providers in developing mastery, and attends to their motivation, expectations, and sense of self-efficacy. Durlak and DuPre (2008) emphasize that training should include modeling, role-playing, and performance feedback. The training can also provide re-training of initial providers, training new staff, and emotional support. DuFrene et al. (2005) found that early

monitoring of implementation followed by retraining doubled the fidelity of implementation to 85% for providers who initially had difficulty with the innovation.

Durlak and DuPre (2008) found a few studies that referenced other variables that influenced implementation of an innovation, such as teachers' perception of the problem, school climate, and school leadership. For example, Kam et al. (2003) found that when principal support and the fidelity of teacher implementation on a program were high, students improved significantly on all outcomes. When the opposite conditions occurred, the researchers noted negative changes in the students.

### Principal Leadership

Other researchers reinforced Durlak and DuPre's findings related to delivery systems; individuals identified as change agents often do not share the same personality traits, school experiences, or professional training. Rather, they share a belief and a commitment to a vision or ideal that will make a difference for students, whether adopting a specific educational program or making a series of changes that will provide maximum opportunities for students to learn what they need to know to be successful in school (Reeves, 2009).

In many cases, one or more obstacles challenge school leaders' attempt for change starting at the inception level. A common obstacle in the change process is fear of change (Reeves, 2009). In these cases, the idea of change so frightens the parties involved that they become paralyzed and unable to move toward implementation.

A second obstacle encountered at the inception level is the notion of *buy-in*. Many school leaders believe that new initiatives are ill fated, especially if the staff does not endorse the proposed change in advance (Reeves, 2009). This thinking also paralyzes the implementation of the initiative.

Once a principal makes the decision to initiate a change, the critical step is determining how to go about planning the process. While there are a variety of commercially published materials that span the continuum of how to implement change, including topics such as the concept of bartering to study groups, it is essential that the change process focus on deep implementation and long-term sustainability rather than quick fixes that yield short-term results (Reeves, 2009).

### Stages of Leadership

Current educational research provides several models for leaders to use as a guideline for implementing change. Sergiovanni (2001) identified four leadership strategies, which he refers to as the Four B's. Reeves (2009) recommended a readiness assessment before implementing change. Kral (2003) outlined six leadership tenets essential to change. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model commonly referred to as CBAM (Hord, et al., 1987) outlined a set of stages individuals' transition through as they participate in the change process. While CBAM is a model for interpreting and monitoring where individuals are in the change process, it also pinpoints where a leader might provide guidance and assistance in helping individuals transition and adapt to an innovation.

Sergiovanni (2001) states that "not every situation a principal faces requires the same leadership strategy" (p. 131). In actuality, principals must construct their practice based on the circumstances surrounding a situation. Sergiovanni (2001) identifies four leadership strategies that principals can employ in the context of their practice. These *Four B's* of leadership build on the concepts of *bartering, building, bonding, and binding*.

Bartering refers to situations where principals and teachers strike a bargain. This Let's Make a Deal type of strategy allows principals to give something to teachers in exchange for a

desired outcome. Building differs from bartering in that leaders provide conditions that enable teachers to feel psychologically fulfilled, such as providing door prizes for the first teachers arriving at a staff meeting to ensure that the meeting can begin on time (Sergiovanni, 2001).

Sergiovanni (2001) defines bonding as the relationship between principals and teachers based on mutually held obligations and commitments. His fourth strategy, binding, brings principal and teachers together as a community that has shared values and beliefs (p. 132). Binding calls on teachers to be morally responsive, to do what is best for the sake of the student. Sergiovanni (2001) emphasizes that although these stages indicate a developmental sequence, they can be used interchangeably to suite the principal's need at any point during a situation.

Reeves (2009) presents practical guidelines for implementing steps that will increase the likelihood of success. Reeves states that in order to prepare for the change, individuals should begin by taking the Change Readiness Assessment (Reeves, 2009). Once individuals have analyzed where they fit on the readiness continuum, leaders use that information to assess the organization.

Kral (2003) discussed six tenets in which principal leadership is paramount to any type of reform; support change, active participation, prime the pump, model collaboration, build relational trust, and make it happen. These tenets revolve around the principal's involvement in all aspects of the innovation. Kral (2003) indicates that the principal's involvement signals to the staff his or her commitment to the change. Without that commitment, staff members are unlikely to proceed with the innovation.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) (Hord et al.,1987), is a well-researched leadership model, which describes how people develop as they learn about an innovation and stages of the process (Sweeney, 2003). In research, Loucks-Horsley (1996) conducted related to

CBAM, seven tenets leaders should keep in mind when instituting change. Those tenets are awareness, informational, personal, management, consequences, collaboration, and refocusing.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter opened with discussion on leading for change. The second section reviewed factors related to program implementation as outlined in a meta-analysis of over 500 studies. The third section reviewed programs and models, which could serve as a possible solution by looking at the characteristics of leaders identified as effective with implementing innovations. The fourth section examined the stages of leadership and operating tenets in leading a change initiative (Sergiovanni, 2001).

### CHAPTER III

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the style of a specific leader when implementing a programmatic change. To be more exact, the study examines the role of leadership in the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of single-gender education.

This study examined the principal's decisions and leadership when initiating single-gender classes, the process for implementing this program choice in select grade levels, for choosing staff members to teach the single-gender classes, and for choosing student participants. The single-gender classroom environment was chosen by the principal as a strategy to increase student achievement at one elementary school in a mid-Atlantic suburban school district that offered the choice of single-gender education to its students beginning in 2007.

The primary focus of this study was on the principal as the individual in the school who effected the change, how the principal selected the innovation, implemented it, and sustained it over a lengthy period. This study included interviews with the principal, staff members selected to teach the single-gender classes, the reading specialist, and parents.

The principal, as instructional leader within the school, played a key role in designing, creating, and implementing innovative instructional programs to promote student academic success (Schmoker, 1997). The single-gender education option at this elementary school was designed to minimize the influence of gender on academic achievement. This principal researched single-gender education and presented information to everyone involved about her vision of the program's design and implementation, the selection and training of staff members

to carry out program components, and the identification and selection process for students and their families.

### Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What strategies did the principal use to manage the changes resulting from initiation, implementation, and sustainability?
2. How did the faculty and community respond to the manner in which the principal implemented the innovation and how did their perceptions of the principal change over the three years since the inception of the innovation? How did the leader ensure commitment to single-gendered instruction as it unfolded at the school?
3. What challenges has the principal faced and how did she respond?

### Research Method Rationale and Process

#### *Case Study*

The research methodology used for this inquiry was qualitative case study because this methodology provided the opportunity to gather more in-depth information about a school than other methodologies would provide. The researcher intended to learn how one principal led a school through the stages of initiation, implementation, and sustainability of a major instructional innovation, namely single-gender education. This process included understanding how all the stakeholders, such as community members, teachers, and parents joined in support of this instructional change.

As Merriam (1998) states, a qualitative case study examines how everything works together to form a whole.

Merriam (1998) states:

While case studies can be very quantitative and can't test theory, in education they are more likely to be qualitative. A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcome, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned for case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and further research (p. 19).

The inquiry into the principal's action when implementing single-gender classrooms lent itself to seeking knowledge by asking probing questions. The information gleaned assisted this researcher in discovering how the principal organized the individuals involved to attempt the instructional innovation. The interview analysis captured the essence of the inquiry while maintaining contextual integrity.

The synthesis of these themes into a rich descriptive narrative ultimately revealed the leadership characteristics used by the principal as she initiated and implemented the innovation as well as the leadership qualities needed to sustain it.

The researcher conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with the principal, the reading specialist, staff members selected to teach single-gender classes, and selected parents using guided interview question created by the researcher (Appendices B, C, D, and E).

Seidman, (2006) describes the guide as, "preset questions to which they want answers or about which they want to gather data" (p. 91).

As stated above, the guiding interview questions created by this researcher for the interview sessions are Appendices B, C, D, and E found at the end of this document. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Following the interviews, the researcher

copied them onto a memory device and sent them for professional transcription. Upon return of the memory device to the researcher, the transcriptions were printed for analysis by the researcher. The researcher then listened to the transcriptions while reading them to identify patterns, themes, descriptors, and discrepancies. These areas were color-coded by the researcher to ease identification and recognition. After analysis, the transcriptions were copied onto a memory device, which was then placed in a locked cabinet known only to the researcher.

### *Setting*

This study focused on one elementary school in the mid-Atlantic area that has gradually implemented single-gender education as a choice for students and their families. It is the only public elementary school within its district to offer single-gender classes.

The school is located in a high socioeconomic community; however, the boundaries were re-drawn within the last decade to include several low-income apartment complexes. At the time of the study, the total enrollment was 525 students. The largest ethnicity among the student enrollment was Black, followed closely by White and Hispanic students.

### *Participants*

Participating in this study was the building principal, Dr. Helena Thurston, a female veteran educator who had been in the profession almost 30 years as a teacher and administrator. She was instrumental in bringing the innovation of single-gender education to the school. In addition to the principal, another participant included the reading specialist, a female veteran educator who had already retired from another state school system. There were three classroom teachers responsible for instructing in the single-gender classrooms. The first teacher, Mr. Franks, was a middle-aged sixth grade teacher whose only teaching experience was at Mayfair Wind. His colleague, Ms. Kitchen, was a middle-aged third grade teacher who, like Mr. Franks,

had only taught at Mayfair Wind. The third teacher, Mr. Edgerton, was a young third grade teacher in his fourth year of teaching at Mayfair Wind. The two parents whose children received single-gender instruction included Mr. Franks, who had two children enrolled in the single-gender program, and Mrs. Milbank, who was the grandmother of another single-gender enrollee. It is important to note that the principal selected all the participants interviewed for the study.

### *Interview Protocols*

The researcher began by discussing the project with Dr. Thurston and asking if she would be willing to participate. When she agreed to participate, the researcher began the interview process by sending a letter to the principal outlining the purpose of the study and requesting interviews with her, members of the staff, and parents whose children are participating in the program (Appendix A). The researcher determined at a later date that information from the reading specialist would provide further insight, and after discussing this with Dr. Thurston, she agreed this was an important piece of the puzzle. The principal's preferred method of communication in the initial phases of the study was through email.

Upon receiving notification from the principal that all required documents, such as the Institutional Review Board forms for the school district and the university, were signed and submitted, the researcher arranged an appointment with the principal for an interview. Dr. Thurston allotted an hour for the interview, which would occur in her office, and the interview guide is Appendix B found in this document. The principal sat at her desk while the researcher sat across the desk from her. The digital voice recorder was placed on the desk to record the conversation. During all of the interviews, the interview guides found in the appendices of this document, were followed exactly as written with no interjections or interruptions by the researcher.

At the end of Dr. Thurston's interview, she identified the names of the other participants. She gave the researcher the participants' names, email addresses, and a brief account on the length of time each individual served at the school and their years of experience in the single-gender program.

All interviews were digitally recorded and interviewees were aware of the recording. Mr. Franks' one-hour interview was held in the office conference room during his planning period and the interview guide can be found in Appendix D. The interviews for Ms. Kitchen and Mr. Edgerton, also an hour in length and during their planning period, were held in each teacher's classroom. The interview with the reading specialist, Mrs. Simpkins, lasted for one hour and was conducted in her office. The guardian, Mrs. Milbank, and the researcher met for one hour in the office conference room. A subsequent interview was held with Mr. Franks, again in the conference room, when the researcher learned that his name was put forth as both a teacher and a parent. The subsequent interview focused on Mr. Franks as a parent. Guides for all of these interviews are appendices B, C, D, and E found at the end of this document

### *Confidentiality*

The researcher hired a professional transcription service to render the text into a readable format from the digital recording. As part of the service agreement, the transcriber is required to maintain confidentiality of all information included in the interviews. The researcher was the sole individual handling the typed transcriptions. As stated earlier, the original memory device was returned to the researcher and is stored in a locked cabinet. The use of pseudonyms protects the identity of the participants and the school from identification. The coding key that links the identities of the interviewees to pseudonyms is stored separately. The researcher was the only

individual who collected and analyzed data for this study, and conducted and analyzed all interviews to identify recurrent patterns, themes, descriptors, and discrepancies.

### Procedure for Data Analysis

#### *Internal and External Validity*

Validity in a qualitative study differs from that found in a quantitative study. Merriam (1998) states that in a quantitative study, data are presented and analyzed using variables providing a very concrete and sequential description of procedures that were followed during a study (p. 199). In a qualitative study, the researcher answers questions demonstrating that the conclusion of a study makes sense based on the information gathered (Merriam, 1998).

Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998) discussed that the results of qualitative research should be able to be transferred to similar settings and not to generalize them to a larger population.

Yin (2009) discusses four tests used to evaluate social research that are relevant to case study methodology. These include construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Yin (2009) believes construct validity is a challenge because critics of case study research point out the failure of the researcher to develop an operational set of measures and the subjective judgments used in data collection. One way to minimize these difficulties is to include a heightened level of construct validity. According to Yin (2009), one way to increase construct validity is to use multiple sources of evidence, which was built into this study by virtue of interviewing a variety of individuals involved with the single-gender program.

The second test extends to the wider problem of making inferences (Yin, 2009). In case study research, inferences are made when events have not been directly observed. Before making inferences, Yin (2009) states that the researcher should ask if other explanations have

been considered. If the research design has not anticipated these questions, then internal validity becomes problematic.

The third test, external validity, tackles the problem of knowing whether the study's findings are generalizable (Yin, 2009). He states that critics confuse the findings from case study research with those from survey research, meaning that survey research is intended for generalization to a larger population (p. 43).

Yin (2009) explains:

This analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case studies.

Survey research relies on statistical generalization, whereas case studies (as with experiments) rely on analytic generalization. In analytical generalization, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory (p. 43).

The fourth and final test is reliability. Yin (2009) states reliability means that if a successive investigator followed the same procedures and conducted the same case study as the first investigator, then the successive investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions. Yin (2009) emphasizes, "The main goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study" (p. 45).

#### *Method of Analysis*

"The analysis for case study research is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies" (Yin, 2009, p. 127). For this study, the researcher needed to examine and compare the interview responses thoroughly to determine emerging patterns, themes, descriptors, and discrepancies that demonstrated the principal's method of leadership. Once themes were identified, the transcribed texts were scrutinized for evidence of leadership characteristics noted in all the interviews, as well as characteristics that were not consistently

mentioned by all interviewees. Yin (2009) stated, “the goal is to analyze the case study by building an explanation about the case” (p. 141).

The analysis of this study began with the color-coding of the seven interviews looking for elements of responses that related to the researcher’s purpose and questions; each of the questions was assigned a specific color and the researcher analyzed transcripts to determine which statement connected to which research question. After color-coding, a chart was created to categorize the information gleaned from all the interviews. A thorough examination of the chart revealed interesting patterns, themes, and discrepancies. The researcher reviewed the data with a fellow researcher to discuss analysis.

During the discussion, the researcher and colleague became aware that there were many possible alternative explanations for the increases in student achievement. It was discussed that many programmatic changes were occurring simultaneously and it would be virtually impossible to parse out which one was responsible for the increased student achievement. The researchers also discussed the forcefulness of Dr. Thurston’s leadership style and how that extended to the researcher when the researcher was told who would be interviewed and that she only allocated one hour for her interview.

An additional element to the researchers’ conversation was that Dr. Thurston firmly believed that single-gender instruction was one of the keys to student success. However, the data indicates that while some achievement was noted, particularly in math, gains were inconsistent.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the rationale for selecting a qualitative case study design. Discussion included the setting and the participating subjects for the study, the protocols

followed for the interview process, as well as data gathering, confidentiality, and the procedures for data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to examine the style of a specific leader when implementing a programmatic change. To be more exact, the study examines the role of leadership in the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of single-gender education.

1. What strategies did the principal use to manage the changes resulting from initiation, implementation, and sustainability?
2. How did the faculty and community respond to the manner in which the principal implemented the innovation and how did their perceptions of the principal change over the three years since the inception of the innovation? How did the leader ensure commitment to single-gendered instruction as it unfolded at the school?
3. What challenges has the principal faced and how did she respond?

This chapter presents the results of the study. The opening section provides the principal's plan for implementation of single-gender classes at Mayfair Wind Elementary School. The second section includes demographic data and discussion on the site selection. The third section introduces the study participants, the research questions, and discussions on each one.

#### The Principal's Plan for Implementation

The principal of Mayfair Wind Elementary School presented the innovation of single-gender instruction to the staff and school community in the spring of 2007. This introduction occurred at a staff meeting; faculty and staff were informed that this was the program they would be implementing and they were given no opportunity for input into the decision.

At this meeting, the teachers were told that they would participate in a Teacher as Readers book club where they would all read and discuss Gurian's 2003 book entitled *The Boys and Girls Learn Differently!: A Guide for Teachers and Parents*. Staff were also informed at this time that there would be a series of staff development opportunities focused around Gurian's book. At that time, they were told of no other staff development opportunities that would be provided to facilitate implementation of single-gender instruction. The principal determined the program would be considered a pilot program in grades two and six, and if it proved to be successful, it would be expanded two additional grade levels until full implementation was achieved in grades two through six. Neither Dr. Thurston nor other interviewees shared the criteria that would be used to determine whether or not the program was successful. The principal and staff decided that students in grade one and younger would not participate in single-gender classes in order to offer younger learners an opportunity to experience socialization with peers of both genders; the researcher is not aware that the staff was given other opportunities for input.

As of spring 2011, Mayfair Wind fully implemented single-gender classes in grades two through six. Each grade level had two designated single-gender teachers: one to instruct the males and another to instruct the females. The remaining students were assigned to two teachers per grade level who instruct the mixed-gender classes.

#### Discussion of Selected Site and Introduction of Participants

##### *Mayfair Wind Elementary School*

Mayfair Wind Elementary School was built in 1963 for students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Renovated twice, the original two-story building was expanded to provide more

classroom space with each renovation. Modular classrooms are located behind the school to accommodate increased enrollment due to the addition of instructional programs.

The principal, Dr. Helena Thurston, has been at Mayfair Wind for ten years. Her staff consists of a mix of veteran and new teachers, many of whom she hired during her tenure. Both the school’s community and staff are ethnically diverse; student diversity is represented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the school’s demographic data by ethnicity. The Hispanic, White, and Black populations are within five percentage points of each other, accounting for 84.10% of the entire school population. The remaining 15.90% of the school population fits under the Asian and Multiracial demographic categories.

Table 1  
*2009-2010 Membership by Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Total Students in School (N=525)	Total Percentage of School
White	164	28.03%
Black	179	30.60%
Hispanic	149	25.47%
Asian	54	9.23%
Other	39	6.67%

Mayfair Wind offers many programs found in comparable elementary schools throughout the district. These include an Advanced Academics or Gifted and Talented program, special education services, Responsive Classroom®, Young Scholars, and Odyssey of the Mind, which

is a program that provides opportunities for students to practice creative problem solving skills. Additional atypical programs at Mayfair Wind include single-gender classes, a pre-school autism program, and two Head Start classes.

The school provides multiple opportunities for parent participation. These include volunteering in classrooms, frequent parent and community dinners, and annual events, such as Family Heritage Night, that encourages families to share their culture's food, music, dress, and customs.

### *Participants*

Dr. Helena Thurston, principal of Mayfair Wind Elementary School answered the interview questions found in Appendix B. As stated above, she has been the principal at Mayfair Wind for ten years, and it was her desire to address the achievement gap that led her to examine initiatives, such as single-gender instruction, for her school. Dr. Thurston selected all participants in this study. It is likely that the results are biased due to her selection of the participants.

Three classroom teachers, Mr. Charles Franks, Ms. Haley Kitchen, and Mr. Rick Edgerton, have taught single-gender classes since the program's inception at Mayfair Wind or since their arrival at the school. They answered questions found in Appendix C. The reading specialist, Mrs. Barbara Simpkins, transferred to the school in 2004 and retired at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. She answered questions found in Appendix D.

The final group of participants consisted of a parent and guardian of students enrolled in single-gender classes. Mr. Charles Franks participated in the roles as both teacher and parent. It was unknown to the researcher prior to the interview that Mr. Franks was also a parent at the school. His dual roles surfaced during his interview. Mr. Franks had two students attending

Mayfair Wind in single-gender classes. After his parent interview, the principal shared with the researcher that she selected him to participate because of his dual roles. Mrs. Dana Milbank is the grandparent and guardian of a young student who participated in a single-gender class for two years.

*Demographic Data*

Table 2 shows the percentage of the students at the school that are at each grade level. As stated above, students enrolled in early grades, such as Preschool, kindergarten, and first grade do not participate in single-gender classes.

Table 2

*2009-2010 School Enrollment by Grade Level*

Grade Levels	Total Elementary School Each Grade (N=525)	# of Single Gender Classes out of Total Classes
Preschool	3.0% (16 students)	0/2
Kindergarten	13.7% (72 students)	0/4
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	19.2% (101 Students)	0/5
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	16.9% (89 Students)	2/4
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	11.6% (61 Students)	2/4
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12.3% (65 Students)	2/4
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	13.1% (69 Students)	2/4
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10.0% (51 Students)	2/3

Table 3 shows the breakdown of students by gender. Data was taken from the 2009-2010 school year.

Table 3  
*2009-2010 Membership by Gender*

Gender	Total Students (N=525)	Percentage
Male	304	51.97%
Female	281	48.03%

Table 4 illustrates the socioeconomic demographic data for the school. Because the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch is high, Mayfair Wind qualifies for Federal Title I funds. Title I funds are designed to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged; schools who have a high percentage of at-risk students, such as students living in poverty, have limited English proficiency, or have disabilities. The socioeconomic breakdown for the single-gender classes was not made available to the researcher.

Table 4  
*2009-2010 Socioeconomic Breakdown*

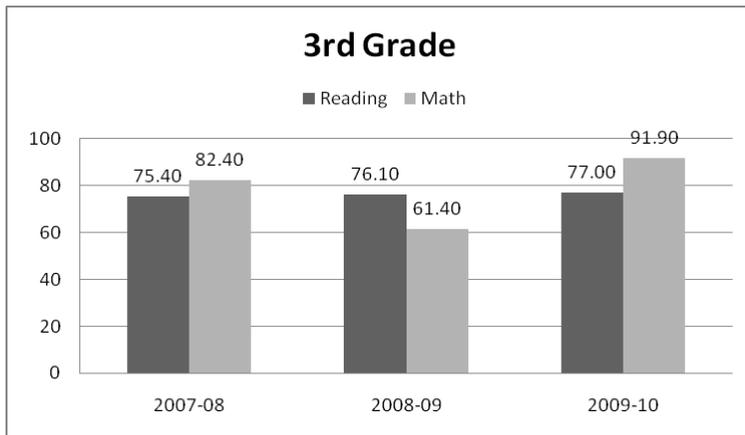
	Total Students (N=525)	Percentage
Free/Reduced	305	52.14%
Full Fee	280	47.86%

#### *Student Achievement Data*

The figures below show a three-year comparison of the state's end of the year assessments in reading and math for all third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students at Mayfair Wind. The researcher wanted to examine overall grade level data to look for trends in

achievement over a three-year period. The researcher asked for data that separated the students participating in single-gender classes from those in traditional classroom settings, but was informed that the data was not analyzed in this manner. The three-year trend in student achievement in grades three through six demonstrated that there was steady improvement in reading achievement during that period. The three-year trend in math achievement during the same time period indicated greater gains in two of the four grade levels.

*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*

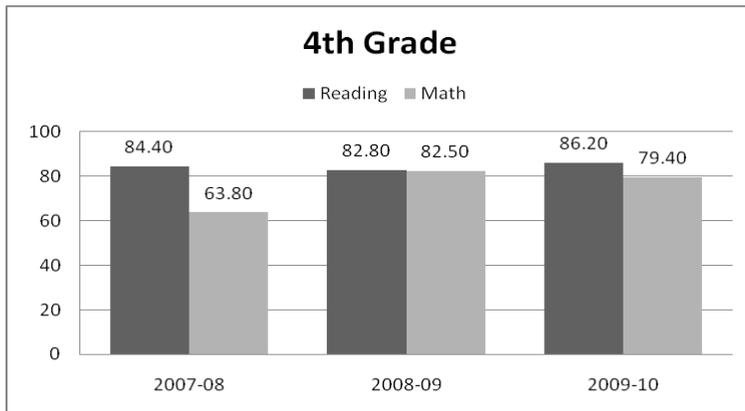


Figure 3

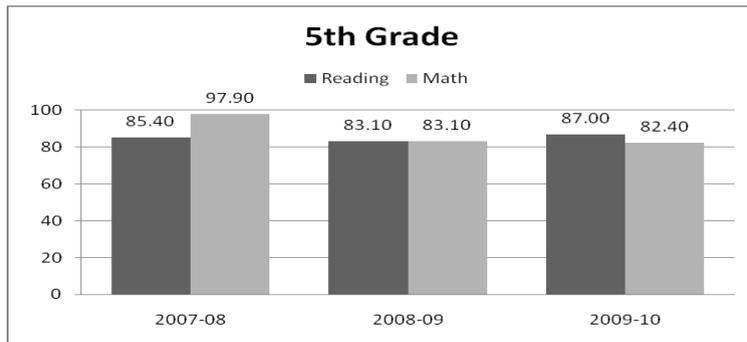
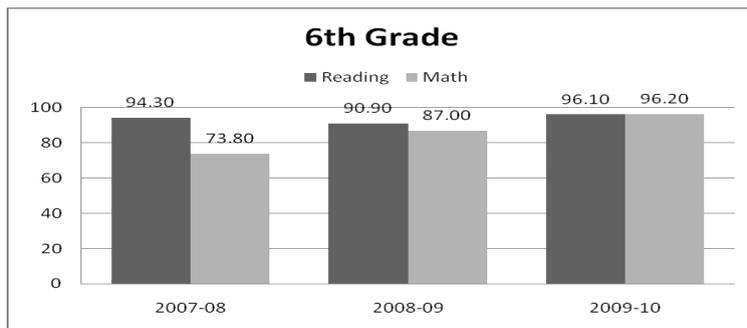


Figure 4



### Discussion of the Research Questions

This section discusses the information shared from the interviews with the principal, the three single-gender classroom teachers, the reading specialist, and the parent and guardian. Each interview followed the guiding questions specified in Appendices B, C, D, and E.

What strategies did the principal use to manage the changes resulting from the initiation, implementation, and sustainability?

*How did the principal begin the single-gender journey, or inquiry into selecting this innovation for implementation?*

The principal's journey, defined as the processes that led her to implement single-gender instruction, started in the early years of her career and was based on her experience with males and language development. Dr. Thurston began her career in education as a speech pathologist, and her first assignment was in a kindergarten through twelfth grade alternative school for students with emotional disabilities. She stated that, "Ninety-nine percent of my case load was Black males. I had one female. This was their last chance. If they didn't make it there, they were not going to receive an education." Dr. Thurston explained that the number of Black males identified with speech and language difficulties perplexed her, but other than her observations, she believed she did not know enough to draw any conclusions.

Following her assignment at the alternative school, Dr. Thurston transferred as a speech pathologist to an elementary school. Her curiosity about males and language development continued as she made new observations. She stated that her caseload was, "heavy on males, but not just Black males. It was heavy on males who received special education services for reading, speech and language, and learning disabilities." She believed her new observations provided some insight into males and learning, but not definitive answers. She stated that, "it didn't have anything to do with culture, but I hadn't figured out what it did have to do with. My quest continued."

As she continued her personal research into determining the sources of learning discrepancies between the genders, Dr. Thurston decided to pursue a doctoral degree. She stated that her initial interest was on differences in the way genders learn, but came to her own conclusion that what she was observing in her role as a speech pathologist was not a gender

issue. “I said to myself at the time, it’s not gender. There is something else totally going on here.” She began conducting research for her dissertation on the topic of males and learning, and came to her own conclusion that she believed explained the males and learning phenomenon. “It was the poverty issue, and why does poverty impact males in a different way than it does females?” Based on her research, Dr. Thurston wrote her dissertation and a book that focused on the issues of poverty and learning.

It was while working on her doctoral degree that Dr. Thurston became principal at Mayfair Wind. She stated, “Not only was I researching about poverty, but I was living it. This school’s location is very deceiving. We sit in a wealthy neighborhood, but we have a high poverty rate.” She stated that other issues were also affecting the school. “We were not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and student behavior referrals were through the roof.”

As principal, Dr. Thurston began looking for solutions to address these issues. It was during this research period that two pieces of information occurred to her: a problem and a potential solution. The problem was the behavior of the sixth grade students. Dr. Thurston stated, “I had just spent an entire year with boys bopping each other and girls mad at each other because someone stole someone’s boyfriend. It was just absolute nonsense in sixth grade.” The potential solution presented itself based on the 2006 revisions to the No Child Left Behind Act. The revisions permitted public schools to offer a single-gender educational opportunity to students if parents chose to have their child participate.

According to Dr. Thurston, her need for a behavior solution was the inspiration for single-gender classes. She stated, “It was all about me on the sixth grade end. The behavior had to end.” After hearing about the revisions to NCLB permitting single-gender instruction, Dr. Thurston researched the legal aspects in anticipation of proposing her idea to her immediate

supervisor. He gave her permission to pilot the program, and she made the unilateral decision to implement single-gender instruction for the next school year in grades two and six.

To prepare for implementation, Dr. Thurston shared her vision about teaching students in gender-specific classes and outlined her plan to bring single-gender classes to Mayfair Wind at a staff meeting in the spring of 2007. She stated that Mayfair Wind would pilot the program in grades two and six, but added that if the pilot program were successful, additional grade levels would offer single-gender classes. She explained that, “Kindergarten and first would not do single-gender because research showed students at that age needed mixed-gender classes for socialization.” During this initial meeting, Dr. Thurston polled each teacher asking them to write down on paper a response to this question, “If you felt you connected better with a gender, which gender would that be?” Teachers who expressed interest in teaching a single-gender class received consideration for the positions, but Dr. Thurston made the final decisions.

Dr. Thurston also met with parents in the spring of 2007 to introduce them to the idea of single-gender classes at Mayfair Wind. She recalled holding several meetings, but was unable to recall the exact number. In each meeting, she presented information on the program, and highlighted its benefits to the students. Parents received a hard copy of an intent form where they indicated the placement preference for their child. Dr. Thurston directed parents to the internet and to Gurian’s book (2003) when they expressed interest for further information.

Mr. Franks, the teacher for the sixth grade male class, remembered Dr. Thurston’s frustration with sixth grade behavior, but was unaware that she had researched single-gender instruction until she presented the program to the staff.

Mr. Franks recalled that:

Dr. Thurston came to us with the idea of doing single-gender classes. She was asking for volunteers and I looked at the fifth grade that was coming up, and there was a lot of socializing going on that was not always positive. And I thought to myself, I can see doing single-gender with this group and separating the genders and experiment with that like Dr. Thurston wanted. So, I volunteered to do it for sixth grade.

Ms. Kitchen, the teacher for the third grade male class, believed that Dr. Thurston conducted her own research on single-gender education. Ms. Kitchen recalled the meeting Dr. Thurston held to inform the staff on her decision to bring single-gender classes to Mayfair Wind, but stated that:

When I heard the program was a pilot for second and sixth, I tuned her out. I did fill out the form and I chose all boys because I thought I would prefer that to all girls. I thought nothing was going to come of it. I would wait and see what happened the next year. And then, it went really well in second and sixth, I mean behavior really improved, and so she decided to expand to third and fourth and then that's how I got involved. Dr. Thurston selected me to teach the boys.

Mr. Edgerton, the teacher for the third grade female class, transferred to Mayfair Wind after the single-gender program began. His initial assignment was to teach a mixed-gender second grade class, but his assignment changed to a third grade female class at the last minute. Mr. Edgerton stated, "Initially I was wary, but I was kind of intrigued at the same time. I decided to try it."

Mrs. Simpkins, the reading specialist, recalled that Dr. Thurston, "announced to the staff that single-gender education was coming to Mayfair Wind. I'm not sure how Dr. Thurston became interested in the program, but it may have had something to do with behavior."

Mr. Franks, in his role as parent, stated that he had an advantage compared to other parents because he was a member of the staff and had knowledge of the program from Dr. Thurston's meeting. He stated that his wife had researched the program independently and together, they believed the program was a viable educational opportunity for their child. Mr. Franks explained that at the time of the pilot program, his eldest child was entering second grade. He remarked that, "We felt this was a good opportunity for our child to grow as a leader and gain self-confidence."

Mrs. Milbank became knowledgeable about the program after she received a call from a teacher as her grandchild was entering fifth grade. She stated that she did not understand the program until that phone call. At the time of the interview, Mrs. Milbank's grandchild was a sixth grade student. Mrs. Milbank stated, "I thought the program was for students who were behavior problems, so I didn't want anything to do with it. I called Dr. Thurston to be sure. I wish I had known sooner when my grandchild was in third and fourth grade."

Dr. Thurston provided a detailed explanation in her response. She stated:

Single-gender in my mind is a piece of the puzzle. I do not think you can take boys and girls, separate them, have lousy teachers, lousy instruction, or no intervention, and expect that you are going to get great results. Neither can you just stick boys in this room and girls in this room. I would love to tell you that when I fought for single-gender, it was the key to tremendous education. It is a key to a multi-locked door. I mean there is more than one lock on the door to learning. You know, this is one little key. Many other things need to happen.

It has been a five-year journey of putting in Responsive Classroom® to improve behavior, interventions to provide more learning opportunities for students, getting rid of crap (...) staff, looping, and single-gender.

Dr. Thurston provided more information on the strategies she believed needed to be followed to effectively implement single-gender instruction. For Mayfair Wind, the first strategy she mentioned was adding Responsive Classroom® to the curriculum for addressing their behavioral concerns. Dr. Thurston stated that, “if the behavior sucks, I do not care what kind of formation you are going to put them in; it is not going to help with learning.” She shared that some staff members experienced in Responsive Classroom® came to her and suggested that the entire school receive training in the program. Dr. Thurston made the decision for school-wide training to occur the same year as the pilot program for single-gender began. Responsive Classroom® (Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc., 2007) emphasized that teachers alter their approach to teaching and learning in order to foster safe, challenging, and happy classrooms and schools.

The second strategy Dr. Thurston mentioned was an intervention block for Mayfair Wind students’ that was for all classes to implement, including those in the single-gender program. Dr. Thurston stipulated that each teacher should have a structured intervention block incorporated into his or her classroom schedule: she permitted each teacher to determine when that block would occur in his or her daily schedule. Dr. Thurston believed that the structured intervention block provided students with additional time for either participating in enrichment activities or relearning content.

The third strategy Dr. Thurston believed needed to happen focused on hiring strong teachers and streamlining the dismissal process for teachers deemed ineffective for classroom

instruction. Dr. Thurston believed that the school district needed a swifter process for removing these teachers from classrooms. She stated that, “We really aren’t here to provide people with a job. We really are here to provide children with an education.”

Dr. Thurston mentioned looping as the fourth strategy that needed to occur when implementing single-gender. Looping is an educational term that means that a cohort of students move to the next grade with the same teacher. Gurian’s (2003) publication suggested looping as a teaching strategy that can be effective with children, and stated that looping provided students and teachers with continuity in learning and behavioral expectations. Although looping occurred at Mayfair Wind, it occurred in situations where the teacher asked permission to loop instead of occurring as a natural feature of the single-gender program; in other words looping was initiated by the teachers and not one inherent to Dr. Thurston’s initiative.

Dr. Thurston perceived single-gender education as one thread woven with several others that was necessary for teaching some students at Mayfair Wind. In her mind, single-gender was not the sole innovation needed but rather one in a collection of innovations implemented that addressed the behavioral and academic needs of her students.

According to the teachers and the reading specialist, the critical factor for choosing single-gender education over other innovations was student behavior. All teacher interviewees responded that behavior at Mayfair Wind was not conducive for learning: they independently concurred that the inclusion of Responsive Classroom® into the school’s behavioral plan had a positive impact on student behavior and learning. While Ms. Kitchen stated that, “implementing Responsive Classroom® was a lot of work”, everyone praised how the program had changed student behavior within the building. Mrs. Simpkins believed that some teachers were more successful with implementation of Responsive Classroom® than others were, but credited the

program for making a difference for many children. Aside from the positive observations made by the participants, the school did not have data that Responsive Classroom® strategies worked well in single-gender classrooms.

Neither Mr. Franks nor Mrs. Milbank referenced Responsive Classroom® in their interview. Mr. Franks knew about the program since he was a teacher at the school, but it is unlikely that Mrs. Milbank had any opportunities to learn about Responsive Classroom® unless her grandchild was directly involved with the program. She did state, however, that being in the single-gender program, “made her grandchild more self-confident and had fewer behavior problems while in the program.”

*How did the faculty and community respond to the innovation and how did their responses change over the three years since the inception of the program? How did the commitment to single-gender instruction unfold at the school?*

In the course of her interview, Dr. Thurston believed the faculty supported the innovation from its inception because student behavior was a strong school-wide concern. She stated, “The faculty has always supported the program. They wanted student behavior to improve.” She shared responses from the community and stated that many parents were very excited in the days leading up to the first year’s implementation of single-gender instruction. She commented that, “the day before school started, I had dads calling me, asking me, begging me, to put their child into the program. I still do.”

All of the other interviewees painted a completely different picture regarding the faculty’s response to the single-gender initiative. Mr. Franks shared that there was friction among the mixed-gender staff regarding the single-gender program because the program often skewed the gender distribution of students. Those students siphoned to single-gender classes

often left a larger number of either boys or girls to move into the mixed-gender classes. This was particularly true if the grade level offered one single-gender class rather than two. Mr. Franks stated that on occasion, “a mixed-gender class came close to resembling a single-gender class.” Another concern that Mr. Franks observed had to do with the number of new teachers, “who have been added to the staff and do not understand the single-gender program.” He stated that training and reading Gurian’s (2003) book have not been required of new staff members.

During her interview, Ms. Kitchen discussed two concerns that impacted staff members’ responses. She stated her first concern was jealousy and explained what she meant by that comment; she personally experienced negative comments from colleagues who wanted to teach the single-gender class but were unable to do so because she would not relinquish her position therefore denying them the opportunity. Ms. Kitchen explained that she earned this opportunity based on the length of time she had been at Mayfair Wind. In other words, her perception of seniority entitled her to teach the single-gender class as opposed to other colleagues with less tenure at Mayfair Wind. Ms. Kitchen added that jealousy among the mixed-gender teachers arose over the issue of class size. Ms. Kitchen stated that single-gender classes had fewer students compared to those in the mixed-gender program. She cited that she typically had 15-18 students while her mixed-gender colleagues had 20-25 students in a class and this fact created resentment between staff members.

Mr. Edgerton appeared reluctant to comment on staff response to single-gender education. He finally offered that, “On occasion, we have not had the right teachers for the program. We had an awful situation with an upper grade teacher in a female class. Fortunately, she’s gone now.”

Mrs. Simpkins, the reading specialist, stated that the first year of single-gender classes was very difficult for the sixth grade team. Her perception was that the two teachers in question did not value the program. Mrs. Simpkins commented that, “It was the first year and maybe they weren’t ready for the program. They left after that school year.”

Mr. Franks did not mention faculty responses in his role as parent. Mrs. Milbank also did not comment on faculty response to single-gender classes.

The second part of the question asked how the parents’ and community’s opinion of the single-gender program have changed as the program continued and grew. Dr. Thurston believed that the parent and community continued to recognize the value of the single-gender classes. She stated that many parents expressed support for the program and parents repeatedly told her how much they liked having choice in their children’s education.

All the teacher interviewees stated that the parents and community valued the program and the impact it has had on learning. Mr. Franks and Ms. Kitchen commented that parents new to the community often have researched single-gender education prior to enrolling their children. All the teachers agreed that parents loved having choice because they controlled the selection of their children’s teachers. As Ms. Kitchen stated, “What is unclear to many of us is do the parents really like single-gender education or do they just like deciding on their child’s teacher?”

Mr. Franks acknowledged the unfair advantage he had over other parents because he was a staff member. He stated, “I know the teachers in the program, but truthfully, I have not kept my children in the program because of the teacher. I have kept them in because it is what my wife and I believe they need.”

Mrs. Milbank remained a strong advocate for the program, commenting, “I tell everyone about the program. It has really helped my grandchild. I just wish they had it in middle school.”

*How did the commitment to single-gender instruction unfold at the school?*

Dr. Thurston explained that during the first year of the program, she bought Gurian's (2003) book for the entire staff to read. She explained that she established a Teacher as Readers group, which was a structure for book discussions similar to the approach used in book clubs. Dr. Thurston divided the book into sections and set the dates for their discussions. She recalled that they met monthly to talk about the book as well as how implementation of single-gender education was progressing.

Dr. Thurston commented that, in her opinion, she had ensured the program's success because she remained highly committed to it. She stated:

You hope that when we as administrators come up with these hare-brained ideas that there's enough, you know, it is a calculated risk. It's a calculated risk. I mean you do not do anything that is so stupidly foolhardy that the chance of damage is higher than the chance of success. I took that risk with this program. I knew what I was doing. I covered all my bases. Every legal avenue had been handled. I mean, we are lucky on my part that it worked. Had it been awful, I would have had to take the hit for it.

When the teacher interviewees responded to the question on how the program unfolded, their responses were nearly identical, however they did not support what Dr. Thurston stated about implementation. They all stated they read the book and met to discuss it. The only variations in their responses came on the number of times they met; Mr. Franks and Mr. Edgerton recalled that they met monthly while Mrs. Simpkins stated that, "We met a few times, but it was not monthly." Ms. Kitchen agreed with Mrs. Simpkins about meeting two or three times, but added that she did not attend all of them.

The teacher interviewees' responses were quite similar regarding commitment to the program. Mr. Franks stated that, "I want to do what Dr. Thurston wants." Ms. Kitchen made almost the same statement, saying, "I do what the principal wants me to do." Mr. Edgerton also agreed with his colleagues, stating, "I do what I am told to do." Mrs. Simpkins believed that Dr. Thurston trusted the single-gender staff to do what she asked of them. She continued, "Dr. Thurston works hard on her relationships with each staff member. She is always cooking for them. Most of them do what she wants." Mrs. Simpkins added that Dr. Thurston managed the single-gender program herself because, "Dr. Thurston has invested so much into it. Media is here all the time to talk with her about it. Her reputation is at stake."

Mr. Franks, in his role as parent, recalled that his wife attended an information meeting about single-gender instruction before the program began. He was unsure if she attended any once the program was underway, but he recalled seeing a flyer that had meeting dates posted on it.

Dr. Thurston indicated in her interview that she held a meeting with parents to introduce single-gender instruction in the spring of 2007, and held subsequent meetings during the fall of 2007. As stated earlier, Mrs. Milbank originally heard about the program from community members, but discovered that the information provided to her from community members was inaccurate. She believed that the single-gender program was a special program only for students with poor behavior, and she did not believe her grandchild's behavior necessitated such a program. Mrs. Milbank was unable to recall being notified of any of these meetings.

*What challenges has the program faced and how did the principal respond?*

Dr. Thurston stated that the program has experienced several challenges; specifically, ensuring that the students going into the program could handle the single-gender environment, looping, and staff perception.

When discussing that the students entering the program could respond favorably to the single-gender environment, she explained the challenges they have encountered with some students:

We have learned that there are some boys who are not assertive or aggressive enough to withstand being in a male class. They would be chewed up in an all boys' room, so we are protective of them. These boys need that feminine nurturing classmate, so we do not place them in single-gender. We have also found some girls who are so nasty that we will not put them in a single-gender classroom; because they are just belligerent, little mean people and they will upset the whole apple cart. You know, no one will stand a chance. Too many alpha personalities in one room is not a good thing for a class.

The second challenge Dr. Thurston explained involved looping. Although looping was not a required piece of the program, several teachers asked to move up with a class. Dr. Thurston explained that because teachers often decided at the last moment to loop, their decision threw the single-gender program off kilter. She stated that when a teacher decided to loop, a designated single-gender teacher in the rising grade level had to agree to the idea because the looping by the single-gender teacher forced the colleague back into the mixed-gender environment. An example of this is the situation Mr. Franks experienced when he was forced out of the single-gender initiative because his colleague at the lower grade level chose to loop and replaced him as the sixth grade single-gender teacher.

An additional issue related to instructional changes associated with looping was the loss of a single-gender teacher at a grade level. When a single-gender teacher took the option to loop, their decision sometimes forced a mixed-gender teacher into teaching single-gender. What often happened in these situations, according to Dr. Thurston, was the absence of a single-gender class in the grade level where the teacher had looped.

Mr. Franks also shared that a challenge with single-gender was the issue of looping. In fact, he had experienced it himself when the fifth grade male teacher asked to loop to sixth grade. Mr. Franks agreed to the teacher's looping to sixth grade, which left him with the decision to either remain in sixth grade or move to a different grade level and teach a mixed-gender class. Mr. Franks chose to remain in sixth grade and teach mixed-gender, which led to a new set of difficulties. He stated:

I had to relearn how to teach girls. I have seventeen boys and five girls in my class this year. I have had to relearn how to work with girls. The boys are just so willing to just get right up there in front of the group and take risks, but not the girls. The girls are not very confident in their abilities. They just do not want to get up in front of the group. It is the middle of the year, and I am still adjusting how I work with the girls.

Ms. Kitchen initially seemed perplexed with the question on challenges, but in the end offered several. She said one challenge involved placing students in classes for the next year. She explained that some parents requested their child not be with certain students for the coming school year. When the student was in the single-gender program and the parent wanted the child to continue in it, there were few options available to separate one child from another in the program. She stated that, "short of removing a child from the program, it is next to impossible to separate those who should not be together in the same class."

The second challenge she referred to was the perception among some mixed-gender staff that the single-gender staff had an easier teaching position than they did. Ms. Kitchen believed that the perceptions shared by some mixed-gender staff members centered on the lower number of students placed in the single-gender classes. Ms. Kitchen commented on the benefits of having fewer students in her class, stating, “I have seventeen students at any given time. So, it is a small group. It’s wonderful.”

A third challenge provided by Ms. Kitchen focused on the parent option feature of the program. Her tone of voice indicated some irritation as she discussed how the parents liked the option so they can plan where their child would go in the coming year. She related the following incident:

A parent knew the dynamic of the group and did not want her child in it. And so, she removed him for the year and then she, you know, put him back in. You know, it is just, I mean everybody in the neighborhood knows. Most of the parents know. Most of the kids know. It’s not like they are coming into this for the first time with a bunch of strangers unless they are new. I think it is pretty planned out among the parents. They like picking the class and teacher for their kids.

Mr. Edgerton presented a different challenge facing the program. He expressed a sense of disbelief that there had not been any ongoing professional development with the program. “I have been quite surprised by that. I mean we read the book and met a few times, but we do not meet or even discuss what is happening in the program. I just find that odd.”

Curious to learn more, the researcher asked Mr. Edgerton if he had discussed his desire for continued support with Dr. Thurston. He hesitated before answering the question. He stated:

Well, I think I'm probably the only one in the program who is interested in ongoing professional development and support. I believe the consensus among the school is that single-gender education is going well and we don't need any training or support. The truth is we don't really know if we are doing all that we can or if we are taking single-gender instruction to the next level.

Truthfully, I don't think Dr. Thurston would see the need for training or support. She believes the program is great as it is, so no, I have not asked her.

Mr. Franks did not acknowledge any challenges to the program other than his own personal quandary. He explained that his oldest child had been in the single-gender program since second grade. The child would be entering sixth grade for the next school year, and Mr. Franks and his wife were debating the merits of keeping their child in the single-gender program or placing the child into a mixed-gender class. Mr. Franks believed moving his child to a mixed-gender class would be good preparation for middle school. However, Mr. Franks and his wife think highly of the single-gender teacher for sixth grade and believe their child would continue to flourish in his classroom and the single-gender environment.

Like Mr. Franks, Mrs. Milbank did not discuss challenges facing the program but reiterated her own thoughts regarding her lack of knowledge about the single-gender program. She stated, "I did not understand what the program was about until my grandchild's teacher called and suggested I put him in." She stated that she had heard of single-gender education at Mayfair Wind, but explained, "I did not understand what the program was about. I thought it was a program for kids that are always in trouble. I had to call Dr. Thurston to be sure the teacher was right." She agreed to enroll her grandchild, and repeatedly stated throughout her interview that she wished she had understood the program earlier. Mrs. Milbank commented,

“My grandchild did well in single-gender classes. The teacher had my grandchild twice. I wish I had known about it in third and fourth grade.”

*What strategies has the principal used to manage the challenges resulting from implementation?*

Dr. Thurston paused before answering the question. Then she moved closer to the digital voice recorder and stated:

I give the teachers what they want. If they want to loop, I let them loop. If they need materials, I buy them. You know, it's like I tell my staff. I tell them I am a nurturer, and I nurture the bejesus out of my staff. Most of them are young enough to be my kids. I nurture them with the understanding, and they know it, there is a method to my madness. The nicer I am to you, the better you are to my kids, and when that does not happen, then all bets are off. When you interfere with what is going on with the children, then I don't know. I mean, I love them to death. I know their problems, when their boyfriends break up with them, all the craziness. And that's fine. I love them to death. I love my staff. But when it comes down to that you are not good for children, then Cruella De Ville© is lying in wait. You know, it comes roaring out.

Ms. Kitchen and Mr. Edgerton did not answer the question when asked. It was unclear if they were unsure of the question or hesitant to share their thoughts. Mr. Franks, on the other hand, did answer the question. He stated that Dr. Thurston constantly praised the entire school staff on the hard work, improved behavior, and increased achievement she observed. He continued that she shared individual feedback with staff members, and he remarked that he found this personally motivating for him. Mr. Franks expressed further that he had listened to interviews Dr. Thurston had made to media organizations, and had heard her praise her staff. He added, “Dr. Thurston knows what is happening in this building. You can't hide anything from

her.” Mrs. Simpkins, the reading specialist, agreed with Mr. Franks. “You can’t fool Dr. Thurston. She knows the teachers, the students, the parents, and the data.”

Mr. Franks did not provide a response from a parental viewpoint. Mrs. Milbank replied, “You know, I didn’t know Dr. Thurston knew my grandchild, but she did. She and the teachers knew my grandchild.”

### Chapter Summary

This chapter gave a presentation of the findings from the study. This included an overview of single-gender classes at the school along with discussion of site information, such as enrollment by grade level, socioeconomic, and ethnicity data. Information was provided on the study participants, and on their responses to the research questions

## CHAPTER V

### SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter includes a synthesis of the findings presented in Chapter IV. It analyzes the leadership of one elementary principal as she implemented an innovation, namely single-gender education. The selection of the school and principal occurred naturally, as it is the only school within the district to offer single-gender instruction. Completing this chapter are a discussion of the findings as well as recommendations for future study.

#### The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the style of a specific leader when implementing a programmatic change. This study utilized a case study methodology to examine in depth how the principal began the innovation, the critical factors that led to the selection of single-gender instruction over other innovations, faculty and community response to the innovation, challenges the program has faced, and the strategies the principal employed to manage the changes resulting from the program's implementation.

#### Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What strategies did the principal use to manage the changes resulting from initiation, implementation, and sustainability?
2. How did the faculty and community respond to the manner in which the principal implemented the innovation and how did their perceptions of the principal change over the three years since the inception of the innovation? How did the leader ensure commitment to single-gendered instruction as it unfolded at the school?

3. What challenges has the principal faced and how did she respond?

### Synthesis

As an administrator, this researcher became interested in the topic of leading innovations. Specifically, this researcher became fascinated with learning how to lead innovations, and wanted to know the methods used by principals to initiate, implement, and sustain an innovation over time. One innovation that surfaced and that the researcher found particularly intriguing was that of single-gender education. The researcher located a school offering this instructional innovation and the researcher focused on this school with the intention of examining the leadership style used by the principal to implement in which the school leader brought on the single-gender initiative.

The innovation of single-gender instruction was presented to the staff of Mayfair Wind through a Teacher as Readers session, studying Gurian's 2003 publication that the principal used as the underpinning of the initiative. Gurian's (2003) publication presents the initiative as a method to teach male and female students by identifying instructional methodologies that are most effective with each gender. For example, Gurian (2003) asserts most male learners prefer a competitive learning atmosphere while female learners prefer collaborating with less emphasis on competition. However, as the researcher continued to probe into the initiative at Mayfair Wind, it quickly became apparent through the principal's and staff member responses that the single-gender educational initiative centered on student behavior rather than student achievement.

One interesting finding noted by the researcher was that the reading teacher had minimal, if any, input into the decision to implement single-gender instruction or in the steps to make it a reality at Mayfair Wind. At many schools, the faculty perception of the reading specialist is as

the instructional leader charged with implementing instructional programs. Since improving student behavior and not instruction was the rationale behind the single-gender innovation, this may explain the minimal role played by the reading specialist.

Another interesting finding concerned professional development, or in the case of Mayfair Wind, the limited amount of it. The principal initially organized professional development through the formation of a Teacher as Readers book discussion group. The book discussion group met several times throughout the pilot year, but subsequent professional development from single-gender organizations or other outside parties did not occur. In addition, staff members new to Mayfair Wind had not received training in the initiative, even though they may eventually teach a single-gender class themselves. The principal's rationale for the lack of continuous professional development for new employees was that it was unnecessary. The principal stated that new employees would learn about single-gender from their team members.

The principal stated on several occasions that she was very aware of what was going on in the building and how the staff and community felt about single-gender instruction. Yet, when examining teacher responses, some of them indicated that the innovation created an environment of jealousy and animosity among staff members. In addition, community members had stated to the teachers that they preferred the single-gender classroom not for the initiative itself, but because it allowed them a greater say in whom their child would have as a teacher. Consequently, it seemed that not everyone was as committed to the idea of single-gender instruction as it would appear, and if they were, it may not have been for the intended reasons.

## Findings and the Literature

As stated in Chapter 2, Durlak and DuPre (2008) outlined four phases of program diffusion: dissemination, adoption, implementation, and sustainability. When looking through these lenses, the principal at Mayfair Wind appeared to follow these successive phases as she sought to implement single-gender instruction. Based on her interview responses, Dr. Thurston told the staff they would implement single-gender instruction and she notified the community that the school was going to begin the implementation process for single-gender instruction by holding information sessions. The school moved through a progressive adoption phase where the implementation of the program began, initially as a pilot project, in two grade levels annually until full implementation occurred in grades two through six. Achievement of full implementation of single-gender instruction into the school's academic program occurred by the fall of 2009.

There was evidence that Dr. Thurston had assimilated several components set forth by many theorists into her leadership repertoire. For example, Dr. Thurston utilized aspects of Sergiovanni's (2001) four principles. This was observable in her adeptness at building relationships with the staff and bonding with them over shared experiences. There is evidence indicating that Dr. Thurston employed several tenets outlined by Kral (2003), such as actively participating in the implementation process through the book study sessions and managing the adaptations to the program requested by the program participants. There is also evidence that Dr. Thurston followed the four phases of implementation specified by Durlak and DuPre (2008): dissemination, adoption, implementation, and sustainability.

A deeper review of the evidence, however, showed that the similarities between the theories and actual events were surface level features. Based on the researcher's interview with

the principal and the participants, Dr. Thurston's personality and force of will drove the implementation process. Dr. Thurston had strongly held beliefs on the factors that influenced her students' learning, and she did not hesitate to take matters into her own hand to research, analyze, and determine a course of action.

She appeared to be so intent upon finding a solution that she neglected to ask permission from the district to implement her innovation. Dr. Thurston related the story on how the district superintendent learned about single-gender instruction at Mayfair Wind. In the fall of 2007, single-gender instruction had just begun when the district superintendent informed Dr. Thurston that he would be visiting the school on opening day. Following his visit to classrooms, he remarked to Dr. Thurston that he noticed there were classes with only one gender of students. Dr. Thurston immediately stated that she had taken care of the legal requirements. An hour after the superintendent's visit, Dr. Thurston received a phone call from the Office of Division Counsel to learn what steps had been taken to meet legal requirements. It is unclear to the researcher whether she felt it was easier to seek forgiveness than permission, whether she did not truly research the necessary steps to meet legal requirements, or whether she just believed in the program and deliberately proceeded without seeking further advisement. She boldly moved forward, and believed that if questioned by superiors, she would be able to defend her actions.

While the researcher found many admirable components in her style of leadership, her style was comparable to that of a feudal monarch. Mayfair Wind was her fiefdom, and Dr. Thurston was the monarch who cared deeply for her subjects as long as they were taking care of the things that were important to her. There was evidence of her benevolence in her relationships with staff, based on her willingness to purchase requested resources and prepare monthly meals for the entire faculty. She led through the sheer imposition of her will, and most

of her staff members complacently followed. In her educational kingdom, there appeared to be limited opportunities for dialogue, discussion, or disagreement; program success appeared to be evaluated purely on levels of staff compliance. In other words, if it was running smoothly, it must be working.

While Dr. Thurston believed that the single-gender instructional initiative had matured to the level which she determined was sustainable, this researcher did not concur. The staff implemented the initiative because they were told to do so, casting doubt on their belief in and value for the program. Adaptations to the program initiative over time appeared to be unknown to the principal or had been ignored. It is the researcher's belief that following the principal's retirement, the new principal will review the single-gender innovation and with input from the staff, terminate the program. If the leadership style of Dr. Thurston's replacement is not similar to hers, and it appears that the staff continues to implement the program in order to be compliant, it is doubtful that this program implementation will sustain long after the new principal assumes the role of leader at Mayfair Wind school.

There appears to be a contradiction to the researcher regarding what Dr. Thurston stated in her interview about single-gender instruction operating as a key to a multi-locked door to education and that there is more than one lock to the door to learning. And yet, she appears to credit single-gender instruction as the solution to behavior management and academic success while disregarding the complexities of Responsive Classroom®, smaller class size, looping, and teacher selection by parents.

### Unexpected Findings

The researcher anticipated finding several elements as part of the planning process for the innovation's implementation. These included the construction of an ongoing implementation

plan, the rationale for undertaking the innovation, a schedule of teacher professional development opportunities implemented in conjunction with the single-gender program, and scheduled meetings held on a monthly basis with the participants to discuss the program. The researcher also anticipated that the parent interviewees would have more knowledge regarding the program's implementation process.

During her interview, neither Dr. Thurston nor any of the interviewees referred to an ongoing implementation plan for the single-gender program. It is true that the intention of the initial year of the program was to serve as a pilot year, and if it were successful in that first year, it would expand by two grade levels until full implementation was achieved in grades two through six. What appeared to the researcher to be absent from this implementation plan was a method to evaluate its success. Dr. Thurston clearly stated that continued implementation was based on programmatic success; the researcher is perplexed as to how that success was to be measured.

The researcher did not find evidence of a plan for informing parents new to the school about single-gender education. There also was not evidence of a training or indoctrination program on single-gender instruction for new staff members and existing staff members were not aware of any plan to bring this about. It appears that Dr. Thurston believed that once the program started running, the momentum and her leadership style would sustain it.

As part of the implementation process, the researcher anticipated learning about professional development experiences for teachers that supported the program's implementation and sustainability. While there was initial internal professional development with the principal and program participants by reading and implementing a Teacher as Readers program with Gurian's (2003) book, the researcher did not find evidence of other internal or external

professional development support. For example, the researcher anticipated that outside trainers with expertise in single-gender instruction would have provided support and training to the participants; they were not.

In implementing and maintaining the innovation, the researcher anticipated finding that the program's participants met throughout the year to discuss topics specific to single-gender instruction. These included how new students and parents were adapting to the program, how students in the program were achieving academically, how well the teacher and students were adjusting to looping, and if looping was a beneficial component of the program. The researcher found that participants in the single-gender program did not meet following the first year of implementation. Mr. Edgerton stated,

The meetings stopped after the first year, and I don't know why. We do not meet to talk about how the students are doing, if the program is still viable, or who will loop and teach single-gender from year to year. There is so much more to do and learn.

The researcher anticipated that the interviewees' responses, particularly those made by the principal and classroom teachers, would include discussion on academics as a factor in bringing the innovation to the school. While some discussion referred to improved academics with the implementation of single-gender instruction, it was not found to be a major component associated with the innovation. The researcher did find that improving student behavior was the impetus for the single-gender innovation and that finding was based upon data provided by the interviewees.

The researcher also anticipated learning more about single-gender education from the parents participating in the study. As stated earlier, the principal selected the parents for inclusion in the study. Mr. Franks had knowledge about the program by virtue of his being a

teacher in the program. Mrs. Milbank did not have an accurate understanding of the program until a teacher in the program contacted her, explained the program, and persuaded her to enroll her grandchild. Although both parents spoke highly of their children or grandchildren's experiences in the single-gender program, Mrs. Milbank had limited background information on the rationale or critical factors used for implementing the innovation, and Mr. Franks likely had his information due to the fact that he was a staff member.

Based on Dr. Thurston's interview, she made the decision to implement single-gender education for several reasons, among them her interest in altering the educational environment to alleviate the effects of poverty on learning, to instruct males in modalities that met their instructional needs, and to minimize gender behavior disruptions. She selected single-gender education as the innovation, informed the staff of its implementation, managed the legal issues, selected the resource and method of professional development, and appointed herself as the implementation overseer. She had made all the decisions regarding the single-gender innovation, and had led the implementation process based on her knowledge and beliefs of what she determined were appropriate for the students. While she incorporated aspects of professional research in the implementation of the innovation, she did not follow any one methodology with specificity. Consequently, components of the implementation process were unaddressed from the beginning of the process and remain so to this day.

Based on teacher and parent participant interviews, they knew little about the principal's rationale for this innovation. They only knew of the school's need for improved student behavior. The participants appeared comfortable with the innovation's implementation process, an indication to this researcher that they were accustomed to the principal's leadership style of leading for change.

When comparing Dr. Thurston's style with implementing an educational innovation to relevant research, some elements are clearly missing. Dane and Scheider (1998) discussed the need for fidelity when implementing a program innovation. This fidelity was lacking since multiple programs were implemented simultaneously, therefore the level of fidelity to any of the programs was compromised. Many elements of Kral's (2003) leadership model appear to be absent at Mayfair Wind as well as those found by Hord et al. (1987) in CBAM. The most glaring absence appears to be in the area of collaboration. While collaboration does not explicitly appear in all models, it is implicit in each of them.

#### Suggestions for Future Study

This study was limited to learning about one principal's leadership in implementing an innovation, single-gender instruction. It would be interesting to learn of similarities and differences in leadership style of a principal implementing the same innovation at another school to determine leadership traits that affect an innovation's acceptance, understanding, and effectiveness as perceived by a school's staff, parents, and community.

In this study, the implementation of single-gender instruction occurred almost simultaneously with the implementation of the Responsive Classroom® program. It would be helpful to study the implementation of single-gender instruction as a strategy for managing student behavior without the Responsive Classroom® component. The principal brought single-gender instruction to Mayfair Wind to resolve behavior challenges, and the staff members interviewed for this study believed that student behavior was the impetus for the program's implementation.

The unknown information from this study is if single-gender education improved behavior that ultimately resulted in increased academic success for the students enrolled in the

program. It is also unknown whether the components of the Responsive Classroom® program were responsible for improved student behavior, or if the inclusion of both programs contributed to improved student behavior. Future researchers may want to investigate situations where one of these initiatives was implemented independently from the other. A study such as this would provide data supporting or refuting the success of each of these programs in isolation.

On the assumption that the implementation continues when a new principal assumes the role at Mayfair Wind, it would be interesting to conduct a follow-up study to determine whether the style of the new leader had a positive or negative impact on student behavior and academic success.

One additional suggestion for future study is to examine the impact on achievement for students who are not included in the innovation. In this situation, that would involve an analysis of behaviors and achievement of students placed in mixed-gender classrooms as compared to those in the single-gender environment.

#### Practical Recommendations for School Districts Offering Single-Gender Classes

1. School districts should conduct research at schools within their system where non-traditional innovations, such as single-gender education, are occurring. This availability of research to administrators inside the system would permit them to analyze the information while considering implementing related innovations at other schools.

2. School districts should consider the creation of a live or virtual internal leadership forum where school administrators share their experiences in leading programs and innovations. This forum structure could occur on a rotating basis so administrators within the system can learn from others on how to lead, implement, and manage innovative programs and strategies.

## Personal Reflections

I was surprised to see how the path of my research changed as the process progressed; I began by looking at the leadership of implementing an innovation looking at increasing reading achievement and ended with a document more focused on one principal's leadership style. This dissertation has taken on multiple iterations due to the fact that each time I analyzed the data, I realized that the answers were not related to the questions I really intended to explore. It has been a journey.

As I progressed, I realized that my original research questions lead to a very superficial level of understanding, therefore, I had to adjust the questions. Fortunately, my interview guide still provided me with what I needed to know; what needed to change was the lens through which I looked.

As a veteran educator, I have participated in many innovations that began with a flurry of interest and activity only to end in barely a whisper a short time later. As a practiced administrator who has implemented and led innovations, I have learned that they rarely progress in a linear fashion; in fact, they progress in the opposite manner. According to Garmston and Wellman (2009), they assert that schools change through different mechanisms. They state:

Schools are nonlinear dynamical systems in which cause and effect are not tightly linked.

In nonlinear systems, the parts do not add up to the same sum each time they are combined. Fresh combinations result in different outcomes.

A blend of regularity and irregularity shapes nonlinear systems, producing patterns of stability and instability. Critical choice points present new possibilities and new forms of order.

This is certainly what I discovered as I conducted this research. Was it the leader's style or the complexities of the program? While I feel my research questions were answered, I do not believe this question has been answered.

As a novice researcher doing a case study, I found that all my previous learning left me unprepared for what I experienced. In my mind, I created a flawless implementation protocol; what I found in reality was a complex process influenced by a variety of other elements. During phases of the study, the questions I constructed seemed endless and the data massive and unwieldy. Every path I followed yielded new information, and as it was analyzed and reflected upon, provided new insights into the challenges of leadership when initiating, implementing, and sustaining innovations.

As a researcher, I wanted a pure process untainted by outside factors. While it may have been unrealistic to imagine such a scenario, it is hoped that I have provided insight into a principal's leadership as she moved forward with initiating, implementing, and sustaining an innovation.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW REQUEST

Dear Principal,

I am interested in learning about the evolution of instructional change and the leadership skills that are necessary to bring the change to fruition. With regard to your school, I am specifically interested in what the principal needed to do in order to offer single-gender classes as an instructional choice.

In addition to interviewing you, I would also like to interview members of your staff that are teaching single-gender classes and parents whose children are participating in the single gender program. Each interviewee will receive a written copy of the structured and unstructured questions. I will be recording each interview in order to have an accurate transcription. Each participant will receive a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

I have attached a copy of each interview protocol for your review.

Please let me know when it would be a convenient time to meet. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Nancy Mercer

## APPENDIX B

### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW

1. How did the principal begin the single-gender journey, or inquiry into selecting this innovation for implementation?
2. What were the critical factors in choosing single-gender education over other innovations?
3. How did the faculty and community respond to the innovation and how did their responses change over the two years since the inception of the program? How did the commitment to single-gendered instruction unfold at the school?
4. What challenges has the program faced?
5. What strategies has the principal used to manage the changes resulting from implementation?

## APPENDIX C

### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR READING SPECIALIST INTERVIEW

1. How did the principal begin the single-gender journey, or inquiry into selecting this innovation for implementation?
2. What were the critical factors in choosing single-gender education over other innovations?
3. How did the faculty and community respond to the innovation and how did their responses change over the two years since the inception of the program? How did the commitment to single-gendered instruction unfold at the school?
4. What challenges has the program faced?
5. What strategies has the principal used to manage the changes resulting from implementation?

## APPENDIX D

### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STAFF INTERVIEW

1. How did the principal begin the single-gender journey, or inquiry into selecting this innovation for implementation?
2. What were the critical factors in choosing single-gender education over other innovations?
3. How did the faculty and community respond to the innovation and how did their responses change over the two years since the inception of the program? How did the commitment to single-gendered instruction unfold at the school?
4. What challenges has the program faced?
5. What strategies has the principal used to manage the changes resulting from implementation?

## APPENDIX E

### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARENT INTERVIEW

1. How did the principal begin the single-gender journey, or inquiry into selecting this innovation for implementation?
2. What were the critical factors in choosing single-gender education over other innovations?
3. How did the faculty and community respond to the innovation and how did their responses change over the two years since the inception of the program? How did the commitment to single-gendered instruction unfold at the school?
4. What challenges has the program faced?
5. What strategies has the principal used to manage the changes resulting from implementation?

# **APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM**

## **VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS OF INVESTIGATIVE PROJECTS**

**Project Title:** Instructional Leadership for a School-Based Innovation

**Principle Investigators:** William J. Glenn, Ph.D. and Nancy A. Mercer

### **I. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT**

Creating a Reading Intervention Through Leadership has been a complex process. The implementation of single-gendered education is designed to close the achievement gap in reading. This project is designed to demonstrate program implementation aspects which prove most successful. The study involves your elementary school whose name will be confidential. Your participation is voluntary.

### **II. PROCEDURES**

You are asked to participate in a tape-recorded interview when you will be asked a series of questions. This interview will be conducted at your school site, if convenient. If not, an alternative site will be chosen. Your interview will be transcribed and responses analyzed. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. A brief follow-up interview may be requested if found necessary to clarify responses or gather additional information.

### **III. RISKS**

There are no risks involved in this study.

### **IV. BENEFITS OF THIS PROJECT**

Your participation in the project will provide information about single-gendered classroom instruction in your school. This information can be valuable to schools as they consider single gender education as an innovation. When research is completed and results compiled, you are welcome to contact the investigator for the results.

### **V. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

The results of the study and the participants will be kept strictly confidential. Your school will be given a code which will be used during the entire research process and Nancy A. Mercer, the researcher, and Dr. William Glenn, faculty advisor, are the only individuals who will have access to the code. Notes, transcripts, and codes will be secured in the home of the researcher. All transcriptions and analysis will be conducted by Nancy A. Mercer, and reviewed by Dr. William Glenn. All data will be destroyed after a period of five years.

**VI. COMPENSATION**

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW**

You are free to withdraw from the project at any time. You reserve the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview.

**VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH**

This project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Researching Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic and State University as well as the Institutional Review Board for Fairfax County Public Schools.

**IX. SUBJECT’S RESPONSIBILITIES**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the responsibility of participating in one interview and a brief follow-up interview if necessary.

**X. SUBJECT’S PERMISSION**

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project and have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

X

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Study Participant

X

\_\_\_\_\_

Date