My Role as an Administrator in Supporting the Implementation of MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports) Tier 3 Students: A Self-Study in a Public School System

Terrycita Delight Perry

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MY ROLE AS AN ADMINISTRATOR IN SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MTSS (MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORTS) TIER 3 STUDENTS: A SELF-STUDY IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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
TERRYCITA D. PERRY

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to three very important and influential people in my life—my 94-year-old grandmother, my late dad and my eldest sister Nikoya who gave up so much of their life for me. If it were not for the three of them, I would not be the woman I am today. They taught me so many core values about life, particularly, not to be selfish, but to be selfless and giving to others. They inspired and continue to inspire me to be my absolute best! They taught me how to live my life to fullest and not to let anyone hold me back, and that ANYTHING is possible! I always remember my dad saying, the world doesn’t owe you anything, it’s up to you to make your mark in this world. I kept that in mind every step of the way, making sure I didn’t wallow in my sorrows of what I didn’t have and embracing my gifts, talents and blessing that I did and do have.

A little girl from the Southside of Chicago, where the odds were against me, but I prevailed!

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ABSTRACT

For approximately three years, the Chicago Public School (CPS) district has been undergoing a process of creating protocols, structures, and tools that will assist schools with the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). An on-going area of development for the district as well as for my school is developing teachers’ abilities to support all students in the leveled tiers, particularly Tier 3. The purpose of this self-study is to understand, document, and analyze my actions (as the principal) while implementing MTSS Tier 3 (K-3) supports at my school. A self-study is a form of research educators use to understand their practice (Austin & Senese, 2004; Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004; Loughran & Northfield, 1998). In this self-study, I recount my journey as a principal, explaining in detail how I, as the leader, support teachers in the implementation of Tier 3 supports. To inform my self-study, I document and reflect on my actions using reflective journaling. The rationale for this study is driven from a desire to understand how I can provide the tools and support teachers/staff and administrators need to effectively implement MTSS, particularly at the Tier 3 level. My findings identify that as a leader I am an advocate and more aligned to Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

We make the declaration that “all children can learn.” If we believe this to be true, what supports do we have in place to make sure this is happening in our schools? As a building leader, we must ask ourselves every day: How are we making sure all of our children are achieving adequate growth? What systems do we have in place to ensure this happens? And what do we need to do to ensure there is equitable education for all of our children? Part of my responsibility as a building leader is to increase student performance by way of narrowing the achievement gap. The achievement gap in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students (Ansell & Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). There are several indicators used to measure the achievement gap, including test scores, grades, graduation and dropout rates, college entrance, and graduation completion rates (D’Amico, 2001). To close the achievement gap, I argue that, students who are considered low performing must also be given access to the curriculum, as well as different opportunities to learn. As Fullan (2010) states,

of course, an increase in average level of educational achievement in a society is important, but light years better is whether the gap between high and low
achievers’ decreases as the overall average arises. Closing the gap has profound multiple benefits for both individuals and society as a whole. (p. 15)

Closing the gaps involves not only improving achievement for all students, but also taking the necessary steps needed to raise the achievement of low-performing students so that their achievement is on the same level as what is considered comparable to average groups of students. The assumption that I made, and is often made by others, is that teachers automatically know how to make sure all students’ needs are being addressed, but, if this were true, then it would be evident in all schools. Research has shown that teachers need to know how to respond to the burgeoning diversity of contemporary classrooms (Fischer & Rose, 2001; Flem, Moen, & Gudmundsdottir, 2000; McCoy & Ketterlin-Geller, 2004; Mulroy & Eddinger, 2003; Sizer, 1999; Tomlinson, 2001b, 2004a). However, in order for teachers to know how to respond, teachers need to be taught. This transfer of information must come from the leader of the building. Therefore, principals need to be aware of what is happening in their schools and be proactive at making sure all students have access to the most basic learning resource: quality teaching. According to Haycock (1998), the most important educational investment a state can make is in highly qualified teachers. Investing in highly qualified teachers doesn’t just come in the form of hiring; it also comes in the form of training. Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) found that when teachers have an average of 49 hours of professional development in a single school year focused specifically on the curriculum they teach, student achievement increases 21 percentile points.
Although district leaders or principals may provide teachers with a workshop, research has shown that one-time professional development workshops are often outside of the context of the school, not typically aligned with ongoing practice, and do not reliably lead to changes in classroom teaching (Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999). Therefore, principals need to ensure that they are providing teachers with consistent professional development that will capture what teachers need to implement to ensure all students have access to the curriculum by way of differentiating the instruction. Research has shown that when teachers differentiate their instruction, they are providing entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes that are tailored to students’ needs (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003). Differentiated instruction is not just simply grouping students according to their level; it presents an effective means to address learner variance (Tomlinson, 2000a, 2001a, 2003) and avoids the pitfalls of the one-size-fits-all curriculum (McBride, 2004). Teachers need to be aware of the students’ academic level, as well as which interventions to use for which students, how often to use the interventions, and how often to progress monitor students. I believe Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) will support in this endeavor.

In an effort to close the academic achievement gap between students who are higher and lower performing, I conducted a self-study to examine my engagement in providing those necessary tools and supports teachers need to be successful in teaching low-performing students. I also examined my role as the administrator in accomplishing my mission, with explicit details of my actions and interactions I have with others through journal reflections.
Description of Self-Study

A self-study is a form of research educators use to understand their practice (Austin & Senese, 2004; Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004; Northfield & Loughran, 1998). In this self-study, I understood my practice by recounting my journey as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal through journal reflections. The journal reflections also examined and reflected on the steps that I took toward improving my practice to support teachers in improving their practice so they can, in turn, improve student performance.

In this chapter, I take you through my journey: highlighting first-hand accounts of how I first realized my school had structural problems as a teacher, to what I needed to do to make sure change happened when becoming the principal. My journey was prompted based on my childhood experiences. I knew at a very young age that I wanted to work with children, particularly the ones who were underrepresented.

Background for the Study

My Journey

_I am the child that is overlooked. I try to raise my hand, but I am afraid that people will think I am dumb. My teacher always asks questions to the smart kids. I want to learn, but sometimes I need help. I just can’t understand what I have read. I want to learn, but the words are backward and sometimes I daydream. I want to read aloud, but I know I will have trouble with the words and my classmates will laugh. I need help, I cry for help, but there is no one, no one who can hear my silent cry._

So many children in our schools feel this way. They feel that no one is/was there for them. I can relate to these children because there was instability in my upbringing. I was a child raised by my dad in a single-family home. I transferred from seven different
schools before I made it to third grade and was a child whose first meal in school was my last meal of the day. I was an intelligent child but lacked confidence. I was the shy child, the child who was less outgoing. I often felt ignored and wished that someone would help me to find my inner strengths. Now that I am the principal of the very same school I attended, I am determined to make sure all of my students’ needs are met so they will become the leaders they are meant to be. In an effort to be a voice and advocate for children, I became an educator and began my journey as a special education teacher.

**My experience as a special education teacher.** I have worked with students with special needs for over seven years and was appalled by the number of students who had been unfairly identified as having diverse learning needs (special education) by the time they were in third grade. I use the word *unfairly* based on my observations and close work with students with diverse learning needs. What I noticed was most of the students who were identified as having a diverse learning need were not properly diagnosed. In fact, contrary to what their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) stated, the students could demonstrate the ability to master a task when I provided them with one-on-one assistance and taught them using different learning modalities. When given extra practice, some of my students were able to successfully master a skill or task independently. What I found was that every student in my classroom needed something different. Consequently, once I captured what that need was, I was able to see improvement in their work. Based on my daily and weekly assessments and mastery of IEP benchmark goals, over 90% of my students excelled within the first year I serviced them, and 30% of them exited from special education and moved into general education classes. There were students,
however, who had severe deficits, were appropriately diagnosed and placed in my special education classroom, and were properly addressed. After reviewing the progress that my students made, I began to wonder whether my students were placed in special education because of learning disabilities (LD) or was there just a lack of individualized instruction in their general education classrooms? Were the general education teachers not giving the students the support that they needed?

**The general education program.** After a few years of being a self-contained special education teacher, I witnessed my school undergoing a systemic structure change. All of the special education students who were in self-contained special education classrooms were mainstreamed into the general education population, and, as a result, I became the resource teacher. What I didn’t realize at the time is, in hindsight, my new role gave me the ability to observe my interactions with the general education teachers and their interactions with both the general and special education students. As I observed the classrooms, I noted that most of the teachers taught in a whole group instruction manner and through a singular instructional approach. Although whole group instruction definitely has its place and is effective when delivered properly and at the appropriate times, research has shown that the use of single-paced lessons delivered through a singular instructional approach disregards the different learning styles and interests present in all classrooms (Fischer & Rose, 2001; Forsten, Grant & Hollas, 2002; Guild, 2001; Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch, 1998). I found that the teachers were not allowing the lower and special education students to access the curriculum, nor was the presented lesson adapted to the students’ learning styles; rather, the lower-performing students and
students with special needs were sitting together completing an assignment very different from the other students, not participating or being exposed to the whole group (core) lesson. I observed the students who were considered lower performing struggling (in the secluded group), trying to figure out what was being asked of them. Once the teacher concluded the whole group lesson, the teacher did not group the students who were not demonstrating mastery according to their instructional needs. And, as a result, students who performed below grade level were not given the same opportunities to access instruction as the students who performed at and above grade level; they were simply ignored. Based on my experience as a special education teacher, I wondered if all students (particularly lower-performing students) had been given the appropriate pathways to learn and succeed, would they have been placed in special education in the first place. I asked myself, are the teachers appropriately trained? Do they know and understand how to provide that access to the students? Or do they just not care?

My perspective as an administrator. Becoming the assistant principal gave me a broader lens of the entire school. I was able to observe all classrooms and review school-wide data that captured student need. The data showed that students who were considered high performing and at grade level were excelling. The data also showed the students who were below the expected performance level were not making adequate growth. Lower-performing students either failed or were referred to special education services, which usually happened by the third grade level. Student deficits or differences were not being adequately addressed, and, because of this, our lower-performing students fell through
the cracks, creating an achievement gap between the students who were at or above grade level and the students below grade level.

Being both a self-contained and resource teacher coupled with being an administrator at the same school gave me a panoramic view of the different trends and practices within my school. As a special education teacher, I was able to work with other special and general education teachers. In addition, as an administrator, I was able to self-reflect on my own practices. These observations and self-reflections helped to strengthen my hypothesis and confirmed my suspicions of the academic achievement gap between high and low students. It also confirmed the need to better train my teachers and provide them with the necessary supports and tools they needed to improve student equity and growth, particularly the lower-performing students.

Purpose of the Study

Now, as the principal, I seek to understand, document, analyze, and examine my actions in implementing a change initiative: MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports). MTSS is an important tool to utilize in this self-study because MTSS is a process for systemically providing interventions that are proportional to all students’ needs. MTSS is rooted in data-informed practices of RTI and PBIS and explicitly offers a multi-tier approach. In the past, our educational system had essentially two tiers: general and special education. Students who did not do well in the general education curriculum were referred to, and qualified for, special education. MTSS’s emphasis, however, is on schoolwide, differentiated, universal core instruction at Tier 1, Tier 2 and 3; these tiers provide intensive and increasingly individualized interventions (Batsche et al., 2005).
Tier 1 represents “all” students and is evidence-based core curriculum and instruction, with an assessment system and data-based decision making. Tier 2 represents “some” students and is supplemental targeted skill intervention small groups, with frequent progress monitoring to guide intervention design. Tier 3 represents a “few” students and offers more intense supplemental targeted skill interventions, with customized interventions and frequent progress monitoring to guide intervention design. The description of the three tiers was re-created from Kansas’ Multi-Systems of Support Model. I have extracted the academic portion of the Initiative, as that will be my only focus for this self-study.

Based on my observations and the school data, students in Tier 1 and Tier 2 are making adequate yearly growth. Our intensive/lower performing students (Tier 3), however, are not making adequate yearly growth in reading or math. Forty-six percent of our K-2nd grade students are intensive in reading and 13% in math. Approximately 31% of 3rd grade students are intensive while 49% are intensive in math. Therefore, I will be focusing on Tier 3 supports for students in both reading and mathematics. Because my school is in need of a systemic change, MTSS fits perfectly with my mission to support Tier 3 students. I have chosen to focus on the K-3rd grade students because those students were most frequently referred for special education evaluations when I was a special education teacher. And, I believe if you can help students at a younger age, you will decrease the number of targeted (lower-performing students) at an older age. Multiple studies have demonstrated that, with typical instruction, children who do not learn to read adequately in the primary grades will likely continue to struggle with
reading in subsequent years (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996; Juel, 1988; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). Also, K-3rd grades address foundational skills that develop students’ understanding and working knowledge of beginning concepts for both reading and mathematics. I believed if I provided those grade level teachers with the professional development, along with the appropriate resources and progress-monitoring tools and interventions they needed, they will be able to provide the students with the necessary tools to be successful in the general education classrooms, thereby decreasing the number of students referred to special education and increasing the academic growth in the Tier 3 students.

Although our school has attempted to implement MTSS and similar initiatives in previous years, we have not implemented any of the initiatives with fidelity. Therefore, I captured my interactions with staff and the steps I took as a reflective tool creating a fluid, systemic, and comprehensive monitoring tool and protocol that will act as a guide for building principals to use with teachers and staff to implement MTSS with fidelity.

The significance of the study is to provide equal access to the curriculum to all students (particularly low performing), as well as increase student improvement. This self-study will also provide other leaders and educators with a bird’s-eye view of my mistakes, thoughts, growth, and triumphs. I provide a blueprint of necessary steps that need to be taken and the day-to-day barriers that may be faced when implementing a new initiative and use these barriers as teaching tools to improve my practice.

The rationale for this study is driven by a desire to understand what tools and support teachers/staff and administrators need to effectively utilize these supports in the
classroom, particularly for students (Tier 3). Therefore, my research questions considered in this self-study are:

1. In an effort to narrowing the achievement gap, how do I, as a leader at an elementary school, support my teachers in implementing MTSS (Multi-Systems of Support) for Tier 3 students in grades K-3 in both reading and math?
   a. What tools and protocols do I need to create to support my teachers in implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?
   b. How do I create a structured system to help support my teachers in implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?

2. How do I provide MTSS training to help teachers to track students’ progress in reading and math? What were my successes? And what were my obstacles?

**Overview of Conceptual Frameworks**

The development of the research problem is based on the need for all students to gain access to the curriculum. There is a definite need for students in Tier 3 to be provided the appropriate interventions in the classroom in order to achieve adequate growth. This, however, cannot be obtained if teachers are not provided with the appropriate training, tools, or interventions needed. I believe, that the administrator has to create this structure in such a way that is easily accessible to the teachers. Therefore, all of these components (student improvement, teacher supports, and administrative
structure) were synthesized in two conceptual frameworks: one as a guide for the administrator to follow and the other as a reflection tool to capture administrator behaviors. I used these two frameworks’ components as reflective writing points to direct me in my journal writing.

**Ogden Learning Framework**

The first conceptual framework that was utilized in understanding the work is the Learning Support Model from the Ogden School District 2013. The framework was created from a School Improvement Grants Application within the Utah Education System. I was drawn to this model because of the focus it has on the academic strand that specifies required supports for students (Tier 3) struggling academically. This particular framework was chosen because it outlines the leader’s specific tools, programs, and interventions to use in each tier for coaching teachers to implement MTSS with fidelity. The Ogden Framework outlines five components that closely align with essential components in the MTSS model:

1. Planning (teachers, staff, principal)—roll out the initiative, gather information, and get a team on board.
2. Implementation support (what tools, resources will be used)
3. Measure Implementation (professional development, lesson plans)
4. Analysis Leading Indicator Data (qualitative and quantitative)
5. Leadership Monitor and adjust (is it working)

It is very important to note that our school currently has an instructional coach two days out of the week. However, part of my self-study will capture the adjustments I make to
fill the gap when the interventionist is not present or is no longer at our school due to budgetary reasons. MTSS and the Ogden Framework align in specifically focusing on shared leadership, data-based decision making, continuum of supports, evidence-based instruction, interventions, and assessment practices. As MTSS is a huge system to implement, the Ogden Framework offered a structured guide for me to follow while monitoring my actions of ensuring MTSS is implemented with fidelity. I used each component as a guide to understand if I was on the right track of implementation.

**Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership (1992) Framework**

The second conceptual framework that I utilized was Thomas Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership (1992) Framework. Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership Framework serves as a conceptual guide in the present study and helped me in understanding my leadership behaviors. Sergiovanni’s conceptual framework focuses on three key components:

- **Head.** This component centers on leader’s ability to be unbiased and able to self-reflect. The head of leadership has to do with the mindscapes, or theories of practice, that leaders develop over time and with their ability, in light of these theories, to reflect on the situations they face. Reflection, combined with personal vision and an internal system of values, becomes the basis of leadership strategies and actions. (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 8)

- **Heart.** Every leader has his or her own belief system, vision, or reason why he or she became a leader. The heart has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about and committed to—the person’s personal vision, to use the popular
term. However, it is more than vision. It is the person’s interior world, which becomes the foundation of her or his reality. (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 7)

**Hand.** The *Hand* component is very critical for the leader as researcher because it takes the leader, to be honest with him or herself. “Decision, actions, and behaviors that one takes. The leader’s interpersonal style or behavior, or on the leader’s ability to match his or her style to the needs of subordinates” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 7). In other words, how can the leader adjust him or herself to help the needs of others?

**The head, the hand, and the heart.** Sergiovanni (1992) states, “the head of leadership is shaped by the heart and drives the hand; in turn, reflections on decisions and actions affirm or reshape the heart and the hand” (p. 7). My goal as a leader was to have a healthy combination of all three when I lead. As I grow, I also want to become better at understanding when and how to use each.

Through journal reflection, I captured my leadership behaviors and aligned each behavior under Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart. Capturing this information helped with aligning the components to my leadership style, while assisting me with pinpointing which component I lean more toward, and working toward embodying all three. These three components will also assist me in differentiating and adjusting my leadership style and adjusting my style to individual staff need. I believe that, when I adjust my leadership style to being more of a balanced leader, I can make decisions as they relate to supporting the teachers in properly addressing different students’ needs, thereby
narrowing the academic achievement gap between our high- and low-performing students.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For approximately three years, the Chicago Public School (CPS) district has been implementing a process of creating protocols, structures, and tools that will assist schools with the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS). An on-going area of development for the district as well as for my school is teachers addressing all students in the leveled tiers, particularly Tier 3. Change is needed in my district and specifically in my school. As Fullan (2010) states, “a crisis is needed because no real change occurs without a crisis. This is an unfortunate commentary on our limited understanding of systemic change, of our reliance on desperation rather than aspiration” (p. x). Leaders of schools are responsible for being a change agent to ensure that a crisis does not emerge. This is not an easy task; thus, it will take the leader to recognize that there is a problem in their school. According to Heifetz et al. (2009),

leadership is a difficult practice personally because it almost always requires you to make a challenging adaptation yourself. What makes adaptation complicated is that it involves deciding what is so essential that it must be preserved going forward and what of all that you value can be left behind. (p. 45)

As a leader, I have recognized that there is a problem at my school that has caused a core group of my students to not have the same opportunities as their counterparts in having equal access to the curriculum. Therefore, the value and purpose of this self-study
is to understand, document, analyze, and examine my actions (as the principal) in implementing a change initiative: MTSS.

What is Multi-tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)?

MTSS, rooted in the data-informed practices of RTI and PBIS, explicitly offers a multi-tiered approach that include Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels of supports. Students may move fluidly among the tiers based on their response to the instruction and interventions they receive. For example, if students are improving based on the data, a student can move from Tier 3 to Tier 2 or Tier 2 to Tier 1. The students who need intensive services and are assigned to the tier 3 category will receive immediate interventions and supports. It is very important to note that although students are being placed in the individual tiers, the MTSS process is also fluid in the content areas. For example, there may be a student who is in Tier 3 for reading yet in Tier 1 for math. Therefore, the students have different needs in different content areas, and the different needs must be aligned to the students’ area of growth. The leader must keep in mind that the tiers have to be flexible, being careful not to box the students in one tier, not giving students the opportunity to grow and improve to the next tier. Keeping this idea in the forefront of one’s mind will eliminate labeling students within the tiers.

Research suggests that, in order to durably implement and sustain scientifically based practices, schools should be part of a school-wide, multi-tiered system of support (MTSS; Sugai, 2012). According to Colorado Department of Education (September, 15), MTSS is a whole-school, data-driven, prevention-based framework for improving learning outcomes for every student through a layered continuum of evidence-based
practices and systems. MTSS is also defined as “a structured framework that targets all students’ needs” (Sugai & Horner, 2009, p. 226). The MTSS initiative has all of the critical attributes that aligns with our school’s mission and vision. Not only does MTSS provide a systemic structure that tiers students based on their academic need, but also suggests supports and interventions are specifically aligned so that teachers/staff and administrators can follow. MTSS is not a new initiative, as Response to Intervention (RTI) and School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) are two features in the MTSS model. On a national level, RTI was originally developed as an alternative to the cognitive achievement discrepancy criteria for identifying Specific Learning Disabilities (IDEA, 2004), it is most closely associated with academic interventions, and SWPBS (School Wide Positive Behavior Strategies), as its name suggests, is directed at increasing students’ pro-social behaviors. Many suggest, however, that RTI and SWPBS are complementary and, therefore, can be implemented conjointly within an MTSS model (Gamm et al., 2012).

According to Florida’s MTSS, there are eight implementation components that are attributed to the initiative being successful. I kept these components in the forefront of my mind as I navigated supporting my teachers and staff through the implementation of MTSS:

1. Effective, actively involved, and resolute leadership that frequently provides visible connections between a MTSS framework with district & school mission statements and organizational improvement efforts.
2. Alignment of policies and procedures across classroom, grade, building, district, and state levels.

3. Ongoing efficient facilitation and accurate use of a problem-solving process to support planning, implementing, and evaluating effectiveness of services.

4. Strong, positive, and ongoing collaborative partnerships with all stakeholders who provide education services or who otherwise would benefit from increases in student outcomes.

5. Comprehensive, efficient, and user-friendly data-systems for supporting decision-making at all levels from the individual student level up to the aggregate district level.

6. Sufficient availability of coaching supports to assist school team and staff problem solving efforts.

7. Communicating outcomes with stakeholders and celebrating success frequently.

8. Ongoing data-driven professional development activities that align to core student goals and staff needs. (p. 10)

Although there are many programs/initiatives that schools (including my school) have implemented that have included balance and equity, the structure of MTSS has proven to be beneficial to schools when implemented and followed with fidelity.

**Why MTSS?**

In just two years, implementation of an RTI/MTSS model to Reading First programs in Florida resulted in an 81% reduction in the number of students found eligible
for special education in kindergarten, and a 67% and 53% eligibility reduction in first and second grades (Torgeson, 2007). Also, according to Kansas City’s Multi-Tiered Final Evaluation Report (2014), to “some extent” or “to a great extent,” implementing MTSS has had a positive impact on student outcomes: students scoring at benchmark (89.5%), students scoring as proficient on the state assessment (70.3%), a decrease in Office Discipline Referrals (77.1%), and a decrease in special education referrals (63.4%).

As both a special education and resource self-contained teacher, I have serviced students who were either prematurely diagnosed or misdiagnosed based on the poor quality of instruction in my school, particularly lower-performing students. These results are the reason I am concerned that special education identification rates have more to do with whether schools provide quality instruction and use a data-based tiered approach to intervention than the actual presence of a learning disability. I believed that, if the Tier 3 students are addressed, then perhaps I could minimize the increased number of special education students and increase the number of Tier 3 students making adequate yearly growth at my school.

**Why Tier 3 Students?**

Students requiring Tier 3 interventions are the most at-risk students in our schools. If we do not help them immediately, their adult lives will be highly correlated with poverty, welfare, a shortened life span, and incarceration in prison (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2012). As Hernandez (2011) explained,

A student who can’t read on grade level by 3rd grade is 4 times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who reads proficiently by that time. Add poverty
to the mix, and a student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time. Students who did not read proficiently at 3rd grade constitute 88% of those who did not earn a diploma. Low reading skills in 3rd grade are a stronger predictor of dropping out of school than having spent at least one year in poverty. (p. 15)

Tier 3 is the most powerful instruction and is characterized by (a) more instructional time; (b) smaller instructional groups (or individuals); (c) more precisely targeted at the appropriate level; (d) clearer and more detailed explanations are used during instruction; (e) more systematic instructional sequences are used; (f) more extensive opportunities for practice are provided; and (g) more opportunities for error correction and feedback are provided.

There have been few studies examining Tier 3 interventions for students with limited responsiveness in Tiers 1 and 2, and there is even less research examining effective instruction for students who make inadequate progress in Tier 3. Some earlier studies have suggested that, despite over 50 years of research on special education and remedial instruction, gaps remain in terms of how to teach reading to the three to five percent of students with the most severe reading difficulties (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1997). Even in studies that provided highly intensive Tier 3 intervention, some individual students have demonstrated little or no growth (e.g., Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006).

Although research on effective interventions in mathematics and reading are limited, recent meta-analyses examining instructional approaches for students with disabilities (Gersten, Chard, Jayanthi, Baker, & Lee, 2006) and low-performing students
(Tier 3). Baker, Gersten, and Lee (2002) highlighted some positive finding as they relate to mathematics. Instructional strategies such as providing visual and graphic depictions of mathematical concepts, explicit instruction, and verbalization of mathematical processes, peer-assisted learning, and using assessment data to inform instruction are emerging as effective for students needing supplemental interventions. Additional research points to the use of graduated instructional sequences as effective for students who struggle in mathematics (Witzel, 2005).

Ketterlin-Geller, Chard, and Fien (2008) stressed the importance of evidence-based interventions for students struggling in mathematics, as well as the need for an integrated system of instruction and assessment, a key feature of an RTI model. These authors found that providing interventions to students who are underperforming in math can improve their mathematics performance on different achievement measures. The academic area most often targeted in schools that implement response to intervention (RTI) models is beginning reading (Spectrum K12 School Solutions, 2009). Although most students respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 instruction, a small percentage (i.e., 5%) will not and may require Tier 3 intervention. Because of this percentage, I wanted to advocate and bring attention to the 5% of our children who are often forgotten, ignored, or underrepresented. Also, because there is a lack of research that can pinpoint effective strategies for Tier 3 students, I was more inclined to examine how I could increase student growth for those particular students.

A part of MTSS’ focus includes differentiated instruction, the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model and small group instruction. I believed if I trained the teachers first
on these strategies, I would fulfill my desire to improve my ability to ensure teachers are adequately trained. It is important to note that differentiated instruction and the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model are implemented in all three tiers; however, based on the of inconsistency and support provided in the implementation at my school, I was specifically focused on making sure I provided Tier 3 support in these areas.

**Differentiated instruction.** One of the major components of the MTSS process is differentiated instruction, which emerged as a fully developed model in 1995 (Tomlinson, 1995) and, when fully implemented, can significantly improve student achievement (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). Differentiated instruction and MTSS share a central goal: to meet the needs of all learners. Differentiated instruction is based on the premise that there should be varying instructional approaches within the curriculum and adaptations should be made in relation to individual and diverse students in classrooms (Tomlinson, 2014). The goal of a differentiated classroom is “to maximize student growth and individual success” (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000, p. 4) by providing many avenues for students to acquire content, to process information and ideas, and to develop products. Differentiated instruction is the heart of MTSS in that it encompasses all of the attributes that are required to meet every child where they are. As written by Levy (2008), “every teacher who has entered into a classroom has differentiated their instruction in one way or another” (p. 162). Nevertheless, what is most important is that teachers are strategic at finding out the supports, interventions, and strategies that are necessary to ensure student growth. Misulis (1997) contended that “regardless of the teaching model and methods used, effective instruction begins with careful, thorough,
and organized planning on the part of the teacher” (p. 45). Early planning models developed by experts such as Tyler followed a rational model: develop objectives, develop activities to help students achieve objectives, and evaluate the students to determine if the goals have been met (Sardo-Brown, 1990; Yinger, 1980; Zahorik, 1975). However, now the planning process has evolved to focus more on designing learning activities that meet the diverse needs of the students to ensure that learning has taken place (Baylor & Kitsantas, 2001; Ornstein, 1997; Panasuk, Stone, & Todd, 2002). When teachers plan their lesson according to student needs, there can be positive effects on student learning.

Canadian researchers conducted a three-year study on K-12 students in Alberta. Their purpose was to analyze what effects differentiated instruction had on these students, once the strategy was implemented. As a result, all students of different levels demonstrated improvement. There was also a comparison conducted between the general education students and students with mild or severe learning disabilities. The students with the targeted disability benefited more from the differentiated and intensive support, particularly, small groups or with targeted instruction (McQuarrie, McRae, & Stack-Cutler, 2008). It is very important to note that differentiated instruction benefits students with a very wide range of ability levels (Neber, Finsterwald, & Urban, 2001).

Evidence of effective instruction is accumulating at an astounding rate. We know that all learners need purposeful instruction in reading skills and strategies, motivation to read, access to a wide variety of texts, and authentic opportunities to read and write both inside and outside of school (Farstrup & Samuels, 2002; Fink & Samuels, 2008). We also
know that students need to develop their expertise in all aspects of reading and writing, including oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Frey & Fisher, 2006). And we also know that the skills of the teacher, and how the teacher uses valuable instructional time, matters. This evidence on effective literacy teaching, which includes small group instruction, differentiation, and response to intervention, presents a challenge for many teachers and schools. Apparently, whole-class instruction will not work to improve the literacy achievement of our children. To be effective, teachers have to engage students in purposeful education designed to meet the needs of individual and smaller groups of students.

The delivery of Tier 3 instruction is focused on the skills that pose the greatest barrier to the acceleration of student learning. Tier 3 instruction is characterized by the greatest number of minutes of instruction available in a building and the narrowest focus of that instruction. Typically, the instruction is provided to individual students or in very small groups (University of South Florida, n.d.).

**Small group instruction.** Small group instruction is imperative to narrowing down the student’s needs. However, small groups must be implemented with fidelity and correctly to ensure effectiveness. Research states that the optimal group size for learning seems to be teams of three to four while those of six to ten “did not learn significantly more than students from ungrouped classes” (Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers, & d’Appolonia, 1996, p. 448). With five or fewer children in a group, teachers can focus needed attention on individual children and make sure that each child has opportunities to participate and their needs are met. Differentiated small-group instruction is done by
matching instruction to meet the needs of learners (Kosanovich, Ladinsky, Nelson, & Torgesen, 2007). One-on-one or small group instruction also provides intensity as Tier 3 students have more opportunities to practice and respond. According to a beginning reading study, the small-group, differentiated reading model implemented enabled teachers to focus on specific skills needed by varied groups of children (Tyner, 2003). In general, small groups are used to increase understanding and further grasp concepts. Most importantly, small-group time enables children to have access to high-quality interaction with their teachers (Wasik, 2008). In this self-study, high-quality interaction in a small group setting is necessary for our Tier 3 students to garner the time and attention that they need for improvement. What is also needed to improve achievement is the differentiation of instruction according to student ability and academic level. Although this self-study is focused on Tier 3 students, it is important to note that the Gradual Release Model is embedded in small-group instruction, as well as all three Tiers. It is also important to note that, if the core instruction is not strong for all students, it is difficult to get an accurate depiction of the leveled tiers. Therefore, students’ needs are not accurately met. Hence, it is important that teachers deliver the lesson in such a way that reaches all the children so they can master a concept independently.

**Gradual release of responsibility model.** The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model of instruction has been documented as an effective approach for improving literacy achievement (Fisher & Frey, 2007), reading comprehension (Lloyd, 2004), and literacy outcomes for English language learners (Kong & Pearson, 2003). The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model of instruction requires that the teacher shift from
assuming “all the responsibility for performing a task…to a situation in which the students assume all of the responsibility” (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 211). This gradual release may occur over a day, a week, a month, or a year. Stated another way, the gradual release of responsibility “emphasizes instruction that mentors students into becoming capable thinkers and learners when handling the tasks with which they have not yet developed expertise” (Buehl, 2005, p. 114-124). However, this must be done when the students have demonstrated when they are ready. Although the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model predominantly focuses on literacy, some components can be used in mathematics.

I argue that Tier 3 students are the most vulnerable students who need to be addressed because of their severe deficits. However, if principals are not making sure they are monitoring teacher practices with fidelity and consistently providing teachers the appropriate resources and tools, then those students will continue to suffer from not making adequate growth.

**Definition of Fidelity**

Fidelity of implementation is traditionally defined as the determination of how well an intervention is implemented in comparison with the original program design during an efficacy and/or effectiveness study (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Biglan & Taylor, 2000; Freeman, 1977; Fullan, 2010; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987; Lipsey, 1999; Mihalic, 2002; National Research Council [NRC], 2004; Patton, 1978; Scheirer & Rezmovic, 1983; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). According to Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, and Wallace (2005),
full implementation of innovation is reached when at least 50% of the currently employed practitioners simultaneously perform their new functions acceptably, that is, when measured by criteria that denote fidelity to the original innovation in their replication. This requirement may appear easy to meet, but it is not. (p. 6) Fidelity has to be modeled, taught, and monitored to see the expected results. Fixsen et al. further stated that, if staff training, coaching, supervision, and the consistent use of data is needed to implement any program with fidelity to inform the overall process. As the principal, I must ensure I am monitoring teacher practices with fidelity.

In summary of the organizational factors, Fixsen et al. (2005) concluded that, when strong core implementation components are well supported by strong organizational structures, the desired outcomes of sustaining high fidelity practices can be achieved. In this case, the strong organizational structure is MTSS. I argue that when principals ensure that MTSS is implemented with fidelity, then the academic achievement gap between high and low students will decrease. Many barriers exist, however, in MTSS schools that prevent teachers in fully engaging in implementing MTSS. According to the University of South Florida’s (n.d.) MTSS, there are three basic types of “fidelity” for districts and schools to support and/or integrate into instruction and intervention: (a) fidelity of implementing the critical components of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS); (b) fidelity of using the problem-solving process across all three tiers; and (c) fidelity of implementing evidence-based instruction and interventions matched to specific need(s).
The first type of fidelity (District MTSS system) requires that the district and school(s) have provided the basic elements of the MTSS infrastructure. This includes the provision of professional development and support (technical assistance/coaching), data support (data sources and technology), leadership support (policies, expectations and evaluation) and program evaluation (on-going data collection to ensure integrity of implementation and support). Assessment tools have been developed in Florida to assess levels of implementation and educator perceptions of the fidelity of the MTSS system. These tools include (among others) the Self-Assessment of Problem-Solving Implementation (SAPSI), the Benchmarks of Quality (BOQ), the PBS Implementation Checklist (PIC), and the Benchmarks of Advanced Tiers (BAT) that can be used to determine implementation across buildings, educator perceptions (beliefs, skills, practices, and satisfaction) and a district Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Implementation Components Common Questions 8 Needs Assessment Process.

The second type of fidelity focuses on the degree to which the four-step, data-based problem-solving process is implemented appropriately. This is important because the development of instruction and interventions is based on this process. If the process is flawed, then the instruction and interventions developed as a result of the process will be flawed. Tools are designed to be used concurrently with the problem-solving process (Critical Component Checklists) and to assess the degree to which “products” contain critical elements of the problem-solving process.

The final type of fidelity focuses on the degree to which instruction and intervention are delivered in the manner intended and the degree to which instruction and
intervention is integrated across the tiers of service delivery. This type of fidelity includes both “sufficiency” (the amount of the service delivered) as well as integrity (the degree to which the service was delivered as intended). In Tier 1, the integrity of instruction focuses on the degree to which core instruction is delivered in the way intended, based on lesson study (or lesson planning), the presence of effective instructional strategies, and the degree to which those instructional strategies are appropriate to the skill level and demographic characteristics of the students (language, abilities). Typically, the fidelity of Tier 1 is assessed through the use of walkthroughs by principals and peers and/or direct observation of the critical elements of the instructional process. Tools such as the Benchmarks of Quality and PBS Implementation Checklist allow for measurement of the fidelity of Tier 1 behavior supports and instruction. The sufficiency of instruction in Tier 1 is based on the degree to which teachers implement core instruction consistent with the time expectations for instruction in specific content areas each day (e.g., literacy, 90 minutes). Integrity in Tiers 2 and 3 focuses on a structured support system for Tier 2/3 providers. This system consists of regular meetings to determine student response to the intervention, regular technical assistance, and support and barriers to the delivery of the intervention.

**Barriers to MTSS**

Hagans and Powers (2014) presented different barriers that schools may face when implementing MTSS. The barriers discussed are pre-service preparation, leadership support, and teacher training. This notion warns leaders that barriers need to be addressed and rectified, and, when this happens, the MTSS process will be able to flow with
Although there are barriers to the implementation of MTSS at the school level, there must be considerations between school personnel’s current knowledge, skills, and beliefs. For example, Hagans and Powers pointed out that school personnel may not possess the knowledge and skills to implement MTSS (e.g., a skill deficit) or may not see the need to implement MTSS (i.e., motivation deficit) because they are satisfied with current practices or they don’t think MTSS will make a difference (i.e., just another fad). Another example of a barrier is when school personnel believe they are fully implementing MTSS but, in fact, have only established a limited practice such as fall, winter, and spring benchmarking or the appointment of an RTI specialist. It is not until the leader goes beyond the surface of not just what is going on in your school, but how the implementation is working, that you will then be able to make the proper assessment of what needs improvement or how well your school is actually functioning. In an effort to being self-reflective, I followed two frameworks that guided both my thinking and practice.

**Conceptual Frameworks for Analysis**

The two conceptual frameworks that I followed while conducting this self-study were (a) Moral Leadership as defined by Thomas J. Sergiovanni (1992), and (b) the Learning Support Model created by Ogden School District (2013), which was designed by the teachers and staff in support of a *School Improvement Grants Application* in the Utah Education System in order to bring understanding to this initiative.

**Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership**
The first conceptual framework that I utilized in understanding the work is Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership (1992). Sergiovanni encompasses,

What kind of leadership will be needed for schools to effectively serve society as we look further into the future? Whatever the answer, it will not be the superhero leadership of the past. The new century will not be kind to leaders who seek to change thin by the sheer force of their personality. Nor will it be kind to leaders who seek to change things by the sheer force of their bureaucratic authority. Instead, we will need leadership for schools themed to learning, to the development of civic virtue, and to the cultivation of self-management.

(Sergiovanni, 2001, p. 39)

Thomas Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership (1992) serves as a conceptual guide in the present study. Sergiovanni’s conceptual framework focuses on three key components: The Head, The Hand, and the Heart. Sergiovanni stated that “the head of leadership is shaped by the heart and drives the hand; in turn, reflections on decisions and actions affirm or reshape the heart and the hand” (p. 7). A reflective journal will be used to capture the daily interactions that the leader will encounter when implementing Sergiovanni’s three components.

**Head.** The head of leadership has to do with the mindscapes or theories of practice that leaders develop over time, and with their ability, in light of these theories, to reflect on the situations they face (in other words, minimize bias). “Reflection, combined with personal vision and an internal system of values, becomes the basis of leadership strategies and actions” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 8). I have had over 19 years of experience
and held several leadership positions and, during that time, have developed theories of practice and a vision for the school. The vision of creating a school that will close the achievement gaps by creating pathways, structures and interventions that will provide all students the skills that they need to become successful individuals will be accomplished through recorded daily reflections. The reflections were used to record the situations faced when implementing the MTSS initiative. These reflections helped me note what went well and what continues to need work while working with teachers and staff. The reflections also inform the researcher of other leadership strategies and actions that must be taken or changed.

Heart. Heart refers to what a person believes, values, dreams about and committed to—the person’s personal vision, to use the popular term. However, it is more than vision. It is the person’s interior world, which becomes the foundation of her or his reality (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 7). I will journal how I lead the teachers with raw data that outlines the need for Tier 3 students to be serviced and addressed. I will then reflect through written journals my observations and review of teacher grade level, professional development, or any other staff meetings or trainings that we have at the school. I will also reflect on meeting minutes, lesson plans, exit slips, and asset-mapping information that are being used by the teachers. This information will be a part of my daily reflection to capture buy-in, teacher understanding, and the willingness to collaborate and make decisions that are best for children without being compliant for administration but because it’s the right thing to do for children. The reflective journal will also capture my
ability to encourage, motivate, and guide the teachers in making the best decisions for children.

**Hand.** Hand refers to the “decision, actions, and behaviors that one takes. The leader’s interpersonal style or behavior, or on the leader’s ability to match his or her style to the needs of subordinates” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 7). The Hand component is very critical for a leader because it takes the leader to be honest with him or herself. Once the leader identifies with his/leadership practice, the alignment to the staff members can take place. The leader must get to know the staff through conversation, observation, and interactions. These three components will assist the leader with differentiating and adjusting his or her style and aligning supports to the right staff member. I will reflect on the different interactions and encounters that I face on a daily basis so that I can capture bias or familiarity that may take place, to help inform my study research. Bias can easily and sometimes subconsciously occur when the researcher is (a) the principal and (b) employed at the school for many years. The journal reflection is an excellent tool to use to reflect upon and analyze one's practices and correct any injustices or biased behaviors.

**Learning Support Model**

The second conceptual framework that will be utilized in understanding the work is the Learning Support Model from the Ogden School District (2013). The framework was created from a *School Improvement Grants Application* within the Utah Education System. The MTSS three-tiered model is superimposed onto the Ogden Model in a broader community context, which utilizes family and community assets and services to create a comprehensive system of learning supports. I chose this particular framework
model based on the Ogden District’s specific coaching and guidance for teachers and administrators not making sufficient progress. As stated before, we currently only have one part-time coach (interventionist) who comes to the school twice a week. Therefore we needed a model to follow. I also chose this framework because it addresses the potential barriers that Hagans and Powers (2014) noted that schools may face when implementing MTSS. The barriers include pre-service preparation, leadership support, and teacher training. The academic strand specifies required supports for students struggling academically, as the behavior strand specifies supports for students struggling behaviorally. The difference in this framework that differentiates it from others is that it provides the leader with specific tools, programs, and interventions to use in each tier for coaching teachers to implement MTSS with fidelity in both behavior and academics; I specifically targeted the academic component of the model for the sake of this study. The model also provides the leader with very precise steps that are cyclical. The framework addresses five major components and explicit support for a coach and leader to analyze and measure implementation (see Figure 1). I will use each component as a guide to measure how I assist the teachers in implementing MTSS with fidelity:
Note. Adapted from a Learning Support Model created by Ogden School District in 2013.

Figure 1. A Learning Support Model.

1) Planning - This component aligns with Hagans and Powers’ (2014) barriers to pre-service preparation. I will begin planning my team (teachers, staff, principal), roll out the initiative, gather information, and get a team on board. The teachers will be given an asset mapping to gauge their understanding of what they know about the MTSS process, as well as what the school currently has, to utilize tools that are already in the building, and then work toward bringing in needed resources.

2) Implementation support: This component aligns with Hagans and Powers’ (2014) barriers to leadership support and teacher training: tools and supports and resources the teachers/staff need. During the implementation process, I
will review the definition and purpose of the MTSS process with teachers and staff at the beginning of the school year. Based on my prior experience with the staff, teachers will create their cut scores to determine which tiers the students will be placed in depending on their NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) scores. Although our school-wide data show evidence that our Tier 1 and Tier 2 students are meeting adequate growth and access to core instruction, I want the teachers to know exactly which Tier 3 students they will be working with. Creating their cut scores will allow the teachers to take responsibility for grouping the students, therefore taking ownership of their learning. Once the teachers have created a cut score for each tier, I will then meet with each teacher to discuss student goal setting and the tiered groups. The teachers will then be given the time slots that each tiered group should have during instructional time. The teacher will begin putting the students in groups after whole group instruction. The coach will use the coaching rubric to determine if the teacher and/or staff member needs more assistance and guidance in implementing the leveled groups. I will monitor the agendas collected, minutes for grade level meetings and professional development and through reviewing instructional practices in the lesson plans.

3) Measure Implementation: This component aligns with Hagans and Powers’ (2014) barriers to teacher training: conduct observations, provide professional development and give feedback. Based on the exit slips from the professional development, the journal reflections, data from the NWEA scores, and
minutes and agendas from both the professional development and lesson
plans, the researcher will assess the level of teacher/student improvement.

4) Analysis Leading Indicator Data - Review student improvement data
(qualitative and quantitative). The leading indicator of student improvement
will be determined by the district-wide MOY (Middle of the Year) and EOY
(End of the Year) NWEA assessment, with particular emphasis on the
developing (low performing).

5) Leadership Monitor and Adjust - I will adjust interventions, professional
development according to teacher/staff need. I will also evaluate how I am
helping the teachers/staff to determine if the supports that are given are
working. I will monitor teacher lesson plans, student growth, and small group
instruction. I will also review professional development minutes and agendas
and exit slips on a daily basis or each time I meet with the teachers. I will
make the necessary adjustments that are needed to assist the teachers/staff.

I used this framework as a guide for monitoring how I implement MTSS. The
support model will help me stay focused and will be used as a reference to keep me on
track and be consistent and deliberate when making decisions when implementing the
MTSS initiative within the school. In an effort to ensure I have followed all of the MTSS
components, I also used the following eight components according to Florida’s MTSS
tool as a reference:

1. Effectively, actively involved, in making connections between a MTSS
framework with my school and the district.
2. Creating a universal alignment of policies and procedures across classroom, 
grade, building, and district.

3. Ensure a problem-solving process to support planning, implementing, and 
evaluating effectiveness of services.

4. Creating collaborative partnerships with all stakeholders who provide 
education services to assist with student outcomes.

5. Incorporating comprehensive, data systems to support decision-making at all 
levels.

6. Assign a coach to support staff.

7. Acknowledge frequent celebrations.

8. Provide school with ongoing data-driven professional development activities 
that align to core student goals and staff needs. (p. 10)

In this self-study, I followed Ogden’s Learning Support Model’s (2013) five 
components and the interventions and tools outlined in the framework (see Figure 1), as 
well as the conceptual framework of Thomas Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership (1992), 
 focusing on my leadership behaviors, specifically, the hand, head and heart. Not only is it 
important for a leader to be adaptive, but it is also as equally important to practice moral 
leadership as well. Sergiovanni observed that moral leadership challenges traditional 
views of leadership as only consisting of forceful, top-down direction, arguing that 
leadership needs to be reconceptualised in a way that not only accounts for the hand, of 
leadership but also to the head and the heart.
Summary

There are so many children who have been misdiagnosed or simply have not made adequate progress in school. I am proposing that if administrators, particularly the principal, provide teachers with the supports they need to assist these students, particularly the lower performing students (Tier 3), then there will be teacher improvement and consequently student growth, thereby decreasing the academic achievement gap of higher- and lower-performing students. The vehicle that I chose to accomplish this task with is MTSS. This self-study will provide me with authentic information in carefully examining my steps and behaviors and interactions. I will also gain a better understanding of who I am as a leader and what my next steps need to be in narrowing the achievement gap and answering my research questions:

1. In an effort to narrowing the achievement gap, how do I, as a leader at an elementary school, support my teachers in implementing MTSS (Multi-Systems of Support) for Tier 3 students in grades K-3 in both reading and math?

   a. What tools and protocols do I need to create to support my teachers in implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?

   b. How do I create a structured system to help support my teachers in implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?
2. How do I provide MTSS training to help teachers to track students’ progress in reading and math? What were my successes? And what were my obstacles? Both Sergiovanni and Ogden Frameworks will assist me with staying on track. Some of the barriers that I will face when examining my leadership is making sure I support the teachers and staff in providing pre-service preparation, leadership support, and teacher training.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Setting

My self-study took place at my school in Chicago. I am the principal at a Level 1+ Pre-K-8th grade school. Level 1+ is the highest rating a school can receive in the school district and is based on several factors such as the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment, attendance, adequate yearly growth, percent of students at attainment (achieving grade level for both general and special education), and parent/teacher/student survey and Data Quality Index (structure and organization of the school). The student population is 100% African American. Of the 600 students, 53% are female and 47% male, with 84.6% low income, 11.6% diverse learners, and 1.2% students with limited English proficiency. The attendance rate is at 96% for students, with an 11.6% mobility rate. Approximately 13% of students K-2 are considered Tier 3 in reading and 8% in mathematics. In 3rd grade, approximately 18% of students are considered Tier 3 in reading, 42% in mathematics.

My school’s mission is to provide equitable education that will meet the needs of all students. The school, staff, parents, and families continue to help prepare students for the challenge of becoming competent individuals and contributing members of society. Through continuous staff development; emphasis on literacy, science, mathematics, technology; and the incorporation of the arts, the school is preparing its students for
college and career opportunities that will enable them to be successful in their future careers and compete in a global society. Our mission specifies meeting the diverse needs of all students, equitable education and providing teachers with staff development. In an effort to align what we are saying we are doing to observable actions, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. In an effort to narrowing the achievement gap, how do I, as a leader at an elementary school, support my teachers in implementing MTSS (Multi-Systems of Support) for Tier 3 students in grades K-3 in both reading and math?
   a. What tools and protocols do I need to create to support my teachers in implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?
   b. How do I create a structured system to help support my teachers in implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?

2. How do I provide MTSS training to help teachers to track students’ progress in reading and math? What were my successes? And what were my obstacles?

**Research Design**

To answer the research questions, I carried out a qualitative self-study. I focused on my leadership behaviors and structures that I, as principal, initiate to ensure the implementation of MTSS is done with fidelity. I also reflected on my actions and the impact my actions had on teachers and staff. This self-study helped me to better
understand what tools and supports teachers/staff need to effectively utilize these supports in the classroom.

**Self-Study**

Self-study involves “systematic, intentional inquiry” with a focus of professional development of one’s self (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990). Self-study research focuses on personal experiences in teaching. As teachers intentionally reflect on their practice, they make a concerted effort to make sense of their teaching and participate while being aware of their growth and development (Zeichner, 1999). Many self-study researchers have been influenced by the area of reflective practice, particularly Schön’s (1991, 1995) and Dewey’s (1938) work in reflection. In this case, I captured personal experiences of my role as leader implementing the process of MTSS, while trying to make sense of how I lead in an effort to grow in my practice. I openly, reflectively, and systematically examined my practice with critique from others to gain alternative points of view (Samaras, 2010).

Anderson-Patton and Bass (2002) noted that merely reading research on teaching is not nearly as effective in transforming practice as would be personal reflection and self-study research. It is also important to keep in mind that, while self-study “facilitates both inductive and deductive inquiry ... like any systematic inquiry, self-study must be grounded in the extant literature to ensure it is not merely personal reflection” (Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy, & Stackman, 2003, p. 161). Therefore, my self-study was also based on the experiences I encountered as an educator and leader and how I had come to the desire to evoke change at my school.
Who you are is one of the most important aspects of a self-study. It is important to make the experience of the teacher (administrator) educators a research resource, and urge those who engage in self-study to be reflective of themselves and their roles as both researchers and teacher (administrator) (Feldman, 2009; Feldman, Paugh, & Mills, 2004). Therefore, I approached my self-study through personal experiences, self-reflection (within my professional setting), and reflective journals. My self-study was conducted with the goal of analyzing and examining my actions and the steps that I took in making sure that teachers are implementing MTSS. I was also interested in how I monitored the implementation of MTSS as well as provided the teachers with the necessary tools and training that they needed. I intended to push myself as a leader in finding different ways to assist teachers in the classroom. Finally, I conducted an “intentional and systematic inquiry into my own practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 5). Through this inquiry, I was able to get a better understanding of what kind of leader I was and how I can make improvements in my own practice to become and even better leader.

Procedures

**Data Collection**

**Written reflective journals.** I kept daily written reflective journals. The reflections were written at the end of the day. I also journaled during different meetings for real-time data and authentic reflections. I used a combination of pre-determined prompts as well as open-ended writing on my experiences inside and outside the classroom (see Appendix A for a list of journal prompts). Through these journals, I captured my leadership style and encounters with staff. These journals were aligned with
both Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart and the Ogden Framework. These daily reflections were important to me, because they shaped my thinking and allowed me to see how I operated as a leader as well as what improvements I made. Reflection is an essential component that brings understanding to the complex nature of classrooms (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). As a principal, I find it immensely important to think about what I am doing to lead my school, what happened in the process, and what I can do differently the next time to make a significant change.

My self-study is of journal reflections. In my journal, I reflected on the following interactions and experiences: (a) my experiences, as a teacher, assistant principal and principal; (b) my leadership self-assessment coupled with Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership; (c) feedback from critical friends; and (d) my thoughts, opinion, reactions of the teachers’ MTSS Beliefs Survey, asset mapping, teacher observation, grade level, professional development and Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings and observation feedback.

My experiences as Principal. Because I have been at the school for over 19 years, I have had the benefit of knowing the history of the school and personal investment of sustaining the success of my school. I had insight into what my school’s needs were/are. I have seen initiatives that were sustained and implemented with fidelity and others that were not. Being a teacher at the school, I had first-hand experiences of what was needed at the school from a teacher’s point of view. As an administrator, I had interactions with teachers and staff prior to this self-study, thereby gaining an idea of
staff needs. My background knowledge and experiences of the school enabled me to make authentic reflections as well as see the progress that we made in the future.

**Leadership self-assessment.** According to Rogers (1959), we want to feel experiences and behave in ways which are consistent with our self-image and reflect what we would like to be like, our ideal-self. Rogers’s places self-assessment at the start and heart of the learning process. Therefore, I gave myself a leadership legacy assessment by Robert M. Galford and Reg Fazio Maruca. This assessment captured my instinctive learning style as well as identified my personal strengths and areas where improvement is needed. The assessment comprises 30 questions in ranking order of “That would almost never be me” to “I’m nearly always like that.” The assessment is computerized, and, once the assessment is complete, the results are calculated and categorized in six characteristics: Ambassador, Advocate, People Mover, Truth Seeker, Creative Builder and Experienced Guide. Each component is summarized as follows:

- **Ambassador:** Instinctively knows how to handle a variety of situations with grace.
- **Advocate:** instinctively acts as a spokesperson in a group.
- **People Mover:** Think: Talent-spotter, career-builder, motivator, someone with parental, nurturing qualities.
- **Truth Seeker:** Think: Fairness, good judgment, equalizer, level-headed, process-oriented, scrupulous neutrality, and objectivity is the high standard.
- **Creative Builder:** These individuals are visionaries and entrepreneurs—they are happiest and most driven at the start of things. (p. 1)
The assessment is said to give the leader an idea of how they are leading others and the impact they are having on others. The survey answered several questions: In what way is my leadership affecting the people who work with and for me? How do I affect the way they work, the way they think, the way they approach a task at work? How does my natural style affect their style? These questions will help me in reflecting my leadership style and what adjustments I need to make.

After I reviewed my leadership survey results, I captured the results in my journal, and aligned (crosswalk) the six characteristics with Sergiovanni’s (1992) Head, Hand and Heart (see Appendix B). As noted, Sergiovanni stated that it is important to have all three in order to be a balanced leader. This information gave me an idea of where I was as a leader and pre-assessed how I was balanced between the three. After I surveyed myself as a leader to determine my leadership style, I gained a better idea of how I, as a leader at an elementary school could support my teachers in implementing MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) for Tier 3 students in grades K-3 in both reading and math.

**Asset map.** As a leader, I captured (a) what teachers currently know about MTSS, (b) what structures we currently have in place, and (c) what resources are available at the school (see Appendix C). In order to gain a better understanding of where my school was in terms of implementing MTSS and what I needed to do to move forward in my leadership, I used an asset map. The teachers’ responses were charted and I reflected on my thoughts and *take aways* in my journals. I captured how I led the asset-mapping meeting and summarized my findings, next steps, and reactions. Capturing this
information began my journey to improving my interactions and actions as a leader, as well as told me what direction I needed to go to better understand what I needed to do to help myself, my teachers and staff move forward.

**MTSS survey.** After I gained insight into the teachers and school assets and needs, I gave my teachers a *MTSS Beliefs Survey (CPS).* This survey is composed of 15 questions that ask if the teacher strongly agrees or strongly disagrees. The survey asks questions such as beliefs about core instruction, interventions, and student expectations. I reviewed the teacher/staff responses and documented my reactions to the responses and my next steps based on the responses. I then charted both my thoughts and trends of what the school’s beliefs were and what resources we had (see Appendix D). Once I examined both our asset map and the teacher belief surveys, I determined a starting point and guide to what my school had to offer in terms of MTSS, and what leadership behaviors I needed to have in order to move forward.

**Observations.** I began journaling my thoughts, reactions, and opinions of my observations. I reflected upon the observations that I conducted of all kindergarten through 3rd grade classrooms (seven teachers) to see what, if any, MTSS components were being implemented in the classroom. I followed a template (see Appendix E) that helped me to structurally document this information. This information helped me as the leader to gauge what I needed to assist my teachers within the classrooms, as well as what strategies, supports, tools and resources I further needed to provide them with. My observations also consisted of meetings that were conducted at my school. I reflected upon my reactions and thoughts of grade level meetings, minutes and agendas, as well as
any professional development that I offered or led. This information also assisted me with how I supported my teams and teachers, as well as my next steps in making sure they were getting the support they needed. I then reflected on how I strategically planned action items for staff and myself, by following Gibbs’ six components within the Reflection Tool. Professor Graham Gibbs published his reflective cycle book in 1988 \textit{Learning by Doing}. It is particularly useful for helping people learn from situations that they experience regularly, especially when things are not going well. The cycle also encourages one to think systematically about the phase of an experience or activity. Gibbs’ Reflection Tool will only be used for the purpose of observations. Gibbs’ tool helped to inform me of the initial identification of what I needed to do to assist teachers (see Appendix F). I used each component of Gibbs’ tool, however, for the sake of this study, I only highlighted my conclusions and next steps. Below, I extracted Gibbs Reflective Cycle components from Gibbs learning guide (Gibbs, 1988) and tailored them to fit my self-study: (a) description, (b) feelings, (c) evaluation, (d) analysis, (e) conclusion, and (f) action plan.

For description, I described what I observed, what happened during my observation chosen for reflection and describe what I initially observed and all the interactions I see in the classroom, such as teacher/student interaction and student/student interaction. I will also describe the role I play in the observation.

For feelings, I described what I was thinking or saying at the time and name my personal reactions. I considered these questions: What were the range of my feelings?
What are my personal beliefs? What are my connections and disconnections between my beliefs and my feelings with regard to my reaction to and/or analysis of this incident?

For evaluation, I explained what worked well/what was good, what could have been better/what was not good about the experience. I will draw on the first parts of my writing to set out my thinking about why the incident was challenging. Then, I will detail specifics about what would need to happen for me and for others in terms of actions, beliefs, and power dynamics to make a change.

For analysis, I then linked the incident or episode to what I’ve been learning in course readings and assignments; in community work; in cross-cultural contexts; and in interpersonal growth in order to extend my thinking.

For a conclusion, I speculated about what else I could have done. What could I and others could not have done now that I look back on the situation? What have I learned in writing this reflection? How have I expanded my knowledge base and thinking about my future choices and actions I may take?

For action plan, I set out “next steps”: What action can I take now with others in the scenario at the heart of my reflection? Going forward in this and/or new context? What might I do differently? How will I adapt my practice—my own actions and interactions with others—in the light of my new understanding? I used the aligned the components within Gibbs’ tool as a guide, I then reflected on my responses and constructed my supports I needed to provide my teachers. Chapter four will highlight the results.
This information also helped with answering the question: What tools and protocols do I need to create to ensure MTSS is implemented at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math? It is very important to note that I did not include any information about what is actually happening in the classroom, only my reflections on what I am learning (in general terms and not specific to any one classroom or teacher).

**Next steps.** In an effort to answer the question how do I provide MTSS training to help teachers monitor students’ progress in reading and math? Based on the information I collected from my classroom observations, teacher survey, asset map and my background knowledge, I began to plan professional development and provide resources, interventions and resources teacher/staff need (see Appendix G). I documented what kind of professional development that the teachers demonstrated a need for. I provided individual professional development to specific staff who had specific needs. I continued to monitor how I provided teachers with feedback on how they implemented the professional development. I monitored the kinds of professional development I offered the teachers/staff, and what my next steps were after I gathered and reviewed all of my data, including professional development exit slips (see Appendix H). Data collection for the self-study began in April of 2018 and continued until the end of June (see Appendix I for a complete data collection timeline).

**Data Analysis**

I reported whether teacher/staff implementation changed after I created tools, protocols, and teacher training to ensure that MTSS is implemented at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math. I followed a qualitative self-study design. Data
analysis included constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) described the method of constant comparison analysis as allowing the researcher to build theories, analyze data systematically as well as creatively, understand the data in multiple ways, and identify and create the relationships among parts of the data.

The data that I analyzed included my daily journal reflections. My leadership behavior interactions through Sergiovanni’s (Head, Hand and Heart) Moral Leadership (1992) were captured from my daily journals as well, following the recommended three stages of constant comparison (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Written journal reflections were used to address the research questions. The journal reflections focused on (a) my experiences, as a teacher, assistant principal and principal; (b) my leadership self-assessment aligned with Sergiovanni’s Head Hand, and Heart, (c) feedback from my critical friends; and (d) my thoughts, opinions, reactions of the teachers’ MTSS Beliefs Survey, asset mapping, ILT, grade level and PD meetings, and teacher observations. The reflections were transcribed and coded using both pre-determined and emerging codes. The following constant comparison analytic approach was used: (a) created codes for each new idea (i.e., open coding), (b) grouped these together into categories with descriptors (i.e., axial coding), and (c) organized categories or concepts that emerged to develop theories regarding my leadership behaviors, interactions and self-reflections (i.e., selective coding) (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). I used a combination of pre-determined prompts as well as open-ended writing on my experiences inside and outside of the classroom, as well as during professional development and meetings
Trustworthiness

The fact that a story is credible tells us nothing—absolutely nothing—about whether or not it is true or false. (Phillips, 1993, p. 21)

The chief aim of data analysis is to distinguish between an event occurring as either reflecting a true effect versus a false one. In addition, bias occurring in the collection of data, or selection of method of analysis, will increase the likelihood of drawing a biased inference. Though bias can never be eliminated, it is critical for me to expose as much bias as possible through such tactics as peer debriefing and engaging in reflexivity as multiple perspectives to support the credibility of this study (Merriam 1998).

In an effort to improve accuracy in my interpretations, I incorporated critical friends into my self-study. Self-study requires working with a critical friend, which is a term used widely by self-study scholars. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) noted that it is “a term coined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) to denote a person who will listen to a researcher’s account of practice and critique the thinking behind the account” (p. 256).

The role of critical friends is to support and empower each other by demonstrating a positive regard for people and providing an informed critique of processes and practices. According to Costa and Kallick (1993), a critical friend is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend.

In my self-study, I used three critical friends. The three critical friends were two educators (no one from my school) and one non-educator. The critical friends provided
feedback on specific journal reflections. The educator provided me with objective feedback and questions that assisted me in thinking critically about how I read the data from teacher surveys, observations, and interactions I had with the teachers (see Appendix J). The non-educator assisted me with creating data that was clear and understandable and that anyone can follow. I used all three of my critical friends to review my themes. I selected this particular group because I want varying feedback on my data and how I documented the trends in my journal reflections.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine my actions as I reflect on my impact as a leader. I captured the steps that I took in supporting teachers in implementing MTSS. In doing so, I empowered myself through research and offered support, professional development, and resources to my teachers. Through self-reflection of my day-to-day encounters with my staff, I focused on what I could do better or differently as a leader in supporting my teachers in being successful in the classroom. By reflecting on my interactions with the staff and my leadership approach, I grew both as a leader and as a researcher. This study has a number of benefits. First, I was able to examine my leadership behaviors and create a balanced leadership approach through Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand, and Heart and Leadership Survey (1992). Second, I was able to reflect on how I interact and examine my interactions and encounters with teachers and staff that led me to support and train my teachers on a systemic initiative that focused on our Tier 3 students. Third, I was able to support teachers with identifying students who needed Tier 3 supports. Fourth, I was able to empower my teachers with voice and solution-based conversations. Fifth, I was able to create awareness of MTSS and the need to tier our students. Sixth, I was able to better understand the barriers to implementing MTSS and what I can do to avoid and address these barriers. Finally, I was able to provide a better
perspective to administrators and staff on what they can do to further support teachers’
need to improve their practice for students who perform lower than their peers. While
conducting my self-study, I ensured that my research remained focused on and was
guided by my research questions:

1. In an effort to narrowing the achievement gap, how do I, as a leader at an
elementary school, support my teachers in implementing MTSS (Multi-
Systems of Support) for Tier 3 students in grades K-3 in both reading and
math?
   a. What tools and protocols do I need to create to support my teachers in
      implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and
      math?
   b. How do I create a structured system to help support my teachers in
      implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and
      math?
2. How do I provide MTSS training to help teachers to track students’ progress
   in reading and math? What were my successes? And what were my obstacles?

   **Results**

   The following themes emerged from the analysis of my journal reflections from
my research questions: (a) Stop Blaming Teachers and Hold Myself Accountable; (b)
Improving My Leadership; (c) Giving Voice to Teachers; (d) Don’t Make Assumptions;
(e) Identifying and Meeting Teacher Needs; and (f) Scaffold the Learning. The findings
to each of the research questions follow.
Research Question 1

In an effort to narrow the achievement gap, how do I, as a leader at an elementary school, support my teachers in implementing MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) for Tier 3 students in grades K-3 in both reading and math?

To assess how I supported my teachers in implementing MTSS, several aspects were examined: my ability to reflect on my leadership through self-reflection; becoming a “balanced” leader through Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership and Leadership Self-Assessment; and giving teachers voice through both an Asset Map and MTSS Teacher Survey.

Theme 1a: Stop Blaming Teachers and Hold Myself Accountable

Being a reflective practitioner. I believe that, before one can support others, they must first understand their leadership. Pine (2009) stated that “examining one’s practice allows for teachers to better understand and improve their own teaching” (p. 60); in this case, the practice being examined was my leadership. By engaging in self-study, we are able to assess our progress in the classroom, uncover inconsistencies between our practices and beliefs, and challenge our thinking (LaBoskey, 2004). This was certainly true in my case. Engaging in self-study helped me to realize that change started with me, and, because of this mind shift, I was able to uncover my thoughts of how I viewed the teachers and staff. I was also able to look at my actions, reactions, and interactions I had with the staff as they pertained to making decisions. In analyzing my journal reflections, I made the following assumptions and observations both before and during my self-study. On April, 2018, I wrote:
Thinking back to when I was a special education teacher, working with the teachers, I observed the teachers teaching in whole group, ignoring the lower-performing and special education students; I wonder, do they care about the students? They need to understand differentiated instruction or small group instruction; the children shouldn’t struggle like that. I find it sad that almost 15 years later, the teachers are still having the same problems. I see some improvements, but there are still students who are being ignored, particularly the lower-performing students.

My mindset shifted from what I thought was happening in my school to how I can be a part of making a positive change for my school, and, because of this mind shift, I stopped blaming the teachers and held myself accountable.

At the beginning of this self-study, I noted that it was very important for leaders to train their teachers. I wondered why (at my school) this hadn’t been consistently implemented even though the teachers had been introduced to MTSS and other similar initiatives/programs before. I argued that, if teachers were given the supports they needed, such as consistent professional development, progress-monitoring tools/assessments, etc., then they would improve students’ equitable access to the curriculum, decrease the number of students referred to special education, and narrow the achievement gap between high and low students. And, although I still believe this to be true, I found that none of those things can be improved until I improved my practices first.

As I conducted this self-study, I realized that leaders often say to teachers, if 80% of your students are failing, then it is not a student deficit, it is a teacher deficit. If this statement is true, does this statement apply to leaders as well? That is, if most of your teachers are having difficulty with implementation, then it is time for the leader to self-reflect and make some internal changes to support the teachers. It’s not just about giving
professional development to teachers; it’s about how I deliver the message, how I work
with the staff, and how I scaffold their learning. It’s about my actions. It has taken a huge
shift in my leadership behavior and attitude to look at myself in the mirror and be more
reflective of my leadership behaviors. To illustrate my reflective process, here is an
excerpt from my journal, April 30, 2018:

Being reflective has taught me so much about who I need to be as a leader…. I
know that gaining the ability to help and support my teachers and staff will take a
lot of self-reflection and the willingness to being open-minded. I am so glad that I
have an upper-hand at having background knowledge of the staff and school,
because I am able to reflect on what changes I needed to make within myself over
time in order to give my teachers what they need.

Before this self-study, I would not have realized how important it is to be a reflective
practitioner. Studying the history of self-study helped me to have a better understand the
importance of knowing who you are as a leader or person first, in order to being a better
leader for others. I was also able to capture my biases, misconceptions and inner thoughts
I had of others (particularly my teachers), then in turn make the necessary adjustments I
needed to evoke change at my school. My self-reflections helped me to capture my
behaviors and therefore work on making the necessary changes I needed to become a
balanced leader.

**Become a balanced leader.** Once I became aware of reflecting on my own
practices, it was time for me to find out what kind of leader I was. Finding out this
information provided me with a baseline of what my strengths were and what areas I
needed to grow in. I chose Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership and the Leadership self-
assessment, because both have the characteristics and attributes that assisted me with
making significant changes in my leadership. For example, one of Sergiovanni’s (1992) components that resonated with me was the Hand, which is very critical for a leader because it takes the leader to be honest with him or herself. Once the leader identifies with his/leadership practice, the alignment to the staff members can take place. The leader must get to know the staff, through conversation, observation, and interactions. These three components will assist the leader with differentiating and adjusting his or her style and aligning supports to the right staff member. (p. 7)

This statement exemplified the kind of leader that I aspire to become throughout this process. I wanted to make sure that I built relationships with teachers through collaboration and discussion. I also wanted to observe teachers in practice, making sure I provided them with honest feedback, while giving them the support that is meaningful to that individual teacher to improve. But what I realized is that this could not happen if I don’t maintain a balanced in my leadership.

I have always viewed good leadership as being an instructional leader, but what I have learned is that there are more components to good leadership. Leadership is complex and has layers of attributes that serve to be beneficial, and Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand, and Heart helped me to peel back those layers in myself. What I have learned is that the implementation of Sergiovanni’s moral leadership, head, hand, and heart, coupled with the Leadership Survey, proved to be very helpful when trying to improve my practice and balance my leadership behaviors. I created a crosswalk for both the self-assessment and the framework to identify trends in my leadership style, and, although the
research of self-study helped me to realize and become aware of the need and importance of self-reflection, the Leadership Self-Assessment and Sergiovanni’s framework helped me to see concretely and tangibly where I was as a leader and what critical attributes I needed to have to become a balanced leader, and ultimately led me toward improving my leadership.

Theme 1b: Improving My Leadership

In reflecting on the results of the crosswalk (see table 1) of my leadership self-assessment and Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart, I found that I exhibit characteristics in all attributes. However, there were some attributes that were more prominent than others. For example, in the Leadership Self-Assessment, I leaned more toward being an Advocate; advocates are described as, and instinctively act, as a spokesperson in a group. In Sergiovanni’s Leadership Framework (1992), I leaned more toward the Head; the head of leadership is described as the “mindscapes or theories of practice that leaders develop over time, and with their ability, in light of these theories, to reflect on the situations they face (in other words, minimize bias)” (p. 8). However, I had fewer characteristics in the Hand. Sergiovanni stated that “the Hand component is very critical for a leader because it takes the leader to be honest with him or herself.” Meanwhile, the leadership survey stated that my weakness is People Movers. People Movers are described as talent-spotters, career-builders, and motivators, someone with parental, nurturing qualities. As I noted in my journal, April 30, 2018:

*I am happy that I chose Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership as my framework, it is very closely aligned to keeping the integrity of the self-reflection component of self-study.*
I also noted, April 30, 2018:

Wow, I can’t believe what I’m reading, this is absolutely true. I definitely need to work on my nurturing qualities and building relationships as it relates to adults.

The leadership survey and Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership Framework identified which leadership behaviors that I needed to work on throughout my self-study. Therefore, in working with the teachers and staff, I was intentional and cognizant in demonstrating more nurturing qualities (per the leadership-assessment) such as being honest with what I needed to do to improve as a leader and building relationships by intentionally getting to know the staff through conversation, observation, and interactions. My first step in demonstrating these behaviors was through giving teachers the opportunities to have a voice. In doing this, I gained a better understanding of what the teachers needed support in implementing the MTSS initiative. I knew that giving teacher voice was an integral part of my self-study; however, I suffered from apprehension when I began the process.

As I wrote:

(May 1, 2018):

Would giving teachers’ voice become an issue where teachers continue to complain about everything? I need to make sure that I have structured conversations, a mediator and scribe, so that we can just stick to the facts. I don’t want this platform to become chaotic.

Based on this excerpt, I feared that if I was too understanding or too open, I would lose my control as a leader. On May 1, 2018, I wrote:

If I start being too nurturing and open-minded…would I be giving up my power?

This question rang in my head on several occasions, but I knew if I remained steadfast and focused on providing my teachers opportunities to take ownership of their
learning and school, I would see results. I also knew that, when I provided the teachers a platform for their voices to be heard, I would gain a better sense of how to support them and what they deemed as a need to be successful in their classrooms.

I began my planning in a very succinct way, and, in an effort to keeping the integrity and structure of MTSS, I followed the Ogden Framework. Ogden’s Learning Framework outlines five components that closely align with essential components in the MTSS model and guided me in staying on track during this process. I began following the components of the following:

1) Planning: (Teachers, staff, principal) Roll out the initiative, gather information, get a team on board.

3. Implementation support: (what tools, resources will be used)

4. Measure Implementation: (Professional Development, lesson plans)

5. Analysis Leading Indicator Data: (qualitative and quantitative)

6. Leadership Monitor and adjust: (Is it working)
Planning

**Sub-question 1a.** What tools and protocols do I need to create to support my teachers in implementing MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?

To assess how I created a structured system to help support my teachers in implementing MTSS, I examined several aspects, including my ability to reflect on the asset map, MTSS survey, and observation reflections.

**Theme 1c: Giving My Teachers a Voice: Find Out What They Need**

I began the process by giving the teachers room to speak honestly about what they felt their needs were. I believe that, through giving the teachers and staff a MTTS survey and an opportunity to speak their voices during an asset mapping session, I was able to collect concrete documentation of the teachers’ genuine feelings. This information gave me what I needed in implementing my next steps of supporting them. The asset map helped the teachers (as a collective) to identify current assets at the school, while the MTSS survey gave the teachers an opportunity to state their need on an individual basis. The survey also gave me a better idea the teachers’ knowledge base and what I needed to further support them with. In the past, the teachers were given professional development based on quantitative data and district-wide requirements, thereby giving them the opportunity for their voices to be heard through both asset mapping and MTSS and thus allowing the teachers to take ownership of their learning.

An excerpt from a journal, May 7, 2018:

*I cannot believe that I am letting the staff speak their minds, I honestly feel like this is a mess. Will this backfire or cause chaos?*
I’m used to leading with more of as a “micro-manager” mentality, if I show something different, will I garner the same results? This is very different for me…. I’m really taking a chance.

I have to keep reminding myself to intentionally follow what both the leadership survey and Sergiovanni’s Moral Framework is telling me to. I have to stay on course of being more nurturing and allow teacher voice.

Conducting this self-sty really helped me with staying focused on balancing my leadership.

Although I had some apprehensions and insecurities about giving teachers voice, I realized that it was necessary and important to hear and know what they deemed as a need to help them to improve in the implementation of MTSS. I also knew that I had to relinquish some of my perceived power in an effort to get genuine responses and authentic feedback that would make a positive impact on their growth. And, although it was hard for me to bare, it was definitely necessary for the greater good.

Asset map. As a result from conducting the asset map, I found that I needed to support the teachers in understanding what MTSS was and what it looked like in the classroom. I also found that the staff felt they were not given enough support in the steps that needed to be taken when implementing MTSS. For example, the functions of the three tiers, the time and day the interventions needed to be implemented, and what that looks like in practice were all concerns among teachers. The teachers wanted more of a hands-on approach to learning. Below are more explicit results from the asset mapping, along with my thought and implications. I wrote: May 7, 2018:

Wow, the teachers seem very happy to outline what they already have and what is needed further, it actually seems to be helpful to me and them. I need to support the teachers in the following:

• How to implement interventions in each tier
• Provide resources that will help with each intervention.
• Assign someone to help them with the implementations.
• Provide a step-by-step guide to implementation.
• Provide technology that will align to student need.
• Provide more chrome-books, for individualized instruction
• Provide training specifically on MTSS
• Provide a better understanding of the tiers
• Help teachers to understand when and how to implement interventions

I later journaled, May 8, 2018:

_I have to take that risk because the benefits outweigh the risks._

The implication from the results solidified my observation that my teachers had a desire to want to do better. They wanted to know the how as opposed to the what of implementation. I knew that I needed to equip them with more of a hand-on approach to learning through professional development, as well as through guidance and feedback based on frequent observations. The asset map also served as a vehicle and platform for teachers to survey what they already had in the building as well as what they needed as further supports. Without conducting this asset map and structured time for the teachers’ voices to be heard, I would not have gotten an overall picture of what the collective needed to improve their practice. As I self-reflected on this process, I began to realize, that the teachers are not being defiant, and they are not being lazy, they just have not been taught and they don’t have the right training aligned to their areas of growth. What I am most proud of however, is I garnered a better idea of how my teachers were feeling and what they needed as a school to move forward. My next steps then gauged what the teachers knew and needed to grow in their individual practice.

**Theme 1d: Don’t Make Assumptions**
**MTSS survey.** Implementing the survey provided me with a baseline of how I could cluster different learning needs for professional development. In conducting this survey, I was also able to get authentic feedback because it was anonymous. In my journal reflection, May 8, 2018, I noted:

*what I learned about myself from the survey:*

- *I need to provide supports in helping teachers when knowing when and how to implement interventions.*
- *I need to provide PD that offers a better understanding of the tiers*
- *I need to provide PD on individualized instruction*
- *I need offer more training specifically on the MTSS components*

I further noted on May 8, 2018:

*There are repetitive and similar supports that I need to address.*

While reviewing the trend responses from the survey, I was very surprised at the answers. I thought that, although there wasn’t consistent implementation of MTSS at our school, we were further along with awareness of MTSS. I made a terrible assumption that my teachers were more knowledgeable and advanced than what the results of the survey said.

In an excerpt from journal, May 10, 2018, I wrote:

*I thought that I was going to go right into Tier 3, but it looks like I need to review all of the tiers.*

I further wrote on May 11, 2018:

*I really thought my teachers had a better grasp on MTSS. I realize that I need to start from scratch, from the beginning and review MTSS. I need to provide my teachers more training on the basics before I move on.*

*My teachers are not clear as to what a tier is and represents; I have made so many assumptions. It’s not that they don’t want to implement MTSS; it’s that they don’t know how or when.*
The MTSS survey along with the asset mapping gave me a starting point toward my next steps to helping the teachers. I was also able to determine what supports needed to be put in place for MTSS training. On May 11, 2018, I noted:

*I have a better grasp of what I need to help my teachers with and how I can better support them. I can also begin my observations and conversations with the staff.*

Once I found out what resources and training would better support the teachers, I then began translating the documented information into providing MTSS training to help teachers monitor students’ progress.

**Implementation Support**

**Theme 1e: Identifying and Meeting Teacher Needs**

Reflecting on myself, intentionally balancing my leadership, and documenting need through teacher voice provided me with a baseline to creating pathways toward training my teachers in MTSS. This process also helped me to demystify the assumptions that I had about what I thought my teachers already knew about MTSS and how I had to disseminate the information and training to the teachers. This realization was reflected in the following journal excerpt from May 14, 2018:

*I have to scaffold the learning for the teachers; all teachers can’t just jump right into MTSS; the basics or foundational information must be taught first.*

*I need to see the implementation in the classrooms, to narrow down specific supports.*

*PD can happen both in whole group or grade level, but I have to be careful, because some teachers may feel that the training is redundant.*

Although the teachers had stated what they needed as it relates to MTSS, such as training, resources, schedules, etc., I needed to observe them in practice. Therefore, I
knew that I needed to add an observation component to my research. The observations
helped me to gauge what I needed to assist my teachers within the classrooms, as well as
what strategies, supports, tools and resources I further needed to assist them with. As
stated in Chapter III, I used Gibbs tool as a guide while observing. The reflections from
my observations gave me a better idea of how I can provide MTSS training to help
teachers monitor students’ progress in reading and math. It is very important to note that I
did not include any information about what is actually happening in the classroom, only
my reflections on what I am learning (in general terms; not specific to any one classroom
or teacher). Below are my reflections from my observations on how I would further
support my individual teachers as well as cluster their learning in professional
development (PD). As I observed, I had the following reflection:

Week 1-Observation 1:

*I need to provide the teacher with support on how to elicit questions of all
students. That there was a need for equity of voice. I need to provide my teachers
with different levels of questions, as well as how to build confidence in
themselves. How teachers can have inclusive conversations. How to motivate
students?* (May 17, 2018)

Week 1-Observation 2:

As the principal, I need to ensure that the teacher assistant is being trained in
walking around and checking on all the students. It is okay for the students to
work in heterogeneous groups, but there should be supports in place.

Week 1-Observation 3:

As the administrator, I want to make sure the teachers understand that they need
to be trained in giving students visual examples and allow the students to answer
specific questions on their own. Students also need to be able to reference steps
they were taught. I am okay with the teachers teaching core in whole group, but
they need to teach in a differentiated way.
I can use this particular class as a model of how to differentiate during core instruction, as well as how to utilize a TA if they have one.

Week 1-Observation 4:

I need to provide the teacher with methods of teaching in a differentiated manner, so that all students can benefit when core instruction is being taught. I need to ensure that all teachers are making sure students are included.

Week 1-Observation 5:

As the principal, I need to provide instruction on how to implement small group instruction correctly, making sure small-group implementation includes the gradual release of responsibility model.

Week 1-Observation 6:

As the principal, I can use this teacher to assist with peer-to-peer coaching, observing the teacher’s implementation of the gradual release of responsibility model.

Week 1-Observation 7:

As the principal I need to support this teacher including with all the students in the lesson. There were students who were not participating in the lesson. The special education student were completing an entirely different lesson.

Measure Implementation

Based on my observations, I noted the following trends and my next steps that I followed:

- I need to support teachers on how to implement differentiated instruction during core.
- Provide more support on providing more visuals (for different learning styles).
- Support teachers in equity of voice, particularly for lower-performing students.
- Provide teachers more training on differentiated instruction.
• I need to observe teachers and support more—come into the classroom more often.

• Before I can put times slots on how often the students should be pulled in groups, I need to ensure teachers understand which students should be pulled and how to include the students into the conversations.

• I also need to make sure that I support teachers in questions and discussion.

• Provide more instructional and delivery support.

• Provide more training on flexible grouping.

Ultimately, I came to the following conclusion on May 18, 2018:

My school has a hodge-podge of MTSS attributes; it’s just a matter of organizing it and getting to the root cause of making sure the instruction is equitable so that all students will understand it.

Once I have gotten the teachers through the basics of knowing and understanding the tiers, I can begin to focus on training my teachers on Tier 3 supports.

Based on the information I had collected from my classroom observations, teacher survey, Asset Map and my background knowledge (see Table 1), I was able to begin my professional development planning.
Table 1

**Overall Reflection Document Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset Map</th>
<th>MTSS Survey</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I need to support my teachers in knowing when and how to implement interventions.</td>
<td>• I need to support the teachers in differentiated instruction during core</td>
<td>• I need to support the teachers in differentiated instruction during core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I need support my teachers in aligning resources that will help with each intervention.</td>
<td>• Train teachers in need in providing more visuals</td>
<td>• Train teachers in need in providing more visuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support my teachers with MTSS implementation.</td>
<td>• There needs to be more equity of voice particularly from lower performing students</td>
<td>• There needs to be more equity of voice particularly from lower performing students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A step-by-step guide to implementation.</td>
<td>• I need to observe teachers and support more—come into the classroom more often.</td>
<td>• I need to observe teachers and support more—come into the classroom more often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Technology that will align with student needs</td>
<td>• Before I can put times slots on how often the students should be pulled in groups, I need to ensure teachers understand which students should be pulled and how to include the students into the conversations.</td>
<td>• Before I can put times slots on how often the students should be pulled in groups, I need to ensure teachers understand which students should be pulled and how to include the students into the conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More chrome-books, for individualized instruction</td>
<td>• I also need to make sure that the teachers allow students to explain their answers, so they (the teacher) can gauge what the students understand.</td>
<td>• I also need to make sure that the teachers allow students to explain their answers, so they (the teacher) can gauge what the students understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need training specifically on MTSS</td>
<td>• There seems to be a need for me to give more instructional and delivery support.</td>
<td>• There seems to be a need for me to give more instructional and delivery support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need a better understanding of the tiers</td>
<td>• Need more training on flexible grouping.</td>
<td>• Need more training on flexible grouping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• My school has a hodge-podge of MTSS attributes, it’s just a matter of organizing it and getting to the root cause of making sure the instruction is equitable. So that all students will understand it.</td>
<td>• My school has a hodge-podge of MTSS attributes, it’s just a matter of organizing it and getting to the root cause of making sure the instruction is equitable. So that all students will understand it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-question 1b. How do I create a structured system to implement MTSS at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math?

To assess how I supported my teachers in implementing MTSS, several aspects were examined, including my ability to reflect on my interactions during the ILT and grade-level meeting notes, conversations I had with staff, feedback I provided my teachers. I began with scaffolding the teachers’ learning.

Theme 1f: Scaffolding the Learning for Teachers

ILT meeting. The Instructional Leadership Team met every week for six weeks during this self-study. Now that I had a healthy collection of data regarding how I, as the leader, can support my teachers while demonstrating Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart and the Leadership Survey attributes, I was ready with confidence to roll out my ideas and vision to the ILT. My reality of who I needed to be to my teachers had unfolded. I needed to be a listener, patient and open to learn and grow. As a result, I was able to empower my ILT team to collaborate on our next steps to help the teachers in implementing MTSS, with a specific focus on our underrepresented students, our Tier 3 students.

I captured my interactions with the team through minutes that were taken during the meeting and my immediate notes in my journal reflections. I noted, on May 21, 2018,

*Since the ILT was a part of the staff meetings they agreed that there needed to be better scaffolding of professional development and as a team, we should develop a time-line that encompassed how the trainings should unfold.*
The team and I came up with a timeline (see Table 2), outlining the priorities in order of what needed to be immediately addressed to what would take and need more time to address, based on the complexity of the strategy or model. As we (the team and I) worked through the plan, we noted our progress as well as our accomplishments as we went along. At first, I had some reservations about the process, due to what I thought needed to happen, as opposed to what my teachers needed. I wrote on May 18, 2018:

*I have a specific timeline of what I want the teachers and staff to learn.*

*Will this training have to be continued to the next year?*

*Should I just squeeze it in? Or should I just go with quality vs. quantity?*

Table 2

*Planning Timeline of Training, Support and Outcomes– 2017-2018*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Reflections Results</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Awareness before</th>
<th>Current awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTSS</td>
<td>All teachers were trained</td>
<td>Following Ogden’s Framework</td>
<td>1 out of 7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Tiers 1,2,3</td>
<td>All teachers grouped their students in tiers (1,2&amp;3)</td>
<td>Training Submission of student groups</td>
<td>1 out of 7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions Aligning to Tiers 1, 2, &amp; 3</td>
<td>Aligned Tier 3 interventions ONLY</td>
<td>Aligned to progress monitoring sheets</td>
<td>1 out of 7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradual Release of Responsibility</td>
<td>All Teachers were trained in their grade levels</td>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>2 out of 7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Instruction</td>
<td>All Teachers were trained in their grade levels</td>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>1 out of 7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>All Teachers were trained in</td>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td>1 out of 7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the leader, I realized that I had to structure the timeline in a way that allowed time for demonstration, learning and feedback that supported the teachers’ growth. I could not rush through the process, just because I thought it should be that way. If I did that, I would be immolating bad practices that I have witnessed for so many years that have not worked. Therefore, I stayed true to my beliefs of providing people with an authentic learning experience that captured learning, and, consequently, I created teacher awareness.

Once the ILT and I collaborated on the timeline, I began training my ILT team on MTSS. The MTSS training covered the basic foundation of MTSS. I followed Ogden’s Framework, reviewing each of the tiers and interventions aligned. I noted on May 28, 2018, that

the ILT had a lot of questions about the interventions; they were grasping the 3 tiers; however, they were still in need of more training in when and the time to implement the interventions.

These were great concerns and questions from the team, and the questions helped me to understand my next steps for the staff. I addressed the ILT members’ concerns and further explained to them that, when explaining to the grade levels, we would only go into making sure everyone has a solid understanding of the initiative first and then we

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(merged in GRR)</th>
<th>their grade levels</th>
<th>W/ days and times of Tier 3</th>
<th>On Google share</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed a small Group Instruction Schedule with all the tiers.</td>
<td>All Teachers have schedules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On Google share</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
will go into times and days to begin interventions—our new motto was, *let’s take one step at a time: quality vs. quantity.*

**Grade-level meetings.** The appointed teacher leads, from our ILT team led the conversation and shared the results from the MTSS survey, asset mapping and the overall trends from the observations. I led with explaining to the staff that their feedback and suggestions, coupled with my overall assessment of what the school needs from observations, will guide the MTSS trainings. I noted on May 29, 2018:

*I noticed that when I made that one simple statement of “based on their suggestions and input”, the teachers looked of pride. I really think they are tired of; being given something else new without warning, explanation, input or regard to their feelings.*

*I felt good that they felt good. I am proud of myself for shifting my leadership!*

*I also noted that the teachers and staff seemed confident when speaking in the meeting. It seemed like they were happy that their words had come to reality and actions.*

I followed this continued process of taking one step at time, following both the needs assessment and survey, but also taking the temperature of their understanding from the exit slips.

**Research Question 2**

How do I provide MTSS training to help teachers monitor students’ progress in reading and math? What are the success and what are the barriers?

To assess how I provided MTSS training to help teachers monitor students, several aspects were examined: professional development, feedback and collaboration.

**Observable actions.** Once my teachers had the foundational understanding of MTSS, we began to put our students in tiers based on their district-wide scores. We then
began to align interventions that we already had at the school according to the asset mapping and highlighted the interventions that may help, but we didn’t have. Once we put our students into tier groups, the teachers had a better understanding of all three tiers. The teachers were then trained in some of the PD they stated they wanted and needed and that I observed in the classroom. The professional development targeted was what my teachers stated they needed my support in and my previous observations, including the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) Model and Small Group Instruction. Differentiated instruction was embedded in the professional development because both core instruction and small group instruction require that differentiated instruction be embedded. We targeted these GRR and small group instruction first because both served as a greater and immediate need based on the MTSS surveys, my observations, and the teachers’ requests. On May 30, 2018, I wrote:

*I thought the teachers needed support in the gradual release of responsibility model, small group instruction and differentiated instruct, I’m happy that the teachers asked for these same trainings. This makes it easier for teacher buy-in.*

The teachers were trained by two of their peers from the upper grades who had successfully mastered the concept.

While planning professional development, I was cognizant of how to pace teacher and staff learning, being sure to pace their learning in a succinct way that demonstrated that they were able to articulate their learning as well as demonstrate their understanding and ability in the classroom. I documented which professional development teachers demonstrated a need for, and I provided individual professional development to specific staff who had specific needs. For example, I had a model teacher who demonstrated a
good grasp of small group instruction, but needed training on finding the right interventions for Tier 3 students. I supported that particular teacher by helping him/her with researching interventions that fit student need based on the students’ academic level. I also use that teacher as a model teacher to assist others with the implementation of small groups. When providing the teachers with feedback on their implementation of a particular strategy, I monitored how I provided teachers with feedback, being sure to incorporate Sergiovanni’s Head, Head and Heart. For example, as the Head focuses on being clear of any biases that I may have had over time, I demonstrated being a careful listener, giving the teachers a chance to feel safe to voice what they further needed and providing them with feedback that would help them grow. I also monitored what kinds of professional development I offered the teachers/staff, and what my next steps were after I had gathered and reviewed all of my data, including professional development exit slips. For example, on May 29, 2018, I wrote:

*after reviewing the exit slips, from the first grade-level meeting, after the chairs reviewed the Ogden’s MTSS pyramid of tiers, a couple of teachers were unclear where the special education students fit; they thought that they automatically fell into Tier 3. I need to make sure that all the grade-level teams understand the different cognitive abilities that children with special needs have.*

Because of this statement, I knew that during the next grade-level meeting, I needed to address this misunderstanding. Based on exit slips from grade-level meetings, I noted that I needed to explain to 2nd and 3rd grades the different scale that they would use to put their students in the different tiers. The exit slips kept me abreast of what my next steps would be for the next ILT and grade-level meetings. We used this information as a baseline and gauge of staff understanding.
As I wrote on May 30, 2018,

*I am so glad that I am able to assess the supports that I needed to give my staff after each of our meetings; this helped me to keep my finger on the pulse of learning.*

*I’m going to review all concerns at the beginning of the meeting.*

I decided at that time that I would provide those teachers with individual support during a separate after-school meeting. I provided the teachers with the same opportunities for small group instruction demonstrations and provided those who still had some difficulties with the concept individual assistance as well.

While observing, I noted on June 4, 2018 that

*I have to make sure to address the teachers who may still have questions about small group instruction. I need to have individual training.*

I continued each training in this fashion, until my teachers were ready to demonstrate the learning process in their classrooms. The teachers were then guided to only focus on the Tier 3 supports. Through this process, the teachers:

- Highlighted all Tier 3 students
- Put students in Google Share so that all teachers had access to share practices
- Aligned resources and tools from asset mapping and MTSS survey
- Created a small group schedule for Tier 3 students only
- Gain awareness and knowledge of which, when and why students are being pulled for small and individualized instruction
- Created a progress-monitoring tool that documented mastery of each student in a small group
My next steps were observing small-group instruction groups and schedules to gauge if there were any needs for further support. All teachers were implementing their small group schedules with their Tier 3 students. I noted on June 8, 2018 that

*I am so happy that my teachers are aware of our Tier 3 students. I’m so thankful! It’s amazing that a mind shift can change so much.*

The teachers’ awareness of who the Tier 3 students are, what interventions they need and placing the students in small groups was/is a great accomplishment at our school. I spoke in prior chapters that our most vulnerable students (Tier 3) were being ignored, but now, they are being addressed and have the same access to the curriculum. During this process of supporting my staff, I have been so encouraged and motivated by the successes that we have had and I looking forward to more beyond this self-study.

**Analysis Leading Indicator Data (Qualitative and Quantitative)**

**What Were my Successes?**

In order to best answer this question, I had to reflect on all aspects of my data collection. Leadership assessment, Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership Framework, suggestions from critical friends, and my background knowledge of what I already knew about my school and the experiences I encountered as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. First, I looked at my leadership growth as a principal. Second, I focused on my reactions and interactions during the implementation. Last, I wanted to determine if the steps that I took to support my teachers and staff affected my leadership behaviors. As I reflected on June 9, 2018,

*My successes were the ability to internally reflect on the changes that I needed to make for myself as a leader. I was also open to letting go and allowed the teachers and staff’s voice be heard. I shared the leadership with my staff and*
therefore built a collaborative team to garner a better understanding of what I could support my staff in.

One of the greater successes was that I created awareness and observed that the teacher/staff implementation changed after I created tools, protocols, teacher training to ensure MTSS is implemented at Tier 3 for K-3rd grade students in reading and math. I captured the following successes:

- Balanced my leadership behaviors aligned to Sergiovanni’s Moral Leadership and Leadership survey.
- Gained knowledge of the resources that the teachers needed through the asset map, MTSS survey and observations.
- An increase in the number of teachers that have support in MTSS.
- An increase in number of teacher awareness of MTSS.
- An increase number of teacher awareness of Tier 3 students.
- An increased number of Tier 3 students being addressed.
- An increased number of student performance in both reading and mathematics.
- An increased amount of professional development provided aligned with MTSS.
- An increase in progress monitoring.
- An increase in aligning the appropriate Tier 3 interventions to support students.
These successes were an eye-opener for me, as it made me realize the importance of how my behavior shift created opportunities for teachers to grow in their practice. Once the teachers received the support they needed from me, their confidence began to grow in their teaching and ultimately student improvement had a positive impact as well.

**Leadership Monitor and Adjust (Is It Working?)**

What are my Barriers?

As stated in prior chapters, when implementing MTSS or any new initiative or program for that matter, there are some adjustments that will have to be made especially when encountering barriers. Hagans and Powers (2014) presented different barriers that schools may face when implementing MTSS. The barriers discussed are pre-service preparation, leadership support, and teacher training. I believe that, once I got past the pre-service preparation and leadership support, I was able to have a real focus on the actions of planning professional development/training for the teachers based on what they deemed and I observed as what was needed. But the pre-service part was the toughest. The barrier of the pre-service was the fact that I had to start from scratch. Although Hagans and Powers pointed out that school personnel may not possess the knowledge and skills to implement MTSS (i.e., a skill deficit), I still was not prepared for the results that I got from my staff. I assumed that the teachers had a basic knowledge of what was needed or what MTSS encompassed. I was left with making very critical decisions about our next steps: do I rush through the pre-service information and go straight to the professional development, or do I pace myself and make sure the teachers have a solid and clear understanding of MTSS and the components that are embedded in
the initiative? Although I chose the latter, it served as a barrier to my process, but because I got past the barrier, it turned out to be a success. Not only did I learn how to be patient and provide a quality of learning as opposed to quantity, my teachers were better supported and given the proper training, tools, and support they needed to increase student growth, particularly the lower-performing students.

**Next steps.** I believe that, in any establishment, there are going to be pitfalls, barriers, and successes that you will run into, but what is important is how each are addressed. Although I supported my staff in my mission to decrease the academic achievement gap through self-reflection, adjusting my leadership style, giving teachers voice, aligning need with actions, collaborative planning, professional development, consistent monitoring, recognizing the barriers and highlighting our successes, there is so much more work to be done. All too often, initiatives are rolled out and gone the next year. I plan to continue to support my teachers and improve my leadership behaviors, and maintain a self-reflective mind-set, being sure to be an inclusive practitioner.

**Trustworthiness**

In an effort to exposing bias to gain trust, I incorporated critical friends into my self-study. The role of critical friends is to support and empower each other by demonstrating a positive regard for people and providing an informed critique of processes and practices. According to Costa and Kallick (1993), a critical friend is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend. I used three critical friends. The three critical friends were two educator (not from my school) and one non-
educator. The critical friends provided feedback on specific journal reflections. The educator provided me with objective feedback and questions that assisted me in thinking critically about how I read the data from teacher surveys, observations and interactions I had with the teachers. The non-educator assisted me with being clear and succinct in my writing, in a way that anyone, with any background can follow and understand. I have selected this particular group because I wanted varying non-biased feedback on my data and how I document the trends in my journal reflections. As a result, my critical friends played a huge role in how I focused my thinking to reflect on my leadership style as well as my leadership behaviors. For example, my critical friend noted from one of excerpt from my journal April 30, 2018 that

*There are several trends that are showing that you are still putting the blame on teachers.*

*You are making too many assumptions, because you have prior knowledge, don’t judge, just listen and take note.*

This statement helped me to center my thinking and take myself out of the role of administrator and focus on teacher needs. My critical friends reminded me of the benefits of letting my teachers go when I had some apprehensions; I noted another critical friend stated on May 18, 2018 that

*because the information was not coming from me telling them what changes they needed to make, the teachers gained the ability to reflect upon their own teaching and learning practices back to for themselves.*

As a result, my critical friends helped me to provide clarity in my thinking and helped me to talk through my thoughts by asking me guided questions that centered me around actions I took in supporting my teachers.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a summary of the key highlights of the self-study, a discussion of the findings, and implications for practice for administrators. Recommendations moving forward are also discussed along with plans for future research.

**Key Highlights**

A few significant features of this study include an increased awareness of how I balance my leadership by (a) incorporating Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart to inspire and build teacher capacity; (b) reflecting on support I provide to my staff, in an effort to learn how to provide the necessary tools they need to successfully address our most vulnerable students; and (c) supporting staff through professional development that are aligned with MTSS, with a focus on Tier 3 students.

When I started this self-study, I thought I knew the answer. I was confident that I knew what the teachers needed to grow. I assumed (as stated in Chapter III), since my school had some components of MTSS for Tiers 1 and 2 students (based on the data), I would only need to provide an overview of them both and my biggest time spent would be to focus on Tier 3. But what I soon realized is that, although my teachers were ensuring that the Tier 1 and Tier 2 students were making their adequate growth, it did not mean that they understood the full scope of MTSS. In order for them to truly understand how to support Tier 3 students, they would need to understand each tier and the aligned
supports. I learned that ensuring that I implemented MTSS with fidelity took time and patience.

Both the Leadership Legacy Self-Assessment and Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart provided me with a better perspective of my leadership characteristics, an understanding of how to balance my leadership as well as an awareness of the importance of being a leader who listened and looked beyond the surface to find the root cause of what the teachers needed so I could better support them.

This self-study also addressed my ability as a leader to self-reflect and use those reflections to create awareness and practice. Creating such awareness encouraged and inspired me to make a significant change in how I worked with my teachers and staff. Many leaders tend to look at what the staff or teachers are doing, but what is most important as a leader is to look at one’s self first: to work inward then outward, to ask one’s self questions such as how can I change and shift my thinking? What are some things I can do to improve my approach? What steps do I need to take to see improvement? What supports can I give my teachers and staff? What I have realized as a leader is that I must change me first, for self-reflection creates awareness and awareness creates a need to do better.

I’ve also learned that, as leaders, we cannot assume that we know what our teachers need just because we are the leader. Instead, we must give teachers and staff voice by providing platforms for teachers to be heard and be a part of the conversation and problem solving. Consequently, this voice will evoke significant change at a more systemic level. I further gained a sense of what my teachers needed to successfully assist
the Tier 3 students with the supports that they needed to succeed. I learned that I must first provide the teachers with an understanding of all the tiers before diving right into Tier 3. Conducting this self-study has provided me a deeper look into my leadership characteristics as well as how I make decisions in supporting my staff. It is important to note that every school is different, and leaders must adapt to the culture at their school. The steps that I have taken in this self-study, however, can be implemented in other schools and for other initiatives and programs.

**Discussion of Findings**

As a principal, I am always telling my teachers to release, let go, and allow their students to take the lead. I found myself suffering from the same challenge (letting go), but it was time for me to *practice what I preached*. A part of me letting go consisted of allowing my teachers to tell me what they needed support in, as opposed to me telling them what I wanted to see. Incorporating both the teacher surveys and asset mapping was my first step to letting go and being open to what the teachers were saying they needed. I noted on May 7, 2018

> That giving the teachers an opportunity to complete the survey and the asset mapping helped me to understand how I needed to support the teachers in building their confidence.

I came to the realization that some teachers just needed to be heard, if provided a safe space to voice their concerns or supports they need. Giving the teachers the opportunities to voice their concerns, allowed me to align professional development that the teachers identified as being a great need. I believe, that once the teachers were better trained, their
confidence level increased because they were more knowledgeable about how to address the students.

Following Ogden’s Learning Framework and Florida’s MTSS, eight implementation components formed a useful guide when supporting my teachers and staff through the implementation. The only component that I would add to both Ogden’s framework and Florida’s components would be teacher voice. I realized that, as principal, it is my responsibility to provide teachers with a platform to be heard and to make decisions. And, although this is difficult for administrators who are quintessential authoritarians to do, it is necessary. I learned that letting go consist of being unbiased and the ability to self-reflect. I captured this ability to reflect through Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart. By letting go, I was able to get a true vision of what my teachers needed and how I could further support them in improving their practice. Providing the teachers with the asset map also allowed the teachers to see what they already had in our school, as well as what they further needed to support them in their practice. Misulis (1997) contended that “regardless of the teaching model and methods used, effective instruction begins with careful, thorough, and organized planning on the part of the teacher” (p. 45). When I created awareness to the teachers, they were one step closer to this organized planning process of implementing MTSS with fidelity.

One of the most critical aspects of this self-study was my ability to stop, be patient, and pace my support to my teachers. As I stated in Chapter IV, I had made a grave assumption that my teachers had a pretty good understanding of MTSS. I made the assumption that since we (the school and staff) had already been exposed to MTSS, there
would be less training that I had to support and more *connecting the dots* and creating structures. After careful assessment of my journal reflections of teacher implementation (observations), surveys, and meeting minutes, I began to make the proper adjustments so that I could provide my teachers with the specific support that they needed to be successful. Florida’s MTSS proved to be very useful; I particularly focused on component #3, which outlines ongoing efficient facilitation and accurate use of a problem-solving process to support planning, implementing, and evaluating effectiveness of services. This component helped me to stay focused on re-evaluating my effectiveness of what I supported my teachers in and what supports they needed further. I knew that, before I could continue to move forward, the only way I could fully support my teachers in implementing MTSS with fidelity was to not rush through the fundamentals of MTSS. According to the University of South Florida (n.d.), Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), there are three basic types of “fidelity” for districts and schools to support and/or integrate into instruction and intervention: I focused on the first type of fidelity, providing the basic elements of the MTSS infrastructure.

Once I created pathways that led the teachers and staff in a direction that supported MTSS practices and got all the staff on the same page of what MTSS was and stood for, I was then able to support the learning of Tier 3 structures. As stated in chapter II, there have been few studies examining Tier 3 interventions for students with limited responsiveness in Tiers 1 and 2, and there is even less research examining effective instruction for students who make inadequate progress in Tier 3. Even in studies that provided highly intensive Tier 3 intervention, some individual students have
demonstrated little or no growth (e.g., Denton et al., 2006). And, since the delivery of Tier 3 instruction is focused on the skills that pose the greatest barrier to acceleration of student learning and Tier 3 instruction is characterized by the greatest number of minutes of instruction available in a building and the narrowest focus of that instruction (University of South Florida, n.d.), it was very important to me to slow the pace and ensure that I supported my teachers in developing a deep understanding of Tier 3 interventions and supports, leading them to aligning the appropriate interventions to the students and developing a monitoring system that will capture progress. I had to be proactive at accepting that there would be some barriers and address the barriers as needed. Hagans and Powers (2014) presented different barriers that schools may face when implementing MTSS, including pre-service preparation, leadership support, and teacher training. This notion warns leaders that barriers need to be addressed and rectified, and, when this happens, the MTSS process will be able to flow with fidelity. As discussed in Chapter IV, there were some barriers that I faced, within my own self and there were outside factors that played a role that may have prohibited my progress with supporting my teachers, but I made the necessary adjustments. Hagans and Powers offered a great perspective of what can be expected when implementing MTSS, and what I would add to the potential barriers is the thinking behind the preservice: the self-actualization of the leader and the detail of the pre-service work and what that looks like in real time.

I have documented proof through my journal reflections of real-time engagement that answers the what and the how. I was able to create structures with my team and
support them as they engaged in the process by empowering them with being a part of the process and not just sitting on the sideline being told what to do. Although there were some barriers, due to the assumptions I made about the teachers being knowledgeable about MTSS practice, I was able to create an awareness of our Tier 3 student population and begin our professional development and progress-monitoring process. The teachers were provided with a starting point of interventions and a progress monitoring protocol to monitor student mastery. It is important to note that the explicit process that I took to identify and support Tier 3 students can be replicated for teachers in the implementation of Tier 1 & 2 supports. The teacher can provide students with small group instruction, GRR (Gradual Release of Responsibility) and Differentiated instruction. The Teachers can implement a progress monitoring tool to garner student mastery as well as further support the students’ needs.

**Implications**

The purpose of this self-study was to understand, document, analyze and examine my actions in implementing a change initiative: MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports). Therefore, I approached my self-study through personal experiences, self-reflection (within my professional setting) as well as reflective journals. Through reflective journaling, I generated several implications for myself as a leader and for current and future leaders.

**Implications for Myself and Leaders**

Who you are is one of the most important aspects of a self-study. It is important to make the experience of the teacher (administrator) educators a research resource and urge
those who engage in self-study to be reflective of themselves and their roles as both researchers and teacher (administrator) (Feldman, 2009; Feldman et al., 2004). I engaged in self-study in order to understand how I supported my teachers and provided the teachers with necessary tools and training that they need to successfully implement a change in initiative; MTSS. My ultimate goal was to ensure that our most vulnerable children were provided equitable access to the curriculum through interventions that lead them toward being successful. I intended to push myself as a leader in finding different ways to assist teachers in the classroom. Since “another goal is to conduct an intentional and systematic inquiry into my own practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 5), I openly, reflectively, and systematically examined my practice with critique from others to gain alternative points of view (Samaras, 2010). I have had the courage to self-reflect and change my ways to help my teachers and staff to improve in their practice. I was open to hear teachers’ voices without feeling that I have lost my power. In essence, I gained teacher buy-in and trust. I also built their confidence in making decisions as it pertained to student improvement and teacher implementation. I have learned to trust my staff as well, and, because of that change, I noticed that teachers were more open to telling me what they needed and their concerns. As a leader, I have made several changes in my practice: (a) I made the necessary shifts in my leadership behaviors that allowed me to become more supportive, balanced and open-minded to my staffs’ needs; (b) I changed my role as a leader to more of a collaborative thought partner as opposed to a dictator; and (c) I was more aware of how I led the staff, keeping a balance of Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart. Through the implementation of Sergiovanni’s
Head, Hand and Heart and Robert M. Galford and RegFazio Maruca Leadership Legacy

self-assessment, I was able to capture where I was as a leader and work toward becoming
a better and more balanced leader who supports staff in a change initiative. Finally, I was
able to embody my (Head) theory of practice over time, reflect on the (Hand) actions we
take and the decisions we make, and (Heart) what a person believes, values, dreams about
and committed to—the person’s personal vision

I was able to incorporate these practices into my leadership behaviors, which
helped me in being a better support to my teachers. I used Ogden’s Framework as a
structured guide to make sure I followed MTSS in a sequential manner. Although I
followed Ogden’s framework, I understood that the pace of the implementation was
predicated upon teacher learning and understanding. Therefore, I provided my teachers
with differentiated instruction based on their understanding and learning styles as well as
their readiness to move forward. Differentiating the teachers’ instruction was very
beneficial as it helped me to develop and support each teacher on an individual level as
well as being mindful and respectful of their time. I further came to the realization that
quality vs. quantity was the most important when introducing or reintroducing any
initiative or program. I realized that I had to implement differentiated instruction with
some of my teachers based on their readiness level.

The consistent journal reflections provided me with so much information not only
about myself, but about my staff. As I reflected, I noted that my teachers’ demeanor
looked more positive, they exhibited a sense of confidence; they had found their voice.
Documenting these occurrences helped me to better recognize the different impacts this
process had on myself and my teachers. If I were not conducting a self-study, I would have missed so much.

Additionally, self-study has made a significant change in not just my leadership, but my life. The purpose of this study was to observe how I support teachers; in an effort to evoke change. I documented the change and the support that I provided my staff, but most importantly, I also documented how I pushed myself in taking a risk in adjusting my practices and allowing myself to be vulnerable. I am proud of myself because I know how far I have come. This self-study was a breaking point for me and it really opened my eyes to the potential I have in being a better leader. I urge other leaders to do the same, and not mirror someone else, but become the best leader they can be within themselves.

**Recommendations for Future Investigations**

The first recommendation for future investigation is to encourage other administrators to engage in this type of inquiry—self-study. Self-study allows one to look at the internal aspects of who they are first and then work toward enhancing their strengths. I argue that, when we can realize who we are, then we can help others in their practice. I believe if more leaders did these kinds of studies, they would learn so much more about themselves and how they could make a positive change in education or and field they so desire.

My second recommendation is to replicate the self-study with 4th–8th grade students. I would like to see how I support teachers with MTSS and whether I need to provide them with the same supports as the K-3rd grade teachers. I believe if all grades
are involved, then there would be greater improvement in student equity and teacher collaboration.

Third, I would like to expand the study to a longitudinal study to gather more data on how I support teacher implementation of MTSS using all three tiers and examine the significant impact on student growth, attendance, and teacher implementation. I believe that, in all districts, there should be a structured timeline that not only needs to be put in place, but followed, with guided supports not just for teachers and staff, but also for principals.

A fourth recommendation is to further study the effects of implementing one tier at a time to improve teacher understanding of MTSS. I believe that, when all tiers are rolled out all at once and expected (by the administrator) to be accurately executed, teachers and staff may become overwhelmed and possibly burn out. Although my goal was to focus on Tier 3 students because they were the most vulnerable, I believe that, because I only focused on one tier, I was able to better support the teachers in their individual needs.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Bias of the Researcher**

According to Moorhead and Griffin (1998), “Leadership is both a process and property. As a process, leadership involves the use of non-coercive influence. As a property, leadership is the set of characteristics attributed to someone who is perceived to use influence successfully” (p. 352). As the principal of a school, one naturally has some bias from simply being familiar with the staff. Because I have prior knowledge of the
staff members’ strengths, and weaknesses, I may have subconsciously made assumptions about the needs of the teachers. Reinharz (1992, as cited in Ortlipp, 2008) called this the degree of “closeness.” This closeness can pose a problem because someone may have a need that is overlooked by the researcher, and implementation could potentially be compromised. The problem of bias in qualitative research particularly is still debated in methodology texts, and there is a lack of agreement on how much researcher influence is acceptable, whether or not it needs to be “controlled.” Denzin (1994) referred to this as an “interpretive crisis” (p. 501). Although self-study doesn’t require bias to be eliminated, it does require that the researcher documents and reflects upon it. I continuously took detailed notes of my interactions with staff, as well as being transparent with my thoughts, opinions, and feelings in my journal reflections.

My critical friends played a major role in assisting me with being unbiased; throughout this process, they reviewed my notes and themes for bias and provided me with feedback on my journal reflections. According to Costa and Kallick (1993), a critical friend is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend. My critical friends guided my thinking every step of the way through challenging my thoughts, journal reflections, and interactions with the staff. They constantly checked for biases in my themes and reoccurring thoughts that I had about my observations and my interactions with staff. They refocused me on self, reminding me that this study was my self-reflection as opposed to teacher and staff actions.
Summary

In my now 20 years of being an educator in several capacities, it has become clear that we (administrators, teachers, etc.) can do more for our students. Our children deserve to have the best education. Our children come to us with no idea of what to expect from us; some of them don’t even know what they deserve, but we know. As leaders, it is our responsibility to make sure equitable practices are happening in the classroom. There is no way, however, that a leader can go right into any establishment and just say “do it.” There needs to be a process of learning that has to be involved. I wanted to create that process for my teachers as opposed to just rolling yet another initiative out. I learned that initiatives and programs need to be a collaborative process, one that incorporates others. I have also learned from this self-study how important collaboration is: not just as a leader, but as a person. I have learned that everything begins with me, and, no matter how successful I am, and no matter how many accolades I received, I have to always set aside my ego and reflect on my actions and make adjustments according to the greater good and that is what is best for children.

Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart, coupled with the leadership survey, helped me to look at where I was, work toward balancing my leadership, and incorporate the desired attributes into my everyday practice. Being open to becoming a balanced leader led me toward being a more nurturing listener who created pathways that gave me patience, allowed for teacher voice, and built collaborative relationships with my staff. I believe that a great leader always continues to learn and grow. I always tell my teachers
this: “Greatness is an inherently dynamic process, not an end point. The moment you think of yourself as great, your slide toward mediocrity will have already begun” (James C. Collins, July, 2005). I will continue to reflect on my actions and behaviors so that I can be the best leader and person that I can be, for the greater good, the children.

**Definition of Terms**

1. **Differentiated Instruction** - In the context of education, we define *differentiation* as a teacher is reacting responsively to a learner's needs. A teacher who is differentiating understands a student's needs to express humor, or work with a group, or have additional teaching on a particular skill, or delve more deeply into a particular topic, or have guided help with a reading passage—and the teacher responds actively and positively to that need. Differentiation is simply attending to the learning needs of a particular student or small group of students rather than the more typical pattern of teaching the class as though all individuals in it were alike. (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000, p.2).

2. **Multi-tiered instruction** - The different levels of academic interventions that “changes at each tier, becoming more intensive as a student moves across the tiers” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 93). False positives: Occur when “predictive measures mistakenly over-identify children as at risk for becoming reading disabled (RD)” (Gersten & Dimino, 2006, p.104).

3. **Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)** - A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a systemic, continuous-improvement framework in which database problem solving and decision-making is practiced across all levels of the
educational system for supporting students. (Colorado, Department of Education, retrieved from www.cde.state.co.us/mtss/whatismtss Dec 3, 2013)

4. Northwest Evaluation Association - Founded by educators nearly 40 years ago, Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) is a global not-for-profit educational services organization known for our flagship interim assessment, Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®). More than 7,400 partners in U.S. schools, districts, education agencies, and international schools trust us to offer pre-kindergarten through grade 12 assessments that accurately measure student growth and learning needs, professional development that fosters educators’ ability to accelerate student learning, and research that supports assessment validity and data interpretation. To better inform instruction and maximize every learner’s academic growth, educators currently use NWEA assessments and items with nearly 10 million students.

a. Attainment Percentile - Average spring scale score of students on the NWEA MAP assessment, compared to average national average score. The school is assigned a percentile representing where it would fall on the national distribution.

b. Growth Percentile - Average spring-to-spring scale scores growth of students on NWEA, compared to national average growth for schools with the same average pretest score. The school is assigned a percentile representing where it would fall on the national distribution.
c. Percent Making National Average Growth - The percentage of students in Grades 3-8-NWEA MAP growth met the national 50th percentile student growth score for students with the same pretest score. Student’s NWEA testing results are reported in RIT. An RIT score is an estimation of a student’s instructional level and also measures student progress or growth in school. (Get to know NWEA. Retrieved from https://www.nwea.org/)

5. Performance feedback - “Variables that can improve the integrity of intervention steps by teachers” (Sterling-Turner, Watson, & Moore, 2002 as cited in Duhon, Mesmer, Gregerson, & Witt, 2008, p. 20).

6. Progress monitoring - “Formative evaluation: Teachers use the data to determine whether they need to change their curricula, materials, or instructional procedures” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 94).

7. Qualitative data- Qualitative data- the Qualitative researcher is interested in understanding in the meaning people have constructed that is, how people make sense of their world and experiences they have in the world. (Merriam, 2009, p. 13)

8. Quantitative data- Quantitative data- Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the work visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recording, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world.
Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3)

9. Response to Intervention (RTI) – Response to Intervention (RTI) “RTI is an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data” (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006, p. 2).

10. Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC)- measure is based on an assessment approach developed by Marie Clay, author of an Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (1993). TRC is a running record assessment (alternately known as a reading record) of reading performance that allows teachers to evaluate a student’s foundational skills, which are necessary to become a fluent reader, and the ability to apply those skills to increasingly complex texts. TRC assesses oral reading accuracy and comprehension using a set of calibrated benchmark books. Using TRC, a teacher determines each student’s instructional reading level at three benchmark administration periods during the school year and monitors student reading performance between those periods. (mCLASS®: Reading 3D™ – Text Reading and Comprehension Setting Cut Points for the Amplify Atlas Book Set Retrieved from https://www.amplify.com/assets/pdf/mCLASS_Reading3D_TRC_CutPoints_A.pdf).
The following is a list of journal prompts I completed as I reflected on why this topic was/is important to me.

1. Describe how a change initiative was implemented at my school.

2. Why do I personally care about providing my teachers with a system wide initiative? How will it benefit the students? Why Tier 3?

3. How will developing protocols and tools for teacher impact me as a school administrator?

4. How will implementing this initiative help me grow as a school administrator?

5. Which elements of the initiative are most meaningful to me as a school leader?

6. What are some successes I am experiencing with implementing MTSS?

7. What are some struggles I expect to encounter?

8. What are some obstacles I expect to encounter?

9. What am I learning about the implementation process?

10. How has the work with developing and implementing protocols and putting a system-wide initiative changed the way I understand myself as a school leader?

11. What biases or preconceived ideas am I holding that might be interfering with my ability to provide support to staff?
APPENDIX B

LEADERSHIP SURVEY PROTOCOL
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CROSSWALK</th>
<th>HEAD to reflect on the situations they face (in other words, minimize bias).</th>
<th>HAND <strong>In other words how can the leader adjust him or herself to help the needs of others?</strong></th>
<th>HEART what a person believes, values, dreams about and is committed to</th>
<th>MISC. Does not fit in any category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMBASSADOR</td>
<td>Instinctively knows how to handle a variety of situations with grace. They tend to be the people diffusing the situation. The ones getting involved in conflicts on behalf of broad constituencies, as opposed for their own benefit. They are apt to be persistent in a gentle way—to be persuasive and at the same time respectful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADVOCATE</td>
<td>Instinctively acts as a spokesperson in a group. They tend to be articulate, rational, logical, and persuasive. They also tend to be relentless (in the positive sense of the word), championing ideas or strategic positions. Advocates tend to use both linear and non-linear approaches when they argue a point.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PEOPLE MOVER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think: Talent-spotter, career-builder, motivator, someone with parental, nurturing qualities. People movers instinctively take the lead in building teams. They’re also instinctive mentors. They generally have long contact lists; they are always introducing new people to new ideas and new paths. They’re also generally mindful of their employees’ lives outside of work; they view performance through the larger lens of potential.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRUTH SEEKER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think: Fairness, good judgment, equalizer, level-headed, process-oriented, scrupulous neutrality, and objectivity is the high standard. This is the only role for which there is a “prerequisite”; Truth-Seekers are unfailingly competent in their field; their competence is unquestioned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CREATIVE BUILDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These individuals are visionaries and entrepreneurs—they are happiest and most driven at the start of things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They instinctively see new opportunities for new products, new companies; spot niche markets; take ideas and make them real.

EXPERIENCED GUIDE

RESULTS:

MY INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS:

MY REACTION TO THE RESULTS:
APPENDIX C

SELF-STUDY DATA PROTOCOLS ASSET MAP PROMPTS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT DO I ALREADY DO OR HAVE IN THE BUILDING</th>
<th>WHAT DO I NEED TO SUPPORT MY TEACHERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

My reactions:

My takeaways:

My next steps:
APPENDIX D

MTSS SURVEY PROTOCOLS
What are my thoughts?

What are my reactions?
APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION TEMPLATE
Guided Questions

1. How am I going to ensure all students are tiered (1, 2, and 3)?

2. What structures can I put in place to ensure grouping is happening?

3. How can I provide the teachers with a schedule to ensure grouping is happening in the allotted time?

4. How can I train teachers to progress monitor?

5. How can I ensure Gradual Release is being implemented?

Notes:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX F

GIBBS’ REFLECTION TOOL

GUIDED TO REFLECT UPON OBSERVATIONS
**Description** - Describe what I observed, what happened during your critical incident or chosen episode for reflection. “Set the context: Describe what you initially observed – the sense details of seeing, smelling, touching, hearing, tasting. Describe all the interactions you see among people, between groups, including interpersonal and intercultural dimensions. Describe your role in the episode.”

**Feelings** - Describe what you were thinking or saying at the time. Name your personal reactions. Consider these questions: What were the range of your feelings? What beliefs-personal, community cultural, ideological-inform the feelings you’ve noted? What are the connections and disconnections between your beliefs and your feelings with regard to your reaction to and/or analysis of this incident or episode?

**Evaluation** - Explain what worked well/what was good, what could have been better/what was not good about the experience. Draw on the first parts of your writing to set out your thinking about why and how come was the incident troublesome, difficult, and challenging. Then detail specifics about what would need to happen-for you, for others, in actions beliefs and power dynamics to make a change.
### Analysis
Link the incident or episode to what you’ve been learning, in course readings, assignments: in community work; in cross-cultural context; in interpersonal growth-in order to extend your thinking. “What does it mean to investigate additional perspectives as part of expanding and testing your thinking as you analyze this scenario or incident.

### Conclusion
Speculate about what else you could have done. What could you and others could not have done now that you look back on the situation? What have you learned in writing this reflection? How have you expanded your knowledge base and thinking about your future choices and actions you may take?

### Action Plan
Set out “next steps” What action can you take now – with others in the scenario at the heart of your reflection? Going forward in this and/or new context? What might you do differently? How will you adapt your practice – your own actions and interactions with others-in the light of your new understanding?
APPENDIX G

REFLECTION DOCUMENT OF OVERALL DATA COLLECTION
| ASSET MAPPING (My reflections) | MTSS SURVEY (My reflections) | OBSERVATIONS (My reflections) | WHAT I NEED TO SUPPORT MY STAFF IN (Professional Development) |
APPENDIX H

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXIT SLIP SAMPLE
1. What was helpful from this professional development? How can I as the administrator help better support you?

2. What would you like to learn for the next professional development?

3. What coaching or support do I need to provide in order for you to better implement this strategy?
APPENDIX I

PLANNING TIMELINE FOR DATA COLLECTION

2017-2018
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Participants Responsible</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Conduct self-assessment Leadership Survey</td>
<td>Researcher/Principal</td>
<td>Self-assessment Leadership Survey/ Sergiovanni cross-walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reflect on asset mapping given to the teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Asset-mapping journal reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reflect on MTSS Survey given to teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The T-chart/code responses from survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Teacher observation reflections/journal entries</td>
<td>Researcher/Principal</td>
<td>Gibbs’ Self-reflection tool used for observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Begin journal reflections of leadership behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Aligned with Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand &amp; Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Leadership Team (ILT &amp; grade level teams) observation -- reflection</td>
<td>Researcher/Principal</td>
<td>Journal Reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>journal entries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Based on my journal reflections, I will provide the teachers with the PD needed.</td>
<td>Researcher/Principal</td>
<td>P.D. evaluation exit slip-Journal Reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teachers will be given an evaluation of the PD support that I can further assist them with.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will continue to provide the teachers with supports they need based my journal reflections.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 5: The cycle will repeat
The teachers will be given a follow-up PD.

Week 6: Code data

Study Timeline for all Research Activities Described Above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Event</th>
<th>Key Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Begin Self-Study</td>
<td>4/30/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of Pre-Leadership Self-assessment documents</td>
<td>4/30/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of leadership behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of M.T.S.S. (Multi-tiered Systems of Supports) documents</td>
<td>4/30/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of school related MTSS materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart/Leadership crosswalk</td>
<td>5/07/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of professional growth reflection journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of reflection journal</td>
<td>5/07/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of personal reflection journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of professional development documents</td>
<td>5/07/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of agendas and minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of professional development documents</td>
<td>5/14/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of department meeting minutes and agendas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of achievement</td>
<td>5/21/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of final results from the Illinois School Report Card</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis of Leadership behaviors</td>
<td>5/28/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of final results from post Self-reflection survey/Sergiovanni’s Head, Hand and Heart crosswalk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection of professional growth reflection journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme and write out findings and results</td>
<td>6/18/18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX J

CRITICAL FRIENDS QUESTIONS
1.) What does the evidence of your work indicate to you about your capacity to implement the initiative?

2.) What are your next steps in this process?

3.) Why did you choose this topic?

4.) What have you learned from this self-study process about your leadership style? Your strengths? Your areas of need?
   a. Based on your areas of need, what are your next steps to address them?

5.) What do you hope others will learn from this self-study?


Get to know NWEA. Retrieved from https://www.nwea.org/


develop/create-your-implementation-blueprint


Leech, N.L., & Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2008). Qualitative data analysis: A compendium of techniques and a framework for selection for school psychology research and


University of South Florida (n.d.). Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) implementation components common questions. *MTSS implementation*


VITA

Terrycita Delight Perry is the daughter of Joseph Perry. She was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. She graduated Chicago State University in Chicago, Illinois, in 1999 with a Bachelor of Arts in Education, earning a degree in special education and endorsement in Elementary Education. In 2000 she completed a Master of Arts program in Early Childhood Education from Chicago State University. She furthered her education by earning her Educational Leadership Certification in 2006 from University of Illinois-Chicago and Superintendent Certification from Loyola University Chicago.

Terrycita is an enthusiastic professional educator with 25 years of successful experience. She brings to the table four years of experience as a principal, ten years of experience as an assistant principal, six-and-a-half years of experience as a special education teacher, and five years of experience as a daycare teacher and teacher assistant.

Currently, she is the principal of an elementary school (pre-kindergarten-8th grade) in Chicago, Illinois with an enrollment of 565 students. In this role, she works collaboratively with teachers to ensure that students achieve academically in a safe learning environment.

Her future goals are to obtain her licensure to provide professional development for aspiring and veteran principals, as well as new and veteran teachers. Her ultimate goal in life is to evoke change on a global level. She started her mission on a state level by traveling to Alaska (through Chicago State University), then moving toward a global
level to Rome (through Loyola University), and just recently, China (through the College Board). Through her travels, she has observed cultures, people, and educational systems. These experiences have broadened her knowledge and exposed her to new and different strategies and ways of life that she is able to take back to her school and others to evoke a positive change in the world. Terrycita’s life mission and purpose is to help others, to inspire others, and to make a significant difference to all. She is looking forward to doing more in her lifetime. Terrycita says that advocating for children is what she was born to do.
DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The Dissertation submitted by Terrycita D. Perry has been read and approved by the following committee:

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