A Self Study of My Leadership as Principal to Improve Student Achievement in Literacy in the Middle Grades

Latrese Tonya Mathis

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A SELF STUDY OF MY LEADERSHIP AS PRINCIPAL TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN LITERACY IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

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

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY
LATRESE MATHIS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
MAY 2019
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my husband, Damyion and my wonderful children, Sterling and Sydney. You are my greatest inspiration! With every note, text, nudge, smile and hug, you have motivated me to persevere and to finish the race. No words can express my love and gratitude.

My parents, Oliver and Rita Gilbert, instilled a love for education in me as a young child. I am forever grateful for their unwavering love and constant support. Sunday dinners at “Granddaddy’s house” watered a deep rooted seed for God and faith by my family. For as long as I can remember, as a family, we gather each Sunday for dinner and fellowship. My family is a true circle of support. I want to thank my sister and one of my critical friends, Jacquese, my brothers, Oliver and Omarr, and my “Sunday” family for their encouragement and daily prayers. Gracias family for not letting me get weak and for holding up my arms when I didn’t have the strength. I thank God for His grace to continue on with this course in life.

To walk in the steps that my committee members have walked is a great honor. I am extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from three educational trend-setters. I would like to express gratitude to my Dissertation chairperson, Dr. Felicia Stewart. Thank you for your support, guidance and encouragement throughout my journey. Your counsel, critical eye and wisdom has transformed my thinking as a leader to greater heights. Special thanks to Dr. R. James Breunlin and Dr. Leviis Haney for
stepping in to support me when I first started my study. Your invaluable feedback and
couragement helped me make it through. Thank you all for believing in me.

What can I say about two phenomenal leaders who never let go of my hand? Dr.
Terrycita Perry and Shontell Smith… I am appreciative for your sisterhood, love and
support. Now, let’s get ready for our girls trip to Europe!
DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the memories and legacies of family, love and perseverance from my grandparents, Charles and Elease Gilbert, Steve and Pocahontas Jones and my uncle, Steve Jones, Jr. Although they are no longer here with me, these are the shoulders I stand upon.
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ABSTRACT

This self-study examined my leadership practices as a principal and researcher. Herr and Anderson (2005) define self-study as “a focus on one’s own personal and professional self.” Through reflective analysis of my leadership practices, the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams were supported with protocols and leadership methods to improve literacy instruction at middle grades. Upon reflection, concerns existed regarding inadequate and inconsistent student growth through the lens of school wide assessments. The examination of student data, root cause identification, and the development and monitoring of action items assisted to investigate my analysis of this concern. The significance of this study demonstrated how examination of my leadership methods improved achievement in literacy at middle grades.

This self-study reviewed scholarly literature about the history of education, American public education, schools in an urban environment, middle school, leadership in schools and the role of principals. Additional review of instructional leadership, Instructional Leadership teams, effects of leadership on student achievement, assessments and the achievement gap are included. Based on the conceptual framework of leadership defined by John Kotter’s (2012), Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change, the findings of this self-study examined my leadership practices and decisions. This self-study included my reflection of data analysis from district wide assessment, the Illinois Interactive Report Card and the Five Essentials Survey. Reflections of my journal logs,
agendas and minutes from Instructional Leadership and grade level teams and review of exit slips from professional development assisted me to understand the teacher’s learning and work. The conclusions from the research provided strategies to facilitate Instructional Leadership and Grade Level meetings necessary for improving teaching and learning in literacy in middle grades. The implications of this study identified the importance of understanding school culture, data analysis, data transparency, instructional collaboration, while increasing teacher ownership to build instructional capacity.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Introduction

The role of the principal has evolved over time from a building manager executing compliance and policy issues to the principal who operates as an instructional leader. In fact, this type of school leader coaches teachers to implement best practices, builds instructional capacity among all staff members and provides academic support to strengthen teaching and learning (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Mednick, 2003). Traditionally, a primary focus of a principal is functioning as an instructional leader (Mednick, 2003). As an instructional leader, the principal takes a practical role in the instructional development. The principal’s responsibilities include concentrating on student outcomes and encouraging teachers to learn and improve their practice (Fullan, 2014). Particularly school administrators in an urban environment have less resources, social disparity and must manage social reform efforts (Bass, 2014; Taines, 2012). Taines speaks to the responsibilities for a principal in a challenging school as epic due to inequalities surrounding high levels of poverty, unemployment issues in the community and the fight for fair educational programming.

Research has noted that effective principals ensure the goal of the school is focused on growth in student learning based on measurable student outcomes (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Mednick, 2003). Therefore, student performance is paramount and becomes
the priority (Alvoid & Black, 2014), especially for an administrator in an urban environment. This level of principal engagement impacts student achievement through leveling groups of educators working collectively to advance student achievement results (Fullan, 2014). School culture and climate are affected by the relationship among all stakeholders. Culture and climate are the approaches to enable constructive attitudes, viewpoints and actions to build successful traditions and expectations for a school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Principals are further responsible for facilitating interactions with parents, teachers, students, and community members. Over time, this fostered and contributed to a successful school culture and climate.

Often I listen and respond to others’ thoughts and interpretation of my school-wide decisions and implemented practices. Instead, during this study, I reflected upon my cycle of journal writing to examine my efforts, decisions and practices through support of the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams. Based upon my reflection of various data sources, instructional methods and implemented protocols, I contemplated about the impact my role as Principal contributed to improving student achievement in literacy at the middle grades, which include sixth, seventh and eighth grades. This self-study assisted me to identify and engage in continual reflection of my leadership practices (Sergiovanni, 1987). Coleman and Leider (2013) define self-study as a methodology that allows for a collective analysis of individual and professional development. Again, I solely delved into reflection of my leadership decisions and moreover, the significant implications which offered me additional insight to advance school leadership practices for Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams.
**Background to the Study**

My principalship started three weeks prior to the opening of school in fall 2015. I experienced a blind introduction to the school’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), the Grade Level Teams (GLT) and the school’s data. I did not receive an overview, summary or explanation of current or past work of the Leadership Team nor Grade Level Teams from the previous administrators or district-based supervisors. I had to navigate through binders and memos on my own to piece together the focus and priorities of the Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams. Based on conversations with various staff members and the former Assistant Principal, I was told that the same members of the ILT remained constant for the past three years. There was an expectation that the administrative work with the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams would operate the same as in previous years before I became principal. I initially did not make any changes. However, I started conducting the ILT and GLT meetings on a regular basis. Data was pulled from school-wide assessments and the teams were formulated.

I started maintaining a journal to assist me with reviewing my decisions, plans, actions and leadership goals. During the initial teacher meetings at the onset of the school year, I observed low staff engagement. Perhaps five or six teachers actively participated in discussions, although there is a selected group of 12 teacher leaders identified for the team. As I recall one particular meeting, the agenda item included feedback of instructional observations conducted by the team during the first month’s walk-through of classroom practices. Instead of a discussion of the walk-through trends, the team debated upcoming field trips and engaged in off-topic side conversations. I did not
facilitate the preliminary teacher meetings, I listened and observed. Based on my observation, I concluded the teachers did not have a sense of urgency regarding the lack of priorities.

Based on my reflection, there was a lack of connection, meaning there was little to no discussion or response to the school’s vision and mission to link “the heart” of the school’s core values. Through my reflective journal, I determined this disconnect evidenced in various group discussions where there were no mention of the school’s shared vision or high expectations of student success. This was the reason for this self-study research. I considered the lack of urgency a direct connection of merely going about the day-to-day operation of school affairs. This lack of urgency was repeatedly evident through conversations I held with various team members. In the daily instructional practices, there was no connection to the school’s vision. The faculty’s prior exposures to best practices were not sufficient as there were no evidence to support the alignment to the vision. I assumed the previous building Principal failed to create sufficient urgency with the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams. This assumption was made because the school teams did not reference the school’s vision and mission while conducting the work. As I reflected, there was the realization that teams did not stress the importance of student achievement in literacy during presentations to their colleagues or staff development workshops.

This self-study focused on one’s own attempt to understand personal and professional actions, reflections and impacts by the study (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2005). The research site was an elementary school
in Chicago. The demographics included 25 teachers and 360 students in grades Pre-kindergarten to Eighth. The leading student population is African American. This demographic composes 85% of the student enrollment. The subsequent demographic is Hispanic at 13%. The school has 98% low income, indicating their household income is below poverty level. There are 10% Diverse Learners, 3% Limited English students and the school’s mobility rate is 17%. Mobility is the movement of students transferring in and out of school. Each time a student transfers out, the parent/guardian is given a brief survey to indicate the reason for the transfer. Upon reflection of anonymous exit surveys that parents complete, one main explanation of the transfer is economic reasons. Many of the families have subsidized housing, which today provides Section 8 housing vouchers. Section 8 is a federal housing choice program operated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist extremely low-income families find subsidized living accommodations (HUD website: https://www.hud.gov/topics/housing_choice_voucher_program_section_8). Prior to the issuance of Section 8 housing vouchers established in 1974, this program was known as the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The Fair Housing Act was established by HUD following race riots which stem from the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Throughout the United States, major cities, such as Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and Baltimore were places of extreme rioting, looting and arson which caused HUD to prohibit most housing discrimination (HUD website: https://www.hud.gov/about/hud_history). Therefore, families receive affordable housing in other communities of the city, suburban areas or out of state locations. The second factor to the high mobility rate is the increasing violence in the
community (Chicago Tribune, July 14, 2017). The location of this self-study allowed me to reflect on my leadership decisions for this community.

As I reviewed my role as an instructional leader, I prioritized student achievement as a primary focus. Therefore, student achievement is paramount as I implement sound practices which increased the rating for my school. Currently, my school district uses a level system to rank schools from 1+ which signifies the highest level to the least rank of level 3. Most schools in my district rank levels 1 and 1+ (Chicago Public School website: http://cps.edu/Pages/AboutCPS.aspx). The 2017 School Progress Report indicates that our school is currently rated Level 2 with Provisional Support. This means our student growth is average but, our student attainment is below average.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Attainment Percentile</th>
<th>School Quality Rating</th>
<th>Accountability Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90th</td>
<td>Level 1+</td>
<td>Good Standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70th</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Good Standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50th</td>
<td>Level 2+</td>
<td>Good Standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40th</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Provisional Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Intensive Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Retrieved from Chicago Public School website: http://cps.edu/Performance/Pages/PerformancePolicy.aspx*

**Problem Statement**

The current academic state of the school was evidenced by inconsistent growth and attainment patterns in reading for the middle grades. In reviewing school level data, our students were not making adequate growth on the Northwest Evaluation Association
Assessment (NWEA). The NWEA is an exam which measures academic achievement (Chicago Public Schools Website: www.cps.edu/schooldata and NWEA Website: https://www.nwea.org/research-overview/).

This data factor challenged and supported the need for me to improve my administrative ability to increase student growth and attainment in reading for middle grade students. This self-study was crafted to include my reflection of student data and root cause identification. I also analyzed my leadership methods in the development and monitoring of action items that further assisted the investigation of my leadership decisions.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this self-study was to examine my leadership practices and how those actions and practices positively impacted improved student achievement in literacy in the middle grades. Through analysis of my leadership methods, I scrutinized implementation of data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity. This reflective analysis supported the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams with protocols and leadership methods to improve literacy instruction at the middle grades. Upon reflection, concerns existed regarding inadequate and inconsistent student growth through the lens of school wide assessments. Additionally, the examination of student data, root cause identification, as well as the development and monitoring of action items assisted to further investigate my analysis of this concern. This self-study used a systematic design which allowed me to examine myself and my
leadership decisions (Coleman & Leider, 2013). This study identified and reflected on my leadership practices to increase student achievement.

The site of this self-study research was an elementary school in Chicago. The demographics included 25 teachers and 360 students in grades Pre-kindergarten to Eighth. Approximately 83% of the student population are African Americans. Hispanic students make up nearly 16% of the student demographics. The school had 98% low income, indicating their household income was below poverty level. There are 10% Diverse Learners and 3% Limited English students. Upon reflection, the data revealed an inconsistent growth pattern for middle grade students in reading. Based on the www.cps.edu public site, school level data detailed 7th grade students at the 58th percentile and 8th grade students at the 90th percentile for growth in reading. However, 6th grade students were significantly below as their growth was indicated at the 15th percentile. According to the 2017 Illinois Report Card, middle grade students were below the national average norm of 50 percentile points in reading (retrieved from the Illinois Report Card Website: https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/School.aspx). The Illinois Report Card displayed data based on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) test. This assessment measured student performance aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). PARCC results were used to measure student growth, similar to NWEA. PARCC categorized students in five levels. Both data sources cited indicated a varying trend in literacy for middle grades.
Table 2

PARCC Performance Level Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Did not yet meet expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Partially met expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Approached expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Met expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Exceeded expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For the purpose of this self-study, data from the PARCC assessment was not used because PARCC data would not be immediately available for analysis until months after the assessment window has closed. NWEA data is available up to three times a year. Upon reflection, this rationale qualified using NWEA data due to its immediate availability following student assessment completion. I concluded that although the middle grade students are below the national norm, the students met their NWEA reading growth targets. National norm is different from growth targets. National norm is the national assessment average of students versus their peers across the nation. Growth targets measures student performance over multiple time periods (NWEA Website: https://www.nwea.org/research-overview/).

Student achievement data has a direct correlation to the school’s overall growth and how the status of school is determined. The school has been on “remediation” for several years and has a current accountability status as Provisional Support, according to the Chicago Public Schools 2017-2018 Elementary School Quality Rating Policy Report.
(ESQRPR). *Elementary School Quality Rating Report* (July 28, 2017) (Chicago Public School website: http://cps.edu/Schools/Pages/school.aspx). The Elementary School Quality Rating Report (ESQRR) shows an individual school’s status based on various indicators. Each indicator has a weight and point assigned to each metric. For example, NWEA growth and attainment for both reading and math are measures designated for various student groups. Specifically, the Elementary School Quality Rating Policy Report defines each measure, indicator and specifies the scoring guides that was used for each elementary school. Based on the Elementary School Quality Rating Report (ESQRP), the ratings and status indicate my school did not meet the requirements established by the Chicago Board of Education as outlined in the ESQRPR (July, 2017).


Based on the 5Essentials data from the 2017 My Voice, My School Survey, the school was rated as *Well-Organized for Improvement*. This rating outlines the five components of organization and environment associated with improving our school. The five areas and descriptions are:

1. *Ambitious Instruction*: Classes are challenging and engaging.
2. **Effective Leaders**: Principals and teachers implement a shared vision for success.

3. **Collaborative Teachers**: Teachers collaborate to promote professional growth.

4. **Involved Families**: The entire staff build strong external relationships.

5. **Supportive Environment**: The school is safe, demanding, and supportive.

(http://cps.edu/Pages/surveys.aspx)

Although my school received an overall rating of well-organized, there were different ratings for each category. According to 5Essentials, there was a strong indicator of the likelihood to improve student learning because we had at least 3 ratings of **Strong** out of 5 (Chicago Public Schools Website: http://cps.edu/Pages/surveys.aspx). The following table detailed my school results from the 2017 survey:

Table 3

2017 5Essentials Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious Instruction</td>
<td>Very Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Leaders</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Teachers</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved Families</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Retrieved from: http://cps.edu/Schools/Pages/school.aspx*

Overall, my analysis indicated inconsistent data trends as student achievement fluctuated over the past years as evidenced by the NWEA baseline for literacy in the
middle grades. The NWEA National School Growth percentile in 2017 is less than 50% in reading. However, the National School Attainment percentile for reading is 30% for students. Upon analysis of available data, stagnant growth was evidenced by students’ reading grades submitted weekly by teachers compared to the NWEA growth and attainment baseline results.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was to examine my leadership methods and decisions as I supported the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams. The importance of this study was to examine my leadership decisions to use student, school-wide and classroom data, while asking probing questions and identifying root causes. Linda Lambert (2002) agrees that the purpose of the Leadership Team is to “…analyze data and to plan, advocate, monitor and implement the school improvement plan” (p. 39).

Examining my decision to build leadership capacity among teachers and enhance instructional middle school faculty support from the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams was critical. The aim was to build rigor into daily instruction. According to Lambert, “Participation is most powerful when combined into a thoughtful and integrated school improvement process” (p. 40). Through systematic leadership methods and protocols, I assisted the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to conduct school-wide data analysis to decrease the achievement gap and increase the percentage of attainment on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA), thus raising student achievement levels in literacy for middle grades.
The significance of this research demonstrated how my leadership as a principal transformed a middle school culture to enhance instructional outcomes and increase staff collaboration. According to the Leadership and Learning Center (2008), the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings should be “Collaborative, structured, scheduled meetings that focus on the effectiveness of teaching and learning” (p. 6). This supported my plan to reflect on my leadership practices as I analyzed strengths and obstacles. I established smart goals to include the process of setting, reviewing and revising goals. I selected instructional strategies for teachers to implement, consequently allowed me to determine result indicators (Leadership and Learning Center, 2008).

Leithwood and Mascall (2008) states the model for instructional leadership is built upon the motivation of others, the capacity of teachers and staff and the environment in which teacher performance is set. Therefore, this self-study contributed to the advancement of Instructional Leadership Teams and Grade Level Teams. Moreover, through understanding the work I have used to implement systematic protocols, the implementation led to an increase in student achievement in literacy, such as leadership methods for data analysis and building instructional capacity.

**Research Questions**

This self-study answered the following research questions:

1. How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades?
2. What leadership methods do I implement to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

3. What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

4. What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making?

5. How has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process?

**Overview of Methodology**

The research methodology is a self-study. A self-study is a focus of one’s own personal and professional self (Herr & Anderson, 2005). LaBoskey (2004) indicates a self-study is focused at development with specific attention to “…transforming educators as a means to facilitate student transformation.” A self-study methodology allowed me to analyze my leadership practices in multiple ways (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). This self-study utilized publicly available data sources including: NWEA reading data for middle grades, the Illinois Report Card data, the Five Essentials Survey data, my reflections from teacher meetings, reflections on agenda/minutes from Instructional Leadership Team and
Grade Level Team meetings, reflections of professional development and review of exit slips to understand the teacher’s learning and work.

*Figure 1. Data Sources*

The Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data was beneficial to help me reflect as I identified root causes as well as growth measures. The reflection of grade level agendas and minutes were utilized to gauge what data were discussed and planned during the weekly meetings. Analysis of exit slips from the follow up professional development sessions assisted me to understand the measure of understanding teacher’s learning and work. The results of the Five Essentials Survey enabled me to examine my decisions to review the perspectives of instructional practices, as well as data from the Illinois Report Card database. Through the examination of these data methods, the results assisted in understanding the root causes of inconsistent growth.
patterns as I supported the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to focus on maintaining teamwork development and school improvement, which are vital to teaching and learning (Liontos, 1992). The triangulation of data sources provided the lens to view and reflect on literacy growth and attainment measures for middle school grades. I assisted the team to use leadership methods and protocols to identify student goals, as well as the identification of data trends, quick wins and action plan. I created systematic structures to examine the transformation of the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams. The analysis led to an improvement in student growth and attainment in reading for middle grades. Transformational leadership goals are identified as helping staff to develop and to maintain a collaborative, professional school culture, teacher development, and effective problem solving among teachers (Liontos, 1992).

The Elementary School Quality Rating Report (ESQRR) data was shared with all school faculty and staff in a Professional Development (PD) workshop. During the Professional Development session, the 2017-2018 rating was analyzed by school administration, teachers and support staff members using the Indicator Score and Points according to the Chicago Public Schools 2017 Elementary School Quality Rating Policy Report (ESQRPR). *School Quality Rating Report* (July 28, 2017) (Chicago Public School website: http://cps.edu/Schools/Pages/school.aspx).

Using a point scale from 1 to 5, the following table indicated specific metric areas, the points received and the percentage for each metric:
Table 4

2017-2018 Elementary School Quality Rating Report (ESQRR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METRIC</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
<th>RESULTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National School Growth Percentile on the NWEA Reading Assessment (Grades 3 – 8)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding National Average Growth Norms (Grades 3 – 8)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National School Attainment Percentile – NWEA Reading (Grades 3 – 8)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Voice, My School 5Essentials Survey</td>
<td>Well Organized</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis was important to understand how the NWEA data were used as a performance measure, an accountability tool and leverage to rate a school based on the five point scale. The staff engaged in discussion to identify root causes of the results which ultimately led to a discourse about instructional implications and practices. Some of the root cause examples include the following:

- Lack of understanding and using the NWEA Des Cartes Learning Continuum.
- Lack of using the content framework as recommended by Chicago Public Schools.
- Lack of using a pacing guide / scope and sequence.
- Lack of modifications based on student’s individual needs.

This data was compared to the goals for the 2018-2019 school year, set by the Network Chief and myself (see table below). School Quality Rating Report (July 28, 2017) (Chicago Public School website: http://cps.edu/Schools/Pages/school.aspx).
Table 5

2018-2019 Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2018 – 2019 Goals</th>
<th>METRIC</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
<th>RESULTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National School Growth Percentile on</td>
<td>National School Growth Percentile on the</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>the NWEA Reading Assessment (Grades 3</td>
<td>NWEA Reading Assessment (Grades 3 – 8)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– 8)</td>
<td>Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding National Average Growth</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norms (Grades 3 – 8)</td>
<td>Norms (Grades 3 – 8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National School Attainment Percentile</td>
<td>National School Attainment Percentile – NWEA Reading Grades 3 - 8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– NWEA Reading Grades 3 - 8</td>
<td>My Voice, My School 5 Essentials Survey</td>
<td>Well</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teaching staff worked with the ILT and GLT along with support staff members while using the Spring 2017 Reading NWEA data to identify students in each quartile (Quartile 1 = 1% - 25%; Quartile 2 = 26% - 50%; Quartile 3 = 51% - 75% and Quartile 4 = 76% - 99%). The next step was to use the NWEA Thermal Report to identify students who have positive and negative growth in reading. This report included comparative data from the previous NWEA testing window (Winter 2017) which consisted of the following: the National Percentile Rank, the duration of the test, growth targets, points acquired or loss from the target and goals for each instructional target in literacy (goals as identified by NWEA). The use of this information allowed each teacher to use the NWEA Des Cartes / Learning Continuum to ascertain which skills to focus on during the next five weeks. This created an instructional action plan for students based on data. Teachers used the identified skills to create interventions and necessary modifications based on their current lesson plans and student’s learning plans. This exercise with the staff was important to establish a sense of urgency and to connect
school goals → to NWEA school wide data → to NWEA classroom data → to NWEA student level data → to identified skills → to lesson plans → doable action plan items.

I used journals to reflect and log my experiences. I reflected on the previous data and how data aligns to the leadership methods and protocols I implemented. Additionally, I used the CPS Performance Standards for School Leaders Rubric as a supplementary tool to gauge my leadership experience (Chicago Public Schools website: http://www.cps.edu). This rubric assisted me to rate my practices using the levels Unsatisfactory, Basic, Proficient and Distinguished based on various evidence and my observation. There are six competencies which comprise the Performance Standards, but only four directly related to this self-study as I examined my leadership practices.

*Competency A:* Champions teachers and staff excellence through a focus on continuous improvement.

*Competency B:* Creates powerful professional learning systems that guarantee learning for students.

*Competency E:* Relentlessly pursues self-disciplined thinking and action.

*Competency F:* Leads school toward achieving the vision.

The use of journals and the rubric assisted to analyze my decisions through honest, beneficial and transparent self-reflections (Ortlipp, 2008). I planned to use the process of journaling to document specific leadership actions and decisions in the self-study. The Instructional Leadership and Grade Level meetings were included in the journal within three to four days of the session conducted, as well as all actionable items regarding leadership decisions. The journal reflected my thoughts in regards to the
effectiveness of decisions and the evidence that provided support. My engagement through three critical friends allowed me to solicit feedback as they read to understand my experiences in this study (Costa & Kallick, 1993). The critical friends included two educators and one business accredited friend.

**Conceptual Framework**

This self-study examined the process of data informed decision making I used as principal and researcher. The conceptual framework of leadership defined by John Kotter (2012) for creating major change in an organization was applied.

The methods and protocols for this research utilized *The Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* to guide and analyze the discussion and work of the principal. Based on The Eight-Stage Change Process, Kotter (2012) states this framework supported successful major organizational change through systems and structure.

1. *Establishing a sense of urgency* (Identifying and discussing crisis, potential crises, or major opportunities).
2. *Creating the guiding coalition* (Getting the group to work together like a team).
3. *Developing a vision and strategy* (Creating a vision to help direct the change effort. Developing strategies for achieving that vision).
4. *Communicating the change vision* (Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies).
5. *Empowering broad-based action* (Getting rid of obstacles. Changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision).

7. *Consolidating gains and producing more change* (Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision).

8. *Anchoring new approaches in the culture* (Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success).

The *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* was appropriate for this self-study because the stages outline the process I utilized as the principal and researcher. Through reflection, I engaged in data analysis through addressing the process of change to assist the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams. I used this framework to support the leadership methods and protocols to assist the development of systematic structures to increase student achievement in literacy.

This background created a direct connection to the first three steps of the Eight Stage Process (establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition and developing a vision and strategy).

As Principal, I worked with teacher teams, including the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams to establish the following:

- School wide priorities connected to the Continuous Improvement Working Plan (CIWP) and ESQRR
- Data deep dives
  - Strength of school and class level data
Challenges of school and class level data

- Key students to target
- Rationale for targeted students
- Interventions
- Administrative support needed

These steps opened the path to a two-way dialogue between the teams and myself which directly support steps 1, 2 and 3.


Figure 2. The Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change

The fourth step, communicating the change vision, was necessary because the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team members needed to revisit the school’s vision and mission in order to have a focused perspective. Kotter (2012), states
that this stage is essential because of the defensive behavior of people becoming complacent. There is a sense of reluctance as one might question the leadership decisions and the purpose of an action if they have been averse before. The four steps of the Process of Creating Major Change was used to plan the school initiative using baseline data while steps 5 – 8 (empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change and anchoring new approaches in the culture) was used to create action items.

The conceptual framework was utilized to analyze the first research question: 

*How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades?* The Five Essentials Survey data results; district wide assessment data for middle grades, the Illinois Report Card data, my reflections from teacher meetings, agenda/minutes from grade level team meetings and the Leadership Team meetings; reflections of professional development and review of exit slips to understand the teacher’s learning and work was triangulated for team work development.

The second research question was scrutinized using the conceptual framework: 

*What leadership methods do I implement to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?* The Five Essentials Survey data results, my reflections from teacher meetings, agenda/minutes from grade level team meetings and the Leadership Team meetings, reflections of professional development and review of exit slips to understand the teacher’s learning
and work, NWEA data, and IIRC data are used to triangulate identified school wide trends, quick wins and action plan items.

The final three research questions employed the process. What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)? What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making? And how has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process? The data sources identified item analysis based on NWEA Learning Continuum and RIT bands, as well as, best practices identified to support and assist the Instructional Leadership Team.

**Limitations and Biases**

Reliability and validity issues for this self-study included the limitation to generalize this study to larger or smaller schools or similar size schools with multiple Instructional Leadership Teams and Grade Level Teams. Due to the review and study of one principal’s story in one inner city elementary school, the results of this research limited those whose schools have different dynamics and different data sources. The types of validity that were critical to this research study are data triangulation, member checking, and use of critical friends and of course, the use of scholarly research. The use of these strategies increased the validity in this study as I looked for limitations and areas of bias, used coding, reported positive and negative results and clearly identified the instruments used in the study. The school remained anonymous to ensure non-
identification and association of the school. I maintained a reflective notebook/journal to write down personal feelings and biases in an effort to keep judgmental statements and opinions out of the research study. I also conducted member checking among the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team members to ensure that the researcher captured true and accurate responses of the research study (Merriam, 2009).

**Definition of Key Terms**

Best Practices – The focus of curriculum, literacy and instruction to have a stronger effect on school improvement (Schmoker, 2016).


Dashboard – a Chicago Public Schools application which comprises of school-wide performance data available and updated every five weeks (http://cps.edu).

Data – Recorded observations, in textual or numeric form (Schwandt, 2007).

Data Informed Decision Making – Using data to plan instructional improvement strategies (Spiro, 2016).

Des Cartes Continuum of Learning – A tool designed by NWEA that teachers use to identify academic skill strands aligned to RIT scores (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2017).

Education – The process of educating; teaching (Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1997).
ESQRPR – Elementary School Quality Rating Policy Report defines each measure, indicator and specifies the scoring guides that are used for each elementary school (http://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRPHandbook.pdf).

ESQR – Elementary School Quality Rating Report shows an individual school’s status based on various indicators. Each indicator has a weight and point assigned to each metric (http://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRPHandbook.pdf).

Experience – Qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experiences (Schwandt, 2007).

Field Journal – A bound notebook that the field-worker carries into the field and in which is recorded observational notes, personal notes, sketches, ideas and lists of terms (Schwandt, 2007).

Field Notes – A kind of evidence on which inquirers base claims about meaning and understanding (Schwandt, 2007).

5Essentials – A survey developed by the University of Chicago to measure key aspects of school organizational culture (https://illinois.5-essentials.org/2017/).

Grade Level Teams – Teacher teams who monitor their instructional strategies by examining student work, common grade level/course assessments and instructional tasks, and peer observation data (School Performance Management Toolkit, 2010).

Instructional Leader – Able to frame teacher leadership within the context of the school, valuing teachers as leaders who can develop the instructional program, make positive changes, share their expertise with others, and shape the culture of the school (Zepeda, 2013).
Instructional Leadership – Focuses on instruction was a strong purpose and an equally strong commitment to student learning (Zepeda, 2013).

Instructional Leadership Team – A team of school leaders and specialists work in concert to meet the needs of all students in a deliberate and impactful manner (School Performance Management Toolkit, 2010).

Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process – The methods used in successful transformations (Kotter, 2012).

Level 2 – School quality grade indicating below average performance, which is the accountability status of provisional support rating signifying increased support from the Network (http://cps.edu/Performance/Documents/SQRPHandbook.pdf).

Literacy Instruction – Evidence-based best practices within a comprehensive framework of literacy instruction that includes attention to motivation, composition, oral language, and critical thinking (Gambrell, Morrow & Pressley, 2007).

Member Check – Also called member or respondent validation. This is a sociological term for soliciting feedback from respondents on the inquirer’s findings (Schwandt, 2007).

Methodology – A theory of how inquiry should proceed (Schwandt, 2007).

Methods – the process of carrying out something (Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1997).

Mission Statement – Describes the ultimate result that the organization is trying to accomplish and answers the questions, what is the organization’s purpose? And what the mission is trying to achieve? (Spiro, 2011).
Mixed Methods – The notion of using multiple methods to generate and analyze different kinds of data in the same study (Schwandt, 2007).

Network Chief – Mini-superintendent.

Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) – A web-based assessment, computer-adaptive, multiple-choice assessment with questions that automatically adapt to each student’s instructional level based on their responses, independent of the enrolled grade level.

Observation – Direct firsthand eyewitness accounts of everyday social action regarded as essential to answering the classic field-work question “What’s going on here?” (Schwandt, 2007).

Probation – The School Probation and Remediation Policy defines probation schools based upon performance on state tests administered citywide and other relevant indicators of school performance or a failure to sustain progress in student performance on state tests and other relevant indicators of school performance despite the development of a remediation plan or other measures taken to improve the school.

Protocols – Norms and protocols facilitate productive meetings and are effective in building trusting relationships – which are essential for teams to be learning teams (Leadership and Learning Center, 2008).

Review of Literature – Analyzing and synthesizing multiple studies for the purpose of demonstrating collective relevance for solving some problem, for understanding some issue and for explaining some relationship (Schwandt, 2007).
RIT Scale – An achievement scale useful for measuring growth over time and measures a student’s level of achievement in a particular subject. RIT scale stands for Rasch Unit scale (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2017).

Self-study – A focus on one’s own personal and professional self (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Self-study – Focused more on gaining knowledge about how one’s identity impacts and is impacted by one’s practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Student Achievement – meaningful growth in what students learn (School Performance Management Toolkit, 2010).

Triangulation – A procedure used to establish the fact that the criterion of validity has been met (Schwandt, 2007).

90/90/90 – 90% or more of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students were members of ethnic minority groups, and 90% or more of the students met the district or state academic standards in reading or another area (Reeves, 2001).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter II included the scholarly review of literature beginning with a brief history of education and American public education which provided an understanding of the historical perspectives and contributions which shaped modern education today (Alexander & Alexander, 2001; Cordasco, 1976; Ubben, Hughes & Norris, 2004). Administrators in urban schools, while being aware of their leadership style, must manage social reform efforts to develop a strong instructional culture to close the
achievement gap (Fullan, 2014; Taines, 2012; Ubben et al., 2004). Included was discussion of the middle school concept to show the necessity for teachers to have strong content background (Stephens, 2014; Wormeli, 2006; Stephens, 2014). Moreover, the literature review supported building capacity for instructional leadership for school improvement efforts (Weiner, 2014; Zepeda, 2013). For this reason, the examination of student, classroom and school level data was reviewed with the purpose of assessing student achievement (Gambrell et al., 2007; Marzano, 2000). Finally, this chapter showed how the analysis of student data, root-cause probe as well as the planning and monitoring of action items impact student achievement.

Chapter III reviewed the methodology in the self-study. Background of an inner city elementary school in Chicago along with a data analysis for middle school grades were incorporated. A thorough detail was provided of the data collection including, district wide assessment data for middle grade students, the Illinois Report Card data, the Five Essentials Survey data, my reflections from teacher meetings, reflections of agendas and minutes from Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings. Reflections of professional development and review of exit slips to understand the teacher’s learning and work were described. Chapter III also included an explanation of the triangulation of data sources which provided school wide growth and attainment measures in literacy. My reflection of the explanation and identification of data trends, quick wins, action plan development and monitoring of action items were also included.

Chapter IV included an analysis of the data collected throughout the self-study. This chapter consisted of the procedures and protocols for the Instructional Leadership
Team and Grade Level Team meetings as well as the role and my experiences as the principal. These procedures were analyzed through the conceptual framework for leadership defined by John Kotter’s *Eight Stage Process of Creating Major Change* for organization through discussion and inquiry of relevant data sources.

Chapter V included the review and discussion of the research questions, data collection, data findings and implications to the field of educational leadership by the principal through my reflections and the impact of the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The engagement of members of an Instructional Leadership Team, as well as the Principal as the instructional leader, are essential to improving student achievement. Members include the principal, assistant principal, counselor, teachers and resource teachers, such as music, physical education, art, etc. The collaboration of these key stakeholders speaks to their collective commitment to the school’s shared vision and personal ownership of the tasks of the Instructional Leadership Team (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010). Williamson and Blackburn state that personal ownership first starts with the will to become a team player as a key stakeholder to guide one’s effort. Ownership constitutes the will to be involved in the outcome of a decision making team, such as the Instructional Leadership Team, and also “have some level of expertise” (p. 84). The capacity of a team member includes the level of involvement which is to have a personal stake in the outcome, but also having some level of capability and proficiency. This chapter touched on education, leadership in an urban environment and schools in an urban environment to facilitate change in literacy for middle grades.

Education

From creation, thousands of kids taught themselves to play and to discover learning and stimulating activities on their own. Children’s natural desire to learn was the
first step to explaining why schools are what they are today. The history of education spans as early as 3100 BC with the invention of writing. There the Babylonians and Egyptians found writing necessary in order to properly communicate and function in a society that was becoming increasingly complex. They felt writing was necessary to develop a way to accrue, record and preserve their traditional legacy. The method of learning during this period was mainly memorization and the consequence of rebellion of this act involved punitive corporal punishment.

Early civilizations developed schools which included the education of Jewish boys. Educating adolescent males in the first five Judaica Books of the Old Testament was critical. Oral tradition and learning the arts of peace and war for Grecian adults was also a part of the requirement (http://history-world.org/history_of_education.htm).

Some viewed schools as a place to shield children while other influential societies wanted to provide learners with ethical and intellectual training and education. Others felt this was needed to develop the children into honorable and skilled adults. Literature was at the crux of schooling for male adolescence in Athens. The boys learned running, hurdling, sparring, grappling, circle and spear throwing. Learning to perform the lyre, sing, count, read and write (Mulhern, 1959) were also crucial.

More sophisticated teaching occurred around 390 BC as assemblies of learners committed themselves to the places where Plato, Isocrates or Aristotle taught. This form of permanent schooling commenced the concept of higher education. In 146 BC, grammar schools were established where Latin and Greek were studied with grammar and literature. Around the middle of the 1st century BC, the arrangement of graded
schools were established throughout the Roman Empire. Greek education greatly influenced and fostered the tutelage of science, philosophy, music, dance and physical training.

In Italy, education continued to be influenced through the heart of the Renaissance during the 14th century. Language and mathematics were impacted in the period of 17th and 18th Century Europe, including Colonial America’s contribution to education through the first rudimentary textbook, which is entitled ‘The New England Primer’ (Gutek, 1991). Each contribution has far reaching effects from the origin of education and the impact today as witnessed in American public education.

**American Public Education**

Although school was not commonly accessible for all, the American colonist knew that education was important. In 1635, the Colonists established public schools with the formation of the Boston Latin School. In 1647 Puritan Massachusetts passed the “Old Deluder Satan Act” requiring each town of 50 or more families to form an elementary school.

Additionally, in 1751, Benjamin Franklin assisted the conception of secondary schools in America. This brought about a curriculum that addressed the necessities of normal life. This included history, geometry, algebra, astronomy and geography.

One room school houses were common prior to the mid-19th century, where pupils of all ages were taught in the same classroom. In 1848, educator, Horace Mann introduced the age grading system in Massachusetts. This became the model in public education.
education-an-origin-story/). Today, public education is free to all children in the United States from Kindergarten to High School (K-12).

Higher learning became more interesting at the end of 19th century. This became relevant when manufacturing started to replace agriculture as the main lead of economic drive (Stevens, Wood & Sheehan, 2000). In 1862, Congress created the Land Grant Colleges. These Colleges focused on preparing students for technical agriculture and engineering science. Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, Iowa State University, Kansas City University and Texas A & M University are just a few of the first federal land grant colleges. Thirty years later, Black Colleges are federally funded.

The progressive movement was noticeable at the end of the 19th century. Based on the injustices and educational reform, hundreds of learning institutes were established due to the growing population throughout the nation. Following this movement was the establishment of compulsory high school. By 1920, thirty percent of all Americans attended high school between the ages of 14 and 17 (Havighurst, 1964).

In 1896, a decision known as Plessy v. Ferguson handed down by court justices, ruled that schools could be separate but equal. This ruling concluded that the Constitution upheld segregation in school accommodations as long as they were considered to be “equal” (Alexander & Alexander, 2001). Of course classrooms were not equal. In fact, classrooms were cramped and poorly maintained, mainly in urban and racially divided communities. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in the case, Brown v. Board of Education which was the most significant change to the American public education system.
Beginning from the early history of education to what is now perceived as American public education, each civilization has greatly contributed to the organization of the school. This includes how children learn and the suggested curriculum which motivate students to achieve (Alexander & Alexander, 2001), including the need to ensure equity and access for all students, regardless of race. As schools in urban environments face multiple challenges, understanding the historical perspective of American education helps to build equity.

**Schools in an Urban Environment**

Many inner-city schools are considered neighborhood schools and have strong ties to the community. Although some are in areas of high-poverty, many are models of academic success (Allensworth, 2015). For example, C. F. School in Chicago has proven successful with a 90/90/90 model. This means the school’s population is at least 90% below poverty level and those students qualify for free and reduced lunch; 90% of the students are minorities and 90% are meeting or exceeding state and local assessment standards (http://www.cps.edu/schools).

The Chicago public school system was once called the worst in the country (Chicago Tribune, 1988; Hess, 1998). Although Chicago school’s now outperform outlying schools, urban schools have been affected by charter schools. Charter schools are often seen as common alternatives to traditional public schools, but have received criticism because of the resources they allegedly rob the public schools (Winters, 2011).

Schools that do not show satisfactory growth on state and district level assessments face consequences and sanctions such as school turn-overs and low ratings
for school levels (Gambrell et al., 2007; Mintrop, MacLellan & Quintero, 2001).

Although there are expectations at the local level for schools to maintain a threshold of student achievement and performance, the state and federal levels also have requirements for schools to demonstrate success and to reverse their decline by improving academic attainment (Mintrop et al., 2001). At this level of high stake accountability, many school districts and state mandates require schools on probation to design and implement School Improvement Plans (Fullan, 1991; Levine & Leibert, 1987; Mintrop et al., 2001). School Improvement Plans are often a required document and process for schools on probation which have demonstrated persistent low student performance. Levine and Leibert (1987) found that an important aim of the School Improvement Plan is designed to position the school back to robust and sturdy scholarly standing. This design must determine the school’s systematic efforts to plan for specific measures and goals identified by the state or district for continuous progress of their growth (Mintrop et al., 2001). Elmore, Abelmann and Fuhrman (1996) identified accountability measures to include attendance, retention, dropout rates, specific assessment growth targets and composite index scores.

The measures and goals are at the center of accountability, together with state and district level performance based assessments, to reflect a probable gap between historical and impending performance (Broadhead, Cuckle, Hodgson, & Dunford, 1996; Mintrop et al., 2001; Morrison, 1998).

Rahm Emanuel, Mayor of Chicago, worked with the school’s top district leaders to create a Principal pipeline designed to improve school leadership, especially for underperforming schools (Maxwell, 2013). This leadership development initiative created
rigorous benchmarks by which potential principals become qualified to lead the most vulnerable, underachieving schools in Chicago Public Schools. Maintaining a threshold and understanding the necessity to increase student achievement, particularly in middle grades, are required if underperforming schools are to improve.

**Middle School**

In the United States, middle schools, or sometimes referred as Junior High School, are normally for students in grades sixth, seventh and eighth. The core subjects taught in middle grades are reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science and foreign language. In most schools, the middle grade students rotate classes. They are taught by a different teacher for each core subject. The students still have alternative classes, such as physical education, library, music, and art classes. Middle grade students typically are able to choose some of their class subjects.

In 1909, the “junior high school” concept was introduced in Columbus, Ohio. During this time, some American public schools had grades 1 through 8. Although many American schools still organize their grades as such, the middle school concept has flourished. Many school districts created school buildings and curriculum solely for this student population. Jon Wiles, author of *Developing Successful K–8 Schools: A Principal's Guide*, said that “a major problem” for the innovative middle school model was “the inclusion of the ninth grade.” Wiles believed the lack of instructional flexibility, was problematic for students experiencing puberty. In the mid-1960s, more middle schools began to appear and thus were created for connecting the gap between the
elementary and the high school. Developing programming around the needs of middle grades relied on a transformational leader at the helm.

**Leadership in Schools**

Maintaining a focus on teamwork development and school improvement are vital to teaching and learning for a transformational leadership style. The leadership goals are identified as the following:

- Assisting the Leadership Team to develop and maintain a collaborative, professional culture within the school;
- Building teacher development;
- Effective problem solving among teachers. (Liontos, 1992, p. 3)

Liontos states a strategy of a successful collaboration involves the development of shared goals and a shared vision. This resulted in the transformation of all stakeholders involved. This strategy builds upon the qualities of a transformational leader to increase his or her influence and to build teacher collaboration.

In schools with sustained academic growth, Sally Zepeda (2013) states the building “…principal is able to support a learning community by engaging key stakeholders in the process of building a vision, and sustaining a culture…” (p. xv). The work of the principal, as instructional leader, is crucial to ensuring positive student achievement results. According to Zepeda, the routine work of the principal is embedded in the need to attain instructional progress. Michael Fullan (2010) reports the contributions of a principal include the following:

1. The establishment of shared goals;
2. Increased instructional student achievement as a priority;

3. Professional development to include both the principal and staff members;

4. The analysis of data for the use of decision making. (pp. 44-45)

The concept of “seven practicalities” aligns to the work of the principal. Ben Levin (2008) identifies the following characteristics of a system leader:

1. Establishing a vision and goals
2. Building a strong team
3. Creating and supporting the school culture
4. Communication, vision, direction and accomplishment
5. Recruiting, developing and retaining leaders
6. Building internal and external support
7. Maintaining the focus on teaching and learning. (p. 177)

Levin’s characteristics of a system leader tie directly into *The Eight Stage Process of Creating Major Change* by John Kotter (2012) for creating major change in an organization to guide principals in urban school environments increase student achievement in middle grades in literacy. The conceptual framework of leadership supports variation and structure as aligned in Table 6.
Table 6

The Eight Stage Process of Creating Major Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Process for Change</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 8</td>
<td>Anchoring new approaches in the culture</td>
<td>Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success.</td>
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Principals

The role of the principal has evolved over time from building managers executing compliance issues, to the principal as instructional leaders who coach teachers, build instructional capacity and provide academic support (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Mednick, 2003). Effective principals ensure the goal of the school is focused on growth in student learning based on measureable student outcomes (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Mednick, 2003).
Principals are accountable for the general operations at the school campus. The responsibilities are outlined by the State and the local school district. Some duties include managing the budget and school finance. Overseeing teaching and learning for both the students and the teachers are additional duties, as well as student performance on state and local assessments. As the chief administrator in the school building, the principal is no longer viewed as solely the building manager, but as a leader who transforms or orchestrates change within education. Transformational leadership is a leadership approach that influences change through the work of a group. A transformational leader is necessary to build collaboration with teachers and other stakeholders. Lontos, (1992) maps out the importance of becoming a transformational leader versus a leader that just takes charge and get things done.

Principals are expected to develop new aptitudes mostly aligned to data, curriculum, instruction and human capital advancement. This is coupled with the demands of state and local expectations (Alvoid & Black, 2014). State and school districts have set expectations through the principal evaluation system. As previously discussed, school leaders are held more accountable for the performance of their students on national and state assessments.

Alvoid and Black (2014) discussed the role principals must share with the responsibility to help educators improve their craft of teaching. The Center for Collaborative Education has designed the critical roles of the principal as the following:

- Sharing real decision-making power with staff and faculty.
- Providing support for effective functioning of teams.
• Being an instructional leader who promotes others to continuously learn and improve their practice.

• Developing collaborative accountability.

• Managing and monitoring the change process to make sure the process moves forward. (Guide to Collaborative Culture and Shared Leadership, 2001)

Sergiovanni (1992) describes five leadership styles, or authority, that impact how school supervision is understood and practiced, not only by the Principal, but stakeholders. Bureaucratic is defined as prescriptive, greatly leading with rules and regulations while another style entitled, personal, relies on building human relationships. This form of authority uses motivational strategies and social skills to lead. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) refers to the technical-rational style as one who uses research-based evidence and logical reasoning in practice. Professional is an authority that is based on the expertise and craft of teachers compared to the leadership style defined as moral. Moral authority relies on the belief that teacher’s value and have shared commitments to the school community. Principals should recognize and understand their own leadership style. Understanding one’s style is a factor and more so influential to the role a principal holds through interactions with all stakeholders (Ubben et al., 2004). The role of the principal is key to working with the staff to develop a strong instructional culture in which teachers collaborate to build instructional leadership.
Instructional Leadership

Building leadership capacity among teachers and enhancing instructional support from the Leadership Team are significant tasks for the principal if he or she is the build rigor into instructional practices. According to Lambert (2002), “Participation is most powerful when combined into a thoughtful and integrated school improvement process” (p. 40). Linda Lambert identifies a framework for instructional leadership which includes a vision shared by the community. This framework builds upon reflection and commitment to the school’s core values by all stakeholders as they use inquiry-based practices to plan and to build collaboration for high student achievement. These are key indicators to sustainable school improvement. The principal, teachers, and all stakeholders learn together. They are the leaders to improve school performance.

Linda Lambert (2006) stated the Quadrant 4 level of a Principal’s participation to build leadership capacity includes the principal and teachers as skillful leaders who have a shared vision that results in program coherence. Lambert’s framework is meaningful for the leadership team through the systematic use of inquiry as student data are analyzed to inform instructional decisions and practices. The framework is also relevant as a tool to define leadership roles and actions that reflect broad involvement, collaboration and collective responsibility of this team. Lambert concludes that reflective practice of the leadership team consistently leads to high student achievement or steady improvement.

Michael Fullan (2014) concludes that an instructional leader is one who maximizes the learning of all to improve student learning. Groups of teachers working together to improve student achievement produces the great effects. Fullan concludes that
principals can have the largest impact with the work alongside of teachers. The principal and teacher group must focus on the following main areas:

1. Specific goals for students.
2. Data that enable clear diagnosis of individual learning needs.
3. Instructional practices that address those learning needs.
4. Teachers learning from each other, monitoring overall progress and making adjustments accordingly.

Fullan notes that instructional leadership impacts Instructional Leadership Teams to improve student achievement and create predictable outcomes when their main focus is student learning.

**Instructional Leadership Teams**

Jennie Weiner (2014) identifies the purpose of a Leadership Team is to create and implement a school’s reform plan through an explicit focus on instruction. According to Weiner, the model for leadership teams is a tool for critical reflection of instructional practices, as well as an opportunity for teachers and principals to collaborate. Weiner adds the model accounts for “who should be on the team; the purpose of the instructional leadership team; and the team function, including the selection of team members based on expertise” (p. 255).

According to Sally Zepeda (2013), “Principals assert their effectiveness by diffusing leadership to a larger set of stakeholders, namely, teachers” (p. 9). The development of an effective Leadership Team is an essential task for the principal to employ and to sustain teacher leadership in a collaborative effort. The work of the
Leadership Team supports the school’s vision and mission with a direct relationship to student achievement. Schmoker (2001) states “when teachers regularly and collaboratively review assessment data for the purpose of improving practice to reach measureable achievement goals, something magical happens” (p. 1).

Chen, Kanfer, Kirkman and Rosen (2007) found team motivation is demonstrated through the empowerment of the team. This form of team motivation increases the leadership capacity of the team to achieve significant work which impacts the organization.

The responsibilities of a Leadership Team consist of:

- Collaborating on gathering data which immediately addresses urgent areas of student achievement.
- Setting improvement goals, collecting and analyzing student achievement data to monitor goals.
- Identifying the function and purpose of an effective team in relation to school and district student achievement goals.
- Discussing the important distinction between effect data and cause data. (Leadership and Learning Center, 2008, p. 2)

According to Lencioni (2003), a school’s instructional leadership team can become dysfunctional if the team is built upon an unsound and unsteady basis or foundation. The basis for all team functions is trust and the absence of trust is the largest factor in a dysfunctional team make up. There are five dysfunctions which causes confusion and contention among a team:
1. *Dysfunction #1*: Absence of Trust – hesitant to be vulnerable with peers, opposed to acknowledging errors, weaknesses or request for assistance.

2. *Dysfunction #2*: Fear of Conflict – unable to freely share viewpoints and struggle to partake in appropriate conflict.


4. *Dysfunction #4*: Avoidance of Accountability – hesitant to hold each other responsible for actions.

5. *Dysfunction #5*: Inattention to results – losing focus of success.


*Figure 3*. Five Dysfunctions

Understanding the characteristics of each factor allows the team to honestly address the concerns which might disrupt the work of the Instructional Leadership Team. Therefore,
a principal must put into place structures and protocols. This avoids dysfunction in the Instructional Leadership Team. Moreover, this is done by questioning the core values of the team and the team’s work. The core values drive the purpose of the team and the team’s function. Without purpose and goal, the team works in vain. The opposite of a dysfunctional team is a healthy team. A healthy team builds upon trust, conflict and solution, commitment, accountability and results (Lencioni, 2003).

The Effects of Leadership on Student Achievement

Leithwood and Mascall (2008) discuss the effects of collective leadership on student achievement, starting from the purpose of collective leadership through influence and control. Their model for leadership is built upon the motivation of others, the capacity of teachers and staff and the environment in which teacher performance is set. These are all factors and variables of an anticipated increase in student performance and academic improvement. The factor of teacher motivation includes self-efficacy, self-confidence, academic self-concept and aspects of self-esteem. The factor of capacity or building capacity is to understand organizational learning and the direct or indirect effect on student achievement. The final factor of work settings encompass the instructional support available, teacher workload, class size, student needs, available support staff and scheduling. Conclusively, the authors indicate there is a direct significant effect on all teacher variables from collective leadership. This study shows the work setting for teachers to have the strongest effect on collective leadership, followed by teacher capacity and teacher motivation.
In a study by Marks and Printy (2003), principal leadership and school performance are based on the conceptions of transformational leadership and instructional leadership. This indication shows significance when the principal in the case study modeled the technique of shared power with the teachers. This shared power had a positive impact on the Leadership Team and student achievement. In this study, eight elementary schools, eight high schools and eight middle schools were sampled. Qualitative and quantitative instruments were used, surveys, meeting observations, document analysis and NAEP achievement levels were utilized to evaluate instruction and assessment practices. The result of this study indicated that high levels of engagement between principals and teachers led to effective and quality instructional practices and increased levels of student achievement.

Douglas Reeves (2002) believes the successful analysis of data is a great discovery in which principals and teachers find those professional practices which can hold the keys to improved student achievement. The work of the Instructional Leadership Team leads to a continuous pattern of improvement through the team’s practices and action items set as a result from data analysis. These work products of the team translate to a direct benefit for students through the analysis of data (Reeves, 2002; White, 2005). This team of core members is responsible for guiding the improvement of instruction (Reeves, 2002; Fullan, 2010). The work of the Instructional Leadership Team focuses on the development of shared goals, student and school-wide improvement and corrective action based on identified areas of concern (Fullan, 2010), including the review of data from various student assessments.
Assessments

Assessments administered by the State are often viewed as high stakes for schools. The pressure to show that students are performing well are matters of concern today (Gambrell et al., 2007). Marzano (2000) defines assessment as the vehicle for collecting data about students’ achievement or performance. This collection of student data used for evaluative determinations create assumptions about the level of understanding or performance, either for the student or at the school level. From the perspective of Marzano’s study, a simple conjecture or inference of the results of the assessments precisely reflects students’ levels of attainment (p. 86). The use of this critical information assisted to determine if schools make adequate progress on state assessments. The assessment data also serve as a consequence which is used as a form of accountability.

There are various types of formal and informal assessments which are used to provide information about students’ achievement. The most popular forms include performance tasks, written responses, multiple choice and oral reports. Performance tasks are sometimes referred to as authentic tasks, which both require students to apply knowledge while constructing their responses (Marzano, 2000; Wormeli, 2006). There are pros and cons to assessments and some concerns with evaluations of student achievement. These might include teachers using their discretion as factors in grading, modifying assessments and mixing various categories of knowledge and skills which Marzano conclude would possibly alter students’ evaluations (p. 13). The benefit to student assessments originate from permitting students to validate what they know and
additionally are able to perform (Wormeli, 2006). Understanding the implications of student assessment data assisted to address the achievement gap for urban schools.

**Achievement Gap**

An achievement gap exists when there are disparities between student attainment and performance levels. Understanding the source of an achievement gap is important to know as there are crucial factors that must be considered and researched. Some factors might include curriculum, quality of teaching and learning. Moreover, programming could also be an aspect of a gap warning. Additionally, the current state shows a broadening achievement breach among students of diverse backgrounds. This also might include gender, social economic status, language acquisition and race (Gambrell et al., 2007). Data derived from student assessments further contributed to the understanding of the achievement gap as data is a lever for monitoring and implementing elements for school improvement. For example, the principal, teachers and leadership team members use data to guide discussion in stimulating deeper examination around the causes and factors of low achievement which contributes to the disparity (Datnow & Park, 2015). Data also measured what students know and inform what they are ready to learn next.

**Conclusion of the Literature Review**

This literature review was relevant for the examination of my leadership practices. The review supported the themes I accentuated. Additionally, the literature analysis established my self-study’s significance and contributed to the field of education, particularly, Instructional Leadership Teams and Grade Level Teams. This chapter reviewed literature about the following topics: education, American public education,
schools in an urban environment, middle school, leadership in schools, principals and instructional leadership, instructional leadership teams, the effects of leadership on student achievement, assessments and the achievement gap. The history of education and American public education provided an understanding of the historical perspectives and contributions which shaped modern education today (Alexander & Alexander, 2001; Cordasco, 1976; Ubben et al., 2004). Moreover, building capacity for instructional leadership and collaborative leadership in schools provide sustainability for school improvement efforts with a plan for student achievement (Lambert, 2002; Fullan, 2014; Weiner, 2014; Zepeda, 2013). Additionally, administrators in urban schools must manage social reform efforts while developing a strong instructional culture to close the achievement gap (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Datnow & Park, 2015; Fullan, 2014; Mednick, 2003; Reeves & Flach, 2011; Taines, 2012). In fact, the middle school concept has flourished to ensure teachers have strong content background required to teach more in-depth content (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Stephens, 2014; Wormeli, 2006). For this reason, the examination of student, classroom and school level data are critical for defining and assessing student achievement (Gambrell et al., 2007; Marzano, 2000). Finally, the analysis of student data, root-cause probe, as well as, the planning and monitoring of action items assisted to scrutinize my instructional decisions as I investigated the concern of varying student growth patterns.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

This study’s focus was to examine my leadership practices as a principal and researcher using various forms of data. My reflective journal detailed informed decision making with fidelity to support the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams. The purpose was to improve student achievement in literacy and reflect on multiple factors to address the problem of inadequate and inconsistent student growth as measured by school wide assessments through examining school-wide and student data. I learned about sustaining best practices in an effort to decrease the achievement gap in literacy and increase student achievement, as well as, build teacher ownership, instructional capacity, positive relationships and a strong data culture.

The site for this self-study occurred at an elementary school in Chicago. The school presented inconsistent growth pattern for students in middle grades in reading, according to the 2017 Illinois State School Report Card. Students in middle grades were below the national average norm of 50 percentile points in reading; although students showed growth, except sixth.

This chapter described the research design and methodology. This research used a self-study design with qualitative and quantitative methods. The district wide assessment data for middle grades and the Illinois Report Card data was utilized as a quantitative
means with the self-study. Qualitative sources included field notes and the exit slips from the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings. Data from the Five Essential Survey and follow up from Professional Development sessions were also included. This chapter described the sample criteria, the procedures for the data collection, as well as the data analysis and triangulation of data sources.

**Research Questions**

1. How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades?

2. What leadership methods do I use to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

3. What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

4. What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making?

5. How has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process?
**Research Design and Methodology**

This self-study used a mixed methods methodology, including reflective qualitative and quantitative data sources for the sample, data collection, analysis and findings (Field, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). The research (Calabrese, 2012) was descriptive as Merriam (2009) states including a “rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 43). The description used specific detail, reviewed all data and a reflective portrayal of my leadership practices as the principal in the self-study. I reflected how to understand my experiences, as the principal, to support data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity. The study supported the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement in literacy for the middle grades.

The primary focus of this understanding was *emic*, which was my perspective as the researcher and principal in the self-study (Merriam, 2009). This was critical to the self-study as viewed through the lens of a researcher. Grounded on reflection of my leadership practices, an increase in student achievement through the work with the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams are demonstrated. Examination of systematic methods was conducted. This included the Instructional Leadership Team, Grade Level Teams and the protocols used in an organized format with fidelity. Lastly, my goal was to identify and sustain best practices for data-driven decision making for the future.
Sample School Context

The sample for the self-study occurred at one elementary school in Chicago whose enrollment consist of 360 students. The demographics included 25 teachers and 360 students in grades Pre-kindergarten to Eighth. Approximately 83% of the student population is African Americans. Hispanic students make up nearly 16% of the student demographics. The school has 98% low income, indicating their household income is below poverty level. Based on the 2017 public data search of the district’s database, students in grades 3rd – 8th were in the 85th percentile for growth in the NWEA assessment in reading. The national average growth was at the 50th percentile. This reflected growth of 35 percentile points over the national norm in reading. However, students were far below the 50th percentile for the national norm for reading attainment. The 2017 data showed an inconsistent pattern for trending data.

The population included the teachers, support staff members on the Instructional Leadership Team, Grade Level Teams and myself as the Principal. According to Lambert (2002), “Participation is most powerful when combined into a thoughtful and integrated school improvement process” (p. 40). Figure 4 describes the process of identifying the sample. The sample’s main criteria was an elementary school in an inner city school district. The sample school administered the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) to students in middle grades in the 2017 Spring EOY. The EOY Spring 2018 NWEA data was analyzed and compared to identify growth and declining patterns. The data indicated an upward trend on the EOY Spring 2018 Northwest
Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) of at least 5 – 10 percentage points in reading.

![Diagram showing the hierarchy of J. H. Elementary School, Teachers, Grade Level Teams, and Instructional Leadership Team.]

*Figure 4. Population*

**Data Collection: Quantitative and Qualitative Sources**

The research methodology was a self-study including the following data sources that were reviewed, analyzed and reflected upon: district wide assessment data for middle grades, the Illinois Report Card data, the Five Essentials Survey data, my reflections from teacher meetings, agenda/minutes from the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings, reflections of professional development and review of exit slips to understand the teacher’s learning and work.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

As I gauged the interest of the teachers and educational support staff members in the school through professional dialogues, school department chairpersons were identified. This group of individuals facilitated the Grade Level Team meetings. The process for selecting the ILT was to identify teacher leaders who expressed interest in
school improvement, were open to learning walks by peers and willing to facilitate professional development and training of other teachers and staff members. This group made up the Instructional Leadership Team.


Figure 5. Data Collection

**Data Analysis**

The Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data and the Illinois Report Card data was beneficial to help me understand and identify root causes and growth measures in literacy. The grade level agenda and minutes were used to gauge what data and core values were discussed and planned during the weekly meetings as
well as methods and protocols. The results of the Five Essentials Survey from the CCSR provided perspectives of instructional practices as well as data from the Illinois Report Card database. The collection of qualitative and quantitative data from the self-study school assisted to:

- Understand the inconsistent growth pattern of middle grade students in the area of literacy and
- Understand my leadership practices through the identification of data trends, quick wins and action plan development and monitoring of action items.

Throughout the school year I created systematic structures to transform the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams. This step was necessary to support the members and their efforts led to an improvement in student achievement. Transformational leadership goals were identified to help staff develop and to maintain a collaborative, professional school culture, teacher development, and effective problem solving among teachers (Liontos, 1992). The conceptual framework was used to analyze the data as the work of the principal was linked to the process illustrated in Figure 5.

- Establishing a sense of urgency
- Creating the guiding coalition
- Developing a vision and strategy
- Communicating the change vision
- Empowering broad-based action
- Generating short-term wins
- Consolidating gains and producing more change
- Anchoring new approaches in the culture. (Kotter, 2012)

During the school year, I gathered data, regularly met with the Instructional Leadership Team and systematically assisted them through established methods and written protocols to analyze school wide data. This data included the Five Essentials Survey, NWEA data, agendas and minutes from the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team sessions. The Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change was important to me as I moved towards guiding and analyzing the discussion and work of the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams. Fernald and Duclos (2005) discuss the potential to lose focus and become side tracked with complications that occur with teams who do not have regular communication and clear procedures. During the meetings, all members had a clear focus of the goal and discussion which included all the members.

The application of Kotter’s conceptual framework helped me to understand my practices as the principal through the work of the Leadership Team. The use of the Eight Stage Process assisted me to understand how I supported the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams through interactions during the bi-weekly team meetings. The exit slips were used to understand the teachers’ learning and work.

**Triangulation**

Figure 6 showed the triangulation of data sources which provided school wide growth and attainment measures, as well as, the identification of data trends, quick wins and action plan development and monitoring of action items.
Figure 6. Data Sources

In a more specific triangulation review in Table 7, entitled, Triangulation and Alignment of Data with Research Questions each research question was identified by the data source and the triangulation goal.

Table 7

**Triangulation and Alignment of Data with Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question #1</th>
<th>How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Five Essentials Survey Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Leadership Team Agenda and Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) Data for middle grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Illinois Report Card Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>School wide growth and attainment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question #2</th>
<th>What leadership methods do I use to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Leadership Team Agenda and Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) Data for grades 3rd – 8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Five Essentials Survey Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Illinois Report Card Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Trends, quick wins and action plan items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question #3</td>
<td>What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Leadership Team Agenda and Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) Data for middle grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Illinois Report Card Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Five Essentials Survey Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Item analysis based on NWEA Des Cartes and RIT bands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question #4</td>
<td>What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Leadership Team Agenda and Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Illinois Report Card Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Five Essentials Survey Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Best practices identified to sustain and assist the Leadership Team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question #5</td>
<td>How has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Reflections from GLT Meetings, Agendas and Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Reflections from ILT Meetings, Agendas and Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Reflections of Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Understand my leadership decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Notes

As the principal, I am a member of the Instructional Leadership Team and a participant during Grade Level meetings. I engaged stakeholders. Through my leadership methods, I employed thoughtful and intentional engagement of the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team to improve literacy at the middle grades. The field notes taken during the team meetings allowed me to better understand my decisions of the context, climate and culture of the self-study school (Merriam, 2009). Additionally,
I noted the environment and diagramed the setting to assist my understanding of the context. Merriam (2009) states the field notes usually include the following:

- Verbal descriptions of the setting, the people, the activities
- Direct quotations or at least the substance of what people said
- Participant comments – put in the margins or in the running narrative and identified by underlining, italics, or bold and bracketing.

As the researcher, I used a journal designed to reflect and log my experiences. I maintained notes to document my leadership decisions.

**Documents**

I used artifacts to assist me to understand my leadership practices and experiences. Such artifacts included viewing the Grade Level and Instructional Leadership Team’s agendas and minutes. Examination of the school’s website offered organizational information, such as the mission and vision of the school, as well as, the school’s staff organization chart.

Review of exit slips captured the thoughts, questions and next steps from the team members. The exit slips were open-ended and asked the following:

- I’d like to know more about…
- Skills / knowledge I learned:
- I didn’t like…
- I’ll be able to follow-up this session with…
- A problem I had which was solved…
- I’m going to use the info from this session for…
• I liked…

• General comments:

Reflections of the Professional Development workshops included my decision to utilize the following:

- NWEA progress reporting by chairpersons
- Student intervention logs
- Tier 1, 2 and 3 supports (students grouped based on their need)
- Goal setting sheets
- NWEA class level data
- Implications for support
- Quarter expectations
- Discussion ideas

**Bias Prevention**

I acknowledge that bias exist because of the nature of the study. Therefore, as the researcher, I maintained a notebook/journal to write down personal feelings and biases and to keep judgmental statements and opinions out the research study. I used the journal to reflect before, during and after the research. Ortlipp (2008) states that reflective journals are beneficial for the researcher to create a transparent response in the research development process, as well as self-reflection. I controlled the bias as I saw my change. The use of the capstone committee also assisted to prevent bias by regularly reviewing the self-study and suggesting feedback.
Validity and Limitations

There were several types of validity that were critical to this research self-study. The use of data triangulation and critical friends were utilized. Additionally, rich, thick descriptions, the engagement of my capstone committee and the use of scholarly research (Merriam, 2009) are important types of validity. Application of these strategies increased the validity in this self-study. I searched for limitations and areas of bias. Reporting positive and negative results and clearly identifying the instruments used in the study are essential. Merriam concludes a limitation of descriptive study includes “describing the phenomenon rather than predicting future behavior” (p. 50). This statement is relevant to this self-study as I am aware of the limitation to generalizing this study to larger or smaller schools or similar size schools with multiple Leadership Teams. Due to the review and study of my principal’s leadership story in one elementary school in Chicago, the results of this research were limited to those schools with different dynamics and different data sources.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology which included mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative data sources in a self-study design. The sample type is one elementary school in Chicago with a majority population of African American students. The mixed methods measures included the following: NWEA literacy data for middle grades, the Illinois Report Card data, the Five Essentials Survey data, my reflections from teacher meetings, agendas and minutes from Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings. This chapter included reflections of professional development and
review of exit slips to understand the teachers’ learning and work. As the principal, I identified and examined my leadership practices. I employed data informed decision making systematically and with fidelity to support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement in literacy at the middle grades.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

At the beginning of my research phase in April 2018 to December 2018, I set out to examine my leadership methods and decisions to improve student achievement in literacy in the middle grades using John Kotter’s *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* as my framework. Specifically, my goals were to examine my leadership decisions to use student, school-wide and classroom level data. Further goals included asking probing questions and identifying root causes were reflected upon and analyzed. My target was to build capacity among the ILT and GLT through building rigorous instructional strategies for teachers to implement.

In Chapter IV, I presented the findings from my self-study. Through reflective analysis of goals and obstacles, the purpose was to ascertain successes and challenges. Both of which are addressed in this chapter. This process of inquiry was documented through journal entries where I discovered the impact of my role as the instructional leader related to decisions made through analysis of various data collection for the duration of this self-study. Several journal excerpts are provided in this chapter to elucidate and detail my journey. Let me begin with an extract from my journal detailing my reflection of some support I provided.
I found that it wasn’t as easy this year to establish the needed support we need to grow academically, but the teacher buy-in is greater than I remember before. It is important for me to ask the teams to connect our daily work to the school’s CIWP and use our data to analyze and plan for deep dives. I realized that I had given the teachers [forms] earlier in the school year, and these [forms] helped us to align our work. I provided templates to identify students to target, rationale and interventions. I didn’t want to make assumptions that the teams knew how to use the templates so I modeled to demonstrate the problem solving process protocol.

(Written journal entry: December 19, 2018).

Although this entry was at the end of the research cycle, this extract was crucial to my understanding strengths as a leader as well as next steps. I’m convinced that our school is headed in the right direction because of my teachers’ buy-in. From each GLT and ILT session we attended together, there was hope. This journey has been long and difficult, and far from over, but I was fortunate to be present and able to document in my journal the interactions we shared through this growth process.

The conceptual framework of leadership defined by John Kotter (2012) for creating major change in an organization was applied throughout my self-examination of leadership practices and decisions. The following steps of *The Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* was utilized to guide and analyze my reflection:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency (Identifying and discussing crisis, potential crises, or major opportunities).
2. Creating the guiding coalition (Getting the group to work together like a team).

3. Developing a vision and strategy (Creating a vision to help direct the change effort. Developing strategies for achieving that vision).

4. Communicating the change vision (Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies).

5. Empowering broad-based action (Getting rid of obstacles. Changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision).


7. Consolidating gains and producing more change (Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision).

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture (Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success). (Kotter, 2012)

**Organization of the Study’s Findings**

The aim of this self-study was to examine my leadership experiences as a principal and researcher to improve student achievement in literacy in the middle grades. A self-study is an emphasis of one’s own personal and professional self (Herr & Anderson, 2005). LaBoskey (2004) indicates a self-study is focused at development with specific attention to “…transforming educators as a means to facilitate student transformation.” A self-study methodology allowed me to analyze my leadership
practices in multiple ways (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). In particular, to analyze the implementation of data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity.

The purpose of this self-study was to examine my leadership practices and how those actions and practices positively impact improved student achievement. Through analysis of my leadership methods, I scrutinized the implementation of data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity. This reflective analysis supported the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams with protocols and leadership methods to improve literacy instruction at the middle grades.

**Methodology Summary**

This self-study began April 2018 and spanned December 2018 to investigate my leadership methods and decisions as I supported the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams. Grade Level Team meetings were conducted weekly during the school year and the Instructional Leadership Team sessions were held bi-weekly, including the duration of summer 2018. Throughout this self-study, significant examination was conducted of evidence collected consisting of weekly written field notes and reflections of documents and data sources. The conceptual framework for leadership, defined by John Kotter’s Eight Stage Process of Creating Major Change for Organization, was applied to analyze my reflections of discussions and leadership actions. The Eight-Stage Change Process resulted in effective transformation and is “…a method designed to alter strategies, reengineer processes, or improve quality…” (Kotter, 2012, p. 22). My journal reflections, Kotter’s Eight-Stages for Change and the six areas of growth were used to
analyze my leadership practices and decisions to improve student achievement in literacy in the middle grades.

I employed publicly available data sources in the self-study. The data resources included: NWEA reading data for middle grades, the Illinois Report Card data, the Five Essentials Survey data, my reflections from teacher meetings, reflections on agenda/minutes from Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings, reflections of professional development and reflections of exit slips to understand my administrative impact of the teacher’s learning and work.

![Data Sources](image)

*Figure 7. Data Sources*

**Population, Sample and Participants**

The research occurred at a public school in Chicago. The demographics included 25 teachers and 360 students in grades Pre-kindergarten to Eighth. Approximately 83% of the student population was African Americans. Hispanic students comprised nearly
16% of the student demographics. The school had 98% low income, which indicated the household income was below poverty level. There are 10% Diverse Learners and 3% Limited English students. As the Principal, I was the sole subject and participant of this self-study.

**Findings**

The findings from the self-study suggested that implementation of strategies to facilitate Instructional Leadership meetings and Grade Level meetings were necessary for team collaboration for improving teaching and learning. The Leadership and Learning Center (2008) determine that highly effective school teams identify quality evidence for areas of academic improvement. This self-study answered the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

1. How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades?

2. What leadership methods do I implement to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

3. What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to
increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

4. What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making?

5. How has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process?

**Research Question One**

How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades?

I utilized stage 4 of Kotter’s *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* to analyze my reflection of the first research question. Kotter describes stage four as “Communicating the change vision” (2012, p. 23) as illustrated in Table 6. Kotter concludes that having a collective understanding of the objectives and direction of the vision are key to connecting the change vision (p. 87). Upon reflection of my journal entries, I concluded that this is no easy task! As I examined the first research question, I initially studied how and why I conducted the Instructional Leadership Team meetings and the Grade Level Team sessions. Specifically, I was seeking to understand how my administrative practices were impacting literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades. Upon reflection of the week’s student grade data, I was alarmed that one teacher had 80% of her 7th and 8th grade students failing in reading. Looking at this data was real and could not be avoided.
As I sat in on four of the meetings in which the ILT member presented, I noticed how each teacher was hesitant to talk about the “elephant in the room.” Several teachers had large amount of students failing within the first few weeks of school. Actually, this week and the coming week I will be meeting with the Network Chief and this is the data the (redacted) uses to start with. I have to be accountable for each data piece of the school, therefore, this type of representation is something that must be addressed. Although it is a delicate situation, the reality is our school is not at a place where this can be ignored. Clearly, this speaks to our core values and how we translate this information to our students and parents.

(Written journal entry: September 24, 2018)

My reflection aligned to Kotter as the conceptual framework using Stage 4 as there was a breakdown in communication of the school’s vision. I made a clear attempt to effectively communicate the vision in all our work and in all my decisions.

My work with the middle grade team detailed a process for increasing student growth by developing differentiated instructional plans. I first worked with the middle grade teachers to review Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) reading scores from the Middle of the Year (MOY) as well as reviewing data from the Illinois Report Card. During the weekly Grade Level Team sessions, I asked teachers to use the tool from NWEA called Des Cartes Continuum of Learning, to identify students based on the use of a RIT scale. Des Cartes Continuum of Learning is a tool designed by NWEA that teachers use to identify academic skill strands aligned to RIT scores (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2017). The RIT scale is an achievement scale which is useful for
measuring growth over time and measures a student’s level of achievement in a particular subject. RIT scale stands for Rasch Unit scale (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2017). Students were then placed in RIT bands which grouped and tiered students based on their attainment in reading. During a two week period, teachers developed differentiated instructional plans for their tiered groups of students based on the MOY reading NWEA results. I developed a planning tool that teachers used to identify the instructional foci for each tiered group. Upon my reflection after the school year concluded, I am more comfortable with the planning tool in hind-sight:

The planning tool is important for teachers because the tool showed the alignment with actual student growth and the skills needed to meet each student’s growth target. Although the middle grade teachers were responsible for the implementation of this action plan, in the long run, it was my responsibility to ensure the planning tool was executed with fidelity. (Journal entry written, June 25, 2018)

This planning occurred at the beginning of April and continued until the End of the Year (EOY) NWEA assessment concluded in the middle of June, 2018. I ensured that the process for monitoring this action plan included my reflections during the Grade Level sessions as teachers and I discussed lesson planning, activities and formative assessments. The following journal excerpt demonstrated this reflective thought:

I believe implementation of a MOY planning tool was in the right direction. However, I was concerned about the lack of quality lesson preparation on behalf of teachers. The lesson plans are not reflective of small group planning from the
data. In my weekly lesson plan checks, I wonder if the middle school teachers understood how to use the data effectively. (Written May 2, 2018)

The NWEA Des Cartes provided teachers with the skill focus for each tiered group. Based on my reflection from my weekly journal I perceived there was a gap and disconnection between how teachers were using the Des Cartes Learning Continuum and how teachers were planning for student success. In reflection, the instructional plans were not differentiated for the levels of instruction and thus not meeting student needs. I planned for teachers to use a small group/differentiated instruction planning tool to help them understand. This included a step by step modeling how to pull data from the Des Cartes Learning Continuum and create lesson plans. I noted in my journal the following reflection:

I perceived teachers using data from weekly formative assessments to re-tier students. I observed teachers re-submitting their learning plans to include progress monitoring strategies they used weekly with students in lower tiers. (Journal entry written: April 30, 2018)

I considered this evidence of success as measured by data alignment and differentiating instruction. The teachers and I were communicating weekly during Grade Level sessions about student growth on the weekly formative assessments and the anticipation of an increase in the End of Year NWEA reading scores.

In my reflections, the achievement level increased by the end of the NWEA reading assessment window in June 2018. Literacy instruction improved because teachers were differentiating instructional plans, the GLT had evidence of targeted instruction
around rigor and the use of complex text. I reviewed the journal entries and in comparing Spring NWEA to Fall NWEA literacy scores, student achievement increased at the middle grades. Despite the obstacles, this was a positive upward trend to close the achievement gap because of the increase in middle grade literacy test scores. Through my lens as a school administrator, I know how a functioning Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team support school-wide efforts to improve instruction and close the achievement gap. Throughout this self-analysis, I reflected upon my interactions with teachers and support staff in school team meetings, in my Local School Council meetings, conversations with my Chief and communications with students and parents. I believed my charge, as the building leader, was to guide this critical work. In reviewing my journal reflections and the results from the Five Essentials Survey, there were several observations I made that shaped my study. I pondered about how I initially viewed the work of the teams in isolation and separate from the work at the middle school level. As I reviewed my journal log and the results from the Five Essentials Survey, I reflected upon my collaborations with the ILT and GLT as I pressed the teams for more data analysis. I found myself thinking deeply about my role and the choices I was making. I considered, “Does the support make a difference for our students?” This critical question forced me to contemplate the effectiveness of the structures in place. “Frankly, I wasn’t feeling confident in some of my actions because I wasn’t seeing the “fruit of my labor”.” (Written, July 16, 2018)

I consistently asked myself, “What do I know about how I am doing for students?” I emphasize the how because as a leader, I regularly examined school data and
instructional practices, but I wanted results now and the outcomes were slow. Many of the conversations held with the teachers focused on the values that I assumed all educators should have for students and the community they serve. This pondering led me into a personal probe of *how* I dissect my decisions. A journal entry early in my research detailed my observation of the Instructional Leadership Team:

I noted the Instructional Leadership Team was not sharing school-wide data with their colleagues. The teachers were expected to use [NWEA] data to identify students and different [percentile] ranges as well as students in different tiers.

During both of the Instructional Leadership Team meetings I did not observe any of the usage of NWEA data. (Written May 7, 2018)

I started to contemplate the power of this problem-solving team charged with collecting, organizing, analyzing and sharing school-wide data. I recall a specific journal record detailing my actions and thoughts when I shared systematic format for the Instructional Leadership Team:

I should have provided a protocol to the Instructional Leadership Team sooner to help analyze data. I think the Instructional Leadership Team should look at the data protocols closer. Just maybe it’s possible to align the key priorities for grade levels (redacted). Going forward I will share with the Instructional Leadership Team the urgency of using data in multiple forms such as looking at school-wide, grade level, classroom level and drilling down to the student level for students who are off-track and are at higher risk for failure. (Written journal, May 19, 2018)
I observed members of the Instructional Leadership Team disseminating information to their colleagues during the Grade Level Team sessions each week from that point. The act of sharing knowledge was a move towards success for our school. Participants of the Instructional Leadership Team were respected by their coworkers. Each member signed up to present data at subsequent team meetings. The team member planned critical questions in advance of our meetings and asked probing questions of the team to get to the root cause. The team tracked action items, persons responsible and assigned a timeline to each action. The members ensured equity of voice and engaged in transparent dialogue for the benefit of the team. I conclude they possessed leadership skills which were valued for the ability to improve our school’s circumstance. Literacy teachers in the middle grades exhibited instructional best practices that were modeled for them during the Grade Level Team sessions. As I reviewed my journal reflections and data from the Five Essentials Survey, analysis of my practices assisted me to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement.

**Research Question Two**

What leadership methods do I implement to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

My reference to leadership methods are strategies that I implemented with the Grade Level Teams and Instructional Leadership Team to build instructional capacity, to increase teacher ownership and buy-in. Therefore, I utilized stages 1, 2 and 3 of John
Kotter’s *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* to analyze my reflection in reference to research question 2. The three stages are described as “Establishing a sense of urgency, Creating the guiding coalition and Developing a vision and strategy” (2012, p. 23). Kotter developed a plan to establish urgency, build the group and develop a real vision and strategies to affect change. Upon reflection of my journal log, I must start with leadership and to establish a sense of urgency in all matters. Kotter states, “With urgency low, it’s difficult to put together a group with enough power and credibility to guide the effort…” (p. 38). In agreement with Kotter, complacency must be addressed to deal with this great concern “head on” and to question the source of complacency. Moreover, through my self-analysis, I deem addressing complacency is the first step which Kotter addressed within stage one.

Stage two and three are applied as a strong guiding coalition is established and vision is developed with strategy. As I reflected upon the data from the Five Essentials Survey, there was a need for collective leadership. One particular question addressed the Instructional Leadership. Does the school leadership team set high standards for teaching and student learning? This question caused great thought and contemplation for me as I pondered if I am communicating a clear vision for our school that the guiding team could follow and are the expectations clear for meeting instructional goals. This involved building a team of trust and a common goal for the benefit of our students.

Upon reflection of the *Stages of Change*, I investigated my leadership methods in which I set the tone for urgency, organized the meetings, including how I identified agenda items and the frequency of each meeting. I started to relinquish the “hold” I had
on the GLT and ILT. I was modeling a top-down, bureaucratic authority as a leadership style. This style was evident to me because I looked inward to develop my leadership skills. I came to this realization while talking with my critical friends. I wanted to build capacity and I thought I had modeled the expectations enough. Clearly I had not. I wanted the teachers to take ownership of the leadership meetings and yet the practice was not happening frequently. For example, our meeting was not starting on time. There were far too frequent side conversations and off-track agenda items. This was an obvious sign to me that I had not established a clear sense of urgency.

I felt a little disappointed today. While I was sitting at the end of the table trying not to disturb the flow of conversation, the team was talking about an incident that happened after school. I wanted to say something, but I wanted to show that I wasn’t being disrespectful. I probably should have said something. I waited until the end of the meeting and then reminded the team of the next meeting and to be on-time because we had a full schedule. In hind sight, I should have stopped the team nicely and re-focused them. (Written September 24, 2018)

I established effective meeting norms, including, objective, facilitator, note-taker, action items with timeline and person responsible. A sample agenda, included in Appendix B, detailed the review of 5 week Dashboard data. Dashboard is a school district application which comprises of school-wide performance data available and updated every five weeks. School-wide data were disaggregated to classroom level and student level data for our review. While reviewing Dashboard data, I engaged the team in discussion about root causes for low student performance. I challenged the group to
simply ask, “Why” five times for each root cause or until we could not address the topic anymore. This was a process I regularly use with the Instructional Leadership Team to get to the essence of any problem when analyzing data. At the conclusion of the meeting, I asked the team to refer to our Network assessment ladder. The assessment ladder is a tool designed to use five week data for intervention planning. Assessment usage during meetings was prioritized as an effective method. In reflection, I wanted to narrow the focus and thus the necessity to initiate a middle school data focus. I wanted to compare students’ performance against norms to evaluate the literacy program and to improve literacy instruction. An excerpt from a journal reads:

I know it’s not too late. One necessary change today! The Instructional Leadership Team looked at the biweekly review of the Dashboard data. This allowed the team to drill down to the student level and various school years. I know the work of the Instructional Leadership Team is instrumental to making the necessary movement so we can have significant data growth. (Written journal: June 11, 2018)

I desired for the teachers to translate this work in alignment with their lesson plans and weekly assessments. I communicated this expectation during the Instructional Leadership Team sessions and the Grade Level Team meetings. Based on my reflection of this session, I believe the tool for assessment planning was a direct connection to lesson plans. During an after school Professional Development session, the planning tool was demonstrated for all teachers. I could see the alignment to school priorities, which led to our core values. Building this level of engagement with the teachers exhibited a
leadership method that continued to produce high stages of discussion during each session. Teacher collaboration increased and I was able to provide formal learning opportunities for teachers regarding assessments and instructional strategies in literacy. I found more opportunities during Professional Development days, Grade Level Team sessions, Saturday Workshops and After School Trainings.

**Research Question Three**

What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?

In order to investigate my third research question, I reviewed the protocols I implemented and reflected on my practice during the school year of my work with the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams. I applied stage 5, “Empowering broad-based action” and stage 6, “Generating short-term wins” of Kotter’s *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* as a tool to analyze my journal reflections. Implementing protocols that teachers used further assisted to positively impact student achievement. As I reviewed my journal entries, I set a target for myself to empower teachers to use tools to differentiate instruction and to address individual student needs. As the school leader, I was compelled to have notable action steps that I used to engage all educators. Kotter (2012) states the objective of stage 5 is the empowerment of stakeholders to take action by eradicating as many obstacles that have the potential to impede the change vision cycle (p. 106). For this reason, I established norms and protocols with the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams before beginning the work with actual data.
At this point, we could use more refined and precise leadership skills from the ILT!! I should have overly emphasized the need and urgency of the changing demand. I feel that it was clearly explained that our school had to show and maintain significant growth. (Written, November 5, 2018)

This journal log arose from the excitement of an increase in literacy in the middle grades. This was the measurable change evidenced by an increase in middle school literacy although I was still teasing out a necessary protocol for the team. The protocol which was implemented in the self-study was facilitated in four steps.

- **Step one:** *Identify the problem of practice.* Define the gap or difference between the expectation and what is in fact happening regarding student achievement.
- **Step two:** *Analyze the problem.* Probable root causes.
- **Step three:** *Implement a plan.* Identify strategies to address the problem of practice. Develop and implement the plan with fidelity.
- **Step four:** *Evaluate the plan.* Collect school-level, grade-level, class-level and student-level data to ascertain if the plan is working to address the problem of practice. Progress monitor and amend the plan, if required.

Therefore, I implemented the use of NWEA MAP Growth reports. This was a significant step for me as I was determined to have systematic practices embedded as a protocol to review data. The MAP Growth reports assisted teachers to create personalized learning experiences for students along with goal setting. Goal setting forms with students’ NWEA scores were distributed and teachers were asked to meet with students
individually to discuss the End of Year (EOY) goal. Teachers created action plans with each student about how they meet the EOY goal.

During an ILT session, I steered my team through a data analysis problem solving process with the middle school literacy data. While reflecting upon the available NWEA data, we determined there was a gap between the MOY and EOY student growth data. My thoughts about a root cause led me to contemplate the question, “Is the classroom instruction differentiated?” As I thought about root causes, I decided to implement an intervention to address the Instructional Leadership Team’s concern. The intervention was then shared with the Grade Level Teams and modeled for during the sessions to ensure correct implementation. I logged the following journal entry as I thought about the “what” and “how” of an action plan:

Teachers developed differentiated instructional plans for their small group instruction. As I review the bi-weekly lesson plans, the various templates teachers are using are not sufficient. More needs to be done to make sure small group differentiated instruction is happening… Note to self, pull (teacher’s name redacted) lesson plans as a model for others. (Written May 7, 2018)

My overall goal for middle school was to increase student growth in literacy. My reflection of my decision to implement this action plan was supported by the MOY to EOY middle school literacy data comparison. I learned that the goal could be achieved with a planning template. The planning template assisted teachers to differentiate instructional plans based on the NWEA RIT bands in reading. I learned to monitor this process through the bi-weekly submission of lesson plans with the additional template.
My critical friend asked me, “How will I know it works?” My understanding to the question was the evidence of success. Reflection on the MOY to EOY data comparison, the evidence of success was an increase in the EOY NWEA reading data due to implementation of the template. On the template, students were identified in RIT bands, based upon the Des Cartes Continuum of Learning and planned for differentiated instruction to include activities and formative assessments specifically designed to meet student individual needs.

There were additional protocols that were necessary and applied. After multiple demonstrations during Grade Level Team meetings, teachers used weekly student assessment samples along with the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) rubric to measure the level of rigor required by students. Additionally, I required teachers to create student interventions based on NWEA RIT bands and identify skill strands. Lastly, I created a Progress Monitoring schedule that supported teachers as they designed and implemented student interventions. The Progress Monitoring schedule was crucial to systematic practices with fidelity because the student interventions were necessary to measure student growth between assessment periods.

**Research Question Four**

What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making?

To guide and inform my journal reflection analysis, I employed stage 7, “Consolidating gains and producing more change” of Kotter’s *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change*. Celebrating small victories are key to keeping a team’s energy
and drive moving upward (2012, p. 138). According to Kotter, this action, as well as eliminating complacency are agents of transformation.

As I reflect on what I learned through research, I often contemplate the responses from others that seem to drive my inner discussion of my leadership experiences. My goal is to promote teacher leadership within my school to build instructional capacity. I believe teachers must believe in my vision for the school and support the efforts that will yield us positive results. (Written June 18, 2018)

I regularly listen to the views and opinions of other educators. I feel that if teachers must execute the protocols and procedures established, then all educators must be engaged in visioning and examining school-wide beliefs and how they impact teaching and student learning. I have learned the best practice was to examine all conditions that impact my leadership practices, including equity of voice among my teachers.

I learned to utilize the structures to support student achievement in a consistent manner. From my journal, I further identified that “I realize that I must maintain a schedule that my staff can count on and expect for me to adhere” (Written June 18, 2018).

For example, I expected for the Instructional Leadership Team to bring their student intervention reports every two weeks to our meetings. Together, we examined and discussed the effectiveness of interventions and observed student growth based on weekly formative assessment data.

I discovered the need to establish clear indicators for successful meetings with the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Team meetings. As I reviewed my
journal logs and reflections from GLT and ILT meetings, agendas and minutes, there were seven areas that I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making. First, there was realization that teacher teams must share and understand the school’s purpose and vision. Second, the teams need to be solution oriented and adhere to the steps to problem solving. I believe I must facilitate this critical cycle for effective teacher teams. Third, I learned to conduct meetings which are scheduled, organized and regular. The importance to have an agenda, agreed upon norms to build trust and teacher relationships as well as meaningful dialogue and time for problem solving became evident to me through my review of agenda items and meeting minutes. Next, I learned to implement protocols and use data appropriately as well as ask structured probing questions to address root causes. Additionally, using time and relevant data resources to analyze trends, concerns and areas of growth provided another learning step for me. The final indicators include tracking and monitoring action items, using strategies to address root causes, designating owners for action items and creating deadlines for completion and accountability.

Sustaining best practices for data informed decision making involves transparency and collaboration among the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams. I discovered there are great benefits on the effects of leadership on student achievement where the success derives from high level engagement, open and honest dialogue and the use of key data points.
Research Question Five

How has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process?

Research question five was the most intricate inquiry that I internally processed during my self-study journey. The complexity of analyzing my own leadership was initially painful because I thought I was heading in the right direction. I never believed that I “knew it all” or that I didn’t have a growth mindset, but I actually didn’t realize that I had not created a plan. As a new principal, I was consumed with preserving the vision of the school because I didn’t want to “rock the boat.” For example, I was careful not to change too much, too soon, as I recalled a conversation with an angry parent because I changed the morning entry procedures. I didn’t want others to be upset, but I knew that I needed to effect change, not just for safety, but for establishing sound instructional practices. As I started making small changes, I noticed in my journal that my thoughts shifted towards teacher development. Throughout my reflections, I realized that after months of work, there was more work to be done. If I conducted this study again, I would still utilize research question 5 because the framework was appropriate for the level of change necessary for my leadership development. I processed the self-analysis and utilized stage 8, “Anchoring new approaches in the culture,” of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change to examine my reflection.

My leadership changed in two major areas. The first was the method in which I envisioned school improvement. I now focus on the end goal and ask myself, “How do we get there?” This question was significant for me because my revolving reflections
have led me to understand as the school leader, I must have a comprehensive plan for the school in order to create change, which included addressing the existing culture. Utilizing an inclusive plan to change my school’s improvement process was key to understanding my leadership, the decisions I made and its impact. Upon reflection, my inclusive plan included leading my school and all stakeholders in our efforts for sustained school improvement by assembling, organizing, evaluating and sharing school-wide data. This made a huge impact on the effects of leadership on student achievement because of the high level of engagement. John Kotter (2012) concludes, leadership is establishing the direction, constructing the vision and approaches for creating the changes desirable to accomplish the vision.

Am I willing to change the status quo? I asked myself this question earlier and yes, I am willing to change our current situation. I even asked the (teacher’s name redacted) and (redacted) if they believed the status quo needed addressing. I knew after my last meeting with (Chief’s name redacted) that I needed to have a more in-depth conversation with the Instructional Leadership Team regarding “human connections” which should be in line with our school’s core values. The buck stops here. I know I am watched and my decisions are scrutinized. My choices for the school must line up with the school’s vision and mission. I am asking the team to re-evaluate their choices, I need to model this with the team as well. (Written journal entry: June 25, 2018)

Based on Kotter’s 8th Stage for Change, sharing the vision intensely supports new initiatives (2012). After reflecting on my leadership practices, I am in agreement with
Kotter who states that “culture is important because it can powerfully influence human behavior” (p. 156). Kotter created an alignment between group behavior and the impact on culture, including leadership and new practices. I concluded that change positively transformed my school, but according to Kotter, if I am not careful, change can come undone (p. 157). Honestly, the possibility that our collective efforts to change and move in an upward direction could become undone is of concern for me. Therefore, I am committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure our comprehensive plan is implemented with fidelity and aligned with success measures.

The second change was my need to establish an internal accountability system. After reviewing meeting exit slips to understand teachers’ learning and professional development, teachers desired to have school leadership identify next steps and feedback for growth. Coupled with reflecting upon my journal entries, I needed to know “How do I know when I’m there?” This step in my self-processing was critical for me to measure continued growth in student learning. After reflection of my School’s District Principal Evaluation, particularly Competency E: Relentlessly pursue self-disciplines thinking and action, I viewed my expectation to be accountable as a strength of a responsible leader.

My Principal Evaluation for Competency E is an area of strength. I have a high level of self-reflection as a new Principal. I seize each and every opportunity to gain coaching support from my Chief. I am personally accountable for each success measure on the SQRP and school related goals. (Written journal entry, July 30, 2018)
There were six areas of growth that were identified to summarize my journey based on journal reflections as I engaged in data analysis.

Area of Growth 1: *Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data*. I established a protocol for the teams to analyze NWEA data. My purpose for creating and implementing the protocol was to understand and use the district provided reports to develop school-based action plans to improve student growth in middle school literacy. The protocol consisted of a series of steps to ensure data validity and the implementation of templates used to chart student, class and school-level data.

- Step 1: Review and analyze school-wide MOY NWEA data in reading.
- Step 2: Identify the grade level with the highest growth and the grade level with the lowest growth.
- Step 3: Identify the teacher at each grade level with the highest growth and the teacher with the lowest growth.
- Step 4: Label growth averages as on track or off track to meet growth targets as set by NWEA. Use 2017 EOY Spring data and 2018 EOY Spring growth targets to determine on or off track.
- Step 5: Use student level data to rank students with the lowest growth and students with the highest growth.
- Step 6: Use guiding questions to analyze data. Possible questions include:
  - *Which skill strands did students perform well across grade levels?*
  - *Which skill strands did students not perform well across grade levels?*
Which skill strands did students perform well for each teacher?

Which skill strands did students not perform well for each teacher?

What trends and patterns can you notice?

What are possible causes for negative growth?

What are possible causes for positive growth?

What questions do we still have based on the data?

Step 7: Create an action plan.

The ILT used the protocol results to identify successes and areas of improvement. The protocol was used to unearth why we are experiencing problems and why we are having success. Based upon my reflection of a journal log for the week of October 9, 2018, I strongly believed that a systematic procedure was needed to analyze the Beginning of Year (BOY) NWEA data. “I need to walk them through the report. Focus on lows... Maintain the highs… Get them to breakdown the percentiles. Identify students with negative growth. Identify students with positive growth” (Written entry: October 9, 2018).

Indeed this journal excerpt is “choppy” as I quickly processed my thoughts, but after this particular ILT meeting, I recalled the need to have a data analysis process and purpose for the protocol that I wanted to establish. Prior to this session, the ILT’s routine comprised of probing questions to guide and facilitate discussions around new data.

The usage of a template to chart NWEA student growth data and to identify student goals was the first phase of data analysis. The second phase consisted of reviewing and analyzing the school-wide NWEA data. The final phases included
answering guiding questions based upon our data analysis and then to develop a school based action plan.

Area of Growth 2: *Challenged and built momentum of teacher ownership and increased leadership capacity by releasing my hold and increasing the level of collaboration among my teachers.* Upon reflection of my journal entries, teachers and I must work together. Working together includes open, honest and collective efforts. Shared leadership builds trust and accountability. This area of growth confronted difficult concerns by listening to all perspectives, establishing innovative means to resolving conflict and sustaining our focus on what’s best for students.

Area of Growth 3: *Established a sense of urgency to improve student instruction.* Upon reflection, it was my obligation to ensure the ILT and GLT members share a common understanding and commitment of our purpose and core values. I combated complacency and the overall low performance and disorganization.

Area of Growth 4: *Checked for understanding of the methods and procedures I established.* My role and responsibilities included managing and monitoring intervention procedures and methods to ensure completion of tasks for the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams.

Area of Growth 5: *Questioned my assumption of the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams.* I engaged the ILT and GLT members with inquiry based discussion while I questioned my intentions and actions of the work I assigned the teams. In an effort to keep me grounded in my
duty to have collective leadership, questioning my assumptions allowed me to learn from the team. After reflecting on the GLT and ILT agendas, minutes and professional development sessions, the planned course of action items was rooted in support for my team, respect of their talent and effort, commitment, leveling responsibilities and being reflective.

Area of Growth 6: Lessons learned from my staff, included the following:

a. **Supported my staff with coaching and modeling.** Upon reflection of Professional Development agenda items, notes and action items, I learned to provide professional readings and articles to teachers in an effort to provide coaching through best practices. By providing instructional coaching of effective strategies, teachers were supported. I learned that learning walks with teachers into other teachers’ classrooms offered modeling and valued support from colleagues.

b. **Staff desired to share leadership decision making.** Based upon my reflection of teacher exit slips, many teachers desired to be involved. I learned that all school community members, to include families, school staff, community members, faculty, administration and students were given the opportunity to be included in the planning for student growth in the comprehensive school plan.

c. **Provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.** All action plans need to be grounded in actionable goals for student achievement. Upon reflection of the Five Essentials Survey, I learned that teachers desired to have more clarity
regarding instructional practices. This included an all-encompassing procedure for determining measurable objectives and sustaining the goals as the foci for all school planning.

**Summary of Findings**

In conclusion, my leadership practices revealed through constant and deliberate reflection an indication that there were several fundamental advantages throughout this self-study. I discovered the impact of my role as the instructional leadership related to decisions I made through analysis of various data collection for the duration of this research. My role impacted the following six areas of growth:

1. Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data;
2. Challenged and built momentum of teacher ownership and increased leadership capacity by releasing my hold and increasing the level of collaboration among my teachers;
3. Established a sense of urgency to improve student instruction;
4. Checked for understanding of the methods and procedures I established;
5. Questioned my assumption of the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams;
6. Lessons learned from my staff, included the following:
   a. Supported my staff with coaching and modeling;
   b. Staff desired to share leadership decision making;
   c. Provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.
The indicated areas of growth are based on my journal reflections as I engaged in data analysis through addressing the process of change to assist the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and the Grade Level Teams (GLT). I used the *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* by John Kotter (2012) as my conceptual framework to support my instructional decisions in the development of systematic structures to increase student achievement in literacy as indicated in the Reflection Comparison and Alignment Table below:

Table 8

*Reflection Comparison and Alignment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>John Kotter’s Change Stages</th>
<th>Areas of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 1:</strong> How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades?</td>
<td><em>Change Stage 4:</em> Communicating the change vision</td>
<td><em>Growth Area 1:</em> Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association assessment (NWEA) data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 2:</strong> What leadership methods do I implement to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?</td>
<td><em>Change Stage 1:</em> Establishing a sense of urgency&lt;br&gt;<em>Change Stage 2:</em> Creating the guiding coalition&lt;br&gt;<em>Change Stage 3:</em> Developing a vision and strategy</td>
<td><em>Growth Area 1:</em> Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data;&lt;br&gt;<em>Growth Area 2:</em> Challenged and built momentum of teacher ownership and increased leadership capacity by releasing my hold and increasing the level of collaboration among my teachers;&lt;br&gt;<em>Growth Area 3:</em> Established a sense of urgency to improve student instruction;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)?</td>
<td>Change Stage 5: Empowering broad-based action</td>
<td>Growth Area 1: Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Stage 6: Generating short-term wins</td>
<td>Growth Area 2: Challenged and built momentum of teacher ownership and increased leadership capacity by releasing my hold and increasing the level of collaboration among my teachers;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Stage 7: Consolidating gains and producing more change</td>
<td>Growth Area 3: Checked for understanding of the methods and procedures I established</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth Area 4:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4: What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making?</td>
<td>Growth Area 5: Questioned my assumption of the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth Area 6: Lessons learned from my staff, included the following: supported my staff with coaching and modeling; staff desired to share leadership decision making; and provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change Stage 8: Anchoring new approaches in the culture</td>
<td>Growth Area 6: Lessons learned from my staff, included the following: supported my staff with coaching and modeling; staff desired to share leadership decision making; and provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: How has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process?</td>
<td>Growth Area 6: Lessons learned from my staff, included the following: supported my staff with coaching and modeling; staff desired to share leadership decision making; and provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Summary and Transition to Chapter V

In summary, this chapter described some of my experiences within the role of the Principal related to my leadership decisions. The data analysis provided insight to my understanding of how my choices impacted and informed the procedures and protocols I implemented for the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team members. The procedures and protocols were analyzed through the conceptual framework for leadership defined by John Kotter’s Eight Stages of Change for creating major change in an organization. The questions that guided the self-study were the following: (1) How has my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades? (2) What leadership methods do I implement to assist data informed decision making to effectively support the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to improve student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)? (3) What protocols have I used to assist data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction in an effort to increase student achievement on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA)? (4) What have I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making? (5) How has my leadership changed as understood by the conceptual framework of Kotter’s Eight-Stage Change Process?

The final chapter addressed the research questions that assisted me in analyzing personal leadership decisions and practices which aligned to Kotter’s Eight Stage Change Process (2012, p. 23). Chapter V also presented a discussion of the results as well as
conclusions and implications of the findings. The self-study concluded with recommendations for future research (Herr, 2005, p. 128).
CHAPTER V
INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this self-study was to focus on the reflections of my leadership to improve student achievement in literacy for middle grades. I analyzed my reflections to further develop my leadership ability for the purpose of improving literacy in middle grades. I learned about sustaining best practices in an effort to decrease the achievement gap in literacy and increase student achievement. In fact, I learned to build teacher ownership, instructional capacity, positive relationships and a strong data culture.

This research used a self-study design with qualitative and quantitative methods. The district wide assessment data for middle grades and the Illinois Report Card data were utilized as a quantitative means with the self-study. Qualitative sources included field notes and exit slips from the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings. Data from the Five Essential Survey and follow up from Professional Development sessions were also included. This chapter described the sample criteria, the procedures for the data collection as well as the data analysis and triangulation of data sources.

Research Design and Methodology

This self-study used a mixed methods methodology, including reflective qualitative and quantitative data sources for the sample, data collection, analysis and
findings (Field, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). The research (Calabrese, 2012) was descriptive as Merriam (2009) stated to include a “rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 43). The study described in specific detail, reviewing all data and a reflective portrayal of my leadership practices as the principal in the self-study. I reflected how to understand my experiences as the principal to support data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to support the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and Grade Level Teams (GLT) while improving student achievement in literacy for the middle grades.

The primary focus of this understanding was *emic*, which is my perspective as the researcher and principal in the self-study (Merriam, 2009). This was critical to the self-study as viewed through the lens of a researcher. Grounded on reflection of my leadership practices, an increase in student achievement through the work with the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams were demonstrated. Examination of systematic methods were conducted. This included the Instructional Leadership Team, Grade Level Teams and the protocols used in an organized format with fidelity. Lastly, I identified and sustained best practices for data-driven decision making for the future.

**Summary of Findings**

The study focused on my leadership practices revealed through constant and deliberate reflection indicated there are several fundamental advantages throughout this self-study. I discovered the impact of my role as the instructional leadership related to decisions I made through analysis of various data collection, methods and protocols implemented for the duration of this research. The indicated areas of my growth are
based on my journal reflections and critical friend conversations as I engaged in practice through addressing the process of change to assist the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and the Grade Level Teams (GLT).

1. Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data;

2. Challenged and built momentum of teacher ownership and increased leadership capacity by releasing my hold and increasing the level of collaboration among my teachers;

3. Established a sense of urgency to improve student instruction;

4. Checked for understanding for the methods and procedures I established;

5. Questioned my assumption of the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams;

6. Lessons learned from my staff, included the following:
   a. Supported my staff with coaching and modeling;
   b. Staff desired to share leadership decision making;
   c. Provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.

I used the *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* by John Kotter (2012) as my conceptual framework to support my instructional decisions in the development of systematic structures to increase student achievement in literacy as indicated in the Reflection Comparison and Alignment Chart. Column 1 identified my research question, column 2 identified the change stage based on my conceptual framework and column 3 identified my areas of growth based upon trends throughout the research.
### Table 9

**Reflection Comparison and Alignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
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<th>Areas of my Growth</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion of Findings**

The implications of this self-study’s findings were important for school leaders and their work with Instructional Leadership Teams and Grade Level Teams. The collective participation of members of an Instructional Leadership Team, as well as the Principal as the instructional leader, are essential to improving student achievement (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010).
Based on the conceptual framework of leadership defined by John Kotter’s (2012), *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change*, the findings of this self-study examined the leadership process of data informed decision making. Utilizing Kotter’s process, the framework supported successful major organizational change through systems and structures. The implications of this study led me to understand a school culture based on data transparency and instructional collaboration.

The findings from the self-study suggested that implementation of strategies to facilitate Instructional Leadership meetings and Grade Level meetings are necessary for team collaboration for improving teaching and learning. The Leadership and Learning Center (2008) determine that highly effective school teams identify quality evidence for areas of academic improvement. The overall goal to examine my leadership methods and decisions to improve student achievement in literacy in the middle grades assisted my outcomes. I built capacity and rigor into instructional strategies for teachers to implement. There were six trending areas that I determined as essential features of my areas of growth.

**Area of Growth 1**: *Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data.* I established a protocol for the teams to analyze NWEA data. My purpose for creating and implementing the protocol was to understand and use the district provided reports to develop school-based action plans to improve student growth in middle school literacy. I strongly believed that a systematic procedure was needed to analyze school-wide and classroom level
data. Additionally, there was a need to have a data analysis process and purpose for the protocol.

Area of Growth 2: Challenged and built momentum of teacher ownership and increased leadership capacity by releasing my hold and increasing the level of collaboration among my teachers. Upon reflection of my journal entries, teachers and I must work together. Working together included open, honest and collective efforts. Shared leadership built trust and accountability. This area of growth confronted difficult concerns by listening to all perspectives, establishing innovative means to resolving conflict and sustaining our focus on what’s best for students.

Area of Growth 3: Established a sense of urgency to improve student instruction. Upon reflection, it was my obligation to ensure the ILT and GLT members share a common understanding and commitment of our purpose and core values. I combated complacency and the overall low performance and disorganization.

Area of Growth 4: Checked for understanding of the methods and procedures I established. My role and responsibilities included managing and monitoring intervention procedures and methods to ensure completion of tasks for the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams.

Area of Growth 5: Questioned my assumption of the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams. I engaged the ILT and GLT member with inquiry based discussion while I questioned my intentions and actions of the work I assigned the teams. In an effort to keep me grounded in my
duty to have collective leadership, questioning my assumptions allowed me to learn from the team. Upon my reflections of the GLT and ILT agendas, minutes and professional development sessions, the planned course of action items was rooted in support for my team, respect of their talent and effort, commitment, leveling responsibilities and being reflective.

Area of Growth 6: Lessons learned from my staff, included the following:

a. *Supported my staff with coaching and modeling.* Upon reflection of Professional Development agenda items, notes and action items, I learned to provide professional readings and articles to teachers in an effort to provide coaching through best practices. Additionally, by providing instructional coaching of effective strategies, teachers were supported. I learned that learning walks with teachers into other teachers’ classrooms offered modeling and valued support from colleagues.

b. *Staff desired to share leadership decision making.* Based upon my reflection of teacher exit slips, many teachers desired to be involved. I learned that all school community members, to include families, school staff, community members, faculty, administration and students were given the opportunity to be included in the planning for student growth in the comprehensive school plan.

c. *Provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.* All action plans need to be grounded in actionable goals for student achievement. Upon reflection of the Five Essentials Survey, I learned that teachers desired to have more clarity
regarding instructional practices. This included an all-encompassing procedure for determining measurable objectives and sustaining the goals as the foci for all school planning.

**Summary Statement**

In summary, my leadership impacted data informed decision making in a systematic format with fidelity to improve literacy instruction and achievement at the middle grades. In reflecting upon the study, there were some movement in literacy for middle grade students on the EOY NWEA. However, there is still a focus on getting to a higher level. Through communicating a vision of change, the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams utilized NWEA literacy data to develop small group differentiated instructional plans for students using the Des Cartes Continuum of Learning.

I implemented leadership methods and protocols to assist with data informed decision making structures. Effective and organized meetings included purpose, meeting norms, roles for participants, agenda items connected with action items and a timeline with identified person(s) responsible.

I learned to establish clear indicators for successful meetings with the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Team meeting. There were several areas that I learned about sustaining best practices for data informed decision making:

1. Organizational teams must share and understand our purpose and vision.
2. Teams must be solution oriented and adhere to the steps to problem solving.
3. Meetings are scheduled, organized and regular.
4. Protocols and data are implemented appropriately as well as structured probing questions to address root causes.

5. Time and relevant data resources are utilized to analyze trends, concerns and areas of growth.

The significance of this self-study allowed me to examine my leadership methods and decisions as I supported the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams. I examined my leadership decisions to use student, school-wide and classroom data, while asking probing questions and identifying root causes. Linda Lambert (2002) agrees that the purpose of the Leadership Team is to “…analyze data and to plan, advocate, monitor and implement the school improvement plan” (p. 39). Examining my decision to build leadership capacity among teachers and enhance instructional middle school faculty support from the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams were critical. The aim was to build rigor into daily instruction. According to Lambert, “Participation is most powerful when combined into a thoughtful and integrated school improvement process” (p. 40). Through systematic leadership methods and protocols, I provided assistance to the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams to conduct school-wide data analysis to decrease the achievement gap and increase the percentage of attainment on the Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA), thus raising student achievement levels in literacy for middle grades.

The significance of this research showed how my leadership as a principal transformed a middle school culture to enhance instructional outcomes and increase staff collaboration and other unattended positive outcomes. For example, the morale of the
staff increased and the climate of the school changed because I listened to teachers and released my “hold” I had on the teams. This practice increased teacher involvement. According to the Leadership and Learning Center (2008), the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Team meetings should be “Collaborative, structured, scheduled meetings that focus on the effectiveness of teaching and learning” (p. 6). This supported my plan through reflection upon my leadership practices as I analyzed strengths and obstacles. I established smart goals to include the process of setting, reviewing and revising goals.

**Implications for Further Research**

Utilizing the leadership methods and protocols similar to those implemented in this self-study would be possible if I applied these practices at the onset of the school year. I see great benefits for my own growth mindset. For example, now that I am conditioned for a reflective habit, it was easier for me to be open to the process of growth and unearthing my challenges and obstacles as a leader. This journal of self-reflection opened my mind to learning rather than just seeking an outcome and would be beneficial for any principal or instructional leader in an urban school. When reviewing my journals and talking with critical friends, I realized that I need to have more moral authority in my leadership practice than the bureaucratic style. In order for me to have a greater connection with my teachers, I need to consider our shared values regarding the direction of our school. When reviewing my journal, I learned my teachers shared their level of commitment with the ILT because we shared values and beliefs. As a group, we had
more transparent conversations around our obstacles to improve literacy instruction at the middle grades after this openness occurred.

The use of the leadership methods increased the potential for greater teacher ownership and an increased leadership capacity. Now that leadership methods and protocols have been *teased out*, a full implementation of the school’s comprehensive plan would allow me to take this study forward. This would be done by creating and presenting the plan to the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level members for buy-in. Together, the teacher teams and I, would co-facilitate our school’s comprehensive plan to all stakeholders for collaboration. Discussing and then agreeing upon our school’s vision and mission would be critical to communicating the change vision. We all must be on the same page. Keeping the sense of urgency first and foremost is paramount to addressing the issue of complacency (Kotter, 2012). Creating a collegial atmosphere to foster open and honest dialogue would assist in the transformation process for organizational change. An instructional leader, or principal would need to know the primary method to be considered for further research is the alignment to school priorities, which leads to sharing and embracing the school’s core values. Another primary method is to implement effective meeting norms such as objective, facilitator, note-taker and action items with timeline. Any principal or instructional leader in an urban environment need to match their leadership style with the school and their stakeholders (Ubben et al., 2004).

**Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

Leithwood and Mascall (2008) states the model for instructional leadership is built upon the motivation of others, the capacity of teachers and staff and the
environment in which teacher performance are set. Therefore, this self-study contributed to the advancement of Instructional Leadership Teams and Grade Level Teams with regards to organizational habits around effective meeting norms and analyzing NWEA data with effective protocols. Moreover, the advancement was applicable through understanding the work to implement systematic protocols and instructional methods for a principal or instructional leader in an urban school environment. Recommendations for future study includes other researchers conducting a similar study with a comparable population. Secondly, starting the process earlier to get teacher buy-in and stakeholder support. I would recommend other researchers to also consider and analyze a principal’s leadership style. A successful principal must be willing to adjust his or her style to meet the needs of their school body and all stakeholders.

**Relationships of Findings to Theory**

The conceptual framework of leadership for this self-study, defined by John Kotter (2012) for creating major change in an organization, was applied.

The methods and protocols for this research utilized *The Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change* to guide and analyze my discussion and my work as the principal. Based on The Eight-Stage Change Process, Kotter (2012) states this framework supported successful major organizational change through systems and structure.

1. Establishing a sense of urgency (Identifying and discussing crisis, potential crises, or major opportunities).
2. Creating the guiding coalition (Getting the group to work together like a team).
3. Developing a vision and strategy (Creating a vision to help direct the change effort. Developing strategies for achieving that vision).

4. Communicating the change vision (Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies).

5. Empowering broad-based action (Getting rid of obstacles. Changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision).


7. Consolidating gains and producing more change (Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision).

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture (Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success).

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to this self-study that impacted the generalization of the findings. First, due to time constraints, this study had a smaller assessment window to analyze student NWEA data as a larger assessment period would provide a more in-depth analysis of potential root causes. The study uses data from the Middle of school Year (MOY) to the End of the school Year (EOY). However, a more in-depth analysis would address root causes if data was available from the Beginning of the school Year (BOY) to the End of the school year (EOY). Second, the members of the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams are limited to those who specifically work on
those committees. Third, the self-study methodology limited the results to the researcher’s own perception. Last, additional data sources to triangulate and provided more support for validity of success measures.

**Summary and Conclusion**

In conclusion, this final chapter addressed the research questions that assisted me in analyzing personal leadership decisions and practices which aligned to Kotter’s Eight Stage Change Process (2012, p. 23). Working with the teacher teams, including the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Teams, enabled me to establish a sense of urgency along with a shared vision for student success. The work is not complete, but the results demonstrated great possibility and encouragement to creating organizational change. Using a self-study method, I examined my leadership practices and decisions as a principal in an urban school environment. The self-study experience aided my understanding of my own learning throughout this journey (Coleman & Leider, 2013). I am able to identify successes and areas of concern regarding the impact on student achievement in literacy in middle grades based on reflective analysis.

A principal or instructional leader must be able to align his or her leadership style with the school and stakeholders (Ubben et al., 2004). Combined with the leadership authority, identified by Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002), I learned the necessity to collaborate with members of the Instructional Leadership and Grade Level Teams after discussion with my critical friend and review of my leadership journal. I categorized my learning based on the impact of student achievement in literacy in middle grades.
There were six areas of growth based upon trends identified throughout my reflection:

1. Routines and procedures for analyzing Northwest Evaluation Association Assessment (NWEA) data;

2. Challenged and built momentum of teacher ownership and increased leadership capacity by releasing my hold and increasing the level of collaboration among my teachers;

3. Established a sense of urgency to improve student instruction;

4. Checked for understanding for the methods and procedures I established;

5. Questioned my assumption of the work of the Instructional Leadership Team and the Grade Level Teams;

6. Lessons learned from my staff, included the following:
   - Supported my staff with coaching and modeling;
   - Staff desired to share leadership decision making;
   - Provided explicit instruction regarding data protocols.

In summary, my research study’s overall goal was to examine my leadership methods and decision to improve student achievement in literacy in the middle grades. In pursuit of this goal, I was able to examine my leadership decisions to use student, school-wide and classroom level data, ask probing questions and identify root causes. Also through examining my leadership practices, building instructional capacity among teachers and building rigorous instructional strategies for teacher implementation are the identified successes of the self-study.
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE ILT AGENDA
ILT Meeting  
Monday, April 30, 2018  
3:00 p.m.  
Library  

“I am a part of all I have read.” ~ John Kieran

Objective: Participants will review school-wide and grade level data to improve student achievement.

Facilitator: Latrese Mathis  
Note Taker: (redacted)  
Timekeeper: (redacted)  
Process Checker: (redacted)

AGENDA

- Dashboard Review (weeks 30-35) 3:00 p.m. – 3:55 p.m.  
  o Root Cause Analysis  
  o 5 Whys  
  o Action Plan  
  o Assessment Ladder  
- Questions/Comments/Concerns 3:55 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Items</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Person(s) Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interventions for students off-track in reading</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
<td>(redacted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTSS log for off-track students</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>(redacted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report back to GLT</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Each member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible after school PD (poll teachers for interest and availability)</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>(redacted)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Norms:

- Start and end on time.  
- Respect all opinions and voices. Do not cut people off.  
- Adhere to agenda/time limits.  
- Roles/assigned responsibilities: timekeeper, note taker, facilitator, process checker.  
- Appropriate technology usage. No texting, cell phone usage, etc.  
- Assume best intentions for all comments.
APPENDIX C

DATA ANALYSIS PROTOCOL
**Purpose:** To understand and use the district provided reports to develop school-based action plans to improve student growth in middle school literacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Review and analyze school-wide MOY NWEA data in reading.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Identify the grade level with the highest growth and the grade level with the lowest growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Identify the teacher at each grade level with the highest growth and the teacher with the lowest growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Label growth averages as on track or off track to meet growth targets as set by NWEA. Use 2017 EOY Spring data and 2018 EOY Spring growth targets to determine on or off track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Use student level data to rank students with the lowest growth and students with the highest growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>Use guiding questions to analyze data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>Create an action plan.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

GUIDING QUESTIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which skill strands did students perform well across grade levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which skill strands did students not perform well across grade levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which skill strands did students perform well for each teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which skill strands did students not perform well for each teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What trends and patterns can you notice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are possible causes for negative growth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are possible causes for positive growth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What questions do we still have based on the data?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

PROTOCOL TEMPLATE 1
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Students with lowest growth</th>
<th>Students with highest growth</th>
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APPENDIX F

PROTOCOL TEMPLATE 2
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<tr>
<th>Reading Spring 2017</th>
<th>Reading Spring 2018</th>
<th>6th Grade</th>
<th>7th Grade</th>
<th>8th Grade</th>
<th>On Track to Meet Growth Target (Y/N)</th>
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Chicago Tribune. (2017, July 14). Austin population drops to no.2 in city for 1st time in 45 years.


Havighurst, R. J. (1964). The public schools of Chicago for the Board of Education of the City of Chicago.


VITA

Latrese Mathis was born, raised and currently lives on the West Side of Chicago in the Great Austin community. She enjoys spending time with her husband, Damyion, of 21 years and two beautiful teenage children, Sterling and Sydney.

Latrese attended Nash Elementary and Von Steuben High School, both Chicago Public Schools. She graduated from Chicago State University in 1996 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education. After returning to Chicago State University, Latrese earned a Master of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction in 1999 and a Master of Arts degree in Reading from Concordia Chicago University in 2008. After deciding to become a change leader, Latrese attended Lewis University to receive an Administrative Certificate and Certificate of Advanced Studies in 2005.

Latrese has worked in the field of education for the past 23 years. Her educational journey began as a middle school teacher then led to become the Reading Coordinator and Assistant Principal at the same elementary school she attended as a child. Currently, Latrese is a proud Principal of an Elementary School. As an instructional leader, Latrese’s goal in life is to enable and inspire young minds to become independent thinkers and empowered citizens. As a change leader, Latrese believes in raising the academic bar, setting and maintaining high moral and societal standards and expectations as well as advocating for those who cannot advocate for themselves.
Latrese loves going to church, vacationing and walking around downtown Chicago. She collects Black memorabilia and listens to jazz and soul music on vinyl records.
The Dissertation submitted by Latrese Mathis has been read and approved by the following committee:

Felicia Stewart, Ed.D. Director
Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

R. James Breunlin, Ph.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Leviis A. Haney, Ed.D.
Principal, The Joseph Sears School
Kenilworth School District 38