Perceived Support for Instructional Innovation Within Urban Charter Schools in Kansas City, Missouri

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to create a qualitative and descriptive study about the perception of charter school teachers regarding their support for innovative instructional practices at the classroom level. This study was designed to speak directly to the educators who impart knowledge to students and those school leaders who impact the instructional decisions of those educators. Because charter schools are so varied in intent of theme, structure, and even purpose, the study focused on one set of charter schools sponsored by a major university located in the Kansas City, Missouri metropolitan area.

This study examined if teachers perceived if there is support for innovation, regardless of the type, at their school that impacts their instructional practices at the classroom level. The researcher used open-ended interview questions to explore the instructional decision-making of charter school teachers at the identified schools. These questions explored elements of leadership, ownership, norms for diversity, continuous development and diversity as identified by the work of Siegel and Kaemmerer (1978) and their Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation research.

Acknowledgements

I am the product of a family that had very little money but a lust for life and passion for adventure. My father, Mr. Jeffie Lee, had less than a 3rd grade education, but told me that an education would likely be my ticket to a life of happiness. Mr. Lee wasn't just a talker; he was also a "doer." I saw him get up every morning before the sun came up to go and work for his family. I didn't know until years later that he also cleaned offices and drove a bootleg cab. He had a "whatever it takes" type of work ethic and we never went without. My childhood was filled with safety, family, candy, and friends. We played in the streets, went to the movies, to the park, and out of town to visit relatives quite often. My mother says it's because Mr. Lee, who happened to be my stepfather, came along and saved us. I am more like him than I am almost anyone I know.

I am the product of my school district. It was racist, and discriminatory, and dismissive of Black children. In 1971, the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) system was taken to court and found guilty of practicing *de jure* segregation or racial separation enforced by law (Moore, 2011). I remember being bused to the White district and being overlooked and continuing to be dismissed at all levels. Despite its discriminatory practices, I consistently made the honor roll at John Marshall High School. However, no one ever talked with me about higher education. It was my eldest sister, Connie Lee Grady who asked me during my final semester if I wanted to go to college. I almost shrugged it off, but agreed. Attending Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO changed my life. I am thankful to my big sister who has always kept her siblings' best interest at the forefront of her life.

I am the product of my early training as a teacher. I thank Lincoln University's special education department under Dr. Gloria Grotjan's leadership. I thank Liz Matthews who hired me

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

School choice has been touted as the answer to the ills of our modern day American public education system. Vouchers, tax credits, and the ever popular charter schools are all forms of the school choice effort. Vergari (1999) found that people's interest in charter schools stemmed from a variety of factors that include the mass media, state and federal lawmakers, high levels of political activism by both proponents and opponents, and the potential threat that charter schools pose to traditional public schools. Proponents of charter schools believe that the dysfunctions of educational bureaucracy creates an inherent tension between the need for autonomy and flexibility, and thus stifles innovative practices that help teachers improve their instructional practices and impact student achievement (Chubb & Moe,1990; Meir, Polinard & Wrinkle, 2000).

Many proponents of charter schools believe that the very removal of regulations, (i.e. deregulation, enhanced autonomy, and a consumer-orientated agenda), will spur innovation within these schools of choice. Rofes (1998) studied traditional public schools and school districts, as well as charter schools, and found that while charter schools may offer innovations in governance, accountability, and assessment, few pedagogical innovations in instructional practices were noted and even fewer differed from what traditional schools offered. While research on charter schools has centered on charter schools as a whole, especially the comparison of student achievement outcomes between charter schools and traditional public schools, few researchers have delved into the daily instructional practices of the charter school teacher and their perceptions surrounding autonomy, flexibility and innovation.

Research Questions

If a primary argument by proponents of charter schools is that they were created to spur instructional innovation, how is such *instructional innovation* currently manifesting itself in charter school classrooms?

1. How are innovative instructional practices defined and described by charter school teachers in the study?

2. What are the barriers to innovative instructional practices in a set of charter schools authorized by a university in Kansas City, MO?

3. How do the organization, practices, and philosophy of charter schools authorized by a university in Kansas City, MO (e.g., deregulation, autonomy and flexibility) relate to support for innovation at the classroom level?

Bulkley and Fisler (2003) found that far less is known about what happens inside charter school classrooms than how they are organized and governed and this is an important area for study. This insight is critical in assessing the continued support of the charter school movement as an educational reform effort that can foster and support instructional innovation at the classroom level.

Framing the Study

This study sought to examine the relationship of perceived support of instructional innovation at the classroom level of charter school teachers who work for schools sponsored by one local university charter school authorizer in the Kansas City, MO urban area. The primary focus of this study was to explore the level at which charter school teachers believe that charter schools are conduits of innovative ideas and if these charter school teachers perceive that there is support for instructional innovation at their school that impacts their instructional practices.

Additional goals are to better understand what classroom practitioners define as innovative instructional practices in the classroom and who initiates instructional decisions at the classroom level.

Rationale and Significance of Study

Few would argue that having a quality education assists in bettering the overall lives of citizens. While motivation for educating citizens may vary—economic, political, social justice—education is usually a vehicle for improving and developing a society overall (Hanushek, 2005). A good education should help students become good problem-solvers within a variety of life settings who can care for themselves, their families, and their communities (Comer, 2001). Charter schools are seen as just one vehicle for improving the quality of education for many marginalized citizens of the United States. Charters schools overall, and charter schools in the Kansas City area specifically, purposefully mimic these trends and tend to educate a larger portion of minority students than White students (Frankenburg & Lee, 2003; MCPSA, 2017). While most charter school research has centered on charter law, charter configuration, and administrative and governance practices, little research has revealed what happens in the charter school classroom. This study specifically seeks to study the decisions and actions of charter school teachers that impact the lives of thousands of children in the Kansas City, Missouri metropolitan area. The impact of education on children should go beyond whether they pass statewide mandated assessments. Many of the charter schools in the Kansas City, MO area are showing positive growth on state tests (MCPSA, 2017). The significance of this study's importance is that if charter school leaders are to make relevant decisions that directly impact students beyond whether or not test scores are improving, understanding the perceptions of

teachers as they make instructional decisions at the classroom level is imperative to educating the whole child and thus preparing those students for productive participation in the society at large.

Role and Assumptions of the Researcher

Over the course of my 33 years in education, I have spent just over 42 percent of that time within four charter school systems. I have served on the board of two different charter schools, and later served as a director of special education, chief data officer, dean of students, and teacher at two other charter schools. Because of my relationship with charter schools and staff who work at them, I bring some aspects of confirmation bias to the study. I would have to admit that this bias seemed to center on the assumption that I would find that teachers who teach in these schools were simply *traditional* teachers operating in very traditional settings and that innovation was not a by-product of what proponents hoped would be the result of less bureaucracy and more autonomy and flexibility. However, acknowledging this bias, I worked to ensure validity and trustworthiness by audiotaping and/or videotaping participants. I took notes while interviewing study participants and transcribed interviews exactly as recorded often revisiting the recorded data to ensure validity. I have worked with several of the teachers who took part in this study. I worked diligently to ensure that the perspectives of the study participants were presented as objectively as possible. All members were invited to participate in member checking and indeed I followed up with three participants to member check and ensure accuracy in reporting and interpretation of information.

While most would admit that writing the dissertation is a daunting experience, I would have to admit that once the interview session of the study began, the process actually became an enjoyable task. I highly anticipated each interview with the study participants. As Appleton (1995) explained study participants were eager to participate and have their voices and their experiences heard. I was able to put each teacher at ease, and this process indeed was able to help

me to personally understand what is taking place in the classrooms at the schools in the study beyond test scores and APR reports. Because I have worked my entire career to help the students in the Kansas City, Missouri realize the fullness that their lives can have for themselves, their families and our community, it is important for me to know that like-minded individuals are still in classrooms "fighting the good fight." It was encouraging to hear the rich articulation of the personal and professional goals of the educators in this study. It was encouraging to hear that they are truly willing to help to continue the process of educating and producing the next generation of leaders in our community and beyond.

Definition of Key Terminology

While there are many interpretations—and even expectations—of what charter schools should bring to the table in terms of being *innovative*, this study defines *instructional innovations* to mean such things as the use of diversified and lively teaching methods/contents in the teaching process such as the use of technology, and practices that aroused students' interest in learning and creativity instead of the heavy emphasis on written tests, memorization, rote learning and recitation of material (Guskey, 1988; Bruce, 1989;Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Machi and McEvoy (2012) define the literature review as "a written document that presents a logically argued case founded on a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study. The presented material seeks to establish a convincing thesis to answer the study's question (p 4)." The review of the literature in this case study will outline what is presently known about the charter school movement as it relates to fostering innovative instructional practices in the classroom. This section is organized into four categories:

a. The History of Charter Schools

b. What is Instructional Innovation?

c. The Perception of Empowerment

d. Support for Innovation

The History of Charter Schools

It seems that we have been trying to reform schools almost since we first began opening the doors to welcome students into them. And although history has shown very little about what reforms should succeed, it tells us even less about what reforms have succeeded (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In modern times, one such reform that has garnered the attention of political leaders, policy makers, parents, and school officials is the charter school movement (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Brouillette, 2002; Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003; Miron & Applegate, 2007; Buckley & Schneider, 2009). Schools of choice come in a variety of plans: vouchers, tax credits, charter schools. Charter schools have emerged as the most rapidly growing and available school of choice programs (Parker, 2000). Vergari (1999) found that the interest in charter schools arise from a variety of factors that include the mass media, state and federal lawmakers, high levels of

political activism by both proponents and opponents, and the potential threat that charter schools pose to traditional public schools. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 included $300 million of federal funding for charter schools. The Obama administration put considerable emphasis on expanding charter schools nationwide by providing Race to the Top funding that specifically mandated that states' applications include initiatives for charter schools (Wong, 2014).

According to the League of Women Voters of Chicago (2008), the following is a timeline of charter schools in America:

- 1974: Ray Budde, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst published a paper in which he envisioned teachers being able to teach without interference from local bureaucracy.

- 1988: Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, promoted charter schools.

- 1992: Minnesota opened the first charter school.

- 1994: Federal legislation established the Office of Charter Schools Programs (CSP) as an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. There were eight grant competitions intended specifically for the charter school community and funds for entities and organizations that provide information for authorizing principles and professional development.

Charter schools are publicly funded independent school established by teachers, parents, or community groups under the terms of legal agreement known as a charter with the sponsorship of a local or national authority. Organizers may be teachers, parents, or others from the public or private sectors. The sponsors may be local school boards, state schoolboards, or

other public authorities, such as universities. The organizers manage the schools, and the sponsors monitor compliance with the charter. The charter agreements contain provisions regarding issues such as curriculum, performance measures, and management and financial plans (Vergari, 1999). Some states, such as Missouri, specifically targeted low-performing urban centers such as St. Louis and Kansas City. Missouri law falls under the "permissive" law category. Permissive laws – the lack of caps, having multiple authorizers, and allowing for-profit organizations – can relate to an increase in charter schools making it easier for charter schools to exist (Wong, 2014). The most recent Missouri Charter Law (August 28, 2012) was amended in the following ways:

Charter schools may operate:

1) In a metropolitan school district;

2) In an urban school district containing most or all of a city with a population greater than three hundred fifty thousand inhabitants;

3) In a school district that has been declared unaccredited;

4) In a school district that has been classified as provisionally accredited by the state board of education and has received scores on its annual performance report consistent with a classification of provisionally accredited or unaccredited for three consecutive school years beginning with the 2012-13 accreditation year under the following conditions:

    a) The eligibility for charter schools of any school district whose provisional accreditation is based in whole or in part on financial stress as defined in sections 161.520 to 161.529, or on financial hardship as defined by rule of the state board of education, shall be decided by a vote of the state board of education

during the third consecutive school year after the designation of provisional

accreditation; and

b) The sponsor is limited to the local school board or a sponsor who has met the

standards of accountability and performance as determined by the

department based on sections 160.400 to 160.425 and section 167.349 and

properly promulgated rules of the department; or

5) In a school district that has been accredited without provisions, sponsored only by the

local school board; provided that no board with a current year enrollment of one thousand

five hundred fifty students or greater shall permit more than thirty-five percent of its

student enrollment to enroll in charter schools.

In accredited districts, only the local school board can sponsor a charter school. After

three consecutive years of classification as a provisionally accredited or unaccredited district,

schools in that district can be sponsored by any of the entities listed in 160.400(3) after approval

from the State Board of Education. The three years start with the 2012-2013 accreditation year.

Chubb and Moe (1990) made it clear that they believed that the fundamental causes for

school failures were not to be found in the schools, but in the institutions that governed them.

Therefore they believed that any reforms imposed upon the schools were destined to fail. The

dysfunctions of bureaucracy created an inherent tension between the need for autonomy and

flexibility. Eliminating most political and bureaucratic control over teachers and principals was

the "panacea" needed to solve current school issues. This loosening of control would "unleash

the productive potential that was already present in schools."

Like an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in special education, charter schools are as

varied as the persons who choose to open one. Buckley and Schneider (2009) pointed out that in

2004 the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement expressed that the promise of charter schools for public school innovation and reform lay in their unprecedented combination of freedom and accountability. Their independence from state laws and district policies on what and how they can teach, spend their money, and hire teachers and other employees would spur on this innovation. While charter school laws vary from state to state, there is a general agreement that each charter school is expected to generate competition between schools, reduce bureaucratic regulation and control, and be free to innovate and create more effective and efficient programs for the students the serve (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Brouillette, 2002; Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003; Miron & Applegate, 2007; Buckley & Schneider, 2009).

What is Instructional Innovation?

In most of the literature the term innovation seems to be synonymous with reform and/or new or unique or a *collective* of processes and uses of technology and computers. However, the term as it is used in the text is nebulous at best. More precise uses of the term innovation come from the business world. Russell and Schneiderheinze (2005) suggest that an innovation presents people with alternative tools and ways of completing everyday tasks and solving a variety of problems in ways not possible without the innovation. Han, Kim, and Srivastava (1998) found that *innovation* is an important function of business management because it is positively linked to business performance and yields higher returns of corporate revenue. They point to research that states that innovation is increasingly tied to an organization's means of survival and growth in the face of competition and environmental uncertainty. Yet, even in their research they raise questions as to whether or not a market's orientation (customers, competitors, internal functions) facilitates an organization's innovativeness. This market orientation is an analysis of an organization's disposition to deliver superior value to its customers on a

continuous basis. The extent to which, system wide, an organization can continuously gather and coordinate customer's needs, competitor's capabilities, and a provision of other significant market agents and authorities determines whether an organization is delivering superior performance. It was interesting to note that in this study about innovation in banking practices by Han, Kim, and Srivastava (1998) a dual core approach was analyzed (administrative vs technical) as well as customer orientation. This critique of innovation appears to be in line with the findings that charter school's may not be more innovative than traditional public schools beyond administrative practices (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Geske, Davis, & Hingle, 1997; Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003; Walberg & Bast, 2003; Lubienski, 2003), that adoption of innovations are influenced greatly by technical workers, that adoption stages impact performance, and that its customers (or students) play a huge role in the outcome of the performances of the innovations. It is loosely aligned to educational principles, but the research is focused on market outcomes in the banking industry and doesn't easily correlate to the anomaly that is schooling.

What are instructional innovations in schools? Schools exist to maximize human potential. They are supposed to develop the skills, capabilities and shape the attitudes of students. Schools are supposed to help children think differently, problem solve, and encourage the development of multiple perspectives (Comer, 2001; Christensen, Horn & Thompson, 2008). However, standardized delivery of instruction does not take into account unique circumstances of students. Those students who do succeed in school tend to match the dominant paradigm used in particular classrooms. Student centered frameworks take into account that how the student is engaged in learning is paramount to his or her education. The worst case scenario for poor and struggling students is that their schooling is characterized as atomistic, highly structured, repetitive, and solidly mechanical, rote, drill and practice instruction that is given little

explanation or connection to larger concepts (Anyon, 1980). While in affluent and highly

professional schools of children, the curriculum allows for creativity, and a hands-on application

of logical and self-directed activities of complex material that is meaningful to the child as well

as the curriculum at hand. Technical changes involve how schools are organized, how teaching

occurs and involve revisions to the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and school organization

(Oakes, 1992).

Newman, Marks and Gamoran (1986) found that a host of activities have the potential to

engage students in thinking, problem solving and construction of meaning. Activities to foster

these processes include small group discussion, cooperative learning, independent research

projects, use of hands on manipulatives, scientific equipment and a host of community based

projects such as service learning activities. These activities, or processes, help students to

actively construct meaning, are grounded in student's experiences, and don't rely on students

simply absorbing and reproducing rote knowledge from subject matter fields. What active

learning, student-centered activities are not include students working in small groups to complete

routine mathematics and or vocabulary assignments; one student giving answers to others to

copy; students completing interviews of community residents with questions that are pre-

specified by the teacher, or students using manipulatives to reinforce superficial exposure to

fragmented knowledge that doesn't promote deeper understanding of concepts.

Another way to introduce student centered learning is through the use of computers.

Today's computer software programs take into account student's intelligence types and speed of

learning (Christensen, Horn & Thompson, 2008). This process combines content in a customized

sequence and process to help teachers move towards a more value adding role. In order to ensure

that teachers do not simply marginalize the way that they are already teaching, Christensen et al. emphasize the use of computers as a disruptional tool that replaces traditional teaching.

Christensen, Horn and Thompson (2008) propose that if teachers continue to deliver instruction via computers in very traditional ways, there will be very little impact on the way students learn. Computer innovation is not simply using computers to type reports, search the Internet for information and play video games. Computer innovation is not simply using computers to make better lesson plans and communicate more with parents through emails and blogs. Moersch (1995) found that it is the complementary role of technology that has supported the conventional instructional curriculum and its corresponding emphasis on expository teaching, traditional verbal activities, sequential instructional materials, and evaluation practices characterized by multiple choice, short answer, and true or false responses.

Even while planning staff development on technology integration, presenters operate under the two assumptions that practitioners can either easily make connections between the technology they have available and their instructional curricula, and that they are ready and willing to initiate these changes into their instructional practices. However, Zhao, Pugh and Byers (2002) found that technology integration is a complex and messy process when introduced into real classrooms. These researchers carefully studied teachers' experiences with using technology in schools and developed an understanding of the conditions under which technology integration can occur. These conditions include factors in the three domains of the teacher, the project and the context. These domains can easily be adapted to illustrate other innovative practices in the classroom.

The Disconnect Between Theory and Practice. Finnigan (2007) found that two primary components of charter school theory, autonomy and accountability, are essential and inextricably

linked, with much of the research focusing on either one or the other. Finnigan's study considered charter school autonomy as a combination of deregulation and school-level control over decisions (Wohlstetter & Chau, 2004; Wohlstetter et al., 1995). This study's analysis found that for the most part charter schools do not have the autonomy that the theory assumes. Autonomy was found to be dynamic in nature and that considerable variation existed in the levels of autonomy based on state laws, relationships with authorizers, and various other partnerships.

Bulkley and Fisler (2003) noted that charter laws were created to sponsor schools that are an *institutional* innovation, meaning the laws allow schools to operate under a different *structure* while attempting to avoid endorsing any particular learning approach or curriculum. These researchers noted that innovations in charter schools fell into the categories of school and class sizes, grade configurations, staffing patterns and use of staff time. They found that charter teachers were less likely to be certified (as allowed by charter laws), and have less teaching experience than their public school peers. Bulkley and Fisler (2003) echoed that there is far less known about what happens inside charter school classrooms than what is known about how charter schools are organized and governed.

Lubienski (2003) found approximately 190 published works dealt with the issue of innovation in charter schools in some significant way. Of those, he found that many were not based on systematic observations of charter schools but were instead either unsubstantiated or attacks on avocations for charter schools. Regardless of the varied definition of innovation, Lubienski categorized the innovation into three categories: 1. the level within the institution: administrative and/or classroom level; 2. the distinctive nature of the practice: replications of familiar practices, adoption of practices used elsewhere or development of new practices; and 3.

the appearance of innovation in a given context: local, state, or national. The conclusion of his study found that there were obvious innovations in organizational activities but fewer clear innovations in the classroom.

Preston, et al., (2011) also found that innovations in charter schools fell more readily in the realm of student grouping structures and staffing policies. Particular innovations were found in block scheduling, multi-aged classrooms, merit pay and tenure status. Again, these authors cited that while research has found that charter schools may not have fulfilled its claim that they are more innovative, little research has probed classroom level curriculum, procedures and practices.

The Perception of Empowerment

Charter schools constitute one of the most controversial, yet widespread and important reform movements of recent times (Bomotti et al., 1999; Lubienski, 2003; Barr et al., 2006; Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Preston, et al., 2011). Proponents present that the theory behind charter schools is that they should increase "consumer" satisfaction and foster competition that improves even existing traditional schools. This satisfaction would be realized through the school's responsiveness to the needs of parents, students and the community at large. Because they are a school of choice, supporters argue that there will be a better match between what the school offers and what the parent/consumers prefer (Lubienski, 2004; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003). Bomotti et al. (1999) examined the claim that charter school laws passed in many states explicitly intended for those charter schools to empower teachers to become self-directed professionals with the autonomy, flexibility and authority needed to design new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Bomotti et al. (1999) devised a study of Colorado charter schools that examined how charter school teachers perceive issues of empowerment, school climate, and aspects of working conditions compared to traditional public school teachers. The researchers examined how Colorado charter schools implicitly addressed "teacher professionalism" in these schools. Colorado charter schools were purposefully created to provide teachers with an avenue to "take responsible risks and create new, innovative, more flexible ways of educating all children within the public schools system." While the charter schools addressed how and what students learned, it has clearly stated objectives to create professional opportunities for teachers. Bomotti et al. found that charter research was sparse and rarely looked at the teacher as the central focus. What they knew at the time was that charter school teachers were often younger, had less teaching experience, and had less advance degrees than their traditional counterparts. They were generally satisfied with their charter schools and agreed with the mission, curriculum, and other educational matters of the school.

The results of Bomotti et al.'s research found that teachers in the traditional schools perceived themselves to be more empowered in the schoolwide arena but less so in the classroom with students. The results showed that the two groups of teachers felt equally empowered with curriculum content decisions. When looking at the second question of school climate, the researchers found that teachers in traditional schools perceived their respective schools to have a climate that rewarded their students for high achievement at significantly greater levels; while charter school teachers perceived their schools to have significantly greater emphasis on academic learning at their schools. Finally, when researching how charter school teachers perceive aspects of working conditions (job contentment and working conditions) in their

schools with that of their counterparts in traditional public schools, charter school teachers were significantly more satisfied except in the area of "physical plant and support conditions."

Bomotti et al. also found that while teachers in charter schools hadn't realized the possibility of schoolwide participation in the management and control of charter schools in Colorado, teachers were satisfied with the control of their classrooms and curriculum decisions. However, teachers also complained about the lack of facility and supports which included computers and other up-to-date technology. What the researchers concluded is that increased flexibility, responsibility and autonomy necessary to deliver new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning at their school sites was present at charter schools in Colorado.

What the researchers did not uncover was whether or not teachers in charter schools in Colorado actually created new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. They only presented results that the conditions exist for such innovation to take place. While they spoke to the fact that charter school teachers complained of a lack of school supports such as computers, they did not indicate any other instructional strategies used by either charter school or traditional teachers. The researchers acknowledge that they did not control for any school effectiveness at either charter or traditional public schools. They also cite that future research might center on the large divergent nature of charter school law and policy contexts across the country and the impact this may have on teacher empowerment and satisfaction with charter schools.

Theorists and policymakers believed that the empowerment, satisfaction and working conditions that charter schools would realize would be the result of improved administrative and institutional structures free from bureaucracy and rigid oversight (Lubienski, 2004). Free from the burdensome top-down regulations, increased autonomy would allow for teachers to be more flexible in the use of curriculum and instructional innovations for the students often

"marginalized by standard practices." Based on economic-styled principles, school choice advocates believe that this flexibility and attention to the needs of the "consumers" (parents and students served) would create more effectively organized institutions that would lead to higher student achievement outcomes. These proponents of school choice promote the idea that there are "educational establishments"—teachers unions, school boards, and administrators—who stand in the way of true innovation taking place in schools. Deregulation, enhanced autonomy, and a consumer-orientated agenda are the solution to the ills of the traditional public schools.

The success of charter schools would be used as the "laboratory" school from which traditional schools could draw inspiration (Rofes, 1998; Lubienski, 2004). In theory, deregulation would foster experimentation, challenge the status quo, and drive schools to meet the needs of a diverse consumer population. Innovation would be found not only in the types of education available, but also in the processes by which education would be more efficient and effective. However, Rofes found that few districts in the late 1990's reacted to charter laws and thus charter schools were not seen as laboratory schools of innovation worthy of replication. The majority of the subjects in Rofes' study from traditional public schools and school districts, as well as those from charter schools, acknowledged that while charter schools may offer innovations in governance, accountability, and assessment, few pedagogical innovations were noted. Rofes' (1998) offered the following reasons for the poor opinion of charter school innovation:

1. Many charter schools were in their first few years of operation and had not had the time to fully develop their pedagogical offerings;

2. During the early years of operation, most charter school personnel did not have time to share lessons learned with people from outside their school; likewise many teachers and

principals in traditional public schools had little time to visit the classrooms in their own

school, let alone in a nearby charter school;

3. In many areas, charter schools and the traditional public schools either had no

   relationship with one another or maintained a hostile relationship that precluded sharing

   pedagogical learnings between the two;

4. Some charter schools conceptualized their mission as fulfilling the educational needs of

   their students and did not feel drawn toward transforming other schools' classroom

   practices;

5. Many charter schools were located in school districts that already offered excellent and

   highly-rated programs and district personnel believed they would have little to learn from

   a charter school;

6. Some district leaders insisted the charter schools were only replicating programs already

   in place in the district schools and a "we already do that" mentality precluded districts

   from learning from these schools.

One of the problems associated with analyzing the innovation of charter schools is our

inability to agree on what is meant by "innovation" (Lubienski, 2004). Lubienski presented that

some argued that innovation meant "something new," while others argued that creating

diversification of options for local residents was proficient. The researcher specifically believes

that charter school innovation is at the point that these schools are seen as research and

development centers for policy changes for others. Lubienski examined research studies and/or

papers which represented some 45 percent of all charter schools in the nation at the time. The

studies produced by researchers with a range of perspectives on charter schools, involved a

diverse range of methods and data that included examinations of curricular materials, classroom

observations, interviews with employees and parents, and innovations self-reported by charter school personnel. Two questions drove his review of the research: 1) At what level within institutions does the practice represent change? and 2) To what extent does the practice represent change across educational sectors?

Lubienski found that charter schools are engaging in a number of activities at the administrative level that appear to be new and distinctive in the broader public sector. They are experimenting with merit pay plans, marketing, parental involvement, and financial support practices that include access to private capital. These innovations lend themselves toward supporting the public choice theory of charter schools. Charter schools are also increasing options for parents in specific localities. By diversifying the range of programmatic options available to parents (e.g., Saxon Math or Hirch's "core knowledge" curriculum) charter schools were meeting the school choice aspect of proponents of charter schools in a local education market. However, in the area of research and development aspects of charter schools —creating innovation that is new and different and should be replicated in traditional districts—the researcher did not find that these schools offered substantially different innovations that could not be found in other traditional districts.

These innovations in institutional conditions found in charter schools are intended to induce innovations in teaching methods at the classroom level. Lubienski found that many of the practices found in charter schools reflect child-centered progressive ideas that may have fallen in and out of favor in various public schools. However, the largest discernible proportions of those charter schools are using their autonomy to provide the "basics" or a traditional curriculum. The researcher found that despite the potential for charter schools to develop innovations in specific areas (such as ethnic-oriented themes), the public choice predictions regarding charter schools

being used as educational laboratories that challenge and inspire traditional public schools appear to be misguided.

Lubienski offers two, albeit unsubstantiated, reasons for this lack of educational innovation at charter schools. One is the newness of charter school reforms even though one might expect that this would cause a more rapid use of innovations given that teachers at charter schools are younger and not yet set in their instructional strategies (Bometti et al., 1999; Lubienski, 2004). The other is that although policymakers may want to promote innovation by designating parents as "consumer" choosers, these same consumers may not be particularly interested in innovation as much as they want a solid, basic academic education for their children. This, however according to the researcher, does not excuse the idea that charter schools were not simply to offer innovative products if parents wanted them, but that consumer demand was going to help develop innovative processes for better satisfying consumer's demands even if the demand was not for innovation itself.

Lubienski goes on to connect the idea that the uncertainty of charter school environments may have the unintended consequence of constraining innovation at charter schools. For instance, charter schools are granted renewal of charters in the state of Missouri for intervals of no more than five - ten year. A school's success is not judged on innovation, but rather soundness of governance and financial practices and student academic outcomes. Charter schools must have authorizers who oversee the accountability of each charter. These authorizers may be local school boards, universities, state boards of education, municipal entities (Philadelphia and Indianapolis), and even nonprofit organizations. Palmer and Gau (2003) found that despite what may be commonly thought about the support of the charter school movement, many state policy environments are not supportive of charter schools and authorizers. In only four states did the

charter policy environment fall within the "B" range. Chartering schools is a complicated process that requires dedicated staff and money. Charter schools have to go through very rigorous systems of audits that include site visits and oversights. Schools may be given school report cards—like traditional schools—and a charter may be revoked if a school receives a "failing" label two or more years in a row. Charter schools that wish to survive the systematic renewal process every five years may more easily emulate successful models of schooling than engage in what might be costly and risky innovations themselves.

Charter School Teachers. Miron and Applegate (2007) suggest that when teachers are satisfied with their school's facilities, have professional autonomy, sufficient resources, appropriate incentives and opportunities for professional development they are more likely to be innovative. Guskey (2002) also found that teachers held a belief that professional development not only made them seek innovative practices, but that it would expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their professional growth and enhance their effectiveness with their students. Professional development was shown to sharpen teachers' toolbox of instructional skills, determine the best methods to differentiate instruction for their students, and it could help school leaders learn new ways to lead and inspire (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). Guskey (2003) found that when professional development is carefully organized between both site-based educators and district level personnel the effectiveness of it is often optimized even when the definition of effectiveness cannot be agreed upon. Guskey states that the three indicators of effectiveness of professional development are educators' opinions about the impact on their instructional practices, consensus of opinions surrounding professional writers and researchers, and finally the impact professional development may have on improved student achievement.

Charter school teachers indicated that they wanted the opportunity to work with like-minded educators and had a keen interest in educational reform. They were attracted to small class sizes, academic reputation, committed parents, and the promises made by charter school's spokespersons during recruitment efforts. However, Miron and Applegate (2007) found that the attrition rate amongst charter school teachers is actually higher than those of traditional schools. By studying those teachers who left charter schools (but not necessarily those who may have left teaching) the researchers found that because charter schools have a high concentration of younger teachers who also have the highest attrition rate, this under 30 group accounted for over half of all teachers who left charter schools. Attrition rates for middle school teachers at charter schools matched that of traditional schools.

Miron and Applegate (2007) also found that teachers at charter schools who left often cited dissatisfaction with salaries and benefits. With more flexibility in salary schedules than traditional public schools, charter schools often pay less while struggling with securing and/or renovating facilities. High attrition rates of 20 – 40 percent can be detrimental to a charter schools's survival let alone impact the use of instructional innovation. High attrition rates force schools to regularly provide pre and in-service training for new hires while simultaneously making it more difficult for charter schools to build stable positive school climates. Additionally, these high attrition rates undermine legitimacy of schools and impact a consumers' (parents) choice of enrollment of schools with high teacher turnover.

The promise of charter schools is that with the combination of autonomy, flexibility, innovation and accountability, improved student achievement would follow. Some would argue that charter schools—with increased autonomy over governance and management, parental choice, and even the lack of influence of teacher unions—may be the real innovation. Using the

same theory of school choice for parents as for teachers, the researchers found that when there is a good match between the teacher and the beliefs, interests, and school's educational missions, implementation of effective educational strategies can be maximized. However, even with the information that is known about charter schools overall, and evolving research of charter school teachers are as a group of educators, less is known about professional development practices and what goes on inside the classrooms of charter schools (Mintrom, 2000; Bulkley & Fisler,2003).

Support for Innovation

Daft (1978) found that getting an innovation proposed is the most important step in the innovation adoption process. Han, Kim, and Srivastava (1998) found that innovation is an important function of business management because it is positively linked to business performance and yields higher returns of corporate revenue. They point out research that states that innovation is increasingly tied to an organization's means of survival and growth in the face of competition and environmental uncertainty. Bomotti et al. (1999) found that conditions of empowerment and job satisfaction exist within charter schools to allow for innovation to take place. From its inception the charter school movement depended on teachers to take a critical role in creating innovation for the at-risk student population it hoped to serve (Mallow & Wohlstetter, 2003). Although Mallow and Wohlsetter also found that teachers at charter schools felt empowered, enjoyed working at charter schools, and even enjoyed a sense of shared philosophical and pedagogical homogeneity amongst staff, there were also high incidences of teacher burnout and attrition. The research indicated that while school autonomy was high, it had not been used to improve classic "bread and butter" teacher issues such as wages, benefits and workload. Overall, Mallow and Wohlsetter acknowledged that there still remained sparse research on charter school teachers from which to draw replicable conclusions about them.

Ferrari, Cachia, and Punie (2009) found that innovative teaching is both the practice of teaching for creativity and of applying innovation to teaching. They state that both aspects call for an educational culture which values creativity and sees it as an asset in the classroom. While teachers are central to constructing this environment, they need support in order to make this a reality in their classrooms. Siegel and Kaemmerer (1978) found that organizations are either innovative organizations or traditional organizations. An innovative organization is defined as one that fosters the creative functioning of its members. The traditional organization is defined as one that is not specifically orientated towards fostering this creative functioning. An organization is characterized as either innovative or traditional based on the degree of five properties. The first property is leadership. Innovative organizations have leaders that believe in a decentralization of authority that respects its members' capacity to be creative, effective, and contribute and accomplish the impossible.

Ownership is the second property and is defined as existing when members of the group feel that they are not limited to merely the application of previously determined solutions, but that their ideas, processes, and procedures can be developed and implemented within the organization .The third property of an innovative organization is that it has a high value for diversity and creative approaches to the solution of its problems. There is a norm for individual autonomy and few behaviors are judged as being deviant. Continuous development and experimentation is the fourth property of an innovative organization. Members have a questioning attitude and they are able to cope with inherent frustration in dealing with new approaches, problems and tasks they might face. Finally, the fifth property of an innovative organization is that it is consistent in its processes. Innovative organizations understand that implementing creative processes can have unintended consequences before having desired

successes. The purpose of the study will be to measure to what extent teachers view the five

properties exist within their school settings and to what extent they perceive that the leaders in

their charter schools support innovation in their instructional practices.

Berends, et. al., (2006, 2010, 2017) cite that there is a need to gather data on instructional

and organizational conditions of charter schools that promote achievement as well as unpacking

the curricular and instructional differences among charter schools and regular public schools and

classrooms. These authors found that while there is a trend in the increase of studies on charter

schools, there continues to be a need to form a framework for the standardization of analyses of

the current knowledge base.

Finally, Goldring and Cravens (2007) argue that for charter schools to enable positive

student outcomes and affect student achievement, they most implement the core components of

schooling that are related to effective organizational conditions, curriculum, and instruction.

Because research on charter schools have been mixed in the area of market theory and

institutional theory, these researchers chose to focus on three questions: To what extent is the

level of teacher academic focus on learning dependent upon in-school organizational conditions

that are associated with effective schools, such as strong instructional leadership? Are charter

schools more likely than non-charter schools to implement the in-school organizational

conditions that are associated with teachers' academic focus on learning? Do charter school

teachers indicate higher levels of academic focus on learning compared to non-charter school

teachers?

While the researchers' conclusions only pertain to a limited sampling and surveying of

schools tested by NWEA, their study suggests that on average, charter school teachers do not

indicate higher levels of academic focus on learning, and were not more likely than regular

public schools to exhibit in-school organizational conditions, such as teacher decision making authority, that are assumed to be associated with flexibility and non-bureaucratic forms of choice. They did find that in-school organizational conditions often attributed to effective schools, such as professional community and principal leadership, are associated with higher levels of academic focus.

This last condition of professional community and principal leadership and how teachers perceive the support for inclusion of decision-making as it affects their instructional practices at the classroom level across several schools authorized by the same university sponsor in the Kansas City, MO area will be the focus of this study. Ni, Sun and Rorrer's (2015) study on Utah principals that found that charter school leaders had fewer years teaching, fewer advanced degrees, less time leading schools, less likely to hold administrative licensure, have the same and/or more managerial responsibilities, and were more likely to leave education than simply transfer to another school once leaving a charter than traditional public school leaders. Comer (2001) found that a lack of proper training in such things as child development is why many leaders can't discuss, let alone construct, social and academic experiences that motivate learning and help the students that they serve overcome racial, ethnic, income and gender barriers. His research found that frequent changes in administrators, governance, or teachers can undo in several months a school culture that may have taken three to five years to create. Charter schools are more likely to have insufficient staffing, higher turnover of teachers who are less experienced, and less support systems for those teachers (Cannata, 2008; Ni, 2012; Stuit & Smith, 2012; Ni, Sun & Rorrer, 2015).

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

The method of study used for this research is a qualitative study methodology. Marshall and Rossman (2014) stated that qualitative studies can be descriptive and exploratory and can build rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are unexplored in the literature. The choice to use a qualitative study methodology was appropriate as this study sought to move beyond examining the quantitative nature of test scores into the realm of understanding why charter school teachers make instructional decisions at the classroom level. Qualitative research helps to understand a situation in its uniqueness as part of a bigger context (Merriam, 2002). Use of the open-ended interview was the method used for completing the qualitative study. Some advantages of using interviews includes the high response rate of participants who want to interview, an interviewer's ability to control the process by putting participants at ease, and the fact that open-ended questions allows participants to expand on their own experiences (Appleton, 1995).

Research Question and Goals

The primary purpose of this study was to examine charter school teachers' perception that there is support for innovation, regardless of the type, at a set of charter schools in the Kansas City area that impacts their instructional practices. Additional goals were to better understand what these classroom practitioners defined as innovative instructional practices in the classroom and who initiated instructional innovation at the classroom level at their schools. Open-ended questions were used in this study. These questions explored ideas of leadership, ownership, norms for diversity, continuous development and consistency of purpose. The specific research questions were:

1. How are innovative instructional practices defined and described?

2. What are the barriers to innovative instructional practices in a set of charter schools authorized by a university in Kansas City, MO?

3. How do the organization, practices, and philosophy of charter schools authorized by a university in Kansas City, MO (e.g., deregulation, autonomy and flexibility) relate to support for innovation at the classroom level?

Participant Selection

The purpose of this study was to create a qualitative and descriptive study about charter school teachers' perception of levels of support for innovative instructional practices at the classroom level. The pool of participants began at the level of teachers who work at nine charter schools sponsored by a university located in the Kansas City, Missouri metropolitan area. The final pool of participants included educators who work for six of those nine charter schools. In 2013, there were 21 charter schools operating in the Kansas City metropolitan area. All operate as their own LEA. In 2017-18 there were 22 with some 36 individual school campuses. The sponsors of these schools include the local school district and three university sponsors.

The charter school scene in Kansas City is ever changing. Even though there have been eight charter schools closed in Kansas City since 2001, these schools are continually being authorized with a same-sex charter set to open during the fall of 2019. Despite the uneven success story of charter schools in Kansas City, by Missouri standards, 13 of the 19 Kansas City charter schools eligible to receive an Annual Progress Report (APR) score received a score of 50% or better which qualifies them to be assessed from provisionally to accredited with distinction status. Four of those are thought of as fully accredited and four are accredited with distinction. Two of those charter schools have an APR score of 100%. By Missouri charter law,

there is no actual provision for charter schools to officially receive accreditation status. However, charter school success, and ultimately whether or not a charter school remains in operation, is contingent on a charter school's APR score over time. Both the state and charter school sponsors utilized these scores as a litmus test for charter school success. Charter school APR scores are reported in the local newspaper each summer and are used to influence parents and community members alike. By charter law, all charter schools in Missouri are required to have a lottery system of some kind to admit students. Kansas City, MO charter schools tend to admit students based on a first-come, first-served, wait-list system, giving preferential status to siblings. The most distinguished charter schools have the largest wait lists. Of the six charter schools in this study, all but one charter school received what is considered a distinguished APR score.

In Patton's (1990) view all samples in qualitative research are purposeful. The purposeful sample study consisted of teachers who teach a core subject at one of the identified schools. Superintendents and/or Principals of these 9 schools were asked to identify $3 - 5$ teachers across grade levels to participate in interviews. The time allotted for these interviews was 45 minutes to one hour. A desirable response rate for the interviews was set at 25 percent or 12 participants and 15 participants were interviewed. Interviews were conducted in person and audiotaped and/or via an online video conferencing platform. Each participant was ensured that they would not be identified by name, school, or charter sponsor. They were ensured that the study was to discuss the instructional practices of charter school teachers. They were notified in writing that they would be audiotaped and/or videotaped for the purpose of collecting data only and that this data would be destroyed once the dissertation process was completed. Because I had worked with three of the study participants at a charter before, a discussion about sponsor-bias was held with

these participants. These three participants made assurances that they could be objective and forthcoming during the interview process.

For the purpose of this study, I took the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation Survey Instrument and used it as a framework to create an open-ended teacher interview tool based on the components of the survey. I was purposeful in ensuring that I did not lead with questions that asked teachers if they were innovative in their instructional practices. I piloted the interview protocol with three teachers and refined the questions. There were some questions that did not support the goals of the study and were deleted. Because the questionnaire was open-ended and the study was qualitative and meant to be descriptive and exploratory, some questions were further modified during the interview to accommodate study participants' backgrounds, experiences, years of service, etc. (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I revised questions to ensure that they were not formatted in such a way as to lead respondents to answer favorably or unfavorably during the study. Although there was a category entitled, "Moving Towards Innovation," I steered clear of asking teachers to describe innovative practices in their classrooms.

From the interviews, I transcribed the recordings and any notes that I took during the interview sessions and provided a narrative through coding themes that paralleled the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation. I provided each participant with a pseudonym for reporting purposes and let the participants know this in advance of the interview. Alignment to themes of leadership, ownership, norms of diversity, continuous development, and consistency were identified. These interviews provided insight into understanding the factors associated with the perceptions of support for innovation and its adoption at the classroom level. An instructional practice was deemed innovative if it moved beyond rote learning, simple identification of facts, completion of worksheets, and/or rudimentary use of technology. A high level of support for

instructional practices would mean that teachers have identified that principals, instructional coaches or other leaders have supported and/or fostered the use of instructional practices as schoolwide vision, mission, goal and they are discussed, modeled and/or evaluated at the classroom level. This project was meant to provide important insight into understanding of how innovation and creativity can alter teacher practice by creating a positive shift in the education of students at the classroom level. This study was not an attempt to define innovation as something new or different than what may be found at a traditional public school. Each participant was asked in advance to provide basic contact information for follow up interviews and three study participants were contacted for member check of the interpretation of their responses. All interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis.

Data Collection

This study utilized a qualitative study design using open-ended interviews of teachers that teach at multiple units of charter schools sponsored by one university located in western Missouri. Simple availability samplings of teachers that work at the sponsored charter schools were utilized. I conducted interviews with teachers who teach core or exploratory subjects at each charter school. The interview questions were developed in conjunction with the five dimensions of the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation. These dimensions include leadership, ownership, norms for diversity, continuous development and consistency of purpose. A triangulation of data included artifacts such as information from each charter's website, newsletters (internal and external), and other studies about the charter sponsor. This information helped to establish the mission and vision of individual charter schools and/or determine if the schools share a vision of innovative practices across schools supported by the charter sponsor.

Expected Findings

      While the study focused on only one set of charter schools which have one sponsor in western Missouri, it is expected that the findings from this study will offer educators, supporters of education, and even parents as consumers of schools of choice a clearer picture of how instructional practices and teacher decision-making within charter school classrooms. These findings should also illuminate the impact that perceived autonomy, flexibility and absences of bureaucracy has on instructional practices in charter schools. While charter schools are touted as a potential hotbed of innovation, revealing what practitioners believe is expected at the classroom level can benefit a myriad of stakeholders involved with education and educational choice today.

Chapter 4

Findings

Overview

This study primarily investigated whether teachers at charter schools perceive that there is support for innovation in their instructional practices, regardless of the type as well as the impact that perceived autonomy, flexibility and absence of bureaucracy has on instructional practices and decision-making of teachers in those charter schools at the classroom level. I interviewed teachers who work at six university-sponsored charter schools located in the Kansas City, Missouri metropolitan area. The unique perspective of the educators interviewed ranged in years of experience from novice (first year) to veteran educators (23 years); discipline from K to 12th grade; self-contained to departmentalized core courses; exploratory courses such as PE; and special education and instructional coaching support. This broad range of novice and veteran educators, who taught across a variety of disciplines helped to round out the impressions about what is going on in the charter school classrooms of the schools of my study.

I interviewed study participants in person and via an online video platform. After reviewing all of the interviews, I transcribed each and created a brief descriptive summary chart that outlined common categories. These responses were identified as units and were then compressed into brief statements which comprised the five themes based on Siegel and Kaemmerer's work. The Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation themes included those of leadership, ownership, norms of diversity, continuous development, and consistency. The sixth category, or theme, centered on specific anomalies that are particular to charter schools and included such topics as teacher retention, turnover of leadership and even political views on charter perception in the community. This qualitative study allowed study participants to be

descriptive and exploratory and build rich descriptions of complex circumstances that they experience in their respective charter schools and that are unexplored in the literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Ownership and Perceptions of Flexibility and Autonomy

An innovative organization is defined as one that fosters the creative functioning of its members. The traditional organization is defined as one that is not specifically orientated towards fostering this creative functioning (Siegel & Kaemmerer, 1978). An organization is characterized as either innovative or traditional based on the degree of five properties. The first property is leadership. Innovative organizations have leaders that believe in a decentralization of authority that respects its members' capacity to be creative, effective, and contribute and accomplish the impossible. While ownership is the second property of an innovative organization, this was the first question asked to teachers to see if they would readily identify setting the instructional landscape as their decision. Ownership according to Siegel and Kaemmerer is defined as existing when members of the group feel that they are not limited to merely the application of previously determined solutions, but that their ideas, processes, and procedures can be developed and implemented within the organization.

In order to ascertain where curricular decisions began, teachers were specifically asked the following: a) describe a typical lesson in your classroom; b) describe the choices for instruction based on curriculum ownership, and to c) describe the extent of flexibility and autonomy for instructional decision-making. Teachers tended to fall into three categories.

One category was the set of teachers who were given explicit and implicit curricular and instructional guidelines for their classrooms. They were told what to teach and how to teach it.

While these teachers cited that they used such innovations as SmartBoards and other technology,

some found that their hands were tied and they tended to use only "approved innovations."

Ms. Arthur, a middle school veteran of some 18 years, spoke about being given very

explicit instructions for curriculum and instructional activities:

> Administration has pre-planned and laid out the entire year for us. There is a lot of flexibility in the "how" instruction is to be delivered. If I feel that what I want to do is good for the kids, I take my concerns to admin, but I do what is expected first.

Ms. Ashton, a novice teacher of less than five years, states how she deals with the same rigid guidelines for her curriculum choices:

> I'll do what admin wants me to do, but I don't ask admin constantly about the decisions that I have to make for my students. Admin isn't in the classroom with my students. I will ask admin for approval of the big things such as schedule changes, etc.

Ms. Coats, a 7th grade science teacher in her third year of teaching, first year at a charter stated that:

> I was given the Missouri Learning Standards at the beginning of the year. Throughout the year the Vice Principal may add additional standards to my curriculum. However, because of the over emphasis on ELA and Mathematics, I am pretty much on my own in terms of how I deliver science. There is little to no room to be creative. I am certain I would get pushback if I want to do something different. Lack of flexibility is actually part of the culture

The second groups of educators were given the curriculum by school leaders, and there

may have even been teacher leaders who shared in the curricular decision making during

professional development before the beginning of the school year. These educators were given

the "what" and were allowed to develop the "how."

Ms. Criss, a 2nd year teacher in a 4th grade self-contained classroom, represents the typical

response of the teachers interviewed:

> We were given the curriculum from administration. However, we can choose the order of 'what, when, and how' to implement it. I can look at the needs of my students and I can modify and plan out my curriculum along the way. If there are things that aren't working with the curriculum, I can schedule a meeting with the principal and we would detail why things aren't working.

Ms. Stone, a 6th grade math teacher in her 5th year had this to say:

I have a lot of autonomy and enjoy using our math curriculum because it is a highly vetted curriculum that helps to ensure grade level rigor and continuity across grade levels. Using a curriculum that has done a lot of the background work for us is helpful.

Finally, there was a group of teachers who were given little to no guidelines in curricular decisions for their students. These teachers felt as if they were "on their own" and made all curricular and instructional decisions for their students.

Mr. James, a 23 year veteran who teaches Social Studies stated that:

While the old methods of teaching are productive, I have decided to use technology to pique the interest of my students and to meet their needs. I also put a big emphasis on writing and building community. Admin respects my decisions. Now others are doing what I've been doing for a while.

Mr. Harold, a Physical Education teacher in his 4th year was very interested in being innovative in his physical education classes. He has a background in brain development and has researched schools in Texas that have developed brain theory activities that get students out of their seats and moving about at regular intervals. He believes that these activities help students throughout all of their classes. However, Mr. Harold believes that while previous administrators first seemed receptive to his curricular ideas, a turnover in staffing at the leadership presented unforeseen obstacles to implementing such innovative programs with fidelity.

Mr. Harold had this to say:

Even though I have 100% of the responsibility to create the curriculum for my classes, I do feel that there is still bureaucracy in place that hinders innovation. When I first asked to implement brain theory programming I was met with support, but with multiple turnovers in administration there was little follow through and many now don't seem receptive to the idea.

Leadership and Perception of Support and Support Systems

Siegel and Kaemmerer (1978) state that innovative organizations have leaders who believe in a decentralization of authority that respects its members' capacity to be creative, effective, and contribute and accomplish the impossible. For the purpose of this study, educators were asked about their perceptions of support systems that help them to make instructional decisions in their classrooms. Specifically, they were asked to what extent they received support for delivery and improvement of their instructional practices and to what extent they sought the support of others for improvement of their instructional practices.

There was only one teacher interviewed who stated that there was a total lack of support for evaluation of instructional practices at her school. Ms. Coats, who had also cited a lack of flexibility and autonomy for teacher instructional practices, stated:

> There isn't really any support for [improvement of] instructional practices. Teachers will get a lot of different "tasks" to do. We are told what to do, but not how to do it. There are different messages given when the "State" observers are not around. When we are by ourselves we are told that we need to "do things right, or you're basically out the door." Two teachers actually quit after the last professional development.

Many of the teachers interviewed discussed a shift in practices at their charter schools over the past year for the better. These teachers actually spoke of administrators and leaders taking feedback from staff and implementing practices that spoke directly to what instructional practices were implemented at the classroom level. These practices included providing staff members who were hired specifically to support teachers at the classroom level. Mrs. Barnes, a novice teacher of less than five years discussed the use of instructional coaches in her building and her perception of the support of those coaches and leadership:

> Last year I felt very restricted [in my instructional choices] and some people got "in trouble" for complaining about things. Last year I felt "thrown in" to teaching and we were all inundated with inflexible schedules, incredibly long lesson plans formats, and we were told that what we had done was done incorrectly but we weren't shown how to do

anything correctly. I feel supported this year and I am more comfortable asking for help from leadership.

This shift in support often led to a stronger sense of confidence and self-efficacy amongst teachers. Some study participants described former working conditions that made them feel trapped in the charter system because they didn't feel prepared to teach anywhere else. Their perception was that charter schools were always "starting over" and that many of the instructional practices that they were forced to implement in the charter system wouldn't be acceptable practice at traditional schools. An example of this was articulated by Ms. Story, a 14 year veteran who has spent 10 years in charter schools:

> I felt that in the past admin were under quite a bit of pressure to "get test scores up." I have spent ten years in charters and I was afraid and intimidated because I had only done what I was told to do. I wasn't given the confidence that I knew what I was doing and I actually "felt trapped in the charter." I felt as if I couldn't go to regular public schools because of a lack of trust in my ability to teach outside of scripted teaching.

Having the confidence to collaborate with instructional leaders who put an emphasis on improving instructional practices was welcomed by the participants of this study. Once they felt supported by instructional leaders, they began to advocate for further improvement for themselves. This feeling of power to advocate for oneself went one step further at one charter school. When a group of teachers felt as if there were a lack of equitable support for certain staff members in areas outside of strictly curricular practices, they took matters into their own hands.

Ms. Smith explains it this way:

> When we saw that equity was not apparent across the board at our school we took matters into our own hands. There was not only a lack of equity in the implementation of the curriculum, but there was a lack of equity in relationships amongst staff. Many were shocked about what was revealed, but have been forced to digest the participants' truths about what has been experienced and/or witnessed. I don't know if this transparency is a "charter school phenomenon," but it is aligned with the mission and the vision of our charter sponsor.

Norms of Diversity

Siegel and Kaemmerer (1978) proposed that in an organization that is innovative, members of the system have a positive attitude toward diversity, the system itself responds positively toward creativity, and few behaviors are judged as being deviant. They stated that there is actually a culture of autonomy that exists. Ingersoll (2001) found that besides a strong compensation structure for employees, the level of administrative support and the degree of employee input and influence surrounding organizational policies greatly affects teacher turnover. He found that schools with higher levels of decision-making influence and autonomy have lower levels of turnover. He found that this was true of even urban, high poverty schools; even more so than large class sizes, intrusions on classroom time or lack of planning time.

In order to address norms of diversity in the study, I wanted to assess the perception amongst participants and their colleagues that being different or presenting something new is important. I also wanted to ascertain what the study participants did if they felt 'pushback' for some instructional activity they wished to implement in their classroom.

Mr. James, a veteran of over 23 years, addressed the topic this way:

If I feel that there is pushback for my [instructional] decisions, I push back. At first I felt like I was always being "told on." I would find myself in front of a panel of people defending myself. However, after [they] saw that gains were being made in my class— and I found myself actually teaching with admin during Saturday school—things began to change. However, a culture of "everyone having a voice" doesn't exist here.

Ms. Ashton, a novice teacher of less than five years stated that

When I lived in another state, our charters approached things differently than they do here. As a teacher, there seemed to be an "open floor to say anything." There seemed to be a platform for everyone to say what they needed. Here things aren't the same. I haven't been told no, but others have been told no. I don't know if admin articulates how they can help.

Mrs. Abby, an instructional coach and math teacher who has 11 years in education with 3 of those years in charter schools was asked to talk about teacher trust and pushback.

> There is so much emphasis on test scores because [they] are afraid that they will be shut down. Everyone is afraid to be innovative. If a teacher wants to try something like flexible seating, she won't try it because the current administration is not a fan. I wish that we would try embracing teachers' styles. I say 'let's try some stuff; it's ok if it doesn't work out.'

Ms. Smith, the 18-year veteran in a traditional Kindergarten class has a different experience. She describes the charter school teacher that is told upfront curricular and instructional practices and expectations as outlined by the charter. She describes a system whereby the charter leader has tried to be as open and transparent as possible about who the charter serves and what expectations are for employment. She stated that:

> There is an extensive interview process at my school with the founder. This actually helps everyone to understand what the founder envisioned for the school. I had the freedom to express what I knew professionally. Through the process of working as a team and trusting the teaching and learning process, we were able to build our curriculum by the second year. There were some hiccups though.

When I asked if this process happened naturally at charter schools, Ms. Smith shook her head "No." She stated that actually becoming a master teacher is a lengthy, messy process. Educators are rarely given the time to grow and learn and change their instructional practices over time. She described a collaborative system of trust and trial and error that in the end benefits the teachers and the students in the long run. She described a lengthy process that allowed her and her partner to stop using worksheets and traditional rote learning practices and to start to implement more innovative practices that were highly differentiated and fit the growing needs of her kindergarteners. When asked to explain she stated:

> I think that it's through the struggles that the creativity is generated. It takes time for you to connect with who you are as a teacher. I worked for a traditional district for 12 years before I came to charter. I felt like my creativity was dimmed because I was told what I was to do "day 1; day 2; day 3." When I came to the charter, my mindset was still the

same because of my own comfort level. Having a new, fresh partner, who was able to look at things from a new perspective helped.

I pushed Ms. Smith to further explain her answer. What she had just articulated appeared to support what most proponents of charter schools stated: if teachers are given the autonomy and flexibility to be creative, they will. Charter schools, more so than traditional schools, will allow for this creativity to thrive. Ms. Smith continued.

This isn't a typical charter school. This is what we designed at our space. I don't know if this has more to do with what is typical at charter schools, but with the mission and vision of our founder.

Continuous Development through Professional Development

There is little doubt that the present-day model of professional development sessions of teachers is going anywhere soon as it is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education (Guskey, 1994, 1998, 2002). In 2002, Guskey found that most professional development programs take an approach whereby the presenters set out to change educator's attitudes and beliefs about instructional practices and strategies before implementation. He found however, that it was not the professional development that actually changed mindsets, attitudes and beliefs, but rather the experience of successful implementation of those strategies that did so. Educators believed new strategies worked because they saw them working.

This study did not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of each charter school's professional development programming in isolation. This study sought to understand if the study participants saw the use of their school's professional development programming as an integral component of their perception of support for the improvement of their instructional practices. This study wanted to gauge whether the participants perceived their school's professional development as either a support or hindrance to their use of innovative practices in their classrooms.

Of the 15 participants of this study, the perception about professional development tended to lean towards the "somewhat effective" category. Most appreciated the time that was given to professional development. The typical time allotted to professional development was a ½ day sessions model on either a Wednesday or a Friday. Teachers expressed an appreciation for the fact that the major change in the professional development was a tiered system of addressing the needs of new or novice teachers versus returning or veteran teachers. While some participants felt that professional development continued to be one shot wonders with too many outside consultants and little follow through. One participant stated that professional development was about 99% of the same PD as before. They rarely felt as if they were learning anything new or that PD applied to them as a professional. However, only one participant saw professional development as completely ineffective at her school.

Ms. Coats stated that professional development wasn't effective at her school.

Mostly we get training in writing in the form of "what to do" and we are rarely given in-depth training on "how to do it." Most of the trainings are for 'show' and if state representatives aren't present the message of unity and support quickly changes to threats of losing our jobs.

The most innovative professional development was described by Ms. Criss a 4th grade teacher in her 2nd year of teaching.

We have two hours of professional development that is usually all planned out by co-teachers. Before the school year began, we all set the agenda about which teaching strategies we wanted to address. After that, 2 days before a PD the teachers plan an agenda for what we will do during our [individual] team professional development. Our PD is tailored for our needs.

Consistency of Purpose

Siegel and Kaemmerer (1978) found that members of an innovative system are sensitive to the notion that the way in which something is accomplished can have immediate and

unintended consequences that may conflict with the objective of the activity. They give an

interesting analogy such as when a parent attempts to teach a child not to strike others by

spanking him. Examples of the questions that the researchers asked teachers in their study

included:

> 1. Sometimes the way things are done around here makes matters worse, even though our goals aren't bad.
> 2. The way we do things seems to fit with what we're trying to do.
> 3. The methods used by our organization seem well suited to its stated goals.

This line of questioning spoke to an organization having consistency through retention of

purpose surrounding its mission and vision. Gurley, Peters, Collins, and Fifolt (2015) found that

amongst 80 graduate-level, educational leadership students, key organizational statements of

mission, vision, values, and goals had only minimal impact on their daily practice. They stated

that organizational and educational experts agree that articulated values, or shared commitments,

are fundamental to the process of organizational improvement. They point to the fact that the

inability to recall such important discourse as shared vision, mission, values and goals statements

presents a strong disconnect between theory and practice as it pertains to schools improving and

impacting student achievement.

One of the most promising statements that I heard from the participants in the study is the

phrase "this year." Of the 15 participants in the study, six of them were employed in the same

district at various schools, levels and positions. These educators pointed to a major shift in their

schools based on a new superintendent and a concerted effort by their district to reevaluate its

charter system across the board. They described that the district wanted to go beyond what they

found to be the rudimentary expectations of their charter sponsor and to truly hold themselves to

what they considered to be a higher standard. The participants of this charter district felt as if

they were truly being heard for the first time. They described a process whereby they were

surveyed and were part of focus groups. The most promising factor for their newfound

enthusiasm was that they have actually seen changes put in place. While still cautious, they

seemed to express hope.

Mrs. Lee, who serves as the Director of Special Services for the district, was able to give

a very succinct look into what the district is hoping to accomplish this year.

> The difference between this year and last year is that we have a new outside company
> that has come in and has helped us to reevaluate who we are and what we stand for. Yes
> we have a sponsor and they have expectations, but what do we believe in and what do we
> expect of ourselves? And what level of standards are we trying to meet? It's not about
> keeping our charter. If we set our own expectations then we are going to meet those goals
> and go beyond.

Ms. Barnes, who is a teacher in the same district, had this to say:

> I felt like I was just thrown in to teaching last year and didn't feel like I knew what to do
> or what was expected. I started to feel supported at the end of last year and this year
> they've been very purposeful in letting us know what their roles are and how they can
> help us. I believe that in our charter new and innovative ways are conducive to how we
> think.

Several study participants seemed to tie teacher dissatisfaction and high turnover to a lack

of clarity with the very purpose of the charter. They spoke to high turnover of administration and

teacher staff and the charter seeming to "always having to start over." Although they did not

mention strategic plans, mission and vision statements, etc., they did discuss a lack of focus

beyond professional development activities.

Mr. James offered the following:

> With the traditional route, there were goals that we were trying to reach and it didn't
> seem to be so disjointed. With charters, they can kind of do what they want. They seem to
> be all over the place; hit and miss; some good, some bad. What's making a true impact?
> If its good stuff, that's good. If it's bad stuff and it's not really making an impact then
> you're kind of stuck with that.

Ms. Story offered additional insight about the importance of a strong sense of purpose:

You can go into a charter school and see how long they've been around or if there is a lot of turnover because there's no consistency. I've been in charters for some 14 years. During my interview it was articulated that if you were not going to be comfortable with [how we do things] then this may not be the right place for you. The school staff has been consistent for the last 3 years. There's parental buy in and support from the community. This is something that I haven't seen at other charters. Everyone knows why we're here.

There was one study participant who actually spoke to the philosophical ideals of her charter. Ms. Stone, a teacher with five years into education, specifically mentioned the mission and vision of her school and had this to say:

Mission/Vision was a reason that I switched schools. My school is very big on its equity mission for students. At its core it wants a rigorous and supportive environment. Our school is very big on restorative practices. Where is the student missing the skill and how do we support them? We have a practice where we say "we believe the best in your child."

Charter School Turnover

Ndoye, Imig and Parker (2010) researched teacher attrition in North Carolina charter schools based on the premise that they were promised, explicitly and implicitly by North Carolina Charter Laws of 1996, to have increasing teacher autonomy that would encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods. The researchers were specifically interested in the dynamics that allowed the classroom teachers to be empowered to make curricular decisions about what to teach at the classroom level. Ingersoll (2001) found that schools with higher levels of decision-making influence and autonomy have lower levels of turnover. This study was developed in conjunction with Siegel and Kaemmerer's (1978) work with the five dimensions of the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation. These dimensions include leadership, ownership, norms for diversity, continuous development and consistency of purpose.

While the five themes of Siegel and Kaemmerer were the focus of this study, other themes emerged through the interviews. These themes of trust, turnover of staff, and the political

image of charter schools in the Kansas City area appeared to be outside of the scope of the study but supported the research in the review of literature. These themes spoke to ideals and thoughts that teachers hold towards students, parents, and community outside of the impact of others. The theme of trust, or lack of trust, was one that went to the heart of what the participants felt kept charter schools from reaching their full potential. This lack of trust wasn't merely administration's lack of trust of teacher skills and abilities. Participants felt that most of this lack of trust came from the people who were entrusted with delivering direct instruction to the students that they served. They presented a narrative that spoke to teachers not trusting that students could meet the academic demands of a curriculum "beyond the basics."

On the subject of her perception of trust, Mrs. Abby offered the following:

There appears to be a lack of trust that the students can handle a more rigorous and innovative curriculum. There is a lot of turnover in the adults that work here; almost a cycle of mistrust. There is lack of trust, high turnover, and then young teachers. Our school doesn't appear to be a final destination for a lot of people. They don't have a true commitment to our kids.

The review of literature found that many charter schools, even more so than traditional urban public schools, have a younger, less qualified teaching and administrative pool. Study participants discussed how this inconsistency in staff helped to erode gains made by the school. Many of the study participants reported that they seemed to always be starting over. They reported the lack of trust was in the overall process of "schooling," the students, administrators and even themselves. They seemed to take a "wait and see" stance to hearing about new goals and expectations each year.

Mrs. Abby was able to succinctly explain how this phenomenon impacts the instructional environment of charter schools.

One of the barriers to building the trust factor amongst teachers and administration may be that we work with a lot of 1st and 2nd year teachers and we have a lot of turnover in

administration. We do want them to try new things, but we don't want them to stray away from 'best practices.' Teachers aren't always forthcoming about the things that they may need. In some ways, they don't even know the questions to ask. This presents a huge barrier to feeling supported. There is a lot of emphasis on test scores and people are afraid to be innovative. This makes it look like there is a lack of trust all around.

Ms. Coats, the 7th grade science teacher in her third year of teaching, first year at a

charter school stated that:

The average years of teachers here seems to be about six; although there are a lot at 1-2 years. I really wasn't surprised that the students were going to be challenging. However, I wasn't prepared for the admin part. Administration is pretty new with just 2-3 years of experience and just about five or more years of education overall. Admin seems to lack cultural competency for the students that we serve.

Ms. Ashton, a novice teacher of less than five years, actually proclaims that there is

difference in how charter schools are operate in the state of Missouri and her home state of

Mississippi. She offers the following:

Charters in Mississippi are one step down from private schools. In Missouri, charters are a step below alternative schools. Kids bounce from charter to charter all of the time. This effects instruction and there is a lot of emphasis on discipline and behavior. Teacher turnover seems to be based on poor student behaviors. There are too many students with disabilities in one classroom.

When Mr. Harold discussed teacher retention he was very knowledgeable about exact

figures, but uncertain about the future of his district:

At four years in, I'm the longest tenured teacher at my school. In 2014-15 we had 80% retention. During the 2015-16 school year we had 38% retention; for 2016-17 there was 42% retention and 46% retention for 2017-18.

Mr. Harold did not offer conclusive reasons for the low numbers of teacher retention, but

when asked if teacher retention improve with perceived improvement from support of

instructional coaches and other administration, he stated:

I hope so. The district is more organized and the superintendent has a K-12 background. There's a new [teacher] evaluation system, a district strategic plan for improving the retention rate; more planning time, and an emphasis on improving pedagogical practices.

I believe that the turnovers have been because of unrest in the district and not because of teacher programs such as Teach for America.

Summary

Siegel and Kaemmerer (1978) found that organizations are either innovative organizations or traditional organizations. An innovative organization is defined as one that fosters the creative functioning of its members while the traditional organization is defined as one that is not specifically orientated towards fostering this creative functioning. An organization is characterized as either innovative or traditional based on the degree of five properties. Through my interview of 15 teachers and instructional leaders across six of the nine charter schools in the study, I was able to identify that the participants were readily able to discuss in detail themes that supported the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation themes of leadership, ownership, norms of diversity, continuous development, and consistency. There were additional themes that emerged that identified specific anomalies that are particular to charter schools and included such topics as lack of trust of teachers and students, teacher retention, turnover of leadership and even political views on charter perception in the community. These themes appeared to be more than just teachers' perceptions of what others could control outside of the classroom. These themes, as expressed by these teachers, seemed to speak to the level of accountability that they held for each other at the teacher level. They also spoke to what they felt the community felt about charter schools and how charter schools operated in general across the country and in the Kansas City, Missouri area. This spoke, if not explicitly then implicitly, about the promise, purpose and shortcomings of charter schools in general.

For the most part, the 15 participants had positive things to say about their charter schools and how they perceived their support of their instructional practices at the classroom level. If the participant used positive statements such as, "I feel very supported" or "I am 100% responsible

for my curriculum" then their perceptions were rated high. If a participant felt supported, but described some situations where they or others were not supported, then their perceptions were rated moderate. If a participant used negative statements such as "we are told what to do, but not how to do it" or "there's no support for instructional practices" then their perceptions for autonomy and/or flexibility were rated as low. Five of the 15 participants presented evidence that their charter schools supported their instructional practices at the classroom at very high levels. These five participants discussed high levels of autonomy and flexibility which correlated to higher levels of innovative instructional practices at the classroom level. Study participants in this category discussed the creation of curriculum and collaboration with colleagues at consistent and meaningful levels. They felt that they were trusted to grow and were given opportunities to be vulnerable by stating that they needed help and support for growth. These participants spoke to stronger and more stable leadership or positive changes in leadership. These participants had stronger and multiple layers of support systems such as instructional coaches and more personalized professional development programs. There was a sense that having unique ideas (norms of diversity) was valued and there was a high consistency of purpose and study participants spoke directly to their school's mission and vision. While study participants who articulated that there was a high level of support and autonomy and flexibility, they discussed that when there were inconsistencies in the way the school operated there were systematic ways to deal with these inconsistencies. Solutions to inconsistencies tended to be collaborative in nature and involved staff members at all levels (teachers, instructional coaches, principals, parents, etc.). These participants spoke to how students were treated and how the needs of their students were at the center of all of their efforts.

Seven of the study participants indicated moderate levels of support for innovation as well as moderate levels of autonomy and flexibility. These participants discussed that while they were supported and trusted by administration, they felt that others were not. They stated that they did not feel that they were in an environment where innovation was the norm. Some of these teachers described highly innovated instructional practices and spoke of differentiating student learning while incorporating technology, community programming and other outside resources. These teachers talked more about modification of curriculum instead of the creation of curriculum. Some of these participants described high turnover of staff and administration, others did not. These participants did not speak of the collaboration of staff, strong support systems, or impactful professional development. Participants in this category did not speak of continuous improvement of efforts of their schools as a whole.

Three of the study participants discussed having low levels of support for innovation and low levels of autonomy and flexibility in instructional practices. One participant in this category believed that she had some autonomy and flexibility in the past, but that she tended to make only rudimentary decisions based on how to implement the approved curriculum. It is interesting to note that this participant identified herself as a team leader, but felt that she was only allowed to assist teachers in very insignificant ways (how to reteach a lesson, etc.). She stated that in the past she was reprimanded for helping a teacher reconfigure her class time to support the needs of her students. She stated that she always "runs an idea" by administration now.

Another participant in the study that identified low levels of autonomy and flexibility stated there was almost no teacher autonomy and flexibility at the classroom level and thus no support for innovation in instructional practices. She stated that not only was there no support for curriculum development or instructional improvement, but that her work environment was

hostile to teachers. She believed that instructional leaders at all levels showed little support and actually caused some staff members to leave the school during the first few months of the school year. She readily reported that while she was not considering leaving education, she could not foresee returning to the same charter school next year.

The three teachers who presented low levels of autonomy, flexibility and support for innovative instruction at the classroom level also presented a narrative of low levels of instruction at the classroom levels. One participant did not discuss instructional practices at all and instead focused on student discipline. She stated that charter schools in Missouri tended to be more akin to alternative schools than an improvement to the traditional public school district in the area. Another study participant in this category spoke of innovative practices that she used to do in the past. She spoke of having created a student newsletter in the past, but she hadn't found the time to create additional student projects this school year. The third participant discussed the excitement she felt at creating an innovative lesson that all of her students enjoyed, but not being able to duplicate this effort because of the curriculum demands that were outlined by administration. When asked to discuss innovation that she would want to implement if she had unlimited autonomy and flexibility, she was unable to do so.

Teachers in the study perceived high, moderate and/or low support of their practices on the ability and consistency of the charter school leaders and the practices that the charter schools held overall. If teachers in the study perceived charter leaders were strong leaders who were stable, purposeful, and believed in fostering sound leadership practices of trust and mutual respect, they felt supported in their instructional decisions. Only one participant felt that there was no system of support of her instructional practices at the classroom level.

Interestingly enough, there was one participant who stated that she was seriously considering not continuing in education, and this was not the participant who stated that she did not perceive that there was support of her instructional practices and decisions. This participant described her first year as being very trying. She felt as if she had been thrown into teaching without supports. She felt as if she not only struggled with simply being a new teacher, but she struggled under a system that had little support for her pedagogical growth in any area. This year she feels as if the school and district has taken great strides in trying to rectify the ills of her first year. However, it may be too little, too late.

When Ms. Barnes was asked if the support system would help to increase her chances for sticking around the professional for the long haul, she stated the following:

> I'm actually on the fence so that's a really good question for me. For me, I'm going to have to feel supported and feel like I can have success in the classroom. I also feel that this has to go beyond my school district, and even the local area. I feel that this may have to be at a state and national level. Teachers are not respected in the community as much as I need them to be.

I interrupted Ms. Barnes and asked if there was anything in the charter school movement, or at her particular charter school that is different than the traditional schools that could possible change her mind and alleviate this image about education for her? Ms. Barnes replied:

> It depends on the charter and there are too many out there that I don't feel help a lot. I agree that parents should be allowed to choose their schools, but I'm scared about the inequalities that charters can create. I have seen good charters and I'm not saying that they are all bad. I kind of want to try out a traditional school to see how they're different. I want to try out a school that is established.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

This study sought to examine the relationship of perceived support of instructional innovation at the classroom level of charter school teachers sponsored by one local university charter school sponsor in the Kansas City, MO urban area. The primary focus of this proposed study was to explore perceptions of charter school teachers and if they believe that charter schools are conduits of innovative practices at the classroom level. Through my interview of 15 teachers and instructional leaders across six of the nine charter schools in the study, I was able to identify that the participants were readily able to discuss and expound in detail themes that supported the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation themes of leadership, ownership, norms of diversity, continuous development, and consistency. Additionally, teachers in the study were able to articulate ideas about teacher and administration turnover and retention and expressed the political and social ramifications of charter schools and their impact on the educational community.

This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on teacher autonomy, flexibility and innovation, and teacher and administrator turnover and retention. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research, and a brief summary. The following research questions helped to keep the study focused:

1. How are innovative instructional practices defined and described?

2. How do teachers in charter schools perceive the existence of barriers to innovative instructional practices?

3. How does the organization and philosophy of charter schools (e.g., deregulation, autonomy and flexibility) relate to support for innovation at the classroom level?

Siegel and Kaemmerer (1978) found that an innovative organization is defined as one that fosters the creative functioning of its members while the traditional organization is defined as one that is not specifically orientated towards fostering this creative functioning. An organization is characterized as either innovative or traditional based on the degree of five properties. Through my interview of 15 teachers and instructional leaders across six of the nine charter schools, 11 of the 15 participants presented evidence that their charter schools supported their instructional practices at the classroom at very high levels. Three of the study participants discussed having low levels of autonomy and flexibility in instructional practices. One study participant presented her school as having low levels of autonomy, flexibility, and support for the instructional decisions at her school.

Interpretation and Findings

Researchers found that studies on charter schools was sparse and rarely looked at the and rarely looked at the teacher as the central focus and that far less is known about what happens inside charter school classrooms than how they are organized and governed (Bomotti et.al., 1999; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003). Critiques of charter schools range from there being little to no innovation beyond administrative practices, to there being little to no impact on student outcomes, compared to those of traditional public schools (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Geske, Davis, & Hingle, 1997; Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003; Walberg &Bast, 2003; Lubienski, 2003). The findings of this qualitative study found that teachers who work in the six participating charter schools perceive that there are systems of low, medium, and high levels of autonomy and flexibility related to instructional innovation and that these levels correlate with the levels of innovative instructional practices that they implement in their classrooms.

Teacher Autonomy, Flexibility and Innovation

For the purpose of this study, I used the definition of instructional innovations to mean such things as the use of diversified and lively teaching methods/contents in the teaching process such as the use of technology, and practices that aroused students' interest in learning and creativity instead of the heavy emphasis on written tests, memorization, rote learning and recitation of material (Guskey, 1988; Bruce, 1989; Amrein & Berliner, 2002). At the crux of the study, I wanted to see whether charter school teachers were realizing the promise of autonomy and flexibility and whether or not this translated into students receiving innovative instruction at the classroom level. I also wanted to know if teachers even knew that they were supposed to be innovative. Did they know that at the core of the charter school movement was the expectation that they would be free from bureaucracy and red tape and that these innovative practices that they would now impart would literally save public education as we know it (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Meir, Polinard & Wrinkle, 2000; Lubienski, 2003; Ndoye, Imig & Parker, 2010)?

To analyze the results of this study I categorized the responses of the participants to the questions as low, moderate or high levels of autonomy and flexibility in their ability to make choices in their instructional practices at the classroom levels. If the participant used positive statements such as, "I feel very supported" or "I am 100% responsible for my curriculum" then their perceptions were rated high. If a participant felt supported, but described some situations where they or others were not supported, then their perceptions were rated moderate. If a participant used negative statements such as "we are told what to do, but not how to do it" or "there's no support for instructional practices" then their perceptions for autonomy and/or flexibility were rated as low.

The results of this study found that the teachers at the six charter schools in the study presented a mixed bag of support for innovative practices at the classroom levels of their schools. Five of the study participants interviewed presented narratives that indicate that there are high levels of support for innovation of instructional practices at their schools at the classroom levels. These participants tended to speak about not just modification of curriculum, but of creation of curriculum for the students that they served. Even if they spoke about modification of curriculum (they were told what to teach and could modify how to teach it), they tended to speak about high levels of teacher input across the school at different levels. These teachers also tended to speak about higher levels of support in many areas. They spoke about support of instructional practices, support of their students through restorative practices, meaningful professional development experiences, and positive and impactful adult relationships. These study participants spoke about mission and vision and consistency of purpose and discussed how to hold themselves and their colleagues accountable for the work of educating their students. While they may have discussed some shortcoming of their schools, or charter schools in general, they readily discussed ways that their school worked collectively, with high levels of teacher input, to improve.

Seven teachers interviewed in the study presented narratives that showed moderate levels of support for innovative practices at the classrooms in their charter schools. Teachers interviewed who tended to be more moderate in the description of their schools spoke of their ability to be innovative in their own classrooms, but did not see their schools as having norms of diversity. They tended to say things like, "the administration trusts me, but this is not a school where everyone has a voice." These moderate level teachers talked about having very innovative ideas about "what they wanted to do," or their instructional innovations were greenlighted, but they were disheartened because the scopes of their instructional plans were severely curtailed.

Moderate level teachers also presented instances where they were told what curriculum to teach, but they had some leeway in the how they were allowed to teach it. They presented instances of modification, but not creation of curriculum that they may have presented to students.

Three teachers presented narratives of systems that tended to have low levels of support for autonomy and flexibility. They presented narratives that spoke to being told exactly what to teach and how to teach it. They presented narratives of administrators who tended to use language that appeared to be threatening in nature. They also presented narratives that showed that when they felt that they, or their colleagues, had low levels of support for innovation they stuck with curriculums and instructional practices that were the least innovative. Even when they wanted to present innovative lessons, they tended to stop presenting them because of lack of time, lack of support, and even lack of materials. These teachers tended to talk less about instructional practices and spoke more of poorer adult relationships and more instances of student discipline issues.

Theorists and policymakers believed that the empowerment, satisfaction and working conditions that charter schools would realize would be the result of improved administrative and institutional structures free from bureaucracy and rigid oversight (Lubienski, 2004). This freedom from top-down regulations, increased autonomy would allow for teachers to be more flexible in the use of curriculum and instructional innovations for their students. The participants in this study presented narratives that they understood that charter schools should "lead the way" in innovative instructional practices. All of the participants spoke to specific idiosyncrasies and structure of charter schools. They stated that they believed that charter schools should set the pace for providing innovative instructional practices in education. However, the consensus that there was support for innovation at the classroom level was a mixed for this particular group of

charter school classroom teachers. Some felt that there was little to no support; others felt that while they were supported, other colleagues were not or that there were not consistent norms and consistency of purpose for creating innovative instruction throughout the school. Finally, some teachers at the charter schools in this study indicated that while there were barriers that existed either in the past or beyond their control, their schools practiced high levels of support of teachers that allowed for innovation at the classroom level across their schools.

Impact on Instructional Practices

How do the teachers in the charter schools in the study perceive that there are barriers to implementing innovative instructional practices in their classrooms? Once teachers perceive levels of autonomy and flexibility how did these perceptions impact their instructional practices at the classroom level? Of the 14 participants who provided direct instruction to students, only three did not provide a narrative that indicated that their instructional practices fell into a category of innovative practices as outlined by this study's operational definition. Two of the participants had perceptions that they had either low to moderate autonomy and/or flexibility in their decision-making about instructional practices. The one participant, who felt that instructional leaders imposed upon her not only what she was to teach, but how she was to teach it, recounted a lesson that she created that went beyond what she had initially expected. She described creating an escape room for her students. Students were to use vocabulary, key concepts in the lesson, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills to complete the science unit. This teacher described, almost with glee, how much fun she and her students had with the lessons. She even found a way to incorporate the mandatory ELA vocabulary lessons into her core lessons. She found that her students remarked how they were able to understand the ELA vocabulary better within the context of her discussing them authentically by folding them into

the core lesson for her class. She then however lamented that this was one of the few times that she was able to create such a lesson because of the mandatory requirements imposed upon her instructional decisions from her educational leaders. She felt that she no longer had the time, energy, and/or support to create such lessons.

Of the two other participants that did not provide a narrative about lessons that were innovative in nature, one expressed a need to follow with fidelity the expectations of administration and to ask permission before she created anything that deviated from their expectations. She described the administrators as the experts and believed in a strict chain of command. The other study participant tended to discuss student behaviors and discipline issues. She did not mention the specifics of her lessons, but talked about tailoring them to meet the "behavioral weather" of her students. She tended to describe working conditions such as having too many special needs students in her class and/or not being able to get supplies. She did state that she felt supported for making curricular decisions in her class, but she only focused on student behaviors.

The remaining participants who articulated the perception that they had moderate to high levels of autonomy and flexibility fell into two camps. Those who fell into the moderate level of autonomy and flexibility camp articulated that they understood what innovative instructional practices are and had support and support systems for them, but that there was just not enough time to implement the strategies that they wanted, or they were still learning how to implement what they felt were basic best practices such as curriculum goals, strands, scope and sequences, classroom management techniques, etc. These two participants were novice teachers and/or were at schools where they felt that the school was "starting over" because of turnover of staff, especially administrative staff. They felt that the support was there, there was a change of

support from the previous year, and that innovative practices were sure to come with the right set of key leadership personnel in place. Others in this camp stated that while they implemented innovative practices in their classes, this was not the norm throughout their schools.

The third camp of participants were those perceived that they had high levels of autonomy and flexibility and presented narratives of using innovative practices not only in their classrooms, but it was the way that the school operated as a norm. These participants felt that presenting innovative instructional curriculum and activities was at the core of who they were as educators. Most of them talked about meeting the differentiated needs of their students. They talked about bringing authentic experiences to their students and having them to understand how to apply what they learned to their daily lives. They talked about understanding what "real students" need and continuously improving their pedagogy to meet the needs of those students. This might mean understanding the role of technology in the lives of students, or understanding that old saying that "dittos don't build dendrites." They collaborated with their colleagues or worked with instructional staff to improve their instructional practices. They did not appear to be afraid to say, "I don't understand that" or "I need help learning how to do that."

This group of study participants who discussed high levels of innovative practices was not just made up of veteran teachers. The years of service ranged from 2 to 23 years. All of the participants in this group, even the 2nd year teacher, have taught at both traditional and charter schools. Teachers in this group did not appear to be diehard charter school proponents. They spoke easily of the shortcomings of both traditional as well as charter schools. What they did articulate was that charter schools offered the promise of an improvement in education for the students that they served. Even when a participant discussed problems in job equity that affected the educators of color at her charter school, she discussed the process and steps that were taken

to remedy this issue. She spoke of teachers being empowered by the founder of the charter and how even this incident helped to change the lives of all involved, including the students that they serve. This group of educators also readily talked about the mission and visions of not only charter schools in general, but their specific charter school's mission, vision and goals. They believed that charter schools should set the pace for providing innovative instructional practices.

Leadership and Perception of Support

Analyzing the perception of leadership support for innovative practices at the classroom level was the key purpose of this study. The results of this study mirror other studies. In the review of the literature, earlier research found that charter school teachers seemed to be more satisfied with the control of their classrooms and curriculum decisions than traditional teachers. While teacher retention and attrition was a key focus of charter teachers' years of experience, lack of satisfaction with facilities and other working conditions, the impact of teacher attrition on student achievement proved to be even more apparent in subsequent studies. Ndoye, Imig and Parker's (2010) research on teacher attrition in North Carolina charter schools found that teachers were more likely to stay in their schools as dimensions of leadership such as trust and mutual respect increased. Stuit and Smith (2010) found that the rate that teachers leave the profession and move between schools is significantly higher in charter schools than in traditional public schools. Additionally, they found that turnover affects many of the organizational conditions important to effective schooling, such as instructional cohesion and staff trust.

As indicated in the studies of teacher attrition, all of the participants of this study offered teacher turnover as an issue with their charter schools. Some felt that teachers did not understand the thrust or purpose of charter schools and that they were not a good fit from the beginning. Some spoke of the fact that they understood from the onset of the interview process that coming

to a charter was going to be a challenging proposition. One participant stated that many of the colleagues that left, or even remain at the charter, did so because it was "just an opportunity." Of the participants who have changed charter schools, the reasons range from charter schools closing to having philosophical differences in how the charter approached educating the students that are served at the charter. While the participants see teacher attrition as a problem, only one participant mentioned such programs as Teach for America by name, but did not see such programs as the problem with teacher attrition.

Although some researchers found that teacher mobility is much more strongly related to characteristics of the students, particularly race and achievement, than to salary, only three of the teachers interviewed in this qualitative study indicated that this was a reason they felt there was high teacher turnover at their charter schools. One participant felt that the teachers who left her school—as well as some who have stayed—have low expectations of the students they serve and don't trust that they are capable of achieving at high levels. This was supported by researchers as who found that schools in urban areas serving economically disadvantaged and minority students appear particularly vulnerable to high turnover of staff (Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2004; Stuit & Smith, 2010). Another teacher expressed that she felt that charter schools in Missouri were comparable with alternative schools and that student behavior was a factor for turnover at her school. While yet another teacher felt as though the students that she served in the past had fewer traumas than now; she also saw more parental support for teachers and the school as a whole in past years.

The overriding point that the 15 participants seemed to indicate as a major issue with teacher turnover was high administrative turnover and lack of consistency in leadership at their charter schools. The majority of the study participants cited high turnover of leadership and

always seeming to "start over" each year. From the turnover of such key personnel as superintendents, to principals and instructional coaches, some study participants described always seeming to get new administration every few years having to "always start over." One participant discussed that she has been at several charter schools and that she can always tell if there has been a lot of turnover of leadership. When there is no consistency in leadership, curriculum focus, etc., it affects the school in its entirety. She explained that because of the consistency at her school for the past 3 years she sees programming implemented with fidelity and even notices a lot of parental buy in and support for everything that is done at the school. One study participant pointed to the fact that her school's turnover of administrative staff, their lack of years in education (2-3 years average), and their lack of cultural competency are all leading to her leaving the school. She stated that because of how some teachers perceived that they were "talked to" by leadership and what they deemed were unreasonable curriculum expectations, two staff members quit after a recent professional development. Even when asked if the increased level of support for teachers with the use of critical staff such as instructional coaches would help with teacher retention, some participants were not hopeful for what lied ahead in the immediate future.

The findings of this study underscore the findings of Ni, Sun and Rorrer's (2015) study on Utah principals that found that charter school leaders had fewer years teaching, fewer advanced degrees, less time leading schools, less likely to hold administrative licensure, but have the same and/or more managerial responsibilities as traditional public school leaders. Every study participant found many aspects of this claim to be true. The study participants cited instances where administrators were "trying to find their way" or "trying to make it better this year." Only those study participants who indicated that their leaders were returning leaders, had

backgrounds as former teachers, or had varied experiences in charter or traditional settings described high to moderate levels of support for innovative instructional practices. This trust in the consistency of the mission, vision, goals and activities of their school and its leaders lead to teachers describing instances where they were more open to collaboration, self-evaluation, and risk-taking, which in turn lead to more innovative practices.

A high turnover of school leaders in high risk urban school environments was seen as detrimental to the teaching staff in all of the schools. The teachers described instances where they were not supported, not trusted, and thus not protected in the work environment. In a charter school setting where teachers are younger, less experienced and less credentialed, this perception of support is crucial. The most telling example of the importance of protecting the experiences of young teachers came from the 2nd year teacher who expressed that she may not be returning to education at all in the future. She expressed that she felt that society as a whole—at the local, state, and national levels—had let teachers down. She felt that teachers were not respected and that even in the media we were made to look dumb and foolish. She also, however, described her first year as almost being a yearlong series of traumatic events. She described having to spend all of her time last year creating elaborate lesson plans that she barely understood, to later be told that they had been done incorrectly. She felt that she had been "thrown in" to a classroom setting with little to no supports and not knowing what to do or what was expected. She described a system that had instructional supports, such as instructional coaches, but she didn't know when or why she should go to them for supports. She stated that she didn't quite understand their role.

She described frustration from having to sit through lots of professional development whereby she was taught things that she was supposed to do, but never having the time to do them. She said that this was very overwhelming to her. It was her first year and she was trying to

figure out teaching plus all of the "stuff" they were asking her to implement. She described being inundated with an inflexible schedule that ate up all of her personal time. She felt being restricted and constrained in her teaching and that if one complained about anything they would get "in trouble." This year she describes a sort of culture shift that appears to open to suggestions, improvements and supports in curriculum and instructional practices. But a lot of her language starts and ends with "I'm curious to see if…." While she appears hopeful, she expresses in her phrasing and in her tone that there remains some doubt. Although her school and district appears to be trying feverishly to change the culture of their school, the bottom line may be that we may have already lost this thoughtful, kind, insightful teacher to some other career.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

While I agree that qualitative research was the best choice for this study, qualitative research tools, such as interviews, are not designed to capture hard facts. The choice to use a qualitative study methodology was appropriate as this study seeks to move beyond the quantitative nature of merely assessing the success or failure of charter schools based on test scores into the realm of understanding why charter school teachers make instructional decisions at the classroom level (Comer, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The strength of this study is that it captured an acceptable number of participants (15) who come from a diverse background of culture, years of service, years of service at various school settings, and background of job positions. A limitation of the study may be that the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation was normed with participants who were teachers and students in traditional and alternative school settings (Siegel & Kaemmerer, 1978). The researchers desired that future uses of the scale be used to determine if it could be used beyond the demonstrated validity within and between different units within an organization to compare the degree of perceived support for innovation.

A quantitative study could be developed to understand what kinds of innovative instructional practices are actually being implemented in each classroom. Future researchers could then use a mixed methods approach and tie perceptions and innovative instructional practices to student achievement outcomes. Another qualitative study might be to compare the outcomes of the Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation to the outcome of charter school teacher interviews. This study found that there was not enough data to support labeling the different charter schools in the study as innovative settings even if the teachers in the study expressed high levels of satisfaction with their charter schools. As identified in this study, 12 of the 15 participants presented responses that showed high levels of satisfaction with their charter schools. Merely being a charter school would not qualify it as an innovative school. Even having high APR scores on the State expectations rating known as the Missouri School Improvement Program, or MSIP5, would not indicate if the school was innovative just that an adequate percentage of students were passing State assessments. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2019) charter schools receive an Annual Progress Report score, but do not receive an accreditation classification under current guidelines.

MSIP5 APR scores are comprised of the following components for the State of Missouri:

1. Academic achievement
2. Subgroup achievement (includes students receiving free/reduced price lunch, African American and Hispanic students, English Language Learners and students with disabilities)
3. High school readiness (K-8 districts) and College and Career Readiness (K-12 districts)
4. Attendance rate
5. Graduation rate (K-12 districts)

More than 61 percent of Missouri districts received at least 90 percent of the possible points, an increase of nearly 15 percent from 2014. Thirty-five districts received the maximum number of points possible. Overall, districts and charter schools continue to show progress on

graduation rates, attendance rates and college and career readiness measures. Again, charter schools receive APR scores but do not receive a classification. Twenty-seven percent of charter schools scored at least 90 percent of the possible points, an increase of 15 percent from 2014. Overall 19 out of 34 charter schools scored at least 70 percent of the points possible (DESE, 2019).

Other limitations for this study would include the fact that the study is limited to one charter sponsor within one demographic area located in Kansas City, Missouri. Of the nine charter schools that were sponsored by the university in the study during the years of 2018 – 2019, six were represented in the study. Although 15 participants typically are considered an acceptable study sample, the outcomes of this study may have been different with more participants and/or participants from other charter systems. This study's focus was to draw upon the perceptions and interpretations of charter school teachers in an interview setting. This study may have taken a different slant if it had compared traditional public school teachers to charter school teachers. The responses of the study participants is based solely on their personal experiences and how they interpret and perceive support for their instructional practices from the school leaders at their particular charter schools at the time the study was conducted.

Conclusion

Many proponents of charter schools believe that deregulation, enhanced autonomy, and a consumer-orientated agenda are the solution to the ills of the traditional public schools and that the very removal of these barriers will spur innovation within these schools of choice. Proponents believe that high parental and student satisfaction and high teacher/employee

satisfaction and empowerment would bring about a positive effect on the broader system of public education (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003).

While there are quite a few studies about charter schools a review of the literature found that some researchers state that charter schools have yet to prove their positive impact on student achievement (Barr, Sadovnik, & Visconti, 2006; Buckley, & Schneider, 2009; Angrist, Pathak, & Walters, 2013). A lack of improvement in St. Louis and Kansas City public schools created dissatisfaction in the Missouri legislature and led to the passage of Missouri's charter school legislation beginning in 1997 (Niedowski, 1998; Buchanan, & Waddle, 2004). However, charter schools don't appear to be going anywhere soon. In the Kansas City, Missouri area alone, it appears that as one charter closes, another one opens (Kennedy, 2018). Not only are new charter schools opening, but established charter schools are expanding (DESE, 2019). In the state of Missouri, this has been made easier through the passage on an expansion of the charter law in 2012 (Wong, 2014). According to the Missouri Charter Schools Association and DESE, in 2017 there were 11,601 students attending charter schools in Kansas City, MO and 14,240 students attending the Kansas City Public Schools. This number does not include the fact that one long established charter closed June of 2018 and another is set to open during the fall of 2019.

Schools in general and the Kansas City, MO Schools specifically, have had a difficult time educating poor and Black and brown children. In recent decades, White flight, a declining tax base, and the rising costs of public services have plagued Kansas City. Today we seem to have a charter school system that mirrors a school system of the past (Green & Baker, 2006). Charter schools in the Kanas City area serve a majority of African American, Hispanic and poor children (MCPSA, 2017; DESE, 2017). These charter schools are being held to the same standards as traditional schools, but must also operate under rules and regulations that are only

particular to charter schools such as charter renewals and oversight by charter law and charter

sponsors. Research on charter schools have found mixed reviews on the impact of charter

schools on student achievement, however, many concede that student achievement in charter

schools is impacted by many factors, including the teaching and learning process, organizational

factors, as well as school leadership (Berends, Springer, & Walberg, 2017; Ni, Sun, & Rorrer,

2015; Angrist, Pathak, & Walters, 2013; Ni, 2012; Berends, Goldring, Stein, & Cravens, 2010).

Several participants in this study discussed that there seemed to be a lack of trust in the students'

abilities that they served. Others cited that student behaviors impacted what curriculum they

were able to teach. While others acknowledged that they were always seeking ways to bring

meaningful curriculum to their students and to not "pigeon-hole" their students simply because

of their culture backgrounds. These educators articulated that they sought to be courageous in

their stance for their students and sought to bring more restorative practices to their teaching and

to disrupt the "school to prison pipeline." These perceptions about achievement align with

research about poor and minority students that state that perceptions and expectations of teachers

reflect and determine the goals, energy, skills and expected rewards of both students and teachers

(Walsh et al., 2014; Fergusen, 2003).

Study participants spoke about the impact of charter school teachers on instructional

practices at their schools. Studies show that teachers at charter schools tended to be younger, less

experienced and less credentialed (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003). Mallow and Wohlsetter (2003) found

that teachers at charter schools felt empowered, enjoyed working at charter schools, and even

enjoyed a sense of shared philosophical and pedagogical homogeneity amongst staff, but there

were also high incidences of teacher burnout and attrition. Their research indicated that while

school autonomy was high, it had not been used to improve classic "bread and butter" teacher

issues such as wages, benefits and workload. Bomotti et al. (1999) found that conditions of empowerment and job satisfaction existed within charter schools to allow for innovation to take place. What the researchers did not uncover was whether or not teachers in charter schools in Colorado actually created new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. This study's participants agreed that there was a low average of teacher tenure, teachers tended to move from charter to charter, and the teachers coming to their schools did not seem to have the cultural competency to work with the students that were enrolled at the charter schools. One study participant believed that if there was not confidence in the students' academic abilities, there would be no use to implement rigorous and/or innovative curriculum.

Finally, the study participants indicated that their perception of support for innovation was impacted by continuous turnover of school leaders. Researchers found that charter school leaders had fewer years teaching, fewer advanced degrees, less time leading schools, less likely to hold administrative licensure, have the same and/or more managerial responsibilities, and were more likely to leave education than simply transfer to another school once leaving a charter than traditional public school leaders (Berends, Springer, & Walberg, 2017; Ni, Sun & Rorrer, 2015). These charter school leaders have a daunting job to do. Ni, Sun, and Rorrer (2015) found that these leaders may have more autonomy and flexibility than their traditional public school leaders, but they also have as much social, political and managerial responsibilities as traditional superintendents, have less time for more instructional decision-making, must navigate state and sponsor mandates, must deal with boards, parents, teachers, and ancillary staff, and may earn less money upfront. The pressure for charter schools to raise statewide test scores above traditional public schools is underscored by the fact that unlike traditional schools if charter schools don't achieve a base standard of expectations over time they can lose their authorization and be shut

down (Betts & Tang, 2011). This added pressure of poor test scores, parental choice of charter enrollment, and threat to job security all add to high charter school leader turnover in charter schools (Comer, 2001).

Ndoye, Imig, and Parker (2010) found in their research that if there was a perception that charter leaders were strong leaders who were stable, purposeful, and believed in fostering sound leadership practices of trust and mutual respect, teachers felt supported in their instructional decisions. This perception seemed to be echoed in my study. Of the 15 participants, only one participant felt that there was not a system of support of her instructional practices at the classroom level. Fourteen participants spoke of support from current leaders, instructional coaches and team leaders and peer and mentor teachers. They felt that there was indeed a new support system in place that seemed to be swelling, that things were "better than last year," and that administrators had stronger instructional and pedagogical skills than previous administrators.

This study indicates that charter school teachers are willing to bring innovative, rigorous, critical and meaningful instructional practices to the students that they serve. The results from the study indicated that the perceptions of autonomy and flexibility and support for innovation at the charter schools in the study are mixed. While there are some teachers at the specific schools who perceive that they are experiencing high levels of support, others indicate that this is not a schoolwide phenomenon. The teachers in this study expressed that they needed consistent and culturally aware administrators who have a strong pedagogical background in education and who were willing to stick around longer than a few years. The teachers in this study also indicated that they needed focused professional development that is grounded in sound practices that have been proven to impact students and that they don't want one-shot informational meetings. The good news is that except for three study participants, the majority of the study participants

highlighted many instances where they saw an improvement in the leadership and the systems of support at their schools.

In conclusion, the charter teachers in this study stated that they needed instructional support systems that allow them to question and then collaborate with others so that they are allowed to grow and develop into the master teachers that their students deserve. When participants described their leaders as consistent and focused on instructional practices and student achievement goals that go beyond simply "preparing students to pass tests" they actually perpetuated the perception that teachers could be innovative. The charter school teachers in this study contend that creative, innovative teachers are not born; they are groomed and developed within a system that is rigorous, equitable, and stable for all.

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Appendix A

Interview Questionnaire

1. Daily Teacher Practices

   1.2 Describe a typical lesson in your classroom.

   1.3 What's the most important take away you want students to get from each lesson?

   1.4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of your instructional approaches?

2. Moving Towards Innovation

   2.2 How have you established daily practices in your class?

   2.3 To what extent do you receive support for your instructional practices?

   2.4 To what extent do you seek the support of others for your instructional practices?

3. Support for Innovation

   3.2 What factors best influence your instructional practices in your classroom?

   3.3 What is the perception amongst you and your colleagues that being different or presenting something new is important?

   3.4 What do you do if you begin to feel 'pushback' for some instructional activity you wish to implement in your classroom?

   3.5 How comfortable with technology and other nontraditional techniques are you?

   3.6 What direct impact has school-sponsored professional development had on what instructional practices are used in your classroom? How often is PD?

   3.7 How do you learn about instructional practices if your school doesn't provide professional development?

   3.8 What would happen if you or your colleagues desired support for instructional practices that aren't currently being implemented in your school?

   3.9 How do you view the impact of your charter status in regards to your instructional practice?

Appendix B

Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation Survey Instrument

Section I: Think about your classroom and how it is structured. Indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements as they pertain to your classroom:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. (D) This organization is always moving toward the development of new answers.				
2. (D) This organization can be described as flexible and continually adapting to change.				
3. (O) I can personally identify with the ideas with which I work.				
4. (L) Our ability to function creatively is respected by the leadership.				
5. (N) Around here people are allowed to try to solve the same problem in different ways.				
6. (O) I help make decisions here.				
7. (N) Creativity is encouraged here.				
8. (C) People talk a lot around here, but they don't practice what they preach.				
9. (N) People around here are expected to deal with problems in the same way.				
10. (L) The people in charge around here usually get the credit for others' ideas.				
11. (L) There is one person or group here who assumes the role of telling others what to do.				
12. (C) Sometimes the way things are done around here makes matters worse, even though our goals aren't bad.				
13. (L) The role of the leader in this organization can best be described as supportive.				
14. (C) The leaders in this organization talk one game but act another.				
15. (D) In this organization, we sometimes reexamine our most basic assumptions.				
16. (N) The members of our organization are encouraged to be different.				

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17. (D) People in this organization are always searching for fresh, new ways of looking at problems.				
18. (C) The way we do things seems to fit with what we're trying to do.				
19. (L) Persons at the top have much more power than persons lower in this organization.				
20. (C) Work in this organization is evaluated by results, not how they are accomplished.				
21. (N) A person can't do things that are too different around here without provoking anger.				
22. (L) The leadership acts as if we are not very creative.				
23. (O) I really don't care what happens to this organization.				
24. (O) I am committed to the goals of this organization.				
25. (C) The methods used by our organization seem well suited to its stated goals				
26. (L) Most people here find themselves at the bottom of the totem pole.				
27. (0) My goals and the goals of this organization are quite similar.				
28. (O) Members of this organization would rather be working here than anywhere else.				
29. (0) In this organization we tend to stick to tried and true ways.				
30. (L) Assistance in developing new ideas is readily available.				
31. (L) New ideas can come from anywhere in this organization and be equally well received.				
32. (O) On the whole, I feel a sense of commitment to this organization.				
33. (D) We're always trying out new ideas.				
34. (L) People in this organization are encouraged to develop their own interests, even when they deviate from those of the organization.				
35. (L) Members of this organization feel encouraged by their superiors to express their opinions and ideas.				
36. (O) The people here are very loyal to this place.				
37. (D) Members of this organization realize that in dealing with new problems and tasks, frustration is inevitable; therefore it is handled constructively.				
38. O) I have the opportunity to test out my own ideas here.				
39. (O) I feel a real sense of responsibility for my work.				

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
40. (C) In this organization, the way things are taught is as important as what is taught.				
41. (D) This organization is open and responsive to change.				
42. (N) A motto of this organization is "The more we think alike, the better job we will get done."				
43. (L) My ability to come up with original ideas and ways of doing things is respected by those at the top.				
44. (D) This place seems to be more concerned with the status quo than with change.				
45. (L) The role of the leader here is to encourage and support individual members' development.				
46. (N) The best way to get along in this organization is to think the way the rest of the group does.				
47. (L) Individual independence is encouraged in this organization.				
48. (O) Nobody asks me for suggestions about how to run this place.				
49. (L) One individual is usually the originator of ideas and policies in this organization.				
50. (L) In this organization, the power of final decision can always be traced to the same few people.				
51. (N) Creative efforts are usually ignored here.				
52. (D) Once this organization develops a solution to a particular problem, that solution becomes a permanent one.				
53. (N) Around here, a person can get into a lot of trouble by being different.				
54. (O) I have a voice in what goes on in this organization				
55. (O) People here try new approaches to tasks, as well as tried and true ones.				
56. (L) Others in our organization always seem to make the decisions.				
57. (L) The leader's "pets" are in a better position to get their ideas adopted than most others.				
58. (L) The main function of members in this organization is to follow orders that come down through channels.				
59. (O) I mostly agree with how we do things here.				
60. (D) There is little room for change here.				
61. (O) These aren't my ideas, I just work here.				