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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MAKING USE OF TEACHER MENTORS: UNDERSTANDING THE
IMPACT OF TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS ON
STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

SARA HAAS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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My journey as a practitioner and research was not taken alone. I would not be at this point in my career without the guidance, love, and support from a whole community of people. I started working towards my doctorate with an amazing cohort of people. Together we grew as administrators, facing similar obstacles and celebrating successes as a family. Without their support and encouragement I most certainly would not have made it this far.

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A good leader is only as strong as their team. I have been fortunate to work with amazing teams during my career. I learned to be a leader during my first position as an assistant principal and those teachers and students I served taught me valuable lessons about how to be an effective and compassionate leader. When I began my role as a principal I was fortunate enough to work with another dedicated team who trusted me to take the school in a new direction. I have not been able to do this alone and without my partner in this endeavor, my assistant principal, I would certainly have not have experienced more frustration than joy, more obstacles than successes.

Of course, I can only trace my passion for education (both for students and my own) to my parents who not only modeled for me a pursuit of knowledge but gave me innumerable opportunities to be my best self and make a difference in the lives of others.

My husband, Bryan, has never stopped believing in me. He has never gotten impatient as my work life overtakes my personal life, as it do often does. He respects and encourages my sometimes crazy commitment to my school and students. He is my biggest cheerleader at the end of the day and is my better half in all things.

This work – as all things I do in my life – is dedicated to my daughter Amelia. Everything I do is to create a better world for you and I hope that I can make you as proud as you make me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

LIST OF TABLES vii

ABSTRACT viii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 1

 Purpose and Research Questions 1

 Context of Study 2

 Significance of Study 5

 Methodology 9

 Conceptual Framework 11

 Limitations and Biases 12

 Key Terms 14

 Chapter Structure 16

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE 18

 Introduction to the Conceptual Framework 18

 Early Warning Indicators (EWI) 20

 Student Engagement 21

 Student-Teacher Relationships 22

 School Based Mentor Programs 25

 Summary 27

III. METHODS 28

 Introduction 28

 Research Design and Methodology 29

 Setting 30

 Procedures 30

 Program Considerations for Mentoring 32

 Conceptual Framework: Leadership Profile Inventory 35

 Data Collection and Analysis 36

 Professional development materials and meeting minutes 36

 Journal entries 37

 Publically available student and school data 38

 Critical friend interview 39

 Bias Prevention 40

 Validity and Limitations 41

 Summary 41

IV. RESULTS	43
Study Overview	43
Research Questions	44
Research Question One	45
Research Question Two	59
V. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	63
Study Highlights	63
Discussion of Findings	64
Systems and Structures	64
Culture and Climate	69
Implications for Leaders	71
Recommendations for Research	74
Limitations	76
Final Thoughts	77
APPENDIX	
A. SUCCESS ANALYSIS PROTOCOL FOR INDIVIDUALS	78
B. CONSULTANCY PROTOCOL	80
C. SELF-STUDY DATA PROTOCOLS JOURNAL PROMPTS	83
D. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL	85
E. SELF-STUDY DATA PROTOCOLS SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	87
F. TRANSCRIPT OF CRITICAL FRIEND INTERVIEW DECEMBER 16, 2016	89
REFERENCE LIST	102
VITA	108

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Kouzes and Posner Five Leadership Practices.....	12

ABSTRACT

The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has determined that if a student completes freshman year with the necessary course credits to be promoted to tenth grade and has no more than one F for one semester/course in a core content area then they are considered on track to graduate high school within four years and ultimately be college and career ready (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). The CCSR did further research examining the factors that indicated what a middle grades student would need to be on track as high school freshman (Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore, & de la Torre, 2014). They found that for middle grade students, attendance and grades were a strong indicator of how students would perform in high school. From this research the “on-track” metric was developed for Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Every five weeks attendance and grades are reviewed for all students in grades three to eight. In order to be considered on track students must have attendance at 95% or above and receive a C or above in reading and math. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, at one elementary school in Chicago, almost half of the students are predicted to not graduate high school within four years of their freshman year. Thus, the purpose of this self-study is to examine how a school principal can increase the number of students considered on track to graduate by fostering supportive relationships between teachers and students. Specifically, a teacher mentor program will be implemented in order to provide students with a supportive adult relationship. The principal will examine her own practice through

the lens of the five leadership practices identified by Kouzes and Posner (2012): Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Other to Act, and Encourage the Heart.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Research Questions

How students perform in the middle grades matters for how likely they will be to graduate high school (Allensworth et al., 2014; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Finn & Zimmer, 2012). The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has determined that if a high school student completes freshman year with the necessary course credits to be promoted to tenth grade and has no more than one F for one semester/course in a core content area then they are considered on track to graduate high school within four years and ultimately be college and career ready (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). The CCSR did further research and published a report examining the factors that indicated what a middle grades student would need to be on track as high school freshman (Allensworth et al., 2014). They found that for middle grade students, attendance and grades were a strong indicator of how students would perform in high school. From this research the “on-track” metric was developed for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) elementary schools. Within CPS, attendance and grades are reviewed every five weeks for all students in grades three to eight. In order to be considered on track students must have attendance at 95% or above and receive a C or above in reading and math during that five week period.

The purpose of this self-study is to examine how I, as a school principal, am able to support the development of teacher-student relationships that positively impact student achievement and put more students on track to graduate high school. This will be examined, specifically through the implementation of a teacher-student mentor program. An examination of the impact of this study will lead to recommendations for administrators around supporting student academic success through relationship building.

The study will answer the following research questions:

1. What have been my experiences in attempting to positively impact student academic achievement through the implementation of a teacher mentorship program?
 - a. What were my successes, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?
 - b. What were my limitations, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?
2. How has my leadership changed, if at all, as understood by the five leadership practices outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2012)?

Context of Study

This study will take place at Southwest Elementary School (pseudonym), within the Chicago Public School district. As this is a self-study, the professional background of myself as the researcher and subject is pertinent. I took over as principal of Southwest Elementary in August of 2014. The 2014-2015 school year was a time of transition for myself as well as for the school as a whole. Both myself and my assistant principal were

new to the school, marking a complete change in leadership with a significant change in leadership styles. We spent our first year learning about what was working in the school and what was not, and just began to put systems in place to address areas of need. The 2015-2016 school year marks a period of change as we put into place several new practices and systems of student support. These new practices and initiatives are intended to have a positive impact on student achievement at Southwest Elementary School.

One of the new initiatives at the school focuses around student behavior. Restorative practices are being used to address student misbehavior and teach positive behaviors. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (Wachtel, 2016) highlights both repairing relationships and proactively building relationships as tenets of restorative practices. During both the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years, the school has been partnered with an outside organization who provides a restorative practices coach once a week. This coach is working to build the entire staff's knowledge and capacity to implement restorative practices approaches to discipline as well as to more closely coach a handful of teachers in the school.

An additional part of this initiative was to create a new position, a Student Climate Coordinator. This employee serves as a resource for teachers and provides some behavior interventions. When a student is referred to the office for misconduct, this employee is the first to address the student and resolve the situation before it reaches the administration. Part of the motivation to create this program was to lessen the amount of time that the administration spends on student misconduct and increase the amount of

time that they are able to spend in the classrooms. Thus, during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years, teachers received much more personalized, instructional coaching in the classroom and both myself and the assistant principal were able to spend more time working directly with teachers.

A focus of the time that we spent coaching teachers has been around how to assess if students' individual needs are being met. There has been a shift in the school to a data focus on making sound instructional decisions. Teachers are expected to monitor their students' instructional level and growth and provide individualized support where necessary. This includes the On-Track metric that provides the foundation for this proposed self-study. Systems and structures have been created so that students who are not keeping up academically can receive additional support. Resources have been allocated so that these students can get extra instruction and academic interventions after school.

All of these initiatives have been created to address specific needs of the students and staff that were observed during the 2014-2015 school year. This self-study was also designed to meet a specific observed need. I have observed strained relationships between students and their teachers. Although an arguably low number, students have expressed feeling dismissed and isolated within their classrooms and have articulated that they do not feel liked by their teacher, and in return do not like them. This has led me to be concerned about the manner in which some teachers talk to their students, particularly those who are disruptive, and thus led to the development of the proposed teacher mentor program in order to improve the adult support that the most at risk students receive.

Significance of Study

In 2013 the on-time (within four years of starting freshman year) graduation rate for the United States was 81%, a record high (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However the graduation success for Latino students is still bleak with a four-year graduation rate of 76% and a dropout rate of 11.7% in 2013, well above the average of dropout rate 6.8% for all students in the nation (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The dropout rate is measured by number of 16 to 24 year olds who do not attend school and do not hold a high school diploma or equivalent credential (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The 2013 five year graduation rate for Chicago Public Schools was 65.4%, a high for the district but still significantly below the national average (Chicago Public Schools, 2013). The five year graduation rate for Chicago public schools has been growing steadily with over a four percent increase from the previous year and over seven percentage points over the past two years. Southwest Elementary is a Chicago neighborhood school with grades preschool to eighth grade and represents the surrounding community demographically. Ninety three percent of the students are Hispanic with the remaining 7% a mix of White, Black and Asian. The vast majority (95.5%) of the students come from low income families (Chicago Public Schools, 2015). At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, 54% of the students at Southwest Elementary were considered On-Track to graduate high school according to the metrics developed by CPS and the CCSR. This means that almost half of the students in grades three to eight were not predicted to graduate high school on time. When combined with national data

on graduation and dropout rates, there is urgency to provide more support for Southwest Elementary students who are not being academically successful.

Researchers have sought to identify factors that can accurately predict on time high school graduation. Balfanz et al. (2007) conducted a longitudinal study and found that attendance under 80%, failure in math and/or English, out of school suspensions and misbehavior in sixth grade were all predictive of on time high school graduation (within five years of entering high school). Students with one or more predictive factors in sixth grade had only a 29% graduation rate. The more negative indicators a student demonstrated, the less likely they were to graduate. The Everyone Graduates Center at John Hopkins University and Civic Enterprises (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011) published a report summarizing a decade of research on early warning indicators and identified three indicators for high school graduation. Coined as the “ABC’s” they are attendance (above 90%), behavior (fewer than two misconducts), and course performance (ability to read at grade level by the end of third grade and passing grades in math and English from sixth through ninth grade, and a GPA above 2.0 with no more than one failed course in ninth grade). The Chicago Consortium on School Research found that “students need at least a 3.0 GPA in the middle grades to be college-bound [and] a 3.5 GPA gives them at least a 50% chance” of graduating college (Allensworth et al., 2014, p. 4).

All of the research indicates that schools can and should watch for signs of students being at risk of dropping out as early as possible. This self-study is an in depth look at my own leadership as I seek to intervene with one of the three main risk factors

that of academic performance – namely failing grades in math and/or reading. One of the possible root causes behind course failure may be student engagement. Brewster and Bowen (2004) define engagement in school as a “student’s affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses related to attachment, sense of belonging, or involvement in school” (p. 49) while Balfanz et al. (2007) define disengagement as the “process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion” (p. 224).

Finn and Zimmer (2012) synthesize four dimensions of student engagement. The first is academic engagement, referring to the completion of assignments, participating in academic activities, and being attentive in class; all aspects of the learning process. The second dimension, social engagement, focuses on student behavior. Does a student follow the codes of behavior, do they come to school on time, do they interact appropriately with others? Cognitive engagement refers to the extent to which a student thoughtfully engages in the learning, asking questions, persisting with difficult material, and seeking out information beyond that covered in class. Finally, affective engagement describes how a child feels about school and whether or not they feel a sense of belonging and value the role of school in their education. Aspects of all four dimensions have been shown to be significantly correlated with academic achievement, indicating that the higher the level of student engagement, the higher the level of academic success (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Several studies have examined the interaction between school engagement and high school graduation and found that attendance, participation in

extracurricular activities, misbehavior, mobility, student beliefs and values and self-perceptions were all predictors of graduation (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2009; Griffiths, Lilles, Furlong, & Sidhwa, 2012; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012).

Supportive adult relationships have shown to increase students' perceptions of school and reduce the number of misconducts for Latino students (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). There is a positive correlation between supportive adult relationships and school engagement and a negative correlation between supportive relationships and other risk factors (Woodley & Bowen, 2007). Programs that purposefully formed these relationships, such as mentorships and small advisory groups have had success in increasing engagement of students (Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009).

This study will contribute to the literature by highlighting the potential role of a school principal in building positive teacher-student relationships towards improved teacher-student academic achievement. Currently there are limited exemplars of school based teacher-student mentorship programs and these studies do not examine the role of the school leadership (Blum & Jones, 1993; Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009; Slicker & Palmer, 1993; White-Hood, 1993). Schools have sought to give students a supportive adult relationship by engaging community organizations in school based mentoring programs, however these programs were examined solely through the experience of the student and mentor, absent the voice of school personnel (Chan et al., 2013; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DeBlois, 2008; Frels et al., 2013).

Based on a reflective point of view of a school administrator, this self-study will offer concrete examples of what a school leader can do to foster supportive relationships

between teachers and students. Specifically, it will offer an in-depth look at how the five leadership practices put forth by Kouzes and Posner (2012) are connected to these positive relationships in schools and how principal actions viewed through these practices can improve academic outcomes for students. The successes and roadblocks encountered in this process by one principal at one school will surely offer a path for other administrators to adapt to their own practice and school's needs. Of course, the specific leadership decisions that lead to a successful implementation of a teacher-student mentor program at Southwest Elementary may not be the same ones needed at another school. Yet, the reflective nature of this self-study will provide a guide for others as they make their own, similar leadership decisions aimed at the same outcomes. Self-study as a methodology allows for both the examination of a practice in general and the "immediate improvement of [my own] practice" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 818), put another way, the self-study researcher "has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self, but for the other" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 17).

Methodology

As a methodology, self-study has its roots in teacher education and has been increasingly used by researcher/practitioners (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). In its simplest terms, self-study is "a look at self in action" (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 17). This requires a balance between self and the practice one is engaged in (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). As the principal of Southwest Elementary, it is my desire to find an effective intervention to address the number of students off track due to academic performance (grades in reading

and/or math) and learn more about myself as a leader through this process. Through a self-study methodology, I will be able to apply existing research and best practices to the unique needs of my students in a reflective manner that not only leads to better outcomes for Southwest Elementary, but makes me a stronger and more aware leader. As put by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), “the aim of self- study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and set” (p. 20) and will further my own leadership by requiring me to continuously reflect, critically examine my own practice and pursue the “so what” of my work.

The mentorship program at the heart of this study was initially implemented during the 2015-2016 school year and involved nine middle school teachers and 27 students in grades five eight at Southwest Elementary. Each mentor was asked to meet with their mentees for a minimum of fifteen minutes a week during which time they engaged in conversations with their mentees around their academic performance and any factors that may be inhibiting success. Additionally, mentors were responsible for maintaining communication with other teachers on the grade level team to help monitor student progress and needs. Teachers participated in team meetings where data, concerns, and successes were shared about the students they were mentoring. All of this is done within the normal school routine and professional expectations at Southwest Elementary. Documents will be collected from this work, including meeting minutes, professional development materials, analysis of publically student data, and reflective journal entries.

Conceptual Framework

This study aims to examine how I, as a school leader, may or may not foster supportive relationships between students and teachers. In order to examine leadership decision making in a structured manner, a leadership framework developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012) will be used as a conceptual lens. This framework is rooted in the idea that leadership is a relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) and that the quality of these relationships between the leader and follower (in this case the principal and teaching staff respectively) matters.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) have identified five practices that leaders need to employ in order to effectively lead an organization. They have named these practices as: Model the way; Inspire a shared vision; Challenge the process; Enable others to act; and, Encourage the heart. Each practice is tied to two specific behaviors that must be demonstrated in order to embody that leadership practice, coined the “Ten Commitments of Leadership.” Leadership decisions made in the course of this study will be analyzed using these five practices. Table 1 summarizes each of these practices and commitments.

Table 1

Kouzes and Posner Five Leadership Practices

Practice	Commitment
Model the way	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values. 2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
Inspire a shared vision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. 4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
Challenge the process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. 6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.
Enable others to act	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. 8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.
Encourage the heart	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. 10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Source: Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 29

Limitations and Biases

It is not necessarily expected that a self-study will carry high levels of external validity. The intervention and resulting data will be very specific to the population and needs of Southwest Elementary as well as the programmatic and structural context of the school. Additionally, my own reflections of the intervention are filtered through my personal experience and are meant to help me improve my own leadership. Because of this, LaBoskey (2004) suggests that a main tenet of self-study is that of “trustworthiness” of the researcher. It is not my goal to present findings that represent a “truth” but to

instead present evidence and findings – based on my own experiences – that provide a foundation that other researchers or practitioners may then build upon for their own work. To put it another way, my successes may not be successes for others, and my limitations may not be limitations for others. Instead, I hope to provide an example and a reflective starting point for others taking on similar work. LaBoskey relies on the 1990 work of Elliot Mishler to provide her own guidelines for what makes a self-study valid. This includes transparency in data and interpretations, representing my work and my research from an honest yet personal perspective.

Self-study does not allow for me to separate myself as a researcher from myself as a practitioner, the research is personal and I am deeply invested. What is lost in generalizable findings, is gained in voice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). This study will provide a picture of the extent to which a teacher-student mentorship program may create positive outcomes for the students at Southwest Elementary and provide recommendations for how school administrators can encourage and foster supportive relationships between teachers and students. However, there are several limitations and biases that need to be identified and acknowledged.

This intervention will not operate in isolation as an effort to improve student achievement. During the initial implementation of the mentor program, the school was in a state of transition being only my second year as principal. There are many programmatic and instructional changes that were taking place in conjunction with the implementation of a teacher-student mentorship program. Although student academic achievement may be affected by many changes in the school, the effects of this specific

intervention will be able to be examined by focusing both on those students receiving the intervention, those who do not, and on the professional learning and collaboration around this initiative.

As the administrator in charge of Southwest Elementary, in addition to the researcher and subject of this self-study, my own biases must be acknowledged. In an effort to mitigate these biases, I will keep a reflective journal in an effort to name any biases that may arise (Ortlipp, 2008). I am responsible for the success of all students at Southwest Elementary and I am evaluated based on how well student successes are achieved. This does add pressure for improved academic outcomes. The same can be said for the teachers who will be involved in the study. Not only are they also evaluated based on student outcomes, but as their supervisor, my interest in this research may have unintended consequences on them, perhaps causing a superficial commitment. A significant effort will be put on creating buy-in among staff around the need for this teacher-student mentoring program in order to avoid teachers simply “going through the motions.”

Key Terms

This self-study takes place within the context and environment of Southwest Elementary, a part of the Chicago Public Schools. There are several terms that are specific to this system and central to the context which I am reflecting upon.

5 Essentials: Five elements that have been shown to be essential for school improvement. Based on these five elements schools are given a rating indicating their

ability to achieve improved results (University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, 2015).

At-Risk Student: For the purposes of this study, an at-risk student is one who is displaying one or more Early Warning Indicators in the areas of attendance, grades, or behavior as defined by the Chicago Consortium on School Research and is at risk to not graduate high school within five years.

NWEA MAP: The term used to identify the test published by the Northwest Evaluation Association. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) is the assessment given to all CPS students in grades three to eight every year. Growth is measured from spring to spring, although it can be administered up to three times a year.

On Time Graduation: Graduation within five years of entering high school.

Off-Track: A metric provided by CPS every five weeks. Students are Off-Track when they do not meet the On-Track criteria (attendance less than 95% and a D or F in reading and/or math).

On-Track: A metric provided by CPS to measure student progress. In elementary schools this is determined by a students' attendance (at or above 95%) and academic performance (C or better in reading and math). This is measured every five weeks.

Supportive Environment: This is one of the five essential factors measured by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (2015). It includes peer support for academic work, academic personalization, safety, and student-teacher trust.

Student Climate Coordinator: Position at Southwest Elementary tasked with coordinating Restorative Practices, addressing student misbehavior, providing behavior interventions, and working with teachers to provide a positive student climate.

Chapter Structure

Chapter II contains an extensive review of literature on the following topics:

1. Early warning indicators for high school graduation
2. School engagement and the link to academic achievement
3. A brief review of studies on increasing school engagement through supportive adult relationships
4. A review of best practices in creating supportive adult relationships
5. A description of the conceptual frameworks used for data analysis

Chapter III provides an overview of the methodology of this action research study. The context of the school will be detailed, selection criteria for participants will be outlined, and the teacher professional development and protocols for the mentoring program will be described. In addition there will be explanation of the data collection procedures.

Chapter IV presents a narrative of my leadership experiences through this process in an attempt to answer my initial research questions. I present my personal analysis and reflections on documents used throughout the implementation of the teacher-mentor initiative and share anecdotal experiences. These along with reflective journals and critical friend interview transcripts will be coded for themes of the five leadership practices laid out by Kouzes and Posner (2012).

Chapter V discusses findings and implications. I explore how my findings fit within the current literature and how my personal experiences fit within the context of educational leadership and leadership development. Next steps for my practice and programs at Southwest Elementary are explored with recommendations for how my experience can be applied for all school leaders.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to the Conceptual Framework

Relationships are core to a child's development and matter not only in the home but in school as well (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Li & Julian, 2012; Riley, 2011; Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Wang & Eccles, 2013; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). It is this fact that forms the foundation of this self-study. Research on attachment theory suggests that from the time of birth, the kinds of relationships that children form with others – in particular the primary caregiver – will affect their personalities and future interpersonal relationships (Ainsworth, Bowlby, & Fowler, 1991; Holmes & Farnfield, 2014; Rholes & Simpson, 2004; Riley, 2011). The theory then extends to the school setting, placing relationships at the center of the teaching and learning process, suggesting that students and teachers must have relationships that are positive and supportive (Li & Julian, 2012; Osterman, 2000; Riley, 2011). Students who are supported in ways that match their needs by caring adults, they will experience more success. As Li and Julian (2012) state, “there is little doubt that attention and participation differ greatly between a child who feels connected to a teacher and thus eager to take part in learning activities versus a child who passively complies” (p. 158).

Just as the relationships between students and teachers clearly matter within the walls of a school, so does the relationships and interactions between a school leader and teachers. I embark on this self-study in an effort to examine how my role as the school leader can impact the relationships that teachers form with their students. This can best be examined through a lens that focuses on the relational aspects of leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2012) began to ask leaders in all settings, from public to private, “what did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader?” (p. 16) in the early 80’s as they sought to understand what made a leader exemplary. They note that while the context in which leaders lead changes across time and settings, what makes their leadership successful does not (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The result of their research was the Leadership Profile Inventory. The five leadership practices laid out by the Leadership Profile Inventory (Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart) all rely on a strong and trusting relationship between the leader and those they are leading. In a school setting, the principal must be focused on the relationships that they are forming with their staff, both in an effort to Model the Way in addition to building the trust needed to Inspire a Shared Vision and Challenge the Process and provide the support needed to Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart. In this sense, what I as the principal do, and how I do it (guided by these practices), will thus have an effect on how teachers form positive and supportive relationships with their students.

Early Warning Indicators (EWI)

The number of students who drop out of high school has been declining but is still a cause for concern (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In order to learn what causes students to drop out and how this can be prevented, a large body of research has been developed around Early Warning Indicators (EWI) (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Allensworth et al., 2014; Balfanz et al., 2007; Bruce et al., 2004; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Davis, Herzog, & Legters, 2013; Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Soland, 2013; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Freshman year has been identified as a crucial time for determining the path on which a student will take towards graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Students' attendance and grades during freshman year serve as a strong indicator of whether or not that student will graduate on time or at all. If a student does not finish freshman year with enough credits to be considered a sophomore or they receive more than one semester F in a core subject area their chances of graduating on time drops significantly (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

With so much at stake for these students, researchers have sought to find indicators of student success that they can identify much earlier. The Center for Social Organization of Schools at John Hopkins University and the Philadelphia Education Fund sought to identify EWI that could be identified in the sixth grade and predict on time high school graduation (Balafanz et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2013). They found that there were four significant indicators of a successful graduation that were highly predictive in grade

six (Balafanz et al., 2007): failure in reading, failure in math, attendance below 80%, and/or unsatisfactory behavior. Students who demonstrated one or more of these factors had a 29% graduation rate. Similarly the Chicago Consortium on School Research found that student grades and attendance were the best predictors of how they would perform in high school (Allensworth et al., 2014). Just as in Philadelphia, performance in reading and math were strong indicators of graduation with overall GPA in eighth grade being the strongest single predictor and attendance with grades together offering the best predictive model. These indicators were predictive well beyond test scores and non-cognitive factors. Attendance, behavior and grades have been identified again and again as being powerful predictors of student success in high school and beyond (Bruce et al., 2011).

Use of EWI data allows for educators to identify students who are at risk and intervene long before they actually make the decision to drop out of school (Davis et al., 2013). EWIs have been found to be as accurate as predictions based on teacher intuition with less bias (Soland, 2013). Simply examining these data on a regular basis allows for educators to engage in constructive problem solving around how to assist at risk students and get them back on track. However, these data do not tell the entire story. Schools must develop systems of support that allow educators to regularly examine data and match interventions to unique student needs (Bruce et al., 2011, Davis et al., 2013; Soland, 2013).

Student Engagement

In light of the overwhelming support that student academic performance matters for high school graduation, it is necessary to examine what factors lead to academic

success. One element essential to success in the classroom is student engagement. Engagement is widely accepted as being essential to learning (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Additionally, engagement can be affected by aspects within the locus of control of a teacher and school (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Teacher support, instructional practices and school environment have all been shown to impact student engagement (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Pianta, Hamre, & Wylie, 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2013; Wooley & Bowen, 2007). In turn, student engagement has a positive impact on student achievement (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Rumberger and Rotermund (2012) note that “the least engaged students were five times more likely to drop out as the most engaged students” (p. 513). The extent to which a student values school, comes to school and attends to classwork and homework, and the interest and persistence he/she exhibits towards the content are all related to his/her academic achievement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Student-Teacher Relationships

In a review of available studies on student-teacher relationships and academic achievement, Roorda et al. (2011) found that there was significant evidence to support an increase in student engagement and academic achievement in the presence of a positive student-teacher relationship. In the same manner, negative student-teacher relationships are associated with lower levels of student engagement and academic achievement. These findings all make sense when considered in relation to students’ need for belonging (Osterman, 2000). The Chicago Consortium on School Research (Allensworth

& Easton, 2005) suggest that monitoring of student class work and grades by teachers, improving relationships between students and teachers, and mentor programs will help to put students back on track to graduation. These recommendations are supported by ample research that relationships matter in a school setting (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Roorda et al., 2011; Wang & Eccles, 2013; Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

Li and Julian (2012) note that “there is little doubt that attention and participation differ greatly between a child who feels connected to a teacher and thus eager to take part in learning activities versus a child who passively complies” (p. 158). Those students who feel supported and respected by teachers and peers will then value school more and exhibit greater engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2013). A literature review by Osterman (2000) reveals that when this sense of belonging or relatedness is met for students a number of positive outcomes are revealed leading to increased academic motivation, engagement, and ultimately achievement.

In one study students’ responses to the School Success Profile were analyzed (Woolley & Bowen, 2007). From these student responses, data were gathered around students’ levels of risk and protective factors. White students reported lowest risk levels, while there was no significant difference between Hispanic and black students. White students also had the highest mean levels of school engagement and supportive adult relationships. In order to further analyze the results, students were broken into low, middle, and high risk groups based on the number of risk indicators they self-reported on the School Success Profile, contextual risk index. The School Success Profile is an assessment tool used in middle and high schools that includes questions around schools,

neighborhoods, friends, family, personal beliefs, school attitudes, and academic (Bowen, Rose, & Ware, 2006). Taken together these items provide a profile of a student and assets or risks he or she may face in a school environment. Those students in middle and high risk had the lowest levels of school engagement. Supportive adults had a significant positive impact on both school engagement and risk factors. All together the findings indicate that supportive relationships can mitigate other risk factors in students. A similar study (Brewster & Bowen, 2004), looked specifically at the relationship between teacher support and school engagement for Latino students using the same School Success Profile. They found that students who reported more teacher support reported less problem behaviors and higher perceptions of school meaningfulness.

In spite of all of the studies supporting a positive relationship between supportive student-teacher relationships and academic achievement, Kosir and Tement (2014) point out that the directionality of the relationship is not clear. There is some evidence that student academic achievement is associated with high levels of support between teachers and students. Their own study found that there was some dual-directionality between the effects of teacher support and academic achievement, with evidence that how the student perceives the teacher support and how well the teacher accepts the student were mediating factors. Within the context of this study, the teacher is able to choose the three students that they will be mentoring from the five students determined to be the most at-risk of their homeroom (based on Early Warning Indicators). It is therefore assumed that there is already a level of teacher acceptance.

School Based Mentor Programs

Most school based mentoring programs pair a student with an adult mentor, usually volunteers, within the school setting (Frels et al., 2013; Pryce, 2012; Schwartz, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2012). Prior research suggests that mentoring programs, whether they take place within or outside of school, can have a positive effect on student achievement (Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2012)

Mentoring programs have been shown to increase positive relationships between teachers and students, even though the mentor was not a school staff member but a community member (Chan et al., 2013). Similarly, Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2009) found that students paired with a teacher within their school for a mentor program reported higher levels of school connectedness and had fewer office referrals. DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) found that while gender and race did not have a significant effect on mentoring outcomes, when the mentor had a background in a “helping profession” such as teaching, the mentoring programs had greater positive outcomes than those programs whose mentors were not from a similar profession. Despite this, there have been few studies conducted where the school based mentor was a school employee or teacher. Rather, most school based mentor programs involve partnerships between the school and an outside organization (Chan et al., 2013; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMakin, 2011; Onwuebuozie, Bustamente, Garza, Nelson, & Michter, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2012; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012). Five different mentoring programs taking place in middle schools utilized teacher volunteers as mentors (Blum & Jones, 1993; Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009; Nunez, Rosario, Vallejo, &

Gonzalez-Pienda, 2013, Slicker & Palmer, 1993; White-Hood, 1993). Teachers were given varying levels of training and paired with a student mentee. In all five studies positive outcomes for students were found. Students were able to practice effective self-regulation towards their learning (Nunez et al., 2013), they decreased their frequency of office referrals (Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009), their relationships with teachers improved (White-Hood, 1993), and they increased their GPA (Blum & Jones, 1993; Slicker & Palmer, 1993). These outcomes suggest that a structured teacher-student mentor program could be effective in improving student academic achievement.

Pryce (2012) examined how mentors develop relationships with their mentees, namely how attuned they were to their mentee's interests and needs. She suggests that active listening, attention to verbal and non-verbal cues, and involving the mentee in the development of mentoring activities can lead to more productive and meaningful mentor/mentee relationship. Additionally she notes that the cultural match between mentor and mentee needs to be acknowledged and may require sensitivity training. Other researchers similarly put an emphasis on the development of the relationship between mentor and mentee, highlighting that mentors should be trained on relationship building methods (Chan et al., 2013). When examining the relationship between teacher actions and student engagement, alignment was found between how well a teacher identified and responded to the needs of his/her students and student engagement (Pianta et al., 2012).

Details matter for a school based mentor program. Schwartz et al. (2012) found that at risk (rated by teachers as needs improvement academically) students who were pulled from academic classes to participate in a meeting with a mentor did not experience

the same academic benefits that at risk students who meet with their mentors outside academic hours experienced. This is likely due to a loss of instructional time and should be considered in the design of a mentoring program.

Summary

Student-teacher relationships have a positive influence on student engagement and academic achievement (Osterman, 2000; Roorda et al., 2011). In a review of research, Osterman (2000) found evidence that student belongingness and presence of supportive relationships lead to positive outcomes in student interest and enjoyment of school, participation and engagement, and ultimately achievement. Roorda et al. (2011) reviewed 99 studies conducted with students from preschool to twelfth grade around school relationships and student engagement and achievement. Based on their findings they suggest that positive student-teacher relationships have an effect on student academic achievement through an effect on student engagement, providing a foundation for making student-teacher relationships a priority for school leaders. This is particularly important in light of research on Early Warning Indicators that suggest that grades, behavior and attendance in the middle grades have lasting effects for students on-track graduation from high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Allensworth et al., 2014; Balfanz et al., 2007; Bruce et al., 2004; Bryk et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2013; Dotter & Lowe, 2011; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Soland, 2013; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this self-study is to examine the ways in which a school leader can have a positive impact on student-teacher relationships, specifically through the implementation of a teacher-mentor program. The following provides an overview of the self-study methodology used, including an overview of the mentoring program implemented and a description of the work products that will be examined through the reflective journaling process.

In order to determine if supportive student-teacher relationships yield the same positive outcomes at Southwest Elementary while revealing how an administrator can help foster these relationships, a self-study will be conducted. This self-study will aim to address the following questions:

1. What have been my experiences in attempting to positively impact student academic achievement through the implementation of a teacher mentorship program?
 - a. What were my successes, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?
 - b. What were my limitations, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?

2. How as my leadership changed, if at all, as understood by the five leadership practices outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2012)?

Research Design and Methodology

Self-study is self-initiated, self-focused, and aimed at improvement (LaBoskey, 2004). It is an interactive process between the researcher and their practice (LaBoskey, 2004) and is based on an assumption that the “self” cannot be separated from the practice and research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I am a school principal at Southwest Elementary and currently addressing issues of student engagement and academic achievement in my daily work. As put by LaBoskey, (2004) self-study methodology is “designed to understand and improve our professional practice settings” (p. 845) and it is my intention to improve the academic engagement and achievement of student at my school. Specifically, there is a great need to better support students towards academic success. As measured by the On-Track data provided by Chicago Public Schools (CPS), almost half of the students in grades three to eight are not predicted to graduate high school on time (Allensworth et al., 2014). There is an urgent need to not only address this deficit and increase the odds for long term success of students, but to also improve their immediate educational experience. Evidence suggests that increasing student engagement (Balfanz et al., 2007; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012) through a teacher/student mentor program (Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009; Frels et al., 2013) can have a positive effect on student achievement. In order to study the impact that a principal can have on this initiative, a self-study will be conducted.

Setting

LaBoskey (2004) notes that self-study researchers must first have a “careful and thorough understanding of [their] settings, which in turn results in an enhanced understanding of that practice” (p. 845) thus leading to results and findings that contribute to the larger context. The school in which the study will take place is a neighborhood school within the Chicago Public School system, Southwest Elementary (this is a pseudonym). The school serves approximately 500 students in grades preschool to eighth grade. The majority of students come from a Hispanic heritage and low-income families. On-Track data are gathered from all students in grades three to eight, although this study is going to target those students in grades five to eight. Students and teachers in grades five to eight are divided into two teams. During the 2015-2016 school year, the fifth and sixth grade team had five core academic teachers (math, reading, writing, science, social studies) and one special education teacher. There were approximately 140 students on this team. In the same year, the seventh and eighth grade team had four core academic teachers (math, reading, writing, science) and one special education teacher. There were approximately 100 students on this team.

Procedures

The need for a teacher-based mentoring program at Southwest Elementary was discovered during the 2014-2015 school year. This was my first year as principal at Southwest Elementary and marked a period of data collection as I assessed the needs of students and staff. Both qualitative (comments from students and teachers in addition to observations) and quantitative data (CPS On-Track metrics) indicated a need to improve

the relationships between students and teachers. Thus, I developed a teacher mentor program that would allow me to enable teachers to better support their students through positive relationships. This initiative was initially implemented during the 2015-2016 school year. Each of nine general education teachers in grades fifth to eighth were assigned three student mentees and given the expectation that they find a minimum of 15 minutes weekly to meet with their mentee and facilitate a supportive conversation. Prior to the implementation of this initiative, teachers were given professional development on the importance of teacher-student relationships and specific ways in which they, as teacher, can serve as a mentor to students. Teachers then engaged in a mentee selection process where student On-Track data from the 2014-2015 school year was examined to determine which students were at risk for not graduating high school based on research by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Teachers were able to discuss each student and choose three that they felt that they would be successful with. Each teacher/mentor was given the expectation that they find 15 minutes within their week to meet one-on-one with each student they were mentoring. They were not given specific protocols or procedures for these meetings but were directed to check on the student's academic progress, see what might be going on with the student, what successes and challenges they were facing, and work on goal setting. The middle school at Southwest Elementary uses a teaming model, making it possible for each teacher to easily check with the student's other teachers to check on assignment completion and academic progress. During team meetings, teachers would be asked to share about their student mentee. Frequently these discussions were framed by the Success Analysis

Protocol (see Appendix A) and the Consultancy Protocol (see Appendix B) (National School Reform Faculty, 2014).

Throughout the 2015-2016 school year some changes were made to the mentoring program as it evolved. This was in reaction to staff and student needs, movement of staff members, and general successes and challenges. Throughout the process I kept a reflective journal detailing my decision making processes and reactions to team meetings and observations.

Based on my reflections and lessons learned during the 2015-2016 school year, I made several adjustments to the intervention for the 2016-2017 school year. Namely, I moved from focusing on the mindset of the teacher mentor, to looking at practices in the classroom. This includes a focus on restorative practices as well as academic intervention. Teachers were no longer documenting or reporting out on their weekly mentorship with an assigned students, but instead were focused on relationship building with the entire class through restorative practices and social-emotional instruction. Problem solving conversations (still using the Consultancy Protocol and Success Analysis Protocol) moved from how a student was behaving in class, to what obstacles a student might be experiencing academically.

Program Considerations for Mentoring

Zachary (2002) identifies four stages to the mentoring process. The **preparing** process involves the pairing of a mentor and mentee and finding the right fit. In most of the studies conducted on school based mentoring programs, students are selected based on need – most often a demonstration of risk factors (Blum & Jones, 1993; Slicker &

Palmer, 1993; White-Hood, 1993). However, little discussion is made on how mentors and mentees are paired. For the purpose of this study, teachers will be allowed to choose three out of five students identified to be at risk. Because previous studies conducted recruited volunteers as mentors, the act of allowing teachers a voice in who they are paired with will mimic some choice in becoming a mentor. Zachary (2002) emphasizes the importance of preparing one's self for being a mentor and exploring personal motivation. In the case of this study, the role of a mentor is embedded into the expectations and responsibilities of being a middle grades teacher. In alignment with Kouzes and Posner (2012) the preparing process for this mentoring initiative will involve finding a common purpose for the mentors. Although research justifying the need for teacher mentors and improved student-teacher relationships will be presented, the program participants also need to be given a cause to commit to and that they have a voice in the process (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The mentors also need to feel that their needs are being met by the leadership in order for them to be able to meet the needs of the students (Riley, 2011).

The next phase described by Zachary (2002) is that of **negotiating**. In this context "negotiating" is the act of setting goals and defining the terms of the relationship. Within the teacher-student mentor program being implemented as a part of this study, the expectations for meeting frequency, duration, and structure will already be set by the principal/researcher. However, teacher mentors will have freedom and flexibility in determining how the relationship will develop between themselves and their mentee. It is my desire to develop an authentic mentoring program that has the greatest chance of

success and longevity. Kouzes and Posner (2012) identify Strengthening Others as a commitment within the practice of Enabling Others to Act. A crucial part of Strengthening Others is to enable others to take responsibility for the direction of an initiative and involving them directly in decision-making (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). For this reason, the teacher mentors will be engaged in group decision making and consensus building around how to frame their conversations with their mentees and what activities they may engage in with their mentees. The hope is that this will also increase teacher mentor acceptance of their mentee if they do not feel forced to engage in an inflexible program, this acceptance being an important factor in supportive student-teacher relationships (Kosir & Tement, 2014).

Mentoring takes place during the **enabling** phase (Zachary, 2002). Daloz (1999) identifies three conditions that are important during this time. The first of these conditions is support, which involves listening, advocating, and relationship building. This is reflective of attachment theory which emphasizes care, trust, and meeting the needs of the student (Ainsworth, et al., 1991; Holmes & Farnfield, 2014; Riley, 2011). The second condition described by Daloz (1999) is that of challenge in which the mentor pushes the mentee. Within this self-study mentors are setting goals with their mentee. These goals may change throughout the duration of the mentor program and are intended to be monitored and discussed on a weekly basis between the teacher mentor and student mentee. The final condition is vision, involving how a mentor models and inspires his/her mentee (Daloz, 1999). In addition to serving as a secure base for their mentee

(Ainsworth et al., 1991; Holmes & Farnfield, 2014; Riley, 2011) mentors will communicate high expectations to their mentee with encouragement and guidance.

In a meta-analytic review of youth mentoring programs, researchers found that there were differences in effect sizes for different best practices (DuBois et al., 2002). Supervision of mentors, structured activities for mentors and mentees, and ongoing training were all found to be predictors of the effectiveness of mentor programs. All three of these best practices will therefore be included in the proposed study. Mentors will participate in ongoing, collaborative training and problem solving lead by the principal/researcher. Mentors will conduct structured conversations with their mentees by following suggested protocols. Other literature recommends that trust, shared activities, and role modeling is also crucial to the mentoring process (Liang, Spencer, Brogan, & Corral, 2008) and will also be built into the structure of the program.

Conceptual Framework: Leadership Profile Inventory

How a leader supports a teacher mentor program and how he/she foster strong supportive relationships between teachers and students is central to this proposed capstone project. All actions of the leader will be analyzed through the leadership framework developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012) and will follow the practices of Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. Attachment theory acknowledges the importance of relationships, between students and teachers and between teachers and their supervisors (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Riley, 2011). The Leadership Profile Inventory also puts relationships between the leader and those he/she is leading at the center of all leadership

work. As an educational leader, it is not enough to make the right decisions and put the right programs into place, but this needs to be done in a way that supports and empowers teachers, engages them meaningfully in the work, and results in lasting change. With this sentiment in mind, I have kept a reflective journal detailing my leadership decisions that can then be examined for what works using the lens of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) recommendations for leadership.

Data Collection and Analysis

At the heart of self-study is the act of reflection (Hamilton et al., 2008). Reflection can happen in a variety of manners including journaling, conversations, and analysis of documents (Hamilton et al., 2008). The foundation of the data that was collected for this self-study is then based on reflective journal prompts (see Appendix C) and reflective analysis of work products collected throughout the program implementation (see Appendix D). Documents that are created throughout the course of the mentor program will be used as evidence of leadership decisions I made and reflected upon as such. Additionally, I will engage in critical friend interviews. These semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a school leader who works outside of Southwest Elementary. The protocol for these interviews can be found in appendix E and will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. The individual work products and documents that will be analyzed are described in the following paragraphs.

Professional development materials and meeting minutes. Agendas and minutes have been collected from each professional development and team meeting focused on the teacher mentor program. Professional development was held in

September 2015 at the start of the school year. The content for this professional development was created and presented by myself to all teachers assigned to grades fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. This professional development covered the following topics: early warning indicators and student engagement, the importance of strong and supportive student-teacher relationships, building strong relationships with students, conversation and listening skills, and initial procedures for the teacher/student mentor program. As a regular part of professional development at Southwest Elementary, teachers submit an exit slip at the end of each session.

Team meetings facilitated by myself were dedicated to the teacher mentor program at the end of each five week cycle at which time the On-Track data will be reviewed so that teachers can reflect on the effectiveness of their mentoring programs and revise plans when necessary. Two protocols have been used consistently throughout these ongoing meetings. They are the Success Analysis Protocol (appendix B) and the Consultancy Protocol (see Appendix C) (National School Reform Faculty, 2014).

Journal entries. I kept a self-reflection journal as a practitioner (Ortlipp, 2008). As the school principal, I was involved with the development, implementation, and evaluation of the teacher mentor program. As such, I made several programmatic and leadership decisions throughout the process. An ongoing record of these decisions, the thoughts behind them, and other observations throughout the process are intended to provide valuable insight into how I actively fostered supportive relationships between teachers and students. In addition, teacher fidelity to implementation was noted within the journal based on observations and conversations with teacher mentors.

Publicly available student and school data. Every five weeks CPS provides a report that indicates which students are considered On-Track for that period. Students are considered On-Track if they maintain an attendance rate above 95% and achieve a grade of a C or better in reading or math. For the purposes of this self-study I focused mainly on those students who are failing reading or math (a grade of a D or an F) in the targeted grades fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth. This is data that is discussed in teacher grade level meetings on a regular basis and is available to school leaders through a platform called Dashboard within the CPS internal student information system.

As I ultimately hope that improved teacher-student relationships will lead to increased student academic achievement, I also examined and reflected upon student growth and achievement as measured by student performance on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. This assessment is given to students each winter and spring in both reading and math. All students in grades five to eight will complete this assessment. The exam, which is adaptive, will provide a picture of how the student is performing in relation to their grade level peers. The results are normed nationally, providing a percentile for each student. A student at the 50th percentile is considered to be at grade level. The percentile earned in the spring of 2016 in both reading and math for each mentee will be compared the percentile they earned in the fall of 2015. Combined with the On-Track and student grades, this metric will give an indication of how the mentored students are growing academically. Students who are improving in their grades may be demonstrating better

school engagement, if they are not also making gains in their NWEA MAP scores than their improved engagement may not be resulting in academic improvement.

Each spring all CPS students in grades six to eight are given a survey around the 5 Essentials (University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, 2015). One of the 5 Essentials measured by this survey is Supportive Environment. This component is measured by asking students questions around four areas: peer support for academic work, academic personalization, safety, and student-teacher trust. As a part of my reflection process, I reviewed the results from the 2015-2016 school year as compared to those from the 2014-2015 school year, specifically around the areas of academic personalization and student-teacher trust.

Critical friend interview. Several self-study researchers stress the importance of an interactive and collaborative process through the use of critical friends in an effort to minimize bias, challenge thinking, and provide feedback (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Hamilton et al., 2008; LaBoskey, 2004; Schunk & Russell, 2005). I will engage in two critical friend interviews as a part of this self-study. The first took place during a mid-point of the mentorship program implementation, towards the end of the 2015-2016 school year. The other took place at the end of the self-study period, half way through the 2016-2017 school year. Although I engaged in several reflective and decision-making conversations with other school leaders at Southwest Elementary as a natural part of my leadership process, I chose a critical friend outside of Southwest Elementary to engage in these interviews. This critical friend is also a school administrator with a

similar student population however has no personal knowledge of the teachers or students of whom I may discuss in the interviews.

Bias Prevention

LaBoskey's (2004) statement that "there is a strong relationship between what a teacher believes and how teaching occurs in the classroom" (p. 829) can almost certainly be applied to leadership as well. The fact that I am also the principal of the school within which this study is being conducted leaves significant concern for bias. In an effort to minimize the potential for bias all quantitative data will be gathered from publically available sources within CPS. All qualitative data that is produced will be a normal product of the work being done on the part of my role as a school administrator.

Throughout the process of keeping a reflective journal, I will make a purposeful effort to name my own opinions and biases (Ortlipp, 2008). This journal and all gathered data will be shared with my capstone project director, a critical friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993), and other school leaders at Southwest Elementary with the purpose of revealing any hidden biases not realized by myself. This reflective sharing will take place through formal critical friend interviews and informal conversations that take place as a part of shared school leadership.

In exploring self-study as a methodology, LaBoskey (2004), stresses the importance of critical reflection as "publically articulated" and "collaborative" (p. 825). In pursuit of this, member checks were conducted frequently (Merriam, 2009). I shared my thoughts and observations with the teachers during team meetings using active listening techniques, such as by using phrases like "what I think I am hearing you say

is...” and “am I correct in interpreting your words this way...”. This kept me accountable for not making assumptions about the teacher’s perceptions, intentions, and opinions as they pertain to their students and the teacher mentor program.

Validity and Limitations

Self-study carries natural concerns of validity when the findings presented at so personal and specific to one context. LaBoskey (2004) builds upon work of other self-study advocates in attempting to redefine how validity is met within a self-study. The aim is not validity, but instead trustworthiness attained through attention to detail and a thorough explanation of what was done and why (LaBoskey, 2004). Through documenting my practice through journals and analysis of work product, I hope to “make visible [my] data, [my] methods for transforming the data into findings, and the linkages between data, findings, and interpretations” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 853).

Summary

This self-study is aimed at better understanding how I as a principal can effectively foster and support positive teacher-student relationships through the lens of Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) five leadership practices. A teacher mentor program has been implemented at Southwest Elementary in an effort to improve student academic outcomes through supportive student-teacher relationships. As a result of this study I learned how teacher mentors can increase academic outcomes for mentored students and improve the overall student-teacher relationship while also outlining recommendations for school leaders on how to support positive relationships between students and teachers.

In the reflective nature of self-study, I examined these desired outcomes by looking at my own successes, limitations, and changes in my leadership.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Study Overview

The purpose of this self-study is to examine if and how I, as a school principal, am able to impact the relationships between teachers and students in order to increase student academic achievement. Specifically the establishment and implementation of a teacher-student mentor program was reflected upon and analyzed in order to study my own leadership within this context. By examining what worked and didn't work in both program implementation and school leadership I intended to improve myself as a school leader while simultaneously improving the relationships between teachers and students and thus impacting student achievement.

Throughout this self-study I learned a tremendous amount about myself as an educator and a school leader. I learned about how I gather and use information to make decisions, about what I value as an educator and a leader, and how I see myself in relation to my leadership. This was done by critically examining work documents, reflective journals, and interview transcripts that contained evidence of my decision-making process, reactions to events, challenges, and triumphs. The initial teacher-student mentor program was initiated in the fall of 2015 and went through several changes before the fall of 2016. In total I was able to analyze and reflect upon fourteen school months of

work product and journal prompts in addition to two interviews conducted with a critical friend.

All analysis was done through the lens of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five leadership practices. These practices were identified and summarized through observations, interviews, and pursuit of the question "what did you [the leader] do when you were at your personal best?" (p. 16) within organizations ranging from large to small, public to private. The result of their efforts was named the Leadership Profile Inventory, consisting of five leadership practices, each of which have two commitments. These are laid out in Table 1. As I seek to answer each of my research questions, I will use these five leadership practices as the lens through which I reflect upon my own leadership.

Research Questions

1. What have been my experiences in attempting to positively impact student academic achievement through the implementation of a teacher mentorship program?
 - a. What were my successes, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?
 - b. What were my limitations, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?
2. How as my leadership changed, if at all, as understood by the five leadership practices outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2012)?

Research Question One

What have been my experiences in attempting to positively impact student academic achievement through the implementation of a teacher mentorship program?

In order to investigate this question, I have looked holistically at my experiences since first noticing a need for improved teacher-student relationships in during the 2014-2015 school year when I started as the principal at Southwest Elementary identifying what was a success, and what was a limitation of my practice.

Sub-question 1a: What were my successes, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?

I adapted. Overall, the implementation of a teacher-student mentor program and pursuit of improved relationships between teachers and students required me to be reflective and reactive in my leadership. I found myself frequently adjusting my expectations for teacher mentors and changing the logistics that I had initially laid out for the program. Put another way, I experienced setbacks and tried new approaches. Kouzes and Posner (2012) would label this as experimenting and taking risks, as well as seizing the initiative; both important parts of the leadership practice Challenge the Process. They note that the “overall quality of work improves when people have a chance to fail” (p. 131) and that strong leaders “met challenge with change” (p. 109). Certainly any success that this intervention had was based on my ability to adjust the plan when presented with a challenge rather than rigidly adhere to initial plans and structures.

While most of the evidence found within my reflective journal for this point is self-critical, the overall picture is that of flexibility and ability to adapt. Frequently my

initial reaction to things that weren't working well was that of frustration. Looked at as a whole, however you can see how I was able to respond to the behavior out of teachers that I found frustrating. A journal entry from the launch of the mentor program reads as follows:

I started our PD this morning by asking teachers to recall an influential adult in their lives and the characteristics that made that adult a mentor. [Redacted] "passed" on sharing out and [redacted] stated she simply had no-one in her life that was a mentor. While this makes me sad, I am concerned about how they will approach this initiative (written journal, September 3, 2015).

I later reflect that:

[Redacted] has continued to make statements that make me doubt her ability to be a meaningful mentor for a student. She has referred to her role as a teacher being purely academic and she doesn't know how to do this "other stuff". I have asked [redacted] to also check in on her students, I hope that this is sufficient (written journal, October 22, 2015).

When a teacher consistently questioned the purpose of mentoring students I provided peer support to assist when the teacher in question felt inadequately prepared. Similarly, when multiple teachers expressed concerns about the time it would take to meet with students, or how they would frame the conversations with them I stopped the process until we could agree on procedures that we felt comfortable with. This included providing a parent letter that informed parents of their child's at risk indicators as outlined by their CPS off-track status and briefly outlined the kinds of support their teacher-mentor was hoping to provide to both the student and parents. Although my journal entry clearly indicates my frustration with how slow the program was getting started, I ultimately allowed the time to "get it right" rather than pushing through:

I just finished meeting with the teacher teams and we STILL haven't made much progress. We agreed today that we would send home a parent letter to the student

mentees. I feel like this need for parent involvement is a result of “passing the buck” off to the parent, but I can also see where the teacher might feel powerless looking at the roster of students we are working with. Nevertheless, buy in from the teacher is more important at this point so we will send the letter and explore getting the parents more involved later in the year (written journal, October 22, 2015).

These adjustments also included prompts for what a teacher may touch base with a student mentee about without the rigidity of weekly reporting of these conversations as initially intended. In a critical friend interview I share the following:

Making sure they filled out the protocol every week, because it was compliance based, became less of a priority for me than well we can just problem solve as a team and figure out some action steps in a collaborative setting so that we can make sure that all the kid we are trying to target were going to be supported (critical friend interview, December 16, 2016).

Spending my energy ensuring that teachers complied with my directive was not going to ensure that the students were having meaningful experiences with their teachers or that their teachers were equipped to meet their students’ needs. Instead of drawing a hard line on having the program roll out as planned, I instead focused on what would make it the most successful.

Teacher’s thinking changed. Early reflective journal entries reflect my perception of teacher’s deficit thinking and lack of self-efficacy:

I asked teachers for an update on their student mentees this week. I am having a hard time getting them to discuss more than the “obvious” issues a student is exhibiting. Every time I ask them about root causes I tend to get either a non-response or they circle back to blaming the student (written journal, January 12, 2016).

Similarly I shared with my critical friend in an interview:

They would say things that led me to believe they didn’t really know what was going on with the kid beyond what they saw in their classroom or I was hearing

the same thing every time we meet about it, there wasn't necessarily anything changing (critical friend interview, December 16, 2016).

I wondered about whether or not teachers truly believed that they could affect student's academic achievement through building relationships. These concerns were based off of early team meetings in which teachers were discussing students in a fairly negative way. They were lazy, unmotivated, didn't try or care. It took digging and prompting in order to begin to hear positive accounts of students and for teachers to begin to share what worked with a particular student in their classroom. As teachers discussed students both through the Success Analysis and Consultancy Protocols (NSRF, 2014) it seemed that both their willingness to collaborate as well as their self-efficacy increased. Towards the end of the 2015-2016 school year I noted more frequent instances where a teacher acknowledged that what *they* were doing needed to be changed in order to get a better response from the student:

The [redacted] team were really problem solving today! They shared strategies that worked to get [redacted] working in their classrooms and decided to do a home visit for [redacted]. This feels like things are actually moving towards making a difference for a student, not just waiting for them to show up and learn (written journal, March 22, 2016).

This particular example showed a team of teachers actively suggesting small actions that they could take to improve outcomes for students. Their ideas sometimes involved differentiating academics, but more often involved a change in interpersonal approaches. The teacher who maintained loose behavior expectations in their classroom needed to be more firm with a student to get them to produce work. Another teacher acknowledged needing to provide more supports around organization while another needed to ensure that a student knew it was okay to fail instead of simply not trying. As teacher's self-

efficacy seemed to increase they also began to discuss more than just student behavior or academic abilities. They spoke about students' home lives, self-esteem, losses they were grieving and peer relationships. Meeting minutes reflect conversations where a teacher shared that one mentee's grandfather recently passed while another student was struggling with the loss of her sister at the anniversary of her death. During another meeting teachers learned that a student revealed self-esteem issues as she was comparing herself with her sister who was achieving more than her and yet another was experiencing anxiety as his mother was waiting for an immigration hearing. (Paraphrased from meeting minutes March 16, 2016 and April 4, 2016). Although these insights did not always lead to action, they did represent a strong shift in how teachers were thinking of their mentees as individuals, not simply students within their class. I celebrate this as I reflect on how our work changed between the 2015-2016 and 2016-2107 school years:

I don't have to convince them to care about kids because they already do. Then we're able to dig a little bit deeper and the dynamics of the teams are more collaborative. Whereas in the past a teacher would talk about the kid in their room and they would have no idea about how that kid behaved or what they did in the other rooms because they weren't talking to each other.... This year they're checking in with each other, "how is this kid doing in your room? What do you think is working for him, what is different?" I don't need to facilitate that as much anymore. We've been able to move on past the mindset and are looking more at the actual supports the students need academically (critical friend interview, December 16, 2016).

So how were these mindset changes achieved? Over the course of almost a year and a half I was able to Enable Others to Act (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) by building a culture of trust, exhibiting both my trust in my teachers, and eliciting their trust in me. This reciprocal trust was built by listening to their concerns, and responding appropriately to meet their needs. When I was experiencing frustration and believed that

they were not fulfilling the role of a mentor as I had envisioned it, I did not berate or belittle. Instead I listened and posed questions that would allow for them to see the gaps in their practice and needs students may still have. I also encouraged collaboration and a joint effort towards success through a team structure. Teacher mentors were asked to discuss their student mentees as a part of grade level meetings. This meant that each student discussed was taught by all teachers on the team. Early mentoring discussions were more ego-centric in nature with each teacher focusing on how the student in question behaved or performed in their classroom. When the evidence presented did not match with how another teacher experienced that same student, the conversation simply moved on. Rather, it was a share out and not a discussion:

[Redacted] was the first to present the Consultancy Protocol today and focused on some difficulties he is having with [redacted]. I don't know how productive the conversation was, the other teachers have known this student longer but still seemed to acknowledge the problem without really offering actionable suggestions. Is this an issue with how I facilitated the process? Perhaps I needed to model the entire protocol? I need to find a way to get them to dig deeper without being the only voice during the discussion (written journal, January 23, 2016).

However, by the end of the fourteen school-month period, teachers were actively sharing ways in which they could support each other with the needs a particular student or group of students, without me leading them there:

[Redacted] came up again in today's team meeting. Although it was off topic and we spent more time discussing this student than our planned agenda, I was pleased. Teachers left my office having offered each other really actionable ideas. One teacher even summed up the conversation at the end, clarifying the plan - it was like I didn't even need to be there! (Written journal, December 8, 2016).

School culture changed. Over my almost three years as principal of Southwest Elementary there has been a noticeable shift in the culture of the school. While this shift

has been the result of many focused improvement efforts, the implemented teacher mentor program has almost certainly been a strong contributing factor. This can be seen primarily in two ways. The first is in the manner in which discipline is handled. Students are sent out of the classroom at a much lower rate. Students who were frequently sent out of the classroom for disciplinary reasons now spend more time in the classroom. While these statements are based on observational and anecdotal data, I reflected upon this after a new student was enrolled in the school:

A new student arrived today, with a reputation from her previous school as being a handful. I could see the look on the teacher's faces when I gave them a heads up about her arrival, and yet I feel really confident about our ability to meet her needs. We have seen several kids come to [Southwest Elementary] and we are told they are out of control. A year or two later and they are like a totally different kid! Able to handle conflict, more confident, respectful... we support and love kids, we don't give up on them (written journal, November 2, 2016).

The success I reflect upon in my journal is shown through the restorative language that is used to address misbehavior and the teachers who take the time to have conversations and ask questions to address the root cause of behavior, not just the behavior itself. Care is continuously shown to students as people and learners:

Just the other day I had a restorative conversation between a student and a teacher. The student had expressed that they didn't think the teacher liked them and was treating them poorly... It turned out that there was a lot of other things at play for this student and it had less to do with what the teacher was doing, but what the student was projecting... because the teacher did care and did want the child to succeed we made a lot of progress.... I don't think that would have happened two years ago (critical friend interview, December 16, 2016).

During the 2016-2017 school year the teacher mentor initiative shifted away from and assignment of individual students to a teacher with isolated conversations and towards a focus on building the teacher's capacity to address the needs of all students in

the classroom. The basis for this transition came from a variety of experiences. By the end of the 2015-2016 school year most teachers' mentoring conversations began to reflect a belief that they could affect their mentees' academic outcomes and moved beyond "student blaming". My June 2016 reflective journal entries include observations that students had been appearing in the office less due to behavior misconducts and that the overall On-Track rates for the middle school had improved:

We have our last flex day PD today and are focusing on celebrations. I am super excited to share with the middle school teams that only 12% of their students are ending the year off track for academics! We will still have 40% of our students off track altogether, which means we need to focus on attendance next, but we are definitely moving in the right direction (written journal, June 9, 2016).

Although I certainly did not consider the structured mentoring program to be resounding success, I saw an opportunity to capitalize on the mindset shifts of teachers to continue to push the school wide climate and culture. As I began to plan and provide trainings for teachers and other school staff on restorative practices, SEL curriculum, and talking circles I noticed those teachers who had formally mentored students the year before were vocal supporters and leaders in this work.

As the school culture shifted to focus on use of restorative practices for all students, I asked teachers to turn their attention from building relationships with individual students, to examining and addressing their academic needs. Teachers were able to identify the students for whom they wanted to provide an academic intervention. During this selection period, during September and October of 2016, I noted that teachers were identifying students that they – or another teacher on their team - may have worked with the previous year. I considered this a success; teachers were capitalizing on the

relationships that they had built and everything that they had learned about these individual students. The way teachers were talking about the students had changed. There was less evidence of “student blaming” and surface level observations. Teachers made thoughtful and student centered hypotheses about what might be holding a student back from academic success.

Taken together, the changes in school culture and the way in which my approach to addressing teacher-student relationships evolved represents the success that comes from *Challenging the Process* (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). While I noted earlier that experimentation and learning from experience was central to my ability to adapt and be flexible, this particular success was achieved by being proactive and looking for opportunities to capitalize on the lessons learned from the teacher mentor initiative.

Sub-question 1b: What were my limitations, if any, as I have encouraged teachers to form supportive relationships with students?

I had a limited perspective. When developing this initiative to address the needs of my students, I left out two very critical voices at different points along the way, that of the student and that of the teacher. Although I had made assumptions and based conclusions on data gathered from observations, anecdotal accounts, personal experiences, and student achievement - I had failed to check these conclusions with those stakeholders at the heart of the issue. When I had observed that the same students who were being consistently sent out of the classroom for minor behavior infractions were the same students who were off track for grades every five week period, I attributed this to a poor and unsupportive relationship between these students and their teachers. I had the

perspective of the student who was being sent out of the room; they reported that the teacher “just didn’t like [them]” and that they were being singled out and treated unfairly. I did not have the perspective of the teacher who later revealed feeling a lack of capacity to deal with these particular students and the behaviors they were displaying in the classroom. I discussed this during a critical friend interview towards the end of the self-study period:

Then I realized, I was seeing this with were a small minority. So I was having these conversations with the kids, and broadly applying that to the whole team. Once we got digging into the work and then saw teachers leave [the school], that shifted. The ones that were really having the most issue with the kids were gone. The other ones - even though there’s still some that don’t have a great relationship with their kids, or don’t make that a priority in their classroom - they’re getting on board a little bit more because now because we are focused on that (critical friend interview, December 16, 2016).

There had just been a transition in administration from my predecessor who had enforced several strict policies with one-size-fits-all consequences to myself who took a more restorative, relationship oriented approach to behavior management and discipline. While I was making false assumptions that some teachers just didn’t put much efforts into their relationships with students, the same teachers were feeling lost with how to proceed under much different expectations.

My goal was to make students feel more supported in the school and classroom, to take those demonstrating the most at-risk behavior and ensure that there was at least one adult with whom they felt cared for, who they trusted and who knew them. I did not ask students what wasn’t working, in what ways they didn’t feel supported. I did not ask them what their teachers could do to help them succeed, and I don’t think their teachers did either. Their teachers may have asked what was going on at home, why they weren’t

focused on doing their homework, what they needed to feel motivated - but I am not convinced that that necessarily lead to them feeling more supported and cared for.

While I had a vision for improving teacher-student relationships and thus increasing student academic achievement, I did not necessarily ensure that it was a common vision or purpose. Kouzes and Posner (2012) name listening to others as a specific behavior part of Inspire a Shared Vision. Although I had always considered shared decision making and building buy in an important part of my leadership, I had to confront the fact that I didn't necessarily do this during my critical friend interview:

I learned that I tend to take the loudest voices, or the teachers that need the most attention, and I end up using those to make almost blanket assumptions about everyone else. Not only did I say "well this is a problem for you so it must be a problem for everyone else" but I also stopped at identifying a problem and not really checking with the rest of the stakeholders to see if they saw the same problem - if that also conflicted with their values as educators (critical friend interview, December 16, 2016).

There was no way for me to know if my vision for the program was shared by either the teachers or students, because I did not ask. I set up and communicated to teachers a rationale for the program during our initial professional development based by sharing research and appealing to their caring natures as educators. However, as Kouzes and Posner (2012) state "the key task for leaders is inspiring a shared vision, not selling their own idiosyncratic view of the world" (p. 81). The specific knowledge of what the students could identify as barriers to their success or necessarily for supportive teacher-student relationship did not inform my vision. Nor did the experiences of teachers who worked with these same students each day. Had I taken the initiative to answer these

questions I am confident that I could have designed a much stronger program that would have led to earlier, better success.

Teachers needed more guidance. This limitation can be directly linked to my limited perspective. I did not know what each teacher needed to be successful as a mentor to their students and therefore unintentionally designed a one size fits all initiative. Ultimately, I think that teachers were left to figure out the specifics on their own. I felt that it was important to not dictate all details of the mentor program. Instead I set expectations for weekly check-ins, but did not require them to adhere to a script or protocol. I encouraged them to set specific academic goals but did not require that it be recorded and monitored weekly. Professional development and grade level team meetings included suggestions for questions to ask or topics to talk about and left room for teachers to discuss, share, and develop their own protocols. All of this was done in an effort for teachers to feel ownership over their role as a mentor and to minimize the opportunities to push back against expectations they felt were too onerous. Although done purposefully and thoughtfully, I think that the end result lead to inconsistency in how different teachers fulfilled their role as mentors and how successful they each were. Notes from meetings indicate teachers demonstrating uncertainty and some discomfort months into the initiative:

When I pressed the teachers today about the quality of conversations they are having with their student mentees I got the same deer in the headlights look. Maybe they aren't making the connection between the work we are doing on restorative practices and how they can bring this to their mentoring relationships? I want them to own the work but some are doing a great job really getting to know the students and others are stop at "she doesn't do her homework" (written journal, December 15, 2015).

Then again a couple months later I write:

[Redacted] shared some really great insights about [redacted] today. I was disappointed to see that some of the other teachers were surprised to learn that she lost her sister. It seems like something they might learn about a student fairly quickly, but [redacted] is obviously asking questions that the others aren't. Need to check with RP coach for some resources (written journal, March 16, 2016).

While I made the decision to not give excessive details and expectations in order to Strengthen Others by providing choices, communicate my trust in the teacher's skills, and give them a chance to take responsibility (Kouzes & Posner, 2012); I failed to take into account the need to first develop their competence and confidence. As Kouzes and Posner so simply state "without the knowledge, skills, information, and resources to do a job expertly... people feel overwhelmed and disabled" (p. 167). I believe that this is what I inadvertently did. Instead of accomplishing my goal of empowering my staff to make this program their own, to apply the skills they were comfortable with, and to limit resistance, I may have actually limited their self-confidence and their ability to be effective as mentors.

Talk didn't always move to action. Because I did not provide enough opportunities for the teacher mentors to learn how to be effective mentors, because I did not do a sufficient job of purposefully building their capacity, there were times where a teacher mentor could identify a need within a student, but did not move forward to act upon that need. It seemed, at times, as if we were caught in loop of continual talk - about the kids and what wasn't working - but didn't move on to actually addressing what we were learning. A past supervisor of mine called it "analysis paralysis." Teacher mentors would bring valuable insights about a student to a team meeting, and we would

discuss what that student might need – or the barriers presented to meeting that need – but upon reflection we often did not talk about what a teacher did to address a student’s need and how that was or was not successful. Journals reflecting upon this feeling of hitting a wall reveal me questioning if I had provided enough accountability to the initiative and to the teacher mentor:

Wishing I could go back to the beginning of the year and start over. I feel like we have lost valuable time on this and kids are still slipping through the cracks. Teachers might be learning more about their students but I don’t know that anything has actually changed in their classrooms (written journal, April 21, 2016).

I question whether or not the teacher mentors felt accountable to the students or accountable to their team. While examining the body of research around school based mentoring programs there was a significant lack of research done where a teacher also held the formal role of mentor within their daily professional responsibilities. While designing a program that fit this description I did carefully consider the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that may not may not be present. I worked on the assumption that adults apply for jobs to be a mentor, or volunteer in this capacity, because it is intrinsically rewarding to them. I then extended this assumption to my staff; that a teacher, who clearly cares for children, would also be motivated to help their students succeed for the intrinsic satisfaction. There is also the built in external motivation that the success of students on academic assessments directly impacts a teacher’s evaluation within Chicago Public Schools. In hindsight I do not believe that these assumptions are invalid, but I do believe that my team of teachers would have been more likely to leave the cycle of “analysis paralysis” if the motivators were more clear or present.

Research Question Two

How has my leadership changed, if at all, as understood by the five leadership practices outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2012)?

This research question has been the most eye opening to investigate. It has required me to take a critical and sometimes evaluative look at myself and my leadership. Holding a magnifying glass to my practice is not always comfortable but has allowed me to learn much about myself. It is also difficult to separate how my leadership has changed as a direct result of this specific program implementation (that of a teacher-student mentor initiative) and how much was a result of my collective growth as a second and third year principal.

I live, and lead through, my values. Throughout the course of the fourteen months of this study, I had to address several challenging situations. While it is in my nature to avoid confrontation, I found myself becoming more and more confident in my leadership decisions and how I carried those decisions out. This sometimes included confronting teacher mentors when they were falling short of expectations, or making tough adjustments to put the needs of students first. The entire purpose of implementing a teacher-student mentor program was to prioritize the relationship between the teacher and the student in order to improve their academic engagement. This means putting the needs of the student before that of the teacher or myself. This focus and commitment helped me to have the courage to lead difficult conversations or simply remove a teacher mentor from a situation where they may not be acting in the best interests of the students. In highlighting the importance for leaders to Model the Way, Kouzes and Posner (2012),

suggest that a leader must “choose the principles you will use to guide your decisions and actions” (p. 42). For me, the teacher-student mentor program at the heart of this self-study is based on the principle and belief that every student benefits from having an adult that knows and cares for them in the school. If this is my stated value, then all of my actions and decisions must follow this value. While reflecting with my critical friend, I spoke about modeling for teachers:

It’s one thing to have a theoretical conversation with the teachers in my office and it’s another thing to go and observe it happening, getting to know the kids better myself... I think I modeled in the sense of this is important, but then also modeling in the sense of I am going to do the work too (critical friend interview, December 16, 2016).

My focus on this initiative has helped me to find my voice and set the example (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). My team of teacher-mentors can see how my actions match my stated values. I started the initiative with a professional development for teacher mentors in which I laid out the research behind why relationships are so important in schools. I communicated how I valued and was committed to this idea. However, I think it took a while for my “walk” to catch up to my “talk”. Now, when I say that relationships are important, I can follow it with action when I put these relationships first, prioritize my time and energy towards building and maintaining these relationships in my school, and confront situations that do not uphold this value.

I build momentum through sustained efforts. The simple act of self-study has forced me to slow down and provide focus to my school improvement efforts. Both instructionally and culturally there are many areas in need of improvement at Southwest Elementary. However, I have begun to see the value in generating small wins and

encouraging risk taking within my school and staff. It is in my nature to be self-critical and unfortunately that seeps into my leadership and I am more likely to point out what is not going well than what is. In seeing how this could stall the work of my teacher mentors I have become more purposeful in finding small wins to celebrate:

Almost towards the end of the year and I need to stop and look at how we have progressed. I know that if I am getting bent down under the stress of this year then my staff is too. They – and I – need a morale boost. I know that despite not seeing huge gains that we are making a difference for lots of our students. I haven't seen [redacted] or [redacted] in the office in weeks! I wonder if the teachers have felt this in their classrooms (written journal, April 15, 2016)

Kouzes and Posner (2012) name this as an important part of Challenging the Process, specifically to experiment and take risks. When faced with a challenging student who seems to lack all motivation and is perhaps disruptive and disrespectful, is it understandable that I would observe teachers as lacking the self-efficacy or even motivation to address this student's needs. My challenge as a leader then has become to find the small victories and use those to build momentum. This has been important not only in my own reflective practice, but in how I lead my team members. I have to personally step back and find ways in which we are moving forward as a school or with an initiative such as the teacher-mentor program. Within the last fourteen months this meant that I would start to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that teachers were working less in isolation but sharing knowledge, tips, and strategies with one another. Instead of getting frustrated and too focused on the lack of consistency in how teacher-mentors were interacting with their mentees, I had to look for the small ways in which this was improving over time when teachers would bring new "ah ha" moments and breakthroughs they had with students. While I had to be purposeful about not getting

stuck in my own disappointments, I also had to ensure that I provided opportunities for the teacher teams to see all the steps they were making towards their own goals and progress with students. This included giving them “small doable actions” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 129) that they could easily accomplish but that would also lead to some noticeable outcome with their student mentees.

These small wins cannot simply be acknowledged, but also need to be celebrated. As an educator, I know how effective small, specific, and positive praise can be to students. The most difficult students need to hear something positive, even if it as minor as the way they walked into a room or that they arrived with a pencil. Consistent celebration of these small wins increases their likelihood of continuing and builds momentum for larger positive changes. It only makes sense that the same would apply to adult staff members. While I grew in my ability to use my values to confront situation that were not aligned with those values, I also began to find way to celebrate when those values were being displayed and strengthened. In this way, I was able to Encourage the Heart and recognize the contributions of teacher-mentors and celebrate victories (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This has been particularly important and powerful as this study was taking place during a time period were resources were being cut from CPS schools, there was tension with a looming strike, and the political atmosphere did not value teachers.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Study Highlights

This self-study was unique in its focus on a specific initiative and the leadership of a school principal. Self-study has roots in teacher preparation and has arose as a tool for pre-service teachers to use reflective inquiry (Hamilton et al., 2008; LaBoskey, 2004; Lyons, Halton, & Freidus, 2013). It is much less common to find in-service educators or leaders engage in formal self-study practices. However, we do not expect that teachers and school leaders stop their own professional growth once they enter their formal teaching and leading roles, and reflective inquiry can be a powerful tool in self-development. In this self-study, I have attempted to explore how my own leadership decisions have fostered the relationships between teachers and students in my school, specifically through the implementation of a teacher-student mentor initiative.

From the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year to the middle of the 2016-2017 school year, the initiative went through several changes and resulted in both successes and lessons learned. A critical and reflective look back upon the program showed success in changing the overall culture of the school to put more emphasis on relationships within and outside of the classroom and the use of restorative practices to address student misbehavior. It also showed increased teacher capacity and collaboration around addressing the individual needs of the students. At the same time, however, it did

not lead to a successful development of a teacher-student mentor program in the same format in which it was originally laid out.

The perspective of a school leader actively engaging in the work of school improvement in this manner can lead to valuable insights. While the findings presented may be unique to this specific setting and the individuals involved, it can still offer insight to those school leaders addressing similar needs within their schools. The voice present in this study represents a perspective that is not easily found in the current body of research.

Discussion of Findings

Kouzes and Posner (2012) have offered a framework of what behaviors effective leaders engage in across organizations, generations, and settings. It is with these specific Five Leadership Practices in mind that two main areas of focus emerged. The first is the specific structures and processes that were used throughout the course of the self-study and were, or were not, successful in achieving my intended goals. The second are the less tangible, more abstract changes that took place in the climate and the culture of the school.

Systems and Structures

At the end of 14 months, the teacher-student mentor program looks quite different. This could perhaps be a case of the specifics of an initiative getting in the way of the intended outcomes. When more focus was spent on the details of what teacher would mentor what students, when they would meet with those students, and what those meetings would consist of – the forest was ultimately lost to the trees. I do not mean to

suggest that mentoring programs do not have a place in schools. Indeed, a large body of research has shown that these mentoring programs can have positive outcomes (Chan et al., 2013; Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009; Frels et al., 2013; Pryce, J., 2012; Schwartz et al., 2012). However, I believe that a program for the sake of a program is not necessary if you can achieve the same conditions that a formal mentoring program provides within the teacher's normal professional practices. I also do not mean to suggest that a teacher can reach all students and meet the needs of all students through his/her everyday practice, as exceptional as it may be. I believe that there is still a great need in schools for a mechanism that identifies those students most at risk and provides them with an adult who is committed to their success. I believe that the right next step for Southwest Elementary in this aspect is to create a system where this happens outside of the classroom by other adults in the school. Instead of creating teacher-student mentorship matches as a result student homeroom assignment, I can be more purposeful about matching students to the right mentor, drawing from all capable and motivated staff within my school. This is similar to programs described by Blum and Jones (1993) and Slicker and Palmer (1993) where a school staff member is paired with an at-risk student, meets regularly with the student, and serves as a role model and advocate. A simple weekly check in with a staff member, similar to Check In – Check Out (Todd et al., 2008) may serve as a more effective and sustained intervention.

The initial design of the teacher-student mentor program at Southwest Elementary ultimately became inauthentic and focused on compliance rather than meaningful improvement of relationships and meeting students' needs. Zachary's (2002) four stages

of a mentoring starts with the preparing process. Teachers at Southwest Elementary were told they were going to serve as mentors, but were given a voice in the pairing of students to teacher-mentors. As recorded in early reflective journals, I quickly noticed that some teachers simply did not buy into their role as a mentor. Without this buy in they presented as merely “going through the motions” if not adversarial. Other successful mentor programs may have employed staff within the building as mentors, but it was done with each mentor willingly volunteering to serve in this role (Blum & Jones, 1993; Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009; Nunez et al, 2013; Slicker & Palmer, 1993; White-Hood, 1993). While I hope to employ a staff who value, care for, and are committed to the best outcomes for students, the reality is that sometimes not all teachers in a particular building do not embody these values. In order to have an overall successful program, I cannot force a teacher to fill this role if they either do not want to, or don’t have the skills to. Although the structural frame of Bolman and Deal’s (2010) leadership framework acknowledges that structures allow people to know their roles and exactly what is expected of them, they also note that not having the right structure in place can do more harm than good.

It is also worth exploring what the mentors themselves gained from the relationship between them and their student mentees. Frels et al. (2013) explored this in their case study examining why mentors were motivated to fill that role and how they approached their role. They found that beliefs, spirituality, and intrinsic motivation all played a role in why an adult chose to become and remain a mentor. This was not something that was replicated or considered as central to this specific program

implementation and perhaps represents a very large missed opportunity. While Kouzes and Posner (2012) include intrinsic and external motivations throughout their Five Leadership Practices. Bolman and Deal (2010), who examine leadership through four frames (political, human resource, structural, and symbolic) address the types of motivations that Frels et al. examine through the human resource frame. Within this frame they argue that leaders must find ways to incorporate the beliefs, spirituality, and intrinsic motivations of their staff and that in doing so they will empower their staff and create commitment.

While I also sought to make the initiative manageable for teachers by giving them choice and voice in the development of the program (when they would engage with students, how they would frame their conversations with students, what would be reported out), this led to a large spectrum within the quality of the mentoring conversations and relationships. Some teachers focused on identifying deficit academic skills, others lamented lack of student motivation, and still others investigated the social-emotional needs of a student. While these all had different outcomes and different levels of effectiveness, it was difficult to see what was working, and what wasn't. Thus, the negotiating state of mentoring (Zachary, 2002) resulted in a range of goals and relationships between teacher-mentors and students.

There were structures and parts of the initial design that were successful and maintained through changes in scope and focus. The most substantial of these is the processes put in place to foster collaboration among teachers. I can attribute this to a few factors. The Success Analysis and Consultancy protocols (NSRF, 2014) used were able

to get teachers focused on a specific problem of practice and created some group accountability as they listened to one another, asked questions, and provided suggestions and feedback. I was also very purposeful in pushing the teachers to consider both what was within their locus of control to address and use an asset based approach to discussing students. This asset based approach required teachers to look for students' strengths and areas of success. While initial conversations at team meetings focused negatively or did not lead to meaningful collaboration, by the end of the self-study period I was reflecting more and more upon how teachers spoke more positively about students, identified meaningful information they had learned about students and shared next steps with one another. During the 2016-2017 school year I asked them to continue these conversations and use them to now focus on academic deficits and interventions for students. The focus on the academic sphere continued to improve the conversations as the teachers felt more empowered to both identify and address what a particular student may be struggling with. Cooper and Miness (2014) explored teacher and student relationships in depth and noted that teachers must have an academic understanding and personal understanding of students. The results of their study found that when high school students perceived their teachers as understanding them as individuals, they also felt cared for by that teacher. This adds importance and priority to how I, as a school leader, encourage teachers to know their students both in an academic sense and a personal sense and must be a practice that is continued at Southwest Elementary.

Culture and Climate

The teacher-mentor program at Southwest Elementary was intended to both provide an intervention in the academic outcomes for specific students, but to also provide a foundation for more positive relationships between teacher and all students. Although some of the more specific aspects of a mentorship program may not have been successful or sustainable at Southwest Elementary, there was an overall shift in the climate and culture that was more supportive of students. Kouzes and Posner (2012) continuously refer to vision and values in their Five Practices for Exemplary Leaders. This was something that represented a shift in my practice as I saw the power in, and need for, practicing what I preached and modeling the values I espoused. I also had to have relentless focus on those areas that I deemed important for my school and where I could affect change. This focus is often discussed in literature as being essential to effective leadership (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2010). Now at Southwest Elementary many teachers start their day with talking or sharing circles at least once a week. This relationship-centered practice allows students a chance to voice what might be on their minds and gives teachers a chance to learn about their students on a deeper level. Similarly, I frequently start staff meetings the same way. Teachers are expected to teach a Social-Emotional curriculum each week and I not only include a matching social-emotional message on the morning announcements for students, but my weekly email to staff reminds them what they are teaching that week to ensure school-wide focus. Parent communication includes ways that they can support these practices at home. These small acts of Modeling the Way (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) set the tone for a school climate that

is focused on relationships and the social-emotional growth of our students. While Kouzes and Posner (2012) name these actions as important for high quality leadership, Fullan (2010) addresses them as being essential to the change process. More specifically he notes that leaders must have a “constant and consistent clear message” (p. 36) and focus on “a small number of core priorities” (p. 55). By modeling this consistent message and focus through my daily work and communications with my staff and students, I am creating a school environment focused on these specific improved outcomes for students.

Within the dynamic context of a school environment, it is difficult to determine how much of the school climate is a result of the teacher-mentor program, but the act of self-study has allowed me to focus in on those aspects of leadership that I have become more purposeful about in the past year. During the last few months of the self-study period we had a few new students arrive that happened to come with a “reputation” from their previous schools. These students were welcomed into the school in a much different way than I think they would have been in years past. They were introduced to administration, the counselor, and the School Climate Coordinator. They, and their parents, were briefly interviewed about their strengths, challenges, interests, and goals. This information was passed on to the teachers who were then armed with a personal knowledge of these students from day one. While these students have not been model pupils since they arrived at Southwest Elementary, they also have not exhibited the same severity of behaviors their records indicate they displayed in the past. This is most

certainly a small win to celebrate and evidence that the culture at Southwest Elementary is responsive to students' needs.

Implications for Leaders

The idea of creating buy-in and practicing shared decision making is found in such a wealth of leadership research that it seems almost too obvious to also draw that conclusion from this self-study. However, the experience of implementing a teacher-student mentor program, then rethinking and adjusting that program has certainly underscored this importance of this practice for me. Several times I noted in my reflective journal that I needed to modify how the program was being implemented, or slow down and take a step back because there was a risk of teachers simply being compliant and not engaged in meaningful work. Each time I made this decision I was working towards a shared vision for my teachers and ensure that absent a “program” that teachers would put relationships first in their classrooms and purposefully get to know and support even the most challenging students. I had always worked to create buy-in by being transparent with decision-making and eliciting feedback from stakeholders. However during this process I had to do more. I quickly realized that I needed to change the mindsets of the teachers and I could only do that if I was willing to let go of the aspects of the program that they pushed against, such as weekly documentation of mentoring conversations. If it wasn't going to be do-able, it wasn't going to be done with fidelity. This process is important to leading change in an organization. While I can easily be caught in the trap of viewing these adjustments and modifications as failure of

my original plan, it actually reflects an approach to continuous improvement (Spiro, 2011).

Once I began to engage in this give and take, I began to see the teachers shift in their practice and in their attitudes. This led to the point where we were able to see success and build upon those successes. The importance of small wins and early success can be found in a wealth of leadership and change theories. In her specific step-by-step plan for leading change, Spiro (2011) identifies securing early wins as step five of eight in the change process noting that they must be observable and symbolic. Collins (2001) calls this the flywheel, those successes and results that start small but begin to build momentum, building commitment from others. Teachers shared a positive moment with a student, something that worked for them. That generated a renewed sense of enthusiasm among the teachers as they continued to problem-solve during team meetings. As I took the time to purposefully step back and look for progress I could see where we had made a difference for some really challenging students, where those students were almost transformed after several months or a year of their teachers and other school staff being persistent, not giving up on them. As someone who is much more likely to identify what isn't going right than what is, I need to constantly remind myself the power of small wins and celebrating and recognizing successes. Without doing this I run the risk of losing momentum, losing commitment (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), and stopping the flywheel (Collins, 2001).

Given the ability to start all over again, there are several changes I would make to the initial design and implementation of the teacher-student mentor program. The most

significant of these would be to frontload training for my staff and build their capacity as mentors. While I frequently lamented the attitude of teachers who did not see this as a part of their role as a teacher, I did not stop to consider that this might be due to the fact that it was not a part of their formal education preparation. When I was a pre-service teacher there was hardly a course on classroom management, let alone one that taught me to connect with difficult students. The productive and successful changes that I did see take place at Southwest Elementary over the past year and a half were results of the continued professional development that we provided on Restorative Practices including talking circles and restorative conversations. Although these took place outside the planned initiative and focus of the self-study, I can draw clear connections between this training that the teachers were engaged in and the growth in their relationships in the classroom. This solidified for me the need to build capacity and actively provide my staff with the tools and resources that they needed to be effective mentors to their students. Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggest developing competence and confidence in order to Enable Others to Act. At first, I successfully did neither. I may have been challenging my staff, but I was not providing them the skills to achieve that challenge. In order to build this capacity I needed to provide more direct training, frequent modeling, and timely feedback. Fullan (2010) offers an interesting justification for capacity building, a cycle of improvement and commitment to an outcome such as teacher-student relationships that comes from good practice. He writes that “good practice produces commitment, committed people pursue even better practices” (p. 47). This type of purposeful and ongoing development that I was missing would have contributed to

teachers being even more committed to the pursuit of strong relationships and perhaps to the program itself.

Recommendations for Research

Self-study is not a common methodology outside the world of teacher preparation. However, it is a transformative process for the researcher and mirrors a reflective approach to leadership. Although self-study is inherently limiting in generalizability, this study can still offer several next steps for research both within leadership development and school mentor programs.

My review of literature revealed a lack of mentor program where the role of “mentor” was embedded in role of “teacher”. I attempted to examine how I might engage my teachers as mentors by assigning them to build relationships with students in their homeroom demonstrating a risk not graduating high school on time. Although I ultimately deemed this structure to be unsuccessful in my building, it leaves many interesting questions for further exploration. The first opportunity centers around mentor and mentee assignment. Frels et al. (2013) examined mentor’s own purposes for - and approaches towards - mentoring but did not look at the match between the adult and child. Other studies have alluded to students being matched to volunteer mentors within a school staff but do not examine how this match was made (Blum & Jones, 1993; Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009; Nunez et al., 2013, Slicker & Palmer, 1993). In one study teacher mentors were able to self-select their student mentees, similar to the process used at Southwest Elementary (White-Hood, 1993). I hypothesize that more meaningful

matching processes could lead to more meaningful outcomes, with mentors better equipped to meet the unique needs of their mentees.

The second opportunity for further exploration is around mentor preparation and development. This is an area that I have self-identified as being a deficit for my own program design implementation. I reflect that I, myself, did not receive much formal pre-service education that would prepare me to be relationship-focused and response to individual students in the classroom. I can presume that I left my teacher preparation program with an understanding that it was important to know, understand, and care for my students; but not necessarily knowing how to make this happen with a student who appeared unmotivated, disengaged, and defiant. Again, a review of the studies focused on mentoring programs - through community organizations or within school staff - does not address how mentors are prepared and developed in their role as a mentor.

My leadership journey revealed through this self-study is personal and unique to me. However, it does offer some insights on how leaders can be effective in responding to similar student and staff needs within a school setting. This reflective and responsive leadership that I engaged in as a result of the self-study almost certainly had an impact on how I made my leadership decisions. In my role as a school principal I don't often have the luxury of time to reflect upon and debrief about decisions, experiences, successes and failures to the same extent that I did through this self-study. This poses several questions around how my leadership would be different should I be able to engage in this reflective inquiry more frequently and how this act of self-study in and of itself leads to successful leadership. Lyons et al. (2013) promote reflective inquiry as a

transformative learning process. Certainly this type of learning should not cease once one the formal act of self-study ends.

Limitations

Self-study poses several limitations and requires the researcher to build trust with the reader (LaBoskey, 2004) through an honest assessment of what worked and didn't work in my specific setting, acknowledging that this may not extend to other schools or leaders. What is presented here reflects this. In order to offer to most beneficial insight for other practitioners and researchers I offer the following limitations to this study.

Throughout the duration of this self-study period, Chicago Public Schools went through several drastic budget cuts, engaged in drawn-out contract negotiations with the teacher's union, and undertook political battles in the fight for fair school funding. It is impossible for these realities not to affect the everyday work happening inside a school building and this is certainly true for this program at Southwest Elementary. Although not made a focus of my reflections or findings, it would be naive to assume that these obstacles did not affect teacher morale or my own ability to dedicate time and energy to this initiative.

Additionally, I conducted this self-study of my leadership while holding the role of supervisor and evaluator for all staff that I was engaging in this work. For ethical reasons, this limited my ability to elicit either their perspective, or the perspective of the students as sources of information or data for my reflections. Although I engaged in member-checks during team meetings in an effort to check my assumptions, I was not able to directly engage my staff members in interviews or observations that would be

specific to this study. This offered a challenge to truly look at myself and how my actions were being reflected in the actions of those around me.

Final Thoughts

Almost two years after identifying a need for improved relationships between students and teachers at Southwest Elementary I am left with successes, disappointments, and most definitely lessons learned. While there were times I could have viewed the mentoring program a failure, ultimately the transformation reflected smart leadership decisions made in the best interest of my students. What has been important is finding a way to meet the needs of the students of Southwest Elementary in a way that is sustainable, meaningful, and successful. I can say with confidence that my teachers and staff are more responsive to the needs of all students within their classrooms and that those students who need extra support and care are receiving that within the school environment. I can also say with confidence that I am a stronger leader and more prepared to continue to foster positive relationships within my building - not necessarily through a one size fits all program, but through ensuring that our climate and culture is responsive and restorative, that teachers receive the ongoing learning they need to uphold that culture, and practicing flexibility over rigidity.

APPENDIX A
SUCCESS ANALYSIS PROTOCOL FOR INDIVIDUALS



Success Analysis Protocol For Individuals

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.

Roles

A timekeeper/facilitator

The facilitator's role is to help the group to keep focused on how this practice is different from your typical. The analysis of what makes this practice so successful is the purpose of the protocol.

"Best Practice" is defined as a process that proved to be highly effective in achieving the intended outcome.

1. Reflect on and write a short description of the one "Best Practice" of your work within the last year. Note what it is about the practice that made it so successful. Be sure to answer the question, "What made this work different from other experiences?" (10 minutes)
2. In mixed groups of 3, the first person shares their "Best Practice" and why it was so successful. (10 minutes)
3. The rest of the group asks clarifying questions about the details of the "best practice". (5 minutes)
4. The group does an analysis of what they heard about the presenter's success and offers additional insights about how this practice is different than other practices. Probing questions are appropriate and the presenter's participation in the conversation is encouraged. (10-15 minutes)
5. The presenter responds to the group's analysis of what made this experience so successful. (3 minutes)
6. Take a moment to celebrate the success of the presenter.
7. Each of the other members of the group takes turns sharing their "Best Practice" and what made it so successful, followed by clarifying questions and the group discussion analyzing how this practice differs from other practices. (Each round takes about 30 minutes for groups of 3.)
8. Debrief the protocol as a whole group. Possible questions: What worked well? How might we apply what we learned to other work? How might students use this process to reflect on their work? What adaptations to this protocol might improve the process? (5 minutes)

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group[®] and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at www.nsrharmony.org.

APPENDIX B
CONSULTANCY PROTOCOL



Consultancy Protocol

The Consultancy Protocol was developed by Gene Thompson-Grove, Paula Evans and Faith Dunne as part of the Coalition of Essential Schools' National Re:Learning Faculty Program, and further adapted and revised as part of work of NSRF.

A Consultancy is a structured process for helping an individual or a team think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma.

Time

Approximately 50 minutes

Roles

Presenter (whose work is being discussed by the group)

Facilitator (who sometimes participates, depending on the size of the group)

1. The presenter gives an overview of the dilemma with which s/he is struggling, and frames a question for the Consultancy group to consider. The framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenter's reflection on the dilemma being discussed, are key features of this protocol. If the presenter has brought student work, educator work, or other "artifacts," there is a pause here to silently examine the work/ documents. The focus of the group's conversation is on the dilemma. (5-10 minutes)
2. The Consultancy group asks clarifying questions of the presenter — that is, questions that have brief, factual answers. (5 minutes)
3. The group asks probing questions of the presenter. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand his/her thinking about the dilemma presented to the Consultancy group. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question s/he framed or to do some analysis of the dilemma presented. The presenter may respond to the group's questions, but there is no discussion by the Consultancy group of the presenter's responses. At the end of the ten minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to re-state his/her question for the group. (10 minutes)
4. The group talks with each other about the dilemma presented. (15 minutes)
Possible questions to frame the discussion:
What did we hear?
What didn't we hear that they think might be relevant?
What assumptions seem to be operating?
What questions does the dilemma raise for us?
What do we think about the dilemma?
What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma? What have we done in similar situations?

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Members of the group sometimes suggest actions the presenter might consider taking. Most often, however, they work to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively. The presenter doesn't speak during this discussion, but instead listens and takes notes.

5. The presenter reflects on what s/he heard and on what s/he is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated for him or her during any part of the Consultancy. (5 minutes)
6. The facilitator leads a brief conversation about the group's observation of the Consultancy process. (5 minutes)

APPENDIX C

SELF-STUDY DATA PROTOCOLS JOURNAL PROMPTS

Self-Study Data Protocols Journal Prompts

The following is a list of possible journal prompts I will complete as I reflect on how I am supporting development of teacher-student relationships that positively impact student achievement.

1. Why do I personally believe that relationships with students matter in schools?
2. What was my perception of the quality of the relationships between teachers before implementing the mentor program?
3. What were my initial reactions to how the intervention was being implemented?
4. How have I seen my own relationships evolve through the implementation of a teacher-student mentor program?
5. What changes have I observed among my staff throughout the intervention?
6. What changes have I observed in my students throughout the intervention?
7. When were some times that I felt success in helping teachers form positive, supportive relationships?
8. When were some times that I felt challenged in helping teachers form positive, supportive relationships?
9. How has my leadership changed as a result of this work?
10. What am I learning about the kinds of support and professional development staff need to form positive relationships with students?
11. What am I learning about the needs of students in regards to supportive adult relationships?
12. How as the intervention changed over time?
13. How will I use what I have learned moving forward?
14. How will I continue to support teacher-student relationships throughout my work?

APPENDIX D
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Document Analysis Protocol

The following is protocol that will be used to analyze documents collected throughout the implementation of a teacher-student mentor program and in reflection upon how I am supporting development of teacher-student relationships that positively impact student achievement.

Document being analyzed (circle one):

Meeting agendas and minutes
 Professional development materials
 Journal entries/Interview transcripts
 Publically available student data

Specific description of the document being analyzed:

1. How does the document reflect the importance of teacher-student relationships?

Evidence:

2. How does the document include data on student achievement?

Evidence:

3. What does the document inform me about how teachers are forming supportive relationships with students?

Evidence:

4. How does the document inform me the needs of students? Of teachers?

Evidence:

5. How does the document highlight changes in teacher-student relationships?

Evidence:

6. How does the document highlight successes or challenges that teachers are experiencing?

Evidence:

APPENDIX E
SELF-STUDY DATA PROTOCOLS
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Self-Study Data Protocols
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A critical friend and fellow school administrator will ask the following questions including follow up questions where appropriate. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

1. Tell me about the intervention so far.
2. What successes have you have experienced? Positive outcomes?
3. What challenges or roadblocks have you experienced?
4. What would you have done differently up to this point?
5. What changes have you seen in your staff? Students?
6. What have you learned about yourself as a leader?
7. How have you seen your leadership change?

APPENDIX F
TRANSCRIPT OF CRITICAL FRIEND INTERVIEW
DECEMBER 16, 2016

Critical Friend Interview
December 16, 2016
Transcribed by Rev.com

Critical Friend: Tell me about the intervention so far.

Researcher: Well, it has gone through some different stages. Last fall, when I introduced the intervention, it was structured so that teachers ... Well, it was very structured for teachers. Teachers were supposed to formally, find 15 minutes in their week that they could have one-on-one discussions with each of the three students that they were mentoring with the objective of checking in with them, figuring out, holding them accountable to how they were performing in their classes like, "Are you doing your homework?" Like, "Do we need to work on study skills?"

Then also finding out if there was anything that was happening in the student's life non-academic that was contributing, right, so anything at home or social issues or whatever, and then the homeroom teachers, because our middle school's departmentalized, would also be checking in with the other teachers. Say [redacted] was one of my students that I was mentoring. Then I might check with his math teacher and see how is he doing in math? That might be his problem area, but even though I'm his writing teacher, I'm still checking with the math teacher and keeping, trying to hold him accountable for doing his homework.

Like, "Hey [redacted], you know your math teacher tells me that you didn't turn in homework at all last week. What's going on?" Then they would be setting goals with the students. There was a form that we were using to help the teachers track there the conversations that they were having with kids. I did give professional development in the beginning. Then we would spend several team meetings a couple times a quarter talking about what was going on with the kids. We used the on-track data to see were there improvements? Were there concerns? Were there things, issues that was happening with kids that needed outside resources? Where were the successes and challenges?

We would use the national school reform protocols, the consultancy protocol and the success analysis. What I found during that time was that there were some teachers to whom this was a very natural process. There were some teachers for whom they really had a hard time

accepting that this was something that was an expectation for them as a teacher that they should care about their relationships with kids or what was going on with kids.

That, it changed the dynamic of those meetings and those conversations because, with some teachers it was more about convincing them that this was something that was important. Unfortunately, the consistency of all of that time I think fell off for a lot of teachers. I would notice that when we were doing our check-ins, the things that teachers would say or the way that they were saying them revealed to me that they weren't really doing the intervention with fidelity.

Because they would either say things that led me to believe you don't really know what's going on with the kid beyond what you see in your classroom or I was hearing the same thing every time we met about it, there wasn't necessarily anything that was changing. We did see students that got back on track. Their grades went up, but it's a little unclear how the mentorship internship really affected that. This year, it looks different. It's really not as formal at all. We still use the on-track data to look at kids' progress, but we're tackling it more from an academic standpoint than a really like a ...

Critical Friend: Social-emotional?

Researcher: ... social-emotional standpoint. Teachers still have kids assigned to them that they're providing academic interventions for. As part of that, in those conversations, we're talking about that social-emotional stuff, but it's holding the teachers more accountable to do that time. Because in their progress monitoring academically and in the problem-solving process, they're being forced to really figure out all of this stuff that going on with the kids and differentiating between an unmotivated and a student that needs academic assistance. Then the ones that fall more in that unmotivated student camp, we're able to use different strategies with.

It looks a lot different this year. We're working towards the same outcomes, but it looks a lot different. One of the other things that I noticed in those team meetings and realized was that the teachers that were having the issues with the students, the ones that were forming negative bad relationships with students were the ones that I had to

convince that this was appropriate, that this was something they should care about. Most of those teachers, for one reason or another are gone from my building. The need of that group of teachers, my middle school teachers, so now instead of nine, I have eight not including special ed, 10 if I include special ed.

I have less teachers. Because of budget cuts and then just different staffing changes, retirements, people choosing to leave, it's a different group of teachers that just care a lot more about kids. I don't have to convince them to care about kids because they already do it. Then we're able to dig a little bit deeper and the dynamics of the teams are more collaborative. As whereas in the past, a teacher would talk about how the kid is in their room and they would have no idea about how that kid behaved or what they did in the other rooms because they weren't talking to each other.

Then we would see in those team meetings, so then we're talking about a kid. We're talking about [redacted] and he is very disruptive and doesn't do any of his work in one classroom, but then in the other classroom, the teacher reports, "Oh, well, he's fine for me." Then we were trying to figure out well, why is that kid so different with different teachers. This year, the teachers are actually doing some of that themselves.

They're checking with each other, "How is this kid doing in your room? Well, what do you think it is that's working for him? What's different?" I don't need to facilitate that as much anymore. We've been enabled to move on to really doing some of like the mindsets, right? I got the mindset last year. It came through staffing changes. It came through just some of the work we were doing. Now, we're looking more at the actual supports the students are getting academically in the classroom.

Critical Friend: How do you feel that the kids respond to that knowing that they have teachers that are checking in with them?

Researcher: Well, so anecdotally, one of the things that I noticed in the '14-'15 school year that that would, became part of the impetus for the study was that kids would tell me. The kids that got in trouble all the time would tell me that their teachers don't care about them and their teachers. There was just this antagonistic relationship between some

kids and their teachers, not all of the teachers and not all of the kids, but certainly the ones who weren't engaged in school. Student engagement, academic engagement is a big part of what I'm looking at as something that leads to the success fact, that leads to students being not being at risk for high school graduation.

Those teachers that I was seeing this anecdotally I realized through the course of last year were a small minority, so whereas I was seeing these, having those conversations with kids and then just broadly applying that to the whole team. Once we got digging into the work and then saw teachers leave, that shifted. The ones that were really the ones that were having the most issue with kids are gone. The other ones, even though there's still some that maybe don't have a great relationship with their kids or don't make that the priority of their classroom, they're getting onboard a little bit more because now, the majority of the team is [crosstalk 00:09:47] focused on that.

I do see anecdotally we don't have kids being sent down to the office nearly as much. We don't have kids expressing that they don't think their teachers care for them nearly as much. Even when we have had that, like just the other day, I had a restorative conversation between a student and a teacher, and it was the student had expressed that they didn't think that the teacher liked them and was treating them poorly. I was surprised about this particular teacher being accused of that and so, we had a restorative conversation.

It turns out that there were a lot of other things at play for the student that it really had less to do about what the teacher was doing or saying and more to do with what was going on with the kid that they were just putting all of this on the teacher. They were just projecting everything onto this teacher and it just became a toxic relationship. Because the teacher did care and did want for the child to succeed and does like the kid and wanted for things to get better, we made a lot of progress with that because the teacher was willing to have that conversation and figure out what was going with the kid. That, I don't think, would've happened two years ago.

Critical Friend: What successes have you experienced or positive outcomes with this?

Researcher: Like I said, we spent a lot less time convincing the teachers that this is important work to do. We've seen our misconduct referrals and the

number of students who are sent out of class go way down. That was something where, in the past, kids were just sent out of class and sent down to the office frequently, we see that a lot less in the middle school. They were being sent for reasons where they were being disruptive or disrespectful. The teacher, just rather than deal with it, sent them out of the classroom. By focusing on the relationship first, we've seen a lot less of that happen because the teachers, I think, are more aware of the fact that that damages their relationship with the kid and they don't want to do that. They want to preserve the relationship.

Another thing that has happened simultaneously with this intervention has been an increased focus on restorative practices. We've been trying to give teachers more tools to have restorative conversations and to lead talking circles and be proactive by building community in the classroom. It's happened simultaneously with this intervention, but has overlapped. There was a lot of places where they overlapped and where that work was married. Now, this year, because we started that last year simultaneously with this intervention, this year now, the focus has ... It's more about restorative practices that are both responsive to when altercations happen and preventative.

Critical Friend: They still provide goals with a ...

Researcher: That was one thing that did not happen the way that I wanted it to happen last year and one that I let go of, not because I didn't think we needed it anymore, but because it just wasn't happening. It became a decision of do I beat the teachers over the head with it? Do I either become punitive or monitor it so much that it becomes more like work, more paperwork than it should be? Then it's-

Critical Friend: Compliance?

Researcher: Yeah, exactly, that it's more compliance-based. I made the decision not to pursue that because it was going to end up just being more compliance-based and documentation-based than authentic. It's something that I still wish we could get to happen more formally, but I still have to figure out what does that look like? What is that actually going to look like so that they'll do it naturally as a part of their practice in an authentic, meaningful way? I think we'll get there. I just haven't figured out that key yet.

Critical Friend: That's probably one of your challenges or roadblocks. Is there anything else that you have experienced along the way with the interventions?

Researcher: Yeah, things that last year's implementation didn't go exactly as I wanted. I think part of that was because of just I spent more time than I had thought with vocal, a minority, right? There was really just one teacher in each team, but were very vocal about the fact that they didn't believe that this was the right thing to do or that they didn't believe that there could something that was going on with a kid that would lead to them not being academically successful other than the kid doesn't care.

To them, it was really difficult and that it hijacked our conversations because even though I might be mentoring three kids, everybody in the room taught those three kids. The conversations were very collaborative. Then when this one particular teacher in each team would then chime in with these just really negative things and that that made it difficult. There was also attrition and the fact that I, on each team, had one teacher on each team with a medical leave for most of year and transitions so that that consistency became really difficult to maintain when, on each of my teams, one a five-person team, one a four-person, there was one person who wasn't there most of the time and another person who was being really negative about it.

It really derailed that. That was a major challenge and it caused me to re-, just to change course and re-put different value on different things as I went along. Making sure they filled out the protocol every week became less of a, because it was compliance-based. That became much less of a priority for me than well, can we at least problem solve as a team and figure out some action steps in a collaboration team meeting setting so that we could make sure that all the kids that we were trying to target were going to be supported in that? Because there were kids that their mentor wasn't around or their mentor was somebody who really didn't see that as something that they should be doing.

Critical Friend: For those teachers that were on leave, who would take over?

Researcher: I did not assign. On each of my middle school teams, there is one special ed teacher that's assigned to that team. They teach kids in grades five through eight, but they're assigned to work collaboratively

as a PLC with either the five-six team or the seven-eight team. I purposefully in designing the intervention did not assign those teachers to be the mentor because the nature of their job was already to really get to know their kids, to really have those close relationship with their kids, to know what the kids need to [wear 00:18:16] at a different level.

Because of that, it didn't make sense to then also assign them this label of mentor and to do compliance when they were already doing it naturally. Because those teachers participated in all of this, when there were issues where either a teacher needed support or whatever, then I would ask a special ed teacher to try to make an extra effort to get to know those kids.

Critical Friend: What would you have done differently up to this point?

Researcher: I think that I spread ... I think having a mentorship program is really important. There were a couple of things that I wanted to accomplish. I wanted to have these at-risk kids have a supportive adult in the building that was going to be consistent and regularly checking in with them. I also wanted the teachers to improve their relationships with students in general because I had seen this evidence of "I'm here to teach you, not care about you," or even if they did "Care," they were maybe approaching things in a wrong way. They were alienating kids by the way that they were talking to them or they were being too aggressive or assertive with kids, kids who maybe needed a more gentler approach or to be approached in a different way.

They weren't differentiating maybe their approaches to kids. I wanted to, one, not only put something in place that was going to support the students, but provide this practice of learning opportunity for teachers so that it became a bigger part. If I say, "Okay, you're going to do this formally with three kids this year," as they're seeing those successes and practicing that, it's seeping into how they're doing things with every other kid. If I, my three most difficult kids, then it's going to change the way that I approach things with all my kids.

I think, unfortunately, I got that a little bit with the teachers, but not because of what they were doing with their kids, more because of the value and the priority that I was giving just this idea of positive relationships between teachers and students. I think their mindset got

there more because of what we were doing in the team meetings. That I was pushing it as something that was important and valued and everything versus I'm trying to help them be solution-oriented versus then what they actually did with the kids because I have serious questions about the fidelity of how that was happening. I think then what I wish was different was the kids that really needed the support, give it to them by a smaller group of adults in the building, so bring in my restorative practices coach and my counselor and my, to give them that support that they really needed.

Then have those people work with the teachers to get the teachers to realize what these kids' needs are while also doing the professional development, professional like PLC stuff that I was doing with the teachers at the same time, from a broader problem-solving approach because I think having the teachers. Looking back from last year, I just know that some of these teachers, some of these kids that really needed that consistent check-in mentoring time just weren't getting it. That's where I wish that it had been designed differently from the beginning.

Critical Friend: What changes have you seen in your staff or students?

Researcher: With my staff, I see that they're handling things with the kids differently. The kid that might be stepping up to a teacher a little bit, that teacher rather than punking them out and putting them, that student in their place in front of the whole class is handling that differently. The teacher that would grumble about doing second step social-emotional instruction or didn't want to lead talking in circles or something in their classroom is spending more time on doing that.

That may or not be because of this, the experience that they had mentoring a kid last year. It may be because of those things that are happening in the building, like having the restorative practices coach and spending more in professional development school-wide time on that, but we're seeing just more the teachers' rapport with the kids has changed. It's not necessarily always, "You're going to listen to me and you're going to do what I say because you have to because you're the kid and I'm the adult."

They're more respectful of the kids as individuals and young adults. That's not to say that we don't still have students in the building that

challenge them to the point where they do get frustrated and then they do feel like the relationship is broken with the kids, but now we talk to the kids about that, right? Now, the teachers say to the kids, “I feel like my relationship with you is broken because of,” whatever. Even if it doesn’t necessarily improve the kid’s behavior or improves the kid’s academic outcomes, the teachers are not necessarily just writing the kids off, so that’s good.

Then with the kids, some of our more difficult kids that would be in the office a lot more aren’t anymore. It could be maturity. It could be a lot of other things. Some of the kids when I think about the 2014-’15 school year, where it was a really difficult year with them, they were very aggressive. They were very confrontational. They were very much very ... They were just difficult kids. They were frequently downstairs in the office, this year now, just aren’t.

I can name kids that I haven’t had to have or the dean or my assistant principal haven’t had to have any conflict resolution with at all this year. If you had told us two years ago that that would happen, we wouldn’t believe it. There are we’ve seen just with specific kids some really good changes. Then we’ve also seen just in general, our on-track data went up. Kids are, seem to be more engaged in class, but that’s very anecdotal evidence, but I also think our teachers are better teachers, so there’s a lot going on.

Critical Friend: Did you notice a difference in your misconduct reports going down?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, we definitely have many less kids being referred to the office. It’s difficult because there’s a lot of things that have happened in this school the last two years that could lead to that, like expectations with a kid getting sent down has changed, right? Teacher training on how to handle that in their classroom has changed. Having more proactive things like community building and talking circles in the classrooms is more apparent. Then when we notice that something’s brewing and going on, we just have more systems in place for adults to lead restoration with kids before it gets to the point that it would be a referral. Yes, we’ve seen that go down.

Critical Friend: Good. What have you learned about yourself as a leader?

Researcher: I think I've always known this, but I definitely I fight back at against doing anything that's compliance-based for my teachers. I've always said, "I believe that this should be [at the 00:27:37] leadership, that buy-in is important," but this one where like I had certain expectations for the teachers as far as filling out a protocol and doing this. That just became less important to me even though I needed it for data collection. It became less important to me than actually being bought in on it.

I also learned. I learned that I tend to take the loudest "Voices" or teachers are the ones that need the most attention and get my most attention. I end up using those to make blanket almost assumptions about everybody else. I've learned that I have to rather than say, "Well, this is a problem because I see it in you and you, so it must be a problem everywhere," I've learned that that's not always the case. I have to be a lot more strategic about knowing who needs what kind of support, but also how I'm going to get them there because I've also learned that I cannot just take teachers at what's initially presented to me.

Critical Friend: Face value?

Researcher: Yeah, face value, right? Like, "Oh yeah, I care about this," and "Oh yeah, I always try to do this," and "Oh yeah, I try to do this," but then as I'm seeing more interactions or hearing more things, it's like, "Wait a second. No, you don't really." I have to be a little bit more critical about the way that I think about things and the way that I take in the information. What else have I learned about myself? I'm trying to think of my conceptual ones. Yeah, yeah, I'll say that. Oh, well, I'll say this. I've also learned that I need to be more transparent and more involved with how this stuff goes with the kids. It's one thing to have theoretical conversations with the teachers in my office.

It's another thing to go and observe it happening and get to know the kids better myself because I think I would've been able to hold the teachers more accountable to actually, like my suspicions when they're sitting in my office telling me about these kids that they're supposed to be mentoring. My suspicions about how that mentoring is happening would have either been confirmed or denied if I could focus more time on also checking in with those kids and knowing what was going on in the classrooms. I think I modeled in the sense of modeling that this is

important, but then also modeling in the sense of I'm going to work on my relationship with these kids, too, I guess.

Critical Friend: I know you talked about this. How have you seen your leadership change, in what way? I know you mentioned that you took away some of the protocols. As you as a leader, how has your leadership changed with everything that you've learned?

Researcher: Well, even though I took away some of the protocols for this, I also learned this was something where it was difficult to teach the teachers or to give ... One of the reasons why I think some of the teachers were uncomfortable with it or maybe it didn't really happen was I didn't direct them how to be a mentor to the kids because that's not necessarily something that you could teach. It's way more abstract and it's going to be different for every teacher and every kid. Instead in like our professional development, we focused on the importance of it, the why, the idea that there could be stuff going on for a kid that was affecting their academic performance that had more to do with their skill level or whether or not they cared or they wanted to do well, their motivation.

We focused on that. We talked about use the check-in, check-out system as a model of here are things that you could say to kids and things that you could do and talked about that, but we didn't spend a lot of time saying, "Here's how this would look," because it's difficult to do with this. This is more abstract. It's more touchy-feely. It's more individualized. This year, as we've shifted to more of a tangible, academic-like, tier-two, tier-three intervention focus for our teachers and students, I've learned that I do more frequent check-ins with the teachers during team meetings.

I model for them in team meetings a lot more. We'll take one teacher and we'll model the problem-solving process. We'll model finding interventions. We'll model determining how those interventions are going to be implemented and then progress monitoring and all of that stuff in a much more concrete way. One, the academic interventions lend itself to that more, but two, they ... I've learned that the teachers just really need that really specific handholding for that to happen. I try not to get as frustrated with them when I have to repeat something over and over again or when we have to go through the same thing over and over again.

Maybe I'm more patient and I think I've accepted, too, that it's okay to take some [best 00:33:57] steps backwards then go back to basics and get even more basic when that doesn't work and get even more basic when that doesn't work whereas last year I probably would've said just, "This just needs to happen." I'm more patient with putting the things in place so that eventually the teachers could take over the practice on their own. I own more of the work now, which I don't love, but I own the work now with this specific path forward, like a specific outcome that we're working towards.

Critical Friend: Do you feel that, I know you said that the teachers are more, like you don't need to sell this to them anymore because they've bought in, but do you give them action steps or goals for them with the students when they're checking in or checking out?

Researcher: Not with the homeroom teachers, but with my climate and culture team, yes, and I think that's where, too, the shift to say, "Okay, having this responsibility to really target these at-risk kids, having that spread out amongst eight or nine teachers like just wasn't being productive. We have to instead increase the responsibility of a smaller group of teachers to do that work." With them yes, with the teachers, we're focusing them much more on the ... I want to make sure it's still recording, yeah, focusing them much more on the academic side of things. Their actions steps are less about their relationships with kids and more about other practice items that they need to do.

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VITA

Sara Haas was raised in the suburbs of Chicago before she attended Illinois State University and obtained her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education with a focus on math education and minor in Psychology. Before graduating Sara completed her student teaching process with the Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline in Little Village. There she developed a passion and commitment for neighborhood schools and community-based, urban education.

Sara began teaching math at Madero Middle School where she also served as a math lead teacher. As Sara began to take on more and more of a leadership role in her school her excitement for administration was ignited. She pursued her masters in school leadership and with her administrator's license soon found herself serving as the school's assistant principal. After learning an immense amount about school leadership she decided to pursue a principal position and her Doctorate of Education in Administration and Supervision from Loyola University. Sara is currently the principal at Brighton Park Elementary where she is joyfully working create an outstanding educational, community based program.

Sara lives with her husband and young daughter in Chicago where she enjoys the burst of energy that life with a toddler brings.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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