1-1-2012

School improvements and student achievement: teachers' conceptions and practices in an urban school community

Jendayi Johari Gardner
Wayne State University,

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN AN URBAN SCHOOL COMMUNITY

by

JENDAYI JOHARI GARDNER

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2012

MAJOR: CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

Approved by:

_____

Advisor Date

_____

_____

_____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of my dissertation is the product of a supportive family and unwavering faith that kept me dedicated to reaching my goal. I will like to start by thanking my advisor, Dr. Jazlin Ebenezer. Thank you for guiding me through this process and helping me fulfill my potential of becoming a scholar. In your role as my advisor, the dedication and high expectations that you demonstrate are admirable. I have been able to observe these powerful traits throughout this entire doctoral process. I am thankful for the many times I was able to work in your office late in order to develop a rich and scholarly product. I can still remember sitting in your seminar class years ago and sharing my educational plan with you. Based on this conversation, I can remember you recommending that I pursue my doctorate and ever since I've push myself beyond my educational limits.

I want to thank my committee members for their expertise and support throughout the doctoral process. Thank you, Dr. Gail Fahoome for dedicating time to assist me with the quantitative portions of my dissertation and providing cutting-edge classes throughout my coursework. As to Dr. Cheryl Waites, your words of encouragement have inspired me to overcome obstacles and meet expectations. I want to also thank Dr. Sharon Elliott and Dr. Jo-Ann Snyder for being supportive and joining my committee. I want to thank the administration and staff from the Oak Park School District.

I will like to thank my mother, grandmother, and other family members for their support throughout this dissertation process. I will like to especially thank my husband, Timothy Gardner, Jr., who has been my rock from the beginning of this process to the very end. Thank you for the words of encouragement and complete faith you demonstrated for me each and every day. Thank you for listening to my concerns, excitement, and joy that I've expressed throughout

this process. Tim, thank you for everything and I am blessed to have shared this journey with you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In today's urban school districts, creating school success remains an issue in education. At this time, urban school districts need a comprehensive education plan that addresses its unique challenges. Instead, governmental agencies have imposed several new challenges to urban school districts. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) established new federal educations standards and mandated educators to meet these new requirements. In cases of urban school districts, the NCLB resulted in school closures, state takeovers and teacher termination. While programs such as NCLB were enacted, governmental agencies failed to address the myriad of risks for at-risk urban school children. Traditionally, urban school children face the following issues: (1) poverty; (2) violence: (3) underperforming schools; and (4) drug-infested neighborhoods (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

Simply put, a child's socioeconomic status severely impacts how a child still progresses in schools. Given the existence of the common deficiencies in an urban child's life, the factors have been exacerbated by rising unemployment in cities (Armstrong, 2010). More importantly, recent studies suggest that low-income students lack the basic necessities of education. For this very reason, low-income students are more susceptible to teen pregnancy, drug use and contact with the criminal justice system. Still, urban public school districts are required to deliver a free and equal public education. Since these limitations face a low-income student in an urban school district these limitations make it more likely that these students fail to satisfy the NCLB standards.

McGuinn (2010) states the criteria of the No Child Left Behind Act for all schools to make Adequate Yearly Progress has intensified this investigation. Furthermore, Oliva (2009)

notes that the No Child Left Behind Act is a product of the standards-based movement, which aligns curriculum with state and national standards in an attempt to make teachers and school districts accountable. According to Wong and Sunderman (2010), urban school districts serving a student population of minority students constantly fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress. As a result, stringent consequences such as school closures, state takeovers and the termination of teachers are implemented **(**Jehlen & Flannery, 2008**).**

Harris and Herrington (2006) state the common barriers of an urban school such as: poverty, violence, underperforming schools, and drug infested neighborhoods have a pervasive impact on the achievement level of poor and minority students in comparison to their counterparts in suburban communities. In addition, the poverty level of children has increased with unemployment rates rising from 4.8% in March 2000 to 10.5 % in July 2009 (Armstrong, 2010). Consequently, low income students do not possess the basic necessities that are essential for academic achievement (Hughes, 2010). Bainbridge and Lasley (2006) point out that, schools serving a large population of poor students struggle to be successful and are more susceptible to unfavorable experiences such as teen pregnancy, police arrests and access to drugs. Urban school districts are also faced with students that feel unsafe in school and experience high levels of absenteeism by students and staff. These various attributes of an urban school district represent the barriers that continue to prevent student success and the ability to satisfy the criteria of the No Child Left Behind Act (Armstrong, 2010). Consequently, the plight of urban school districts leads many to believe student success is unattainable and hopeless (Jacob, 2007).

To address this ongoing problem in urban school districts, Douglas Reeves (2004) developed the 90/90/90 model that is composed of three key components: 1) more than 90 percent of the students are eligible for a free and reduced lunch; 2) more than 90 percent of the

students are from ethnic minorities; and 3) more than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards according to independently conducted standards based tests. As a result, a comprehensive plan to develop an urban school learning community model for student achievement based on the following five characteristics of the 90/90/90 schools was implemented: (1) a strong focus on academic achievement; (2) clear curriculum choices; (3) frequent assessment of school progress and multiple opportunities for improvement; (4) a focus on writing in all areas; and (5) collaborative scoring on student work.

According to Reeves (2004), the 90/90/90 model emphasizes the belief that all students can learn when given the right tools, opportunities and educational support. Furthermore, this belief prepares school districts with the ability to overcome the pressures of the standards-based curriculum that is used as a criterion for school success. Although the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act for all students to be successful on standardized test are met, 90/90/90 schools vow to venture beyond this one dimensional stipulation (Reeves, 2004). Furthermore, Senge, Dutton and Kleiner (2007) point out that many urban schools supply their students with a temporary curriculum in order to produce high scores on standardized test. On the other hand, participating schools of the 90/90/90 model strive to create perpetual learning experiences for their students by implementing a curriculum that surpasses the limited assessment of standardized tests (Schmoker, 2006). As a result, urban school districts striving to improve student achievement must develop a comprehensive curriculum with an emphasis on the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model (Hatrick, 2008).

1.2 Overview of Theoretical Framework

The idea of using principles of the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model to improve urban schools was originally conceived by Reeves (2004) at the Center for Performance Assessment after he first observed multiple schools in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, School District, an urban school district that serves students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Reeves' observational study spanned from 1995 to 1998. The goal of Reeves' study was to examine the relationship between (1) instructional practices of teachers and (2) school improvement. Reeves discovered that the Milwaukee School district improved student achievement regardless of high poverty rates. Based on Reeves observations, he determined that each school possessed three common characteristics. The three characteristics identified by Reeves are: (1) 90% of the students scored proficient or above on the standardized test; (2) 90% of the students were in low socioeconomic status; and 90% of the students received free and reduced lunch. Thus, this school improvement model was named the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model.

Pate and Gibson (2005) have observed that school districts implementing principles of the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model have been successful in increasing standardized test scores among students, thus helping to reduce the achievement gap between poor students and their counterparts. These districts include (1) Wayne Township Metropolitan School Corporation of Indianapolis, Indiana; (2) Riverview Gardens and Hazelwood school districts of St. Louis, Missouri; and (3) Los Angeles and Orange County school districts. In addition, Anderson (2007), Reeves (2004, 2011), and Schmoker (2006) also have contributed to the academic success of minority students based on the five objectives of the model: (1) to focus on academic achievement; (2) to make clear curriculum choices; (3) to conduct frequent and multiple

assessments; (4) to integrate nonfiction writing , and (5) to score assessments collaboratively. These five objectives of the 90/90/90 model have been adopted and adapted in various ways to help schools implement the 90/90/90 improvement model to improve the academic performance of minority students (Anderson, 2007).

The first characteristic prioritizes the importance of academic achievement and educational experiences that expand beyond the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act. In order to accomplish this goal, student success and significant improvements are highlighted throughout the school year through use of multiple sources such as graphs, tables, banners and trophy cases. A focus on student achievement is a top priority for participating schools of the 90/90/90 model. Although student achievement serves as a key component of the 90/90/90 schools, the focus is primarily associated with how students demonstrate improvement during the course of the school year (Schmoker, 2006). In addition, 90/90/90 schools focus on a limited amount of academic gains in order to set realistic and achievable goals (Peters as cited in Schmoker, 2006). According to Reeves (2004), honoring small wins in order to create an environment of success is necessary to make overall academic gains in an urban school district.

The second characteristic, clear curriculum choices, is achieved by prioritizing learning in the core subject areas (reading, writing, and math) for all grade levels. Empirical evidence (Anderson, 2007) revealed in a study on the 90/90/90 schools shows an emphasis on core subject areas improves the academic achievement level in additional subject areas such as science and social studies. As a result, the focus on a coherent (Marzano, 2002) curriculum that represents the standards of the school district and the core subject areas have proven to be key components of the 90/90/90 model as demonstrated in participating urban schools.

The third characteristic, frequent assessments and multiple opportunities, provides a flexible outlook on academic achievement for students. The characteristic enables students to have the opportunity to demonstrate success beyond the initial assessment. According to DuFour (2002), the improvements shown by the students build their morale and confidence and directly increase the achievement level. In order to provide the multiple opportunities to be successful, the 90/90/90 schools measure success in different forms and times; daily, weekly, and monthly**.** This practice established by the 90/90/90 model creates a learning environment of support and growth for students.

The fourth characteristic of the 90/90/90 schools is written responses in performance assessment, which emphasizes written responses throughout the curriculum of participating urban schools. According to Anderson (2007), teachers are enabled to garner diagnostic data from students, which provides a thorough approach to answering questions by developing a comprehensive overview of the students' writing abilities.

The fifth characteristic, external scoring, strives to eliminate the ambiguity that is associated with teachers determining the meaning of proficiency in regards to student work in each classroom (Reeves, 2004). As a result, common assessments are developed by teachers based on the common assessment expectations. In some cases of participating 90/90/90 schools, the principals and other administration are also involved in the process in order to develop consistency of expectations by the entire school community. The model emphasizes the importance of adhering to the expectations of the school by prioritizing meeting times for teachers to gather common assessment tools and discuss the results of the instrument in order to make the necessary adjustments to the common assessments for all students.

While evidence suggests that many urban school districts have been consistently labeled as failing, schools that have implemented the principles of the 90/90/90 improvement model have been able to perform higher than this unfortunate norm (Anderson, 2007). The increasing success rates of schools that have implemented the principles of the 90/90/90 model have resulted in a decrease in the achievement gap among minority students (Freire, 2009; Jehlen & Flannery, 2008; Joyner, 2008). The foundation of the 90/90/90 model maybe supported by Ralph Tyler's (1949) belief that, in order for schools to develop clear purposes, the following four questions must be addressed: (1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? (2) How can learning experiences been selected that are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives? (3) How can learning experiences most efficiently been organized so that instruction is effective? (4) How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated? Tyler has pointed out that answers to these questions may improve student achievement for all schools.

To address the examination of school improvements for student achievement in articles one and three, the study also adopts phenomenography as a theoretical framework. Phenomenography is an analytic tool that helps identify qualitatively different ways that individuals conceptualize a phenomenon. Phenomenography (Marton& Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004) provides the foundation for this study in its attempt to explore common conceptions of teachers about school improvements that lead to increased student achievement. Phenomenography emphasizes the relationship between the subject and object (Lybeck et al., 1988). For the purpose of this study, phenomenography serves as an analytic tool to help explore the variation in which teachers conceptualize the process of school improvement. This

methodological approach allows the researcher to construct the various descriptive categories related to teachers' conceptions as they strive for school improvement.

1.3 Problem Statement

Although 90/90/90 schools serve as an urban school learning community model for student achievement, the conflicting conceptions of teachers remains a problem in urban school districts (Hill, 2009). Present research (Armstrong, 2010) on urban education reveals that teachers of an urban school district possess different conceptions about how to improve student achievement. As a result, it is necessary for urban school districts to acknowledge the impact of diverse conceptions on the productivity of a school (Johnson, 2008). Senge (2000) explains that the conceptions of teachers reflected in existing thoughts and attitudes are the result of individual experiences. Consequently, the diverse conceptions (Hill, 2009) represented by each teacher directly impacts their actions in improving student achievement.

Duffy (2009) states there are many ways the consolidation of conceptions can help achieve educational goals for urban schools. This author explains the foregoing relationship can promote a shared vision of school districts by unifying the diverse conceptions of each teacher in order to perform the necessary actions to improve student achievement. Furthermore, Reeves (2004) cites the shared contributions of teachers are critical to implement the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model. Although the current state of urban school districts suffers from diverse conceptions, identifying the conceptions of teachers will create a foundation for their actions (Hill, 2009). Acquiring this knowledge will allow teachers to implement the necessary tools to unify conceptions, which enables the urban school district to improve student achievement (Covey, 2009).

1.4 Objectives and Research Questions

Three objectives are outlined for this study. Within each objective, one or more research questions are stated. The first objective is to document, analyze, and interpret teachers' conceptions about improving student achievement. The second objective is to document, analyze, and interpret the teacher practices that reflect elements of the 90/90/90 model for school improvement. The third objective is to document, analyze, and interpret teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges.

1.4.1 Rationale for Research Question 1

The conceptions of teachers directly impact the ability of an urban school community to improve student achievement (Johnson, 2008). The awareness of educational conceptions provides a lens for each teacher an opportunity to develop a collaborative effort to enable urban school districts to pursue school success from shared conceptions (Hill, 2009). As a result, teachers participate in the efforts to develop common conceptions on school success, in order to improve student achievement. Exposing the conceptions of the teachers is essential to improve student achievement. Thus, the first research question pertaining to this study is as follows:

Research Question 1. What are teachers' conceptions of school improvements that lead to student achievement?

1.4.2 Rationale for Research Questions 2

There is a plethora of educational models that promote school success and have proven to effectively increase academic levels in school districts. The 90/90/90 schools is a renowned model that is specific to producing successful urban schools by addressing the needs of their

particular student body, teaching staff, and school community. In addition the implementation of the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model: (1) a strong focus on academic achievement; (2) clear curriculum choices; (3) frequent assessment of school progress and multiple opportunities for improvement; (4) a focus on writing in all areas; and (5) collaborative scoring on student work has proven to overcome the common barriers of the poverty-stricken urban school community (Johnson, 2008), which leads to the second research question.

Research Question 2. To what extent do teacher practices reflect elements of the 90/90/90 model?

1.4.3 Rationale for Research Question 3

As the urban school attempts to develop common conceptions to improve student achievement, it is important to recognize the challenges of an urban school community. The identification of challenges by teachers will reveal the constraints of the urban school community during the school improvement process. In addition, the urban school community establishes celebrations of facilities and solutions for developed challenges during the restructuring process enhancing the collaborative efforts of the stakeholders. Furthermore, the analysis of the existing challenges will contribute to a thorough understanding of the school improvement process by exposing potential hindrances of improving student achievement. Thus, the third research question pertaining to this study is as follows:

Research Question 3. What challenges do urban school teachers encounter during the school improvement process?

1.5 Overview of Methodology

The research questions are explored utilizing a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2007), composed of a variety of quantitative and qualitative data gathering procedures. In the attempt of urban schools to improve student achievement, the conceptions of teachers will be qualitatively documented and descriptive categories will be developed. The replication of the 90/90/90 model will be tracked by quantitatively documenting teacher practices using a Classroom Observation Protocol based on the elements of the model. The school improvement challenges based on teachers' conceptions will also be qualitatively documented and descriptive categories will be developed. The analysis of the student achievement based on 2009-2010 MEAP Test scores will be quantitatively documented using a Chi-Square Test.

1.6 Significance of Study

This study is significant to urban school communities, curriculum developers, teachers, and students. Documenting, analyzing, and interpreting the common conceptions will provide insights into how the school improvement process that leads to student achievement is perceived by teachers of an urban school. Documenting, analyzing, and interpreting the extent to which the 90/90/90 model is replicated in an urban school highlighted how an estimated forty district and nationwide schools effectively implement the five characteristics of the model contributing improvements in core subject areas (Rowan, Hall, & Haycock, 2010). The study is of particular significance to the Detroit area students because the majority of the schools are not products of the 90/90/90 model. Dawsey (2010) reports that based on 2005 through 2009 standardized test scores only ten schools served as 90/90/90 schools based on the established criteria. As a result, this study will illuminate how we may help the urban schools faced with numerous challenges

that are associated with minority students by implementing the five elements of the 90/90/90 model. In addition, the study is also significant because it provides a model for schools on how to align a reform model such as the 90/90/90 model with a curriculum theory. This alignment helps schools to select reform models that support their purpose and curriculum choices for improving student achievement.

This study, therefore, may have a lasting impact on urban schools. The identification of challenges of school improvement will help teachers to use proactive measures. The proactive measures will enable teachers to prevent challenges from negatively impacting the school improvement process. The prevention of challenges will help schools to implement strategies and programs that improve student achievement. Furthermore, the positive impact of the facilities also enables teachers to promote the improvement of student achievement. As schools strive to improve student achievement, it is important to recognize the challenges of school improvement.

1.7 Overview of Study

The study will follow an article (manuscript) format that is composed of five chapters. The chapters will be divided into the following sections:

Chapter 1 introduces the study which focuses on conceptions which are represented by thoughts and attitudes of teachers of an urban school community. Through literature review information on the teachers' conceptions of how to improve student achievement, Chapter 1 presents the need for the study. Chapter 1 also provides a brief description of the 90/90/90 Model as well as connections to teacher practices as an urban school strives to improve student achievement. The first chapter also outlines research questions and hypotheses that were

developed from the literature review and methodology are described. The variables that guided this study are also defined in relation to the study.

Chapter 2 will serve as the first manuscript of the study that examines teachers' conceptions about improving student achievement. The conceptions were analyzed and common descriptive categories were developed using phenomenography. Intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions were also be highlighted.

Chapter 3 will serve as the second manuscript and develop answers to the research question that address to what extent do teacher practices reflect elements of the 90/90/90 model. A School Observation Protocol was used to determine the frequency of the teacher practices.

Chapter 4 will serve as the third manuscript and address the results of the study relating to teachers' conceptions about school improvement challenges. The conceptions were analyzed and common descriptive categories were developed using phenomenography. It also evaluated proficiency levels on the 2009 and 2010 MEAP tests for grades 3 - 8.

Chapter 5 will conclude the dissertation with a research summary, answers to research questions, and implications for urban school districts, student achievement, and policy.

1.8 Description of Terms

Success is an event that accomplishes its intended purpose. Success is the result of accomplishing an identified goal. The implementation of a plan that is composed of strategies to accomplish that goal is present. The ability to reflect on the accomplishment as a result of the plan provides a sound description. In addition, the ability to repeat the act of accomplishing the goal by using the original plan or by making necessary adjustments also provides a definition.

Urban school learning community is located in an urban area with a large population of poor and minority students and implements the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model. The characteristics are: (1) a strong focus on academic achievement; (2) clear curriculum choices; (3) frequent assessment of school progress and multiple opportunities for improvement; (4) a focus on writing in all areas; and (5) collaborative scoring on student work (Reeves, 2004)**.**

Stakeholder is the term used to describe constituents that have a shared investment in an organization. Administrators, teachers, parents and students serve as stakeholders of a school. Each individual has an investment in the educational institution and contributes to the productivity of the school (Littky, D., Diaz, N., Dolly, D., Hempel, C., Plant, C. Price, P., & Gabrielle, S., 2004).

Conceptions refer to beliefs and attitudes held by individuals based on past experiences and assumptions. These attitudes are in the subconscious, rarely discussed or questioned. Conceptions justify the rationale for individuals having multiple perceptions for a single topic or idea. The conceptions establish viewpoints and actions in a certain situation. Research shows roadblocks in organizations are the result of contrasting conceptions (Senge, 2000).

90/90/90 schools is composed of more than 90 percent of the students eligible for a free and reduced lunch; more than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities and more than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards according to independently conducted tests of academic (Reeves, 2004).

Instructional Leader is a role assumed by the principal of a school with a focus on curriculum and instruction. The role of instructional leader includes duties such as managing the curriculum, evaluating teacher instruction, monitoring lesson plans, and setting clear goals. The principal that

is a leader in curriculum and instruction ventures beyond the traditional managerial duties of the school day. The instructional leader addresses the schools' needs in response to the demands of the standards-based movement (DuFour, 2002).

School Manager historically is the role adopted by a vast number of principals that emphasize managerial duties of the school. The duties may include financial responsibilities of the school, micromanaging teaching, custodial and support staff. In addition the discipline of students and common paperwork and district responsibilities are areas of concern for the school manager. The university and district preparation programs for principals are developed on the managerial tasks that the principal will face in the school setting (Fullan, 2002).

Professional Development of Teachers refers to workshops and seminars that are designed to support teachers with a specific subject or program adopted by the school. Professional development could be developed by the district or specific school. Presenters range from consultants to members of the school community. Professional development is created to improve the teacher's ability to produce a learning experience for students that is built on success (DuFour, 2002).

Parental Involvement is defined by the involvement of parents in the school system. Parents show involvement in many ways. Attending a parent teacher conference or school assembly is among the common opportunities for a parent to be involved. Parents also volunteer hours in the school and classroom; spearhead fundraisers and activities; assist with hall and lunch duty. In addition parents display involvement by reinforcing the skills learned at school in the home (Wherry, 2009).

1.9 Chapter Summary

The urban school district's response to the progression of analyzing existing relationships between teachers' conceptions of school improvement has prompted schools to launch collaborations with teachers to improve student achievement. Thus, a need for teachers of an urban school community to examine factors that make such collaborations that improve student achievement developed. Integrative frames that account for conceptions of teachers in an urban school are the avenues to achieving success for all learners. The integrative frames for effective practice can be a bridge between the school improvement process of implementing the 90/90/90 model and the conceptions of urban school teachers.

More research is needed to explore the connection between the 90/90/90 model and how it can be integrated utilizing the collaboration of teachers' conceptions. Currently there are no studies or research done that traces the connections made by common conceptions of urban school communities as they attempt to improve student achievement. This identifies a need to pursue the idea of an urban school community developing collective conceptions of teachers. As a result, the study will focus on the school improvement process of an urban school community as they strive to improve student achievement by exploring the impact of teachers' conceptions and the implementation of the 90/90/90 model.

CHAPTER 2: MANUSCRIPT #1

A PHENOMENOGRAPY OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

2.1 Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-6 teachers' conceptions about student achievement. Twenty teachers participated in a phenomenographic individual interview study. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and organized into excerpts that represented the responses of each teacher. The data then were analyzed using phenomenography to develop common descriptive categories. The three phenomenographic descriptive categories that emerged include (1) analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions; (2) a model to decrease disruptive behavior; and (3) high expectations for all students to improve achievement. The findings of the study have resulted in several implications: (1) a practical reform model for school improvement that is anchored in a theory of curriculum can be used as a lens to view student achievement; (2) school districts that incorporate teachers' conceptions about student achievement are able to make effective curriculum-based decisions; and (3) school districts that identify the intra-and inter-variations of teacher conceptions enable schools to address challenges with a common mindset.

Keywords: teacher conceptions; phenomenography; student achievement

2.2 Background

In today's urban school districts, creating school success remains an issue in education. At this time, urban school districts need a comprehensive education plan that addresses its unique challenges. Instead, governmental agencies have imposed several new challenges to urban school districts. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) established new federal educations standards and compelled educators to meet these new requirements. In cases of urban school districts, the NCLB resulted in school closures, state takeovers and teacher termination. While programs such as NCLB were enacted, governmental agencies failed to address the myriad of risks for at-risk urban school children. Traditionally, urban school children face the following issues: (1) poverty; (2) violence: (3) underperforming schools; and (4) drug-infested neighborhoods (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

Simply put, a child's socioeconomic status severely impacts how a child sill progress in schools. Given the existence of the common deficiencies in an urban child's life, the factors have been exacerbated by rising unemployment in cities (Armstrong, 2010). More importantly, recent studies suggest that low-income students lack the basic necessities. For this very reason, low-income students are more susceptible to teen pregnancy, drug use and contact with the criminal justice system. Still, urban public school districts are required to deliver a free and equal public education. Since these limitations face a law-income student in an urban school district these limitations make it more likely that these students fail to satisfy the NCLB standards.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is a reform model designed to lead to school improvement by emphasizing the use of standardized test scores (Brown & Clift, 2010). The NCLB Act has mandated that school districts enable all students to perform in level1, above proficiency or level 2, proficiency in reading and math and to maintain the identified levels on

state standardized tests by the year 2014. Some empirical evidence, however, has suggested that the NCLB mandate has actually increased the achievement gap in urban school districts (Hall & Ryan, 2011). The achievement gap is based on the inability of minority students to perform proficiently on standardized test (Rowan & Haycock, 2010). The inadequate performances of minority students have resulted in urban schools being labeled as failing. Whether or not a school is failing is determined by the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report, which is a key component of the No Child Left Behind Act. The requirement to achieve AYP has provided a challenge for urban school districts and a need to identify solutions (Harris & Herrington, 2006) One promising model that has appeared to reduce the achievement gap is the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model (Anderson, 2007; Reeves, 2004, 2011; Schmoker, 2006). The 90/90/90 model is a reform model used to improve urban school districts. The principles behind this model have been credited with improving the academic achievement of minority students (Anderson, 2007; Reeves, 2004, 2011; Schmoker, 2006). Thus, this article, borrows the principles of the 90/90/90/ model to examine the ways in which teachers of the core subject areas (i.e., mathematics, language arts, and reading) at a K-8 urban school (pseudonym "Wayne K-8 School") participate in their school improvement plan in order to improve student achievement. Although Wayne K-8 School has not named or adopted the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model as its improvement plan, *per se,* the school nevertheless seemed to follow the principles of success found in the 90/90/90 model.

As sound as the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model might be for school success, it lacks theoretical roots in curriculum theory. The theory of curriculum that most accurately aligns with the 90/90/90 model is Ralph Tyler's (1949) framework. Thus, the discussion of the proximity between the 90/90/90 School Improvement model to the Tyler's underpinnings of curriculum is

used to frame my study on K-8 teachers' conceptions of student achievement. Establishing the fit between a school improvement model and a curriculum theory, and subsequently situating the current study within this hybrid framework provides a meaningful contribution to the foundational concepts underlying the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model.

2.3 Phenomenography

Phenomenography is a qualitative research tool developed in Sweden by Ferrence Marton in 1981, to map conceptions of individuals into an "outcome space" called "categories of description". The categories of description were based on their experiential relation to a particular phenomenon under investigation. The relations that occur between the conceptualizing individual (subject) and the conceptualized phenomenon (object) of a study are described by phenomenography (Lybeck, Marton, Stromdahl, & Tullberg, 1988). These authors emphasize Phenomenography shows a concern for both the subject (how) and the object (what) of learning (i.e., the act of conceptualizing and the meaning of the phenomenon as conceptualized). According to Marton and Booth (1997), the purpose of phenomenography is to "study how people experience a given phenomenon, not to study a given phenomenon" (p. 87, emphasis is mine). That is, a dependent relationship is established between the person and the object in question. The researcher as a phenomenographer understands the qualitative different ways people experience a phenomenon influence their conceptions (Walker 1998). Therefore, there is a contextual determination of the conceptions (Säljö, 1988). The conceptions of reality for individuals are particular-to-particular context and problems raised within that context. As a result, conceptions of reality do not reside within individuals (intellectual capacity).

Phenomenography emphasizes the description the possible variations in conceptions held by individuals for a particular phenomenon. As such, Phenomongraphy is also known as

variation theory of learning. The qualitative research tool adopts an epistemological perspective, meaning that phenomenographers understand the world is inherently multifaceted and open to variations in interpretation (Marton, 1984). The integration of the epistemological stance into phenomenography supports the belief that the world is seen through a particular 'lens' and that there is no such thing as common and unbiased reality to every human. Marton argues, "The most fundamental images of our world are always taken for granted and they are mostly not present in individual consciousness, but they are reflected in the way we organize society" (Marton, 1984, p. 45). Marton advocates that we must look beyond the individual in our search for understanding of the various ways in which people perceive a phenomenon.

The examination of individuals' conceptions reveals inter- and intra-variations. Commonalities in meanings are identified and developed into "phenomenographic categories" by the researcher (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004). The categories of description are ways of denoting the researcher's interpretations of individuals' conceptions of a particular phenomenon. Categories of description feature qualitative and quantitative aspects. The qualitative outcome is the categories of description while the quantitative result is the frequency distribution related to the categories (Renstrom, 1988).

This study provides an analysis of intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions about student achievement. The intra-variations provide an opportunity to observe the variations present within the conceptions of one teacher, and inter-variations provide an opportunity to compare multiple teachers' conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997). This intra- and inter-variation analysis is important when attempting to identify beliefs and conceptualizations teachers have within a specific school (Anderson, 2007). The analysis enables schools to become aware of common and conflicting conceptions among teachers--conceptions that may help or hinder

student achievement (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). Thus, this study suggests that intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions should be identified in order to develop shared conceptions about improving student achievement. Senge (2007) has explained that identifying and consolidating perceptions enable schools to achieve a common mindset that allows them to address the challenges that prevent student achievement. Schools that have identified common pedagogical ground are better able to overcome challenges because of the shared conceptions that lead to actions that reflect the needs and priorities of all stakeholders (Covey, 2009). According to Hoff (2007), this consensus allows the stakeholders of the school to become a team and work together to increase student achievement through a shared vision that is supported by the consolidation of conceptions (Hoff, 2007).

Phenomenography is an analytic tool that helps identify qualitatively different ways that individuals conceptualize a phenomenon. Phenomenography (Marton& Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004) provides the foundation for this study in its attempt to explore common conceptions of teachers about school improvements that lead to increased student achievement. Phenomenography emphasizes the relationship between the subject and object (Lybeck et al., 1988). For the purpose of this study, phenomenography serves as an analytic tool to help explore the variation in which teachers conceptualize the process of school improvement. This methodological approach allows the researcher to construct the various descriptive categories related to teachers' conceptions as they strive for school improvement.

Phenomenography (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004) provides the underpinning theory for the article's examination of teachers' common conceptions of school improvements for student achievement. For the purpose of this article, phenomenography will explore the variation in the ways in which teachers (subject) conceptualize "school improvement

for student achievement" (object). The various conceptions teachers relate are dependent on their own experiences with school improvement for student achievement.

2.4 Problem Statement

Various solutions have been implemented to improve student achievement, such as having an effective principal to lead a school, integrating technology in schools to engage students, and hiring highly qualified teachers to provide productive learning experiences, has been discussed by scholars and demonstrated by empirical studies (Bracey, 2008; Jorgeson Learning Center, 2010; Oliva, 2009; Randolph, 2007). Although the various solutions differ in content and procedures, they share the need for a clear purpose and objectives. Tyler (1949) has explained that selecting objectives for school curriculum reflects "educational ends, that are results to be achieved from learning" (p. 37). However, increasing academic performance requires a clear purpose and objectives. There is little research on teachers' conceptions about improving student achievement based on the behavioral objective model. According to Duffy (2009), the conceptions of teachers about school improvement depend on their past experiences. In addition, exploring the conceptions of teachers reveals objectives that they believe are necessary to improve student achievement (Covey, 2009; Hill, 2009; Kennedy, 2008). According to Tyler (1949), it is important for schools to allow teachers to make necessary decisions about the most appropriate objectives for their students. The objectives based on teachers' conceptions may align with reform models, such as the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model. The alignment provides support for various conceptions from teachers about school improvement.

Although teacher quality has been externally imposed on teachers as a key factor in achieving school improvement and ultimately student achievement, no study has yet explained what conceptions teachers have about school improvement that directly impacts student

achievement. This study explores the various conceptions of teachers on school improvement and develops into meaningful descriptive categories using phenomenography (Marton&Tsui, 2004). This first step in increasing students' academic achievement is in alignment with those who have promoted the need to identify and value teachers' diverse conceptions in order to improve student achievement (Hill, 2009). Supporters of the principles underlying the 90/90/90 improvement model understand how conceptions held by teachers are reflected in every action that is executed throughout the school year (Senge, 2000). Senge (2000) has explained that the conceptions of teachers reflect their individual experiences. Consequently, the diverse conceptions (Armstrong, 2010; Hill, 2009) teachers express directly impact the actions they take to foster school improvement. Duffy (2009) has suggested that consolidating conceptions can help achieve educational goals for urban schools in many ways. For example, she has explained that collaborative relationships can promote a shared vision for school districts by unifying teachers' diverse conceptions. The unification of conceptions can create a foundation for the teachers' actions that impact school improvement (Hill, 2009). Exploring teachers' diverse conceptions will allow teachers to implement the necessary tools to unify conceptions and improve student achievement (Covey, 2009; Johnson, 2008). This study will provide a detailed examination of the various conceptions that teachers express in order to address the need for school improvement. Thus, the research question for this study is as follows:

What are teachers' conceptions of school improvements that lead to student achievement?

2.5 Significance of the Study

Identifying, documenting, analyzing, and interpreting the common conceptions of teachers provides insights into the ways that teachers conceptualize school improvement. The results of this study may benefit not only individual schools but also entire school districts by

increasing understanding about teachers' conceptions of the ways that school improvements influence student achievement. Teachers' conceptions have the potential to illuminate critical needs in school districts that support urban school communities as these districts consider, develop, and refine their strategies for school improvement (Hatrick, 2008).

2.6 Methodology

2.6.1 Methodological Framework

Phenomenography is an analytic tool that helps identify qualitatively different ways that individuals conceptualize a phenomenon. Phenomenography (Marton& Booth, 1997; Marton&Tsui, 2004) provides the foundation for this study in its attempt to explore common conceptions of teachers about school improvements that lead to increased student achievement. Phenomenography emphasizes the relationship between the subject and object (Lybeck et al., 1988). For the purpose of this study, phenomenography serves as an analytic tool to help explore the variation in which teachers conceptualize the process of school improvement. This methodological approach allows the researcher to construct the various descriptive categories related to teachers' conceptions as they strive for school improvement.

According to Marton (1986) and Marton and Booth (1997), the purpose of phenomenography is to "study how people experience a given phenomenon, not to study a given phenomenon" (p. 87) The researcher as a phenomenographer understands that the different ways people experience a phenomenon influence their conceptions of a specific subject and that these ways vary according to individual and personal characteristics (Walker 1998). Therefore, a dependent relationship is established between the person and phenomenon under investigation (Marton & Booth, 1997).

2.6.2 Data Collection

Twenty elementary and middle-school teachers from an urban school district voluntarily participated in this interview process. The researcher of this study conducted the interviews during a period of three months (April 2011 to June 2011). The interviews were conducted with the teachers during their regular school days during their preparatory periods and at lunchtime. Two teachers were interviewed each day, allowing a one-hour interview per teacher. Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The interview followed a conversational style (Ebenezer & Frazer, 2003) that enabled the interviewer to ask follow-up questions based on the teachers' responses. In this non-threatening environment, teachers were engaged throughout the entire interview process by answering the initial and follow-up questions about their conceptions of school improvement. Furthermore, the phenomenographic interview questions were not based on the first-order perspective--for example, "What is student achievement?" The answer to this question is based on test scores and report card grades, and would not necessarily reveal whether the teacher understands the process of school improvement. Instead, the participating teachers answered questions of the second-order perspective--for example, "How do you think a school improves student achievement?" A question of this kind requires teachers to respond by sharing how they understand the school improvement process and enables the researcher to better understand conceptions of school improvement.

2.6.3 Data Analysis

The 20 transcripts of interview data were critically analyzed with the purpose of reviewing the teachers' conceptions of school improvement. To conduct the analysis, the researcher implemented several steps. First, each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently

transcribed. Second, phenomenographic categories of conceptions were developed. The developed categories were based on the excerpts from teachers' responses. Third, the developed categories were then assessed for variations in the data that represent different facets of the phenomenon. In addition, as a phenomenographer, I evaluated the identified categories multiple times for internal consistency to ensure the interview data were aligned with each category. In this study, the categories developed reflected the various experiences of teachers in relation to the phenomenon--i.e., school improvement. Finally, an outline of categories discussed in each interview was developed to keep track of trending topics. Coding, pattern development, and supporting evidence were confirmed, until the intersections of teachers' conceptions pertaining to school improvement were grounded in data. Furthermore, interpretations, gestures, and non-verbal expressions were added in support of the common categories of conceptions. From the above data analyses, three common categories of teachers' conceptions of student achievement emerged. The three categories are: 1) analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions; (2) a model to decrease disruptive behavior; and (3) parent involvement to support children's learning.

2.6.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are essential components to a research study of a qualitative nature. Consistency, dependability, and credibility are also three important criteria of a quality investigation (Lincoln &Guba, 1985). In order to address the criteria, the researcher identified a relationship between the data and developed categories based on the excerpts from the interviews. The variations of how the participants experienced the phenomenon were based on the transcriptions of the interview data. According to Dahlin (1999), three factors must be

considered to address the issue of validity in a phenomenographic study: (1) logic, (2) validity, and (3) probability.

The researcher addressed the first factor, logic of the system of categories emerging from the analysis by reexamining the identified categories multiple times to ensure the interview data were aligned with each of the various categories (Dahlin, 1999). The second factor of validity was addressed because the categories that emerged from the data were consistent with empirical studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) on school improvement. The last factor, the probability of the categories to be considered, was also addressed by examining previous empirical studies to determine the likelihood that the categories were present in the research (Dahlin, 1999). The researcher addressed the issue of reliability by having two phenomenographically trained researchers individually analyze the interview data to ensure it is consistent with the findings of the study (Marton & Booth, 1997).

2.7 Results and Discussion

Analysis of the interview data revealed the following three categories (see Table 2.0): (1) analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions; (2) an established model for decreasing disruptive behavior; and (3) parent involvement that supports children's learning. In this section, each category of description is followed by a discussion about the intra-variations that were reflected in the responses of each individual teacher. The discussion begins with the researcher's perspective regarding the categories that emerged from the phenomenographic analysis of the teachers' conceptions. Next, the researcher discusses the contextual influence of the school. Appropriately, the interpretations are then linked to relevant academic and scholarly literature. The research also presents both inter-variations (differences among the group of teachers) as well as intra-variations (differences within an individual teacher). Overall, the

discussion provides a thorough analysis of the teachers' conceptions about school improvements that lead to student achievement.

Table 2.0: Frequency of Teachers' Conceptions

Descriptive Categories	An example of teachers' experiences	Frequency of Responses (f)
Analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions.	Reviewing the data and then looking at each individual situation and talk about what strategies we can use as a collaborative team to improve the learning of a particular child.	85% (17)
A model for decreasing disruptive behavior	The principal is very heavy on PBIS behavior and rewarding positive behavior within the school.	90% (18)
High expectations for all students to improve achievement	We have high expectations for everyone and for every part of the school day.	95% (19)

2.7.1 Descriptive Category 1 – Analyzing Student Achievement Data for Developing Interventions

One of the primary purposes of every school is to improve academic achievement among all students so that they all meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). To help achieve this goal, each student is monitored throughout the school year. The formative assessment scores from multiple data sources are combined with the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) Test scores to report each student's summative score. The student data are aligned with

the core curriculum to establish a criterion for school success, a state requirement formalized by the No Child Left Behind Act.

The alignment of the core curriculum with the student assessment data reflects the first and second objectives of the 90/90/90 model: (1) focus on academic achievement; and (2) clear curriculum choices. The core curriculum is based on the subject areas of reading, language arts, and math, which are the focus of all academic achievement decisions implemented by the school. Furthermore, the adoption of the core curriculum creates clear choices that are aimed at improving student achievement. In order to improve levels of student achievement, the teachers use a variety of research-based instructional strategies that promote success. The teachers provide detailed accounts of empirically driven successful strategies that have led to the improved achievement for each student. Excerpt 1 vividly illustrates one teacher's (Ms. Butler) strategies for improving academic achievement.

2.7.1.1 Ms. Butler's Excerpt

Excerpt 1

1.1 Researcher: How do you think a school improves student achievement?

1.2 Ms. Butler: One of them is data and reviewing the assessment data, such as DIBELS scores and common assessments. This is why it is important to use individual data. Then looking at each individual situation and talk about how and what strategies we can use as a collaborative team to improve the learning of that particular child.

1.3 Researcher: You mentioned that a collaborative team works together to improve learning; how do you think this team uses achievement data to make these improvements?

1.4 Ms. Butler: To meet the needs of all students, the teachers analyze multiple assessment data, such as Dibels scores and common assessments. We talk about ways to implement more interventions to meet students' needs. Like small groups, whole groups, and working together towards the same goal. I am able to use differentiated instruction in the classroom from the individual data. Yes, we work as a collaborative team to improve the learning of the school community based on the student data.

1.5 Researcher: The teachers of your school believe in multiple assessments; how does this help the team of teachers to improve achievement?

1.6 Ms. Butler: Well, making sure they're on target for the next grade. We have our curriculum and state benchmarks that I have to follow. Those are the most important things, but anything I can find that correlates with our curriculum and also our state benchmarks. These assessments are useful to students.

The above excerpt reveals four intra-variations: (1) multiple assessments, (2) collaboration, (3) interventions, and (4) differentiated instruction.

2.7.1.2 Multiple Assessments

Ms. Butler identifies two assessment scores that she believes are important for instruction (1.2): The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Test (DIBELS), which are assessments that schools use to examine the literacy and reading levels of students throughout the school year. This assessment provides multiple and frequent feedback and enables teachers to provide early intervention based on student data (Good & Kaminski, 1996). Ms. Butler also suggests using common assessments to gather student data that inform her instruction (1.2). The

Common assessments are tools that are developed by the instructional staff of a school to provide personalized data for the school community. Common assessments are often used as a pretest and posttest measure to acquire data that is representative of a school community. The Common assessments are administered and scored by the instructional staff to make data-driven decisions for the school. The DIBELS and common assessments are two examples of evidence-based teaching that can be integrated into schools (Good & Kaminski, 1996).

2.7.1.3 Collaboration

Ms. Butler points out that "we" analyze and talk about the data (1.4). The collective analysis of data by teachers is a common practice in schools, and it allows them to identify strategies and interventions that best fit the needs of the students (Charalambos & Silver, 2008). It is important to Ms. Butler that the teachers analyze student data as a team in order to provide input on the interventions selected by the school. This collective process enables her as an individual teacher to provide interventions for the students in her classroom.

2.7.1.4 Interventions

Ms. Butler identifies three interventions that were selected by the team: (1) students working in small groups, (2) whole group instruction, and (3) students working together towards the same goal (1.4). Small group instruction is a cooperative learning intervention that categorizes students by ability, interest, or randomly (Petty, 2006). The students are supported by their groups as they complete assignments, projects, and presentations. Small group instruction increases student engagement and academic achievement among struggling students (Charalambos & Silver, 2008)**.** Whole group instruction is useful for introducing a topic and getting a general overview of the students' prior knowledge on a topic (Charalambos & Silver, 2008).

2.7.1.5 Differentiated Instruction

Ms. Butler acknowledges that the use of individual data enables teachers to differentiate instruction in the classroom (1.4). Differentiated instruction is a practice used by teachers to meet the needs of each student based on his or her unique academic ability (Kaniskan, Little, McCoach, Muller, & Reis, 2011). Lessons that integrate differentiated instruction are developed and assessed according to three academic levels: (1) high, (2) moderate, and (3) low. Student progress is monitored based on the individual data received from ability-leveled assessments, such as the MEAP and DIBELS Tests.

2.7.1.6 Ms. Hill's Excerpt

Interestingly, Ms. Hill agrees with Ms. Butler that using multiple assessments helps teachers have a better understanding about student performance. Similar to Ms. Butler, Ms. Hill also believes that interventions and accommodations must be identified based on student data from multiple assessments in order to improve the learning of individual students. Excerpt 2 explores Ms. Hill's beliefs about implementing interventions and accommodations throughout the school's program.

Excerpt 2

2.1 Researcher: What data does the staff analyze?

2.2 Ms. Hill: We look at a lot of data at this school. We look at MEAP scores, DIBELS scores, and DRA scores. We focus on what the individual students' needs are, and we make accommodations based on those needs. We look at the scores, and we narrow down, for example, the MEAP scores. We look to see where the majority of students scored poorly.

2.3 Researcher: You provided examples of three data sources; how does looking at these different types of data help improve achievement? How is this process helpful?

2.4 Ms. Hill: Because we look at why they got the responses wrong... could it be vocabulary, or is it what the teachers are teaching in the classroom?... In previous years, the staff always became knowledgeable of their [students] test scores and what areas they [teachers] wanted to work on for the next school year.

2.5 Researcher: You mentioned that the staff is knowledgeable of the students' test scores; how does this awareness help teachers to plan to develop interventions?

2.6 Ms. Hill: It allows time to implement the necessary interventions and put things in place. This strategy is productive because when they come back in September, it is introduced to everyone. The teachers then will plan together as a team what they are going to do and how they are going to do it.

2.7 Researcher: When the teachers are developing the plan to develop interventions, are there others involved in the intervention process?

2.8 Ms. Hill: My role as a teacher is to support the child within the class, also to contact the people who may be assisting in that child's learning... umm... perhaps that's contacting the RCT people, psychologist, social worker, umm... and the other resource people and talk about whether or not we need to move forward with some... umm...

deeper intervention for that particular child... umm... as well as having... umm... communication with the parents and talking about ways they can help their child be successful at home.

2.9 Researcher: In addition to including support staff, what other methods of teaching are used in your classroom to improve achievement?

2.10 Ms. Hill: I'm acting everything out; I'm making it more attractive by using everything so they can get a more grasp and understanding too--if it's by myself by acting it out, or if it's by using the Internet or computers or games, manipulatives, things like that they can actually see and feel. I just feel that when you do, they'll eventually get it.

2.11 Researcher: In addition to the teaching strategies, such as using technology, are there additional resources and programs that help struggling students improve on state standardized tests and in the classroom?

2.12 Ms. Hill: Well, they offer Title I tutoring with students that are struggling. There's a lot of programs that can help that I'll use personally and not taking over our curriculum. I use it as a supplement.

Although Ms. Hill begins her conversation about different types of tests (2.2) to obtain achievement data, similar to Ms. Butler, her focus is more on students' needs (2.2) and the types of interventions (2.6) that can be developed based on their needs. Her comment about the students' needs also refers to their performance. She supports students' performance needs by utilizing accommodations (2.2), support staff (2.8), parents (2.8), and external programs (2.12).

2.7.1.7 Multiple Assessments

The types of data that teachers use to conduct assessments include the MEAP test and the Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCE) assessment, which is a state standardized assessment that evaluates the grade level content expectations for each student (2.2). Results of the GLCE are analyzed based on four academic levels: (1) advanced, (2) proficient, (2) partially proficient, and (3) not proficient. The MEAP test is a common tool used by districts to determine whether a school is proficient based on student test scores. The proficiency levels determine whether the school has achieved AYP standards according to the No Child Left Behind Act. The DIBELS and DRA scores represent assessments that evaluate the students' reading and comprehension levels. These three instruments are used to monitor the academic achievement levels of students. Ms. Hill and her team review the areas where the majority of the students have scored in the "not proficient" category. With this information, the staff can determine why students got the wrong responses (2.8). The rationale for wrong responses may include students having a lack of vocabulary skills (2.4). Vocabulary is a key component on standardized test and serves as a barrier for students to be successful on the assessment (Hoff, 2007).

2.7.1.8 Students' Needs

Ms. Hill notes that the needs of the students are determined based on assessment data in various subject areas (2.4) and how the assessment results assist teachers in meeting their students' needs. The subject areas may vary, but the assessments must follow the core curriculum, which includes reading, language arts, and math (Michigan Department of Education, 2010). According to district expectations for instruction, teachers are required to design their assessments based on district-wide curriculum. After assessment scores become available, Ms. Hill reports that teachers then identify areas in which their students need

improvement. As a result, teachers are then able to modify and adjust curriculum in specific areas for the upcoming school year (2.10). The teachers are ready at the start of the new school year and get a "head start" on the school improvement process. Ms. Hill believes this strategy is productive and enables teachers to approach the school improvement process proactively.

2.7.1.9 Interventions

Ms. Hill points out that the team uses the assessment data as a basis for providing appropriate accommodations and meeting the needs of the students. The assessment data may lead the team to provide accommodations for a particular student by reinforcing math and reading skills (2.6). Ms. Hill suggests that schools are implementing interventions and best practices that emphasize the importance of vocabulary in reading and math to improve achievement levels on standardized tests. She also suggests that poor performance on a standardized test could also be the result of the content being taught in the classroom.

According to Ms. Hill, the identified needs of the students are used as a basis for planning the curriculum during the upcoming school year. The plan addresses the core curriculum and serves as a guide to improve student achievement. Ms. Hill comments that the plan developed by teachers for the upcoming school year allows time to implement the necessary interventions and arrange appropriate accommodations for these interventions. The new plan enables teachers to conduct assessments at the end of one school year and place students into intervention classes at the start of the next school year (2.12). The process begins when teachers revisit the plan in September and question "what" interventions they will provide and "how" they are going to implement them.

2.7.1.10 Support System

For Ms. Hill, it is important to first understand her role as a teacher, which consists of supporting children within the classroom and maintaining close contact with people who provide assistance to their learning (2.8). School psychologists (2.8) and social workers (2.8) are key figures in the lives of struggling students. In some instances, students suffer from test anxiety or may be distracted by problems at home. As a result, psychologists (2.8) and social workers provide emotional support to address these concerns, which helps students to focus on their academics. Ms. Hill explains that the discussions by support staff and teachers focus on the effectiveness of the interventions as they determine whether a need exists for more in-depth intervention for a particular child (2.8). More in-depth interventions may consist of further evaluating students to determine whether they may need additional support through the resource program (Hoff, 2007). The resource program is a component of the Special Education Department; it focuses on the core curriculum and provides one-on-one help to students. Ms. Hill also emphasizes "the need to communicate with the parents," (2.8) which are identified as a necessity for student success (Hoff, 2007). Ms. Hill believes it is important that parents discuss ways they can help their children be successful at home (2.8). In order to support students, parents should be aware of the core curriculum and expectations of the school (Wherry, 2009). The support provided at home by parents reinforces the lessons and learning strategies that are introduced to students in school in order to improve student achievement.

In order to improve student achievement, Ms. Hill explains that teachers need to use different measures to engage students, such as acting out concepts and ideas (2.10). Teachers who act out concepts and ideas and use role playing to engage students help students gain a better understanding of a topic (2.10). For example, a teacher and or students may act out a scene

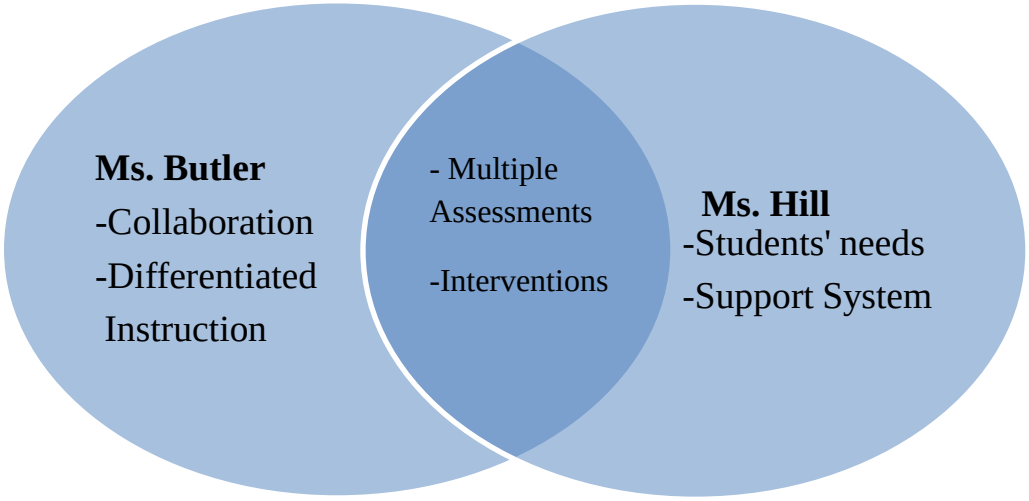
in a story to clarify the conflict within the story. When students are engaged in the lesson, students are more motivated and will perform better on assignments and tests (Hughes, 2010). Ms. Hill reports that these are the reasons she acts out concepts, uses the Internet, uses computers, and incorporates games (2.10). The students have fun and want to participate in the lesson when these tools are integrated. When manipulatives are used in math, such as counting blocks, fraction strips, or counters, students can experience a visual representation of concepts, which improves their understanding. Ms. Hill also points out the importance of integrating concrete educational tools that students can experience with their senses (2.10). When students are provided opportunities to engage in sensory learning, they are more likely to understand the subject area (Hughes, 2010). In addition to engaging students in the learning process, it is important to provide additional services and programs. The services that are provided to struggling students in Ms. Hill's school include the Title I tutoring program (2.12). This tutoring program is a school-based service that is funded through the Title I budget. The Title I budget is federally funded and is provided to schools with high poverty rates to support and promote success through resources and programs. The Title I tutoring program is coordinated and facilitated by teachers from individual schools. The goal is to improve the academic levels of struggling students. In addition to the Title I tutoring program, Ms. Hill mentions that a lot of helpful programs exist for students (2.12). She uses them personally in her classroom and makes sure that they do not replace the district's curriculum. The services are used only as a supplement to improve student achievement (2.12).

2.7.1.11 Intra- and Inter-Variations

Figure 2 represent the intra- and inter-variations between Ms. Butler and Ms. Hill. Ms. Butler emphasizes teachers working together as a team. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) have

supported the importance of teachers collaborating and examining achievement data is when they mention that the stakeholders of the school have a shared responsibility for improving student achievement. Rooney (2004) has suggested that teachers' working toward a common goal is vital for improving student achievement.

Figure 2.0: Intra - and Inter-variations of Ms. Butler and Ms. Hill



Ms. Hill's examination of student assessment data varies from Ms. Butler's conception and focuses on exploring the needs of individual students and using multiple sources of data. According to Kirst and Williams (2006), the high-performing schools consistently have used multiple sources of achievement data to drive curriculum decisions. The data were used as a basis on which to make decisions about the best teaching practices and interventions to improve levels of academic achievement (2006). By looking at the needs of individual students, teachers are able to develop interventions and develop a learning plan that is customized for each student (2.2). Boudette and Steele (2009) have stated that using multiple sources of data for individual students helps to make informed curriculum decisions to meet the needs of students. Kirst and Williams (2006) have also suggested that examining individual students' assessment data is an effective practice for improving levels of academic achievement. Analyzing multiple data

sources, according to Flowers et al. (2009), helps to develop a comprehensive profile based on the needs of each student.

2.7 Descriptive Category 2 – A Model for Decreasing Disruptive Behavior

The PBIS model is a program that has been adopted by school districts to decrease suspension rates and improve student achievement (McIntosh et al., 2009). The ultimate goal of the model is to increase student achievement by emphasizing positive behavior. Reeves (2004) have suggested that by focusing on academic achievement, teachers can emphasize and acknowledge students who are exhibiting the expectations of the school. Incorporating the PBIS model also enables teachers to focus on teaching instead of managing behavior problems with their students (Suguai, 2009). In order to make the program successful, McIntosh, et al. (2009) has stated that there is a need for the staff and students to commit to the principles of the PBIS model.

According to Suguai (2009), the positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) model is designed to be implemented during a three-year period and is grounded in differentiated instruction. The model includes a three-tier process that is comprised of early intervention measures. The three-tier process is a continuum of individualized remediation and prevention strategies for students who exhibit inappropriate behavior. The PBIS model emphasizes proactive strategies to address improper behavior in schools. The PBIS model, which was adopted by the school in the study, seems to have influenced teachers' responses.

2.7.2.1 Mr. John's Excerpt

Mr. John's perception of school success highlights the need for schools to emphasize positive behavior from students instead of the negative behavior. He explains the impact of the PBIS model on school success. This is evident in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1

1.1 Researcher: What are the components of a successful school?

1.2 Mr. John: We need a program that emphasizes positive behavior. We have the PBIS model that we follow where we show the kids positive behavior and they show it back.

1.3 Researcher: You explained how the PBIS model emphasizes positive behavior; how do you think the PBIS model keeps track of the students' behavior?

1.4 Mr. John: With PBIS, it is the number of infractions for each student. The number of infractions depends on if the student is not behaving right. The teacher keeps a log of the number of infractions. The teachers also keep a log of students that are positive and reports out to the school during class, parent-teacher conferences, and staff meetings.

1.5 Researcher: Since the school reports out about students that are positive, what positive behaviors are expected of students?

1.6 Mr. John: The behavior expectations for the school are the 3B's: Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful. The three expectations were created by the students, staff, and parents. We had a contest to come up with the expectations, and these are the three that got the most votes.

1.7 Researcher: It seems the development of the behavior expectations involves the entire school; how does improving student behavior help the school be successful?

1.8 Mr. John: To me, it bounces off. If a student is well behaved in class, I believe then their test scores should go up. When the school looks at the positive

> instead of the negative, more students are going to want to do the right thing for behavior and academics.

The above excerpt reveals four intra-variations, which are (1) tracking behavior, (2) behavior expectations, (3) out-of-school suspensions, and (4) test scores.

2.7.2.2 Tracking Behavior

Mr. John expresses the need for a positive behavior program to create a successful school (1.2). To address this need, Mr. John's school adopted the PBIS model which consists of a three-tier continuum of individualized remediation and prevention strategies for students who exhibit inappropriate behavior (1.2). The inappropriate behaviors demonstrated by students are identified as infractions, which are tracked by teachers throughout the school year (1.4). The teachers of a participating PBIS school are responsible for keeping a log of student infractions (1.4). The log of student infractions serves as data that are used to identify the prevention strategies that are needed for various demographics, such as grade, gender, or disability (McIntosh et al., 2009). Mr. John also acknowledges that the teachers keep a log of students who demonstrate positive behavior (1.4). The data-based tracking system of the PBIS model evaluates two components: (1) infractions of disruptive behavior and (2) positive behavior demonstrated by students (1.4). The purpose of the data-based tracking system is to identify student behavior, disruptive or positive, and analyze its correlation with academic achievement (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). According to McIntosh, et al.(2009), the PBIS model has contributed to the overall academic success of some schools.

2.7.2.3 Behavior Expectations

Implementing the PBIS model begins with developing behavior expectations. The expectations are composed of three self-identified components that are essential to the success of

a school. The expectations are selected by the stakeholders of the school (1.6). The collaborative approach promotes a shared-responsibility of the PBIS model and enables stakeholders to develop behavior expectations that represent their needs (Rodriguez, 2010). For example, the behavior expectations (1) Be Safe, (2) Be Responsible, and (3) Be Respectful are expectations that are important to all stakeholders (1.6). Teachers acknowledge when students exhibit the behavior expectations during various times throughout the school year. Teachers may acknowledge the positive behavior during class, parent-teacher conferences, and or staff meetings (1.4). For example, a teacher may acknowledge a student who demonstrates positive behavior by placing his or her name and picture on a classroom bulletin board.

2.7.2.4 Suspensions

According to Rodriguez (2010), acknowledging positive behavior decreases student misconduct and is vital to the success of the PBIS model. The foundation of the PBIS model consists of the behavior expectations, such as decreasing out-of-school suspensions. McIntosh (2009) has argued that schools should use the PBIS model instead of school suspensions to successfully address disruptive behavior and improve student achievement. The concern that educators have expressed about out-of-school suspension is the need for students to be in school in order to improve academic achievement. Skiba and Sprague (2008) have argued that suspending students because of multiple absences from school does not improve student academic levels. If students are suspended and absent from school, they do not receive the knowledge that is necessary to be successful.

2.7.2.5 Test Scores

Mr. John believes that the increase in positive behaviors by students will lead to improvements on test scores (1.8). McIntosh, et al. (2009) have pointed out that there is a

correlation between academic achievement and behavior that is supported by the PBIS model. Suguai (2010) has argued that when students exhibit positive behavior, they are focused on their classwork and eliminate distractions that may prevent them from being successful in school. Mr. John states that when the school emphasizes positive behavior instead of negative behavior, the number of students wanting to do the right thing increases. He also indicates that the improvements appear in both areas--i.e., behavior and academics (1.8). As a result, the increase in student positive behavior improves academic achievement and test scores (1.8).

2.7.2.6 Mr. Moore's Excerpt

Consistent with Mr. John's perspective, Mr. Moore also believes that schools must emphasize positive behavior to become successful. The focus should be on students demonstrating the positive behavior expectations that have been selected by stakeholders within the school. Mr. Moore also understands the importance of integrating the PBIS model into the school improvement plan. Excerpt 2 illustrates Mr. Moore's beliefs about the incorporation of the PBIS model:

Excerpt 2

2.1 Researcher: How does a school improve?

2.2 Mr. Moore: Well, we as a school should come together and come up with a plan. For example, we're in a PBIS school. We have a positive behavior support system set up to help out by giving out rewards for students that are doing right in the class throughout the building. They are rewarded for their achievement in those areas.

2.3 Researcher: You stated that the teachers come together; what decisions did the teachers make collectively about PBIS?

2.4 Mr. Moore: We had to buy in to the positive behavior support model. The entire school--students, teachers, and parents--chose our expectations and what incentives we were going to use for PBIS. We chose our meeting times and when we were going to acknowledge the students' good behavior; that was something collective that all of us were involved in.

2.5 Researcher: It seems that stakeholders have to dedicate a lot of time to the PBIS model. How effective is the PBIS model?

2.6 Mr. Moore: I think the PBIS procedure is going well; there are signs everywhere, and the teachers review it constantly, and the principal gives tickets. I think it's a really good model; we have to just keep working to make it better.

2.7 Researcher: In addition to signs and distribution of tickets by the principal, what other steps did the school follow to make PBIS effective?

2.8Mr. Moore: The district had training for all teachers. The school then uses the resources and strategies from the training sessions to address the problem behaviors, such as behavior plans, detention, and in-school suspension.

2.9 Researcher: You mentioned that the district provides PBIS training for all teachers; how do you think the training helps school improvement?

2.10Mr. Moore: I think that giving the teachers training helps to reduce the number of suspensions and enables teachers to focus on teaching instead of managing behavior problems.

Although Mr. Moore begins his conversation about establishing a positive behavior support system (2.2) to obtain achievement data, similar to the way Mr. John begins his

conversation, Mr. Moore's focus is more on collaboration of stakeholders (2.2) and rewards (2.2) that are used to acknowledge positive behavior demonstrated by students.

2.7.2.7 Behavior Expectations/Collaboration

Mr. Moore believes the first step toward improving student achievement is to adopt a plan that focuses on establishing behavior expectations. The behavior expectations are developed by all stakeholders in the PBIS model and illustrate a collaborative plan adopted by the school. In order to make the PBIS model a shared responsibility, there must be commitment from all stakeholders (2.4). The buy-in begins with acquiring input from all stakeholders about the expected behaviors, incentives, and acknowledgement times (2.2, 2.4). The input received from the stakeholders promotes empowerment and ownership of the model. According to a study that examined shared decision making (Hood et al., 1997), stakeholders indicated that their voice mattered and were more willing than non-stakeholders to participate in school programs and models.

Mr. Moore emphasizes the importance of the stakeholders working collectively to implement the PBIS model (2.4). Implementing the PBIS model includes duties such as (1) developing and displaying signs (2.6) flyers, (2) choose the expectations and meeting times (2.4) reviewing and modeling the expected behavior, and (3) distributing tickets (2.6) and rewards for positive behavior (2.2) . Stakeholders collectively determine the behavior expectations, incentives, and acknowledgement procedures of a PBIS school. The collaboration required among stakeholders in order to implement the PBIS model is a process that must be continuously practiced and refined in order for the model to be successful. The collaborative efforts of the staff to implement the PBIS model and emphasize positive behavior are vital to the success of the school. Stakeholders collectively determine the behavior expectations, incentives, and

acknowledgement procedures of a PBIS school. The model emphasizes and reinforces students' positive behavior throughout the school day and throughout the school year. This focus on students' positive behavior acknowledges those who are exhibiting the expectations of the school.

2.7.2.8 Rewards

Mr. Moore suggests that the PBIS model is a positive behavior support system that acknowledges students who demonstrate the expected behavior throughout the school day (2.2). He says that a component of the PBIS model is based on rewarding students who are exhibiting the desired behavior in class and throughout the building (2.2). The reward system is a school-wide practice that is shared by all stakeholders (Suguai, 2010). For example, a student demonstrating positive behavior in the lunchroom may be acknowledged by the lunch aide, or the secretary may reward a student for entering the office politely. The PBIS model focuses on decreasing disruptive behavior by recognizing and rewarding students' positive behavior (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

2.7.2.9 Training for Teachers

According to Mr. Moore, the PBIS model is perceived as being effective and requires constant practice if the components of the model are to be effective. Mr. Moore indicates that teachers have a great responsibility and that they impact the effectiveness of the model. Teachers are charged with the implementation of the PBIS model in their individual classrooms (2.8). The students receive the foundation of the model in the classroom, and expectations are reinforced on a daily basis. The teacher's ability to keep track of the students who demonstrate positive behavior is a key component of the PBIS model. According to Rodriguez (2010), schools have addressed this key component by implementing training that is ongoing throughout the three-

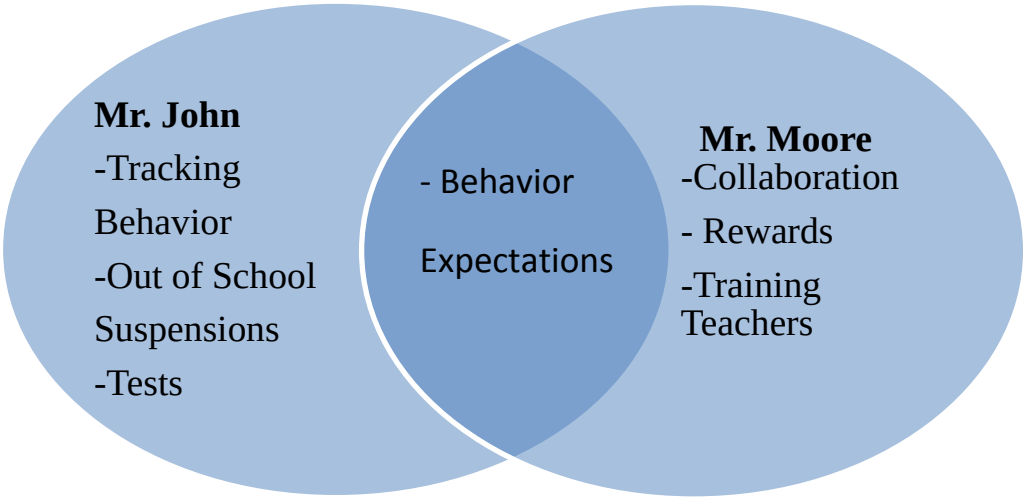
year process. The PBIS training provided by the district enables teachers to implement the model successfully (2.8). The training focuses on four components of the PBIS model: (1) acknowledgment, (2) incentives, (3) check-in mentors, and (4) parent involvement. According to Rodriquez (2010), the ongoing PBIS training helps schools to successfully address student misconduct and focus on improving student achievement. The school then uses resources and strategies from the training sessions, such as behavior plans, detention, and in-school suspensions, to address problem behaviors (2.8). As a result, a reduced number of suspensions enable teachers to focus on teaching instead of managing behavior problems (2.10). The increased amount of focus on teaching helps students to learn the curriculum (Suguai, 2010).

2.7.2.10 Intra- and Inter-Variations

Figure 2.1 represents the intra- and inter-variations between Mr. John and Mr. Moore's conceptions about the PBIS model. Mr. John points out the need to track behavior throughout the school year by teachers (1.4). Rodriguez (2010) states that the tracking of behavior enables schools to develop interventions that helps to decrease out-of-school suspensions. In addition to tracking behavior, Mr. John believes it is important to develop behavior expectations. Suguai (2010) explains that the PBIS model is based on behavior expectations, and these expectations are specifically designed to decrease out-of-school suspensions. The shared expectations and tracking behavior decrease out-of-school suspensions by rewarding students who demonstrate positive behavior. McIntosh, et al., (2009) have argued that schools should use the PBIS model instead of school suspensions as a method of successfully addressing disruptive behavior and improving student achievement. According to Suguai (2010), reducing suspensions and expulsions enables students to stay in school and participate in learning experiences that may be absent in the home setting. Mesmer & Mesmer (2008) state that the increase in the number of

students exhibiting positive behavior results in improved academic achievement. As a result, the increase in the number of students exhibiting positive behavior resulted in improved academic achievement and test scores (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008).

Figure 2.1: Intra - and Inter-variations of Mr. John and Mr. Moore



Mr. John and Mr. Moore exhibit inter-variation when they discuss the need to identify behavior expectations for students. This can be accomplished when schools develop a theme that identifies and demonstrates the behavior expected from students throughout the school year. Behavior expectations are developed by all stakeholders who participate in this development process (1.6). The collaborative approach promotes shared responsibility of the PBIS model and enables stakeholders to develop behavior expectations that represent the needs of their students, their schools, and their teachers (McIntosh et al., 2009).

Mr. Moore's perception of the PBIS model focuses on the need for the staff to work collaboratively to implement the components and objectives of the model. Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) have characterized the PBIS model as an effective tool for decreasing inappropriate behavior and increasing levels of student achievement. The implementation of the PBIS model

promotes collaboration among stakeholders and encourages them to acknowledge and reward students who are demonstrating positive behavior (2.2). The model includes shared decision making and requires buy-in from all stakeholders (2.4). Stakeholders collectively determine the behavior expectations, incentives, and acknowledgement procedures of a PBIS school (2.2, 2.4). The collaboration by stakeholders required to implement the PBIS model is a constant process that must be continuously worked on to be successful (2.6). PBIS has proved to be an effective approach that enables school stakeholders to work together to effectively implement the components of the PBIS model. For example, teachers collaborate by reviewing the behavior expectations and keeping track of students who demonstrate positive behavior (2.6, 2.8). According to McIntosh, et al. (2009), the contributions of all stakeholders are essential in fully implementing the PBIS model.

2.7.3 Descriptive Category 3: High Expectations for all Students to Improve Achievement

According to Anderson (2002), staff, students, and parents at healthy schools demonstrate behaviors described in their mission statements. According to Rooney (2010) the principal sets the tone of the school culture by creating and implementing the expectations for the school culture. Moreover, the expectations at successful schools are displayed and communicated throughout the school year. A common way the expectations were communicated at the research site, Wayne K-6 School, was by the process of modeling. According to one participant, “I model a lot like what’s expected, and it’s different for each teacher. They have their own style and do what they want to do. As I said, for myself, I just model a lot with my expectations. Wilkins and Kuperminc (2010) point out that the use of modeling for students and parents has proven to be an effective technique that promotes the expectations of the school and classroom. Mr. Bell believes

having high expectations is vital to the success of a school. Excerpt 1 provides a detailed discussion on Mr. Bells' perspective on high expectations in a school.

2.7.3.1 Mr. Bell's Excerpt

Excerpt 1

1.1 Researcher:	What are the facilities (highlights) of the school?
1.2 Mr. Bell:	I think our school has high expectations. I model a lot like what's expected to my students. It's different for each teacher. They have their own style and do what they want to do. As I said, for myself, I just model a lot with my expectations.
1.3 Researcher:	You mentioned that the expectations are modeled; what expectations do you think should be modeled?
1.4 Mr. Bell:	I think everything--the behaviors, the academics, parent involvement. Teacher performance, for example, should be represented by high expectations.
1.5 Researcher:	In addition to modeling expectations, how does a school communicate these expectations?
1.6 Mr. Bell:	The expectations for our school are developed by the staff, so we work harder to do whatever is expected because we chose the expectations.
1.7 Researcher:	You stated that the staff develops the expectations can you elaborate on the fact that the staff develops the expectations?
1.8 Mr. Bell:	Yes, the staff is broke into groups and assigned a category, such as behavior, academics, or parent involvement. The group then develops 5-7 expectations for that category. The groups bring their suggestions back to the whole staff, and the staff decides on the top expectations for each category.
1.9 Researcher:	The development process of expectations seems to be a team effort; how does this process of expectation development help improve student achievement?
1.10 Mr. Bell:	Because the expectations are communicated by all members of the school community. This allows everyone to hold each other

> accountable for the developed expectations. The process also outlines our school's road to success.

The above excerpt reveals three intra-variations: (1) modeling expectations, (2) involving staff, and (3) communicating expectations.

2.7.3.2 Modeling Expectations

Mr. Bell identifies his school as having high expectations as a strategy for improving student achievement. More specifically, Mr. Bell reports that it is important to model the expectations for students. When expectations are modeled, it is clear what the task looks and sounds like to students. Teachers strive to remove confusion about expectations by modeling them throughout the school. Although Mr. Bell understands the need to model for students, there are teachers who communicate expectations differently to students--i.e., verbally. (1.2). The expectations must be communicated and modeled for each member. In addition to communicating and modeling high expectations, developing expectations is a key element (1.6). Collaboratively developing behavior expectations makes them easier to communicate and model throughout the school year. The shared development of the high expectations enables each member to model the expectations. Mr. Bell also points out that the shared development of the high expectations enables stakeholders to hold each member accountable to model and practice the expectations. According to Mr. Bell, a common way the expectations were communicated by staff members is by using the process of modeling. The use of modeling for students and parents has proven to be an effective technique that promotes the expectations of the school and classroom (1.4). In addition to modeling, the shared development of the expectations helps to reinforce the expectations of the school.

2.7.3.3 Staff Involvement

Mr. Bell states that high expectations are consistent across all aspects of the school day, from behavior to academic performance, and extend beyond the classroom. The high expectations apply to students, teachers, parents, principals, and other stakeholders. Mr. Bell reports that it is essential that the high expectations are consistently applied to all members of the school community (1.4). Mr. Bell states that the development of the expectations is completed by all stakeholders of the school. The process is made easier because the voices of all members are heard and contribute to the development of the expectations. The collaborative development of the expectations begins with each member developing a committee that focuses on one element of the school, such as behavior, academics, or parent involvement. The committees then develop five to seven expectations for that area. The stakeholders create the expectations of the school by agreeing on the top expectations. The shared development promotes ownership and increases the likelihood that stakeholders will practice the expectations that reflect their needs and concerns (1.6). The development process that allows all stakeholders to provide input about the expectations ensures that each member's voice is represented as improvements are made in student achievement (1.8).

2.7.3.4 Communicating Expectations for all Stakeholders

According to Mr. Bell, schools with a healthy school culture have high expectations for all students. Staff members, students, teachers, and parents at schools with healthy cultures behave in ways that reflect the schools' mission statements (1.2). The staff members, students, teachers, and parents then communicate and model the developed expectations throughout the school year (1.8). Mr. Bell points out that the process of developing expectations is the "school's road to success" (1.10). He also points out that a school's expectations determine the decisions

and actions that should take place in order to become successful. As a result, the expectations of teachers, staff members, parents, and students are important in increasing student achievement. Mr. Bell points out that the expectations of a school reflect the strategies and techniques that the school has adopted to help increase achievement for all students. The achievement level of a school reflects students' abilities to excel in classwork and on standardized tests. According to Mr. Bell, the plans that stakeholders develop are essential in communicating high expectations (1.10).

2.7.3.5. Mr. Henry's Excerpt

Excerpt 2

2.1 Researcher:	What are the facilities (highlights) of the school?
2.2 Mr. Henry:	We have high expectations for everyone and for every part of the school day. The expectations must be for the principal, teachers, parents, students, and any support staff.
2.3 Researcher:	You stated that the expectations are for all staff members; how does a school communicate those expectations to all of those members?
2.4 Mr. Henry:	Our principal sets the tone for high expectations in the school. They make sure that everyone understands the expectations and practice them during the school year.
2.5 Researcher:	In addition to the principal, who else is responsible for making sure the expectations are followed in school?
2.6 Mr. Henry:	Teachers are also responsible, but not like the principal. My role as a teacher is to explain the expectations to my students and what they need to do as far as the curriculum. I am also expected to give students positive feedback and reinforcement in order to motivate them to learn a little bit more.
2.7 Researcher:	You mentioned the teacher is also responsible for setting expectations; how does a teacher set the expectations for their students?
2.8 Mr. Henry:	The expectations for academics need to start with instruction based

on where the student is academically, not necessarily where the student is based on grade placement. Teachers are expected to use test scores and other assignments to help students perform well in school.

2.9 Researcher: In addition to the expectations in school, what are the expectations for students outside of school?

2.10 Mr. Henry: I have really high expectations for my parents and my students, so I think they are expected to practice what we do in school at home. I expect homework to be done with the help of the parent and studying.

2.11 Researcher: You mentioned that the high expectations also apply to the parents; how do the expectations for students and parents help improve achievement?

2.12 Mr. Henry: I think it helps with improving my students' reading scores because they are expected to practice at home with their parent. The students are studying more and doing better on tests. The parents are also more involved, which is important to making improvements.

Although Mr. Henry begins his conversation about having high expectations (2.2), just as Mr. Bell does, Mr. Henry's comments are focused more on having high expectations for all stakeholders (2.2) and staff involvement (2.6), including teachers and the principal. Mr. Henry also believes it is important that parents (2.10) help students practice and reinforce the lessons that teachers present at school (2.10).

2.7.3.6 Expectations for all Stakeholders

Mr. Henry highlights the fact that he has high expectations for every stakeholder at his school facility. He specifically states that he has high expectations for the principal, teachers, parents, students, and support staff (2.2). He reports that when expectations are shared by every stakeholder, the chances of practicing and communicating the expectations are increased. The chances are increased because the expectations are shared by all members, which mean that all

stakeholders potentially impact the success of the school. Mr. Henry reports that the goals of the curriculum are not too advanced for the students and that these goals contribute to students' academic success. To evaluate students' academic success, Mr. Henry reports that teachers are expected to use test scores and other assignments to help students perform well in school (2.8). The tests and assignments serve as assessments about whether the expectations of the curriculum have been met at each grade level. Moreover, Mr. Henry reports that the school's expectations are displayed and communicated throughout the school year, which enables stakeholders to clearly understand the school's expectations.

2.7.3.7 Staff Involvement

Mr. Henry believes the principal is responsible for setting the tone in terms of the high expectations that the school has set. He explains that this responsibility consists of communicating and holding stakeholders accountable for practicing the high expectations of the school (2.4). Although it is common for schools to establish expectations for all stakeholders, research (Chenoweth, 2010) has demonstrated a need for administrators to lead by example and hold members of the school community accountable for the practice of expectations (2.2). According to Chenoweth (2010), administrators must adopt a key strategy: "Inspect what you expect, and expect that all students will meet or exceed standards" (p. 18). Chenoweth (2010) has explained that the process of inspecting what you expect requires administrators to evaluate frequently and promote self-monitoring to examine the stakeholders' level of commitment to the expectations of the school. According to Mr. Henry, the principal sets the tone of the school culture by creating and implementing the expectations for the school culture (2.4, 2.6). In addition to the principal, Mr. Henry believes teachers are also responsible for communicating the schools' expectations. He states that it is the teachers' role to communicate the expectations to

their students about acceptable behavior within the classroom. He also suggests that teachers are expected to give students positive feedback and reinforcement in order to motivate them to learn (2.6). When asked about how teachers establish expectations for their students, Mr. Henry says he emphasizes the students' academic abilities. Mr. Henry states that the expectations for academic excellence need to start with instruction based on the students' current academic abilities, not necessarily on the students' grade placement. Mr. Henry reports that teachers who set expectations based on students' academic abilities are then able to set realistic curriculum goals. When teachers, parents, and other stakeholders practice the school's high expectations and improve student achievement levels, this has a positive impact on the success of the school (2.12).

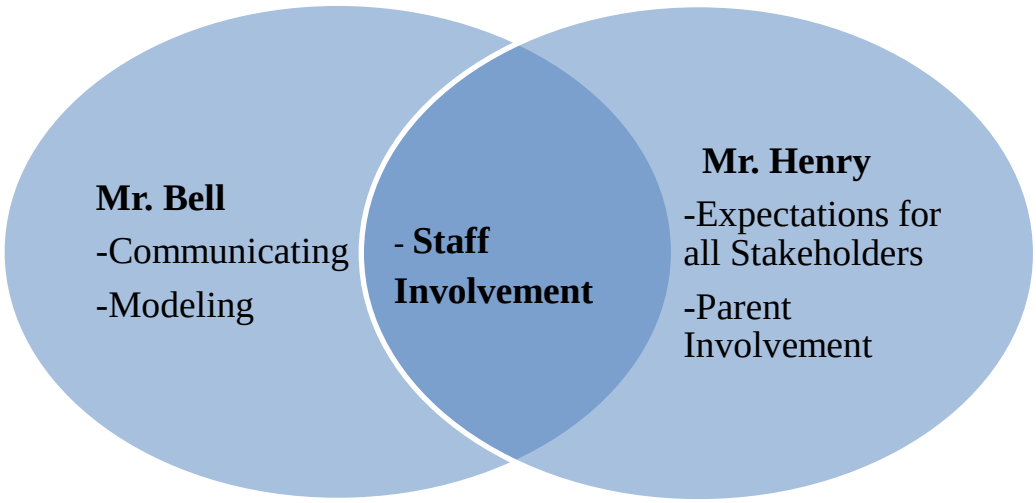
2.7.3.8 Parent Involvement

Although academic expectations for each grade level are important, Mr. Henry points out the need to have high expectations for parents. He states that having high expectations for his parents and students emphasizes the need to practice at home the lessons that are taught in school. For example, he expects homework to be completed with the help of the parent (2.10). Help from parents provides the support for the students to successful carry out the expectations of the classroom. In addition, teachers who have high expectations for parents enable students to practice their reading skills, which improve their performance in the classroom and on tests. As a result, teachers are responsible for communicating high expectations to students and parents in order to make improvements in academic achievement (2.12). The expectations are then shared with parents who are charged with supporting their child by helping with homework and fulfilling the parental needs of the school. The parental needs may be required in the home setting or at the school in the classroom to help to improve student achievement levels (2.10).

2.7.3.9 Intra- and Inter-Variations

Figure 2.2 represents the intra- and inter-variations between Mr. Bell and Mr. Henry. From the intra-variation that focuses on incorporating high expectations incorporation of high expectations to improve student achievement, Mr. Bell emphasizes communicating the expectations for all stakeholders. Schools that are successful communicate and practice achieving high expectations among all stakeholders and classrooms. As a result, stakeholders are aware of these expectations as they plan during the current year as well as the upcoming school year to make necessary school improvements. Wilkins and Kuperminc (2010) have stated that everyone needs to know the current path to success based on a school's expectations. According to these authors, expectations are based on the standards set by stakeholders that lead to improvements in student achievement.

Figure 2.2: Intra- and Inter-variations of Mr. Bell and Mr. Henry



Mr. Bell and Mr. Henry exhibit inter-variations when they discuss the need for the staff to model and be involved in monitoring the school's expectations. The staff members' involvement through involvement through modeling helps to reinforce the expectations of the school for each stakeholder. Therefore, the staff members contribute to the implementation of high expectations that lead to increased student achievement. Mr. Bell and Mr. Henry both report that when expectations are reinforced by the staff members at each school and supported by the stakeholders,

the school year is more successful. The teachers also believe that high expectations should be a part of every aspect of the school as a means of increasing student achievement.

Mr. Henry's examination of high expectations varies from Mrs. Bell's conceptions that focus on communication. Although Mr. Henry agrees with having expectations for all students, his conceptions do not focus on communicating these expectations to stakeholders. Mr. Henry believes it is essential that all stakeholders are aware of the expectations of the school in all areas: academics, school culture, parent involvement, etc. The expectations of the school provide a road map that outlines the steps to achieving success in all areas of concerns (Thompson, 1999). Anderson (2002) states that when stakeholders are aware of the expectations they are able to be an effective asset to the school community and prepare for the upcoming school year. As a result, the expectations address the needs of the stakeholders, which promote improvements in student achievement and the overall success of the school (Thompson, 1999).

2.8 Implications

2.8.1 Illumination of Educational Practice through Theory

For the purpose of this study, I used the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model to examine student achievement among minority students. This model was chosen because researchers (Anderson, 2007; Reeves, 2004, 2011; Schmoker, 2006) have claimed that the 90/90/90 model improves student achievement. Increasing student achievement is a common objective that addresses the demands of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Brown & Clift, 2010).

This study was completed based on the pragmatic value of the 90/90/90 model. However, this model has not been clearly identified with a theoretical basis. One of the goals of this study was to identify and illuminate links between the 90/90/90 model and the behavioral objectives of Ralph Tyler (1949) because of the complementary nature of both the model and curriculum theory. The results of this study suggest that a practical reform model, such as the 90/90/90 model, is a vital aspect of school improvement and that it should be anchored in a theory of curriculum so that it may be used as a lens through which to view student achievement. A key principle of Tyler's curriculum theory is "academic purpose," and Tuncel (2009) has pointed out that a school's activities should be aligned with its academic purpose. According to Schmoker (2006), a purpose-driven school will drive a plan of action to improve student achievement. When a theoretical framework supports a reform model designed to achieve school improvement, it will produce clarity and harmony between theory and practice (Flowers et al., 2009).

Although the common objective of improving student achievement has been prevalent in education, reform models have lacked a curriculum foundation. This study has provided a model that is rooted in a specific curriculum theory. According to Goodland (1995), alignment between a model for school improvement and a curriculum theory enables districts to adopt reform models that reflect the intended purpose of the models and achievement goals of the districts. Selecting a model that reflects the purpose of the school helps educators to make appropriate curriculum-based decisions that result in increasing student achievement (Johnson, 2008).

2.8.2 Teachers' Conceptions as a Basis for Improvement of Student Achievement

This study provides descriptive categories based on teachers' conceptions of student achievement. Hence, the study suggests that in order for districts to increase student achievement

in line with Duffy (2009), input from teachers must be taken into consideration before making curriculum-based decisions. The task of identifying teachers' conceptions of school improvement was accomplished in this study through a phenomenographic approach (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004). The researcher developed meaningful descriptive categories based on teachers' conceptions of student achievement. Categories were created based on participants' responses about the most important steps to take to increase student achievement. After analyzing the data, the researcher developed the following three categories based on teachers' conceptions about school improvement: (1) analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions; (2) a model to decrease disruptive behavior; and (3) high expectations for all students to improve achievement. However, the study failed to identify new teacher objectives that have not already been identified within the research literature base focusing on student achievement. The absence of fresh and innovative ideas about how to improve student achievement suggests that the conceptions of teachers reflect the practices in line with the platform that has been established by the current educational system (Adams & Seagreen, 2007). The established platform implemented by most school districts follows a top-down model that fails to incorporate the shared-decision making and collaborative efforts of teachers (Rooney, 2010).

The results of this study suggest that school districts that continue to ignore the impact of teachers' conceptions about school improvement will likely struggle to improve student achievement (Covey, 2009; Hill, 2009; Kennedy, 2008). This study clearly reveals the impact of the teachers' voice and input in the decision-making process. The teacher is responsible for creating productive learning experiences for students in ways that promote achievement (Hill, 2009). In order to effectively create these productive learning experiences, teacher input must be

considered by educational leaders (Duffy, 2009). The input from teachers reflects their conceptions about the best way to improve schools, and it provides a plan for student achievement (Anderson, 2007). Although the data from this study have been organized into meaningful descriptive categories through a phenomenographic process, the results indicate that teachers have identified elements that reflect the traditional objectives of the educational system. This finding implies that schools may benefit from providing teachers with opportunities to discuss their conceptions about school improvement. The discussions that take place may allow schools to develop curriculum plans that authentically reflect teachers' conceptions about school improvements that lead to student achievement (Kennedy, 2008).

2.8.3 Intra – and Inter-variation Analysis of Teacher Concepts

This study provides an analysis of intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions about student achievement. The intra-variations provide an opportunity to observe the variations present within the conceptions of one teacher, and inter-variations provide an opportunity to compare multiple teachers' conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997). This intra- and inter-variation analysis is important when attempting to identify beliefs and conceptualizations teachers have within a specific school (Anderson, 2007). The analysis enables schools to become aware of common and conflicting conceptions among teachers--conceptions that may help or hinder student achievement (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). Thus, this study suggests that intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions should be identified in order to develop shared conceptions about improving student achievement. Senge (2007) has explained that identifying and consolidating perceptions enable schools to achieve a common mindset that allows them to address the challenges that prevent student achievement. Schools that have identified common pedagogical ground are better able to overcome challenges because of the shared conceptions

that lead to actions that reflect the needs and priorities of all stakeholders (Covey, 2009). According to Hoff (2007), this consensus allows the stakeholders of the school to become a team and work together to increase student achievement through a shared vision that is supported by the consolidation of conceptions (Hoff, 2007).

Schools that encounter conflicting conceptions that reflect inter-variations continue to experience internal conflict as they strive to increase student achievement (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). This conflict prevents the school from addressing challenges with a unified approach. As a result, additional challenges arise based on the inter-variations of conceptions that are held based on past experiences. Allowing time to identify and respond to the intra-variations decreases the time needed to focus on the inter-variations. Duffy (2009) has argued that the use of shared conceptions better prepares schools to successfully address the common educational challenges by understanding that improving student achievement is a shared responsibility.

CHAPTER 3: MANUSCRIPT #2

TEACHER PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: THE 90/90/90 MODEL VIEW

3.1 Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher practices that reflect elements of a reform model that lead to increased student achievement in urban schools. To identify practices that reflect all five elements of this reform model (Focus on Academic Achievement, Clear Curriculum Choices, Frequent and Multiple Assessments, Focus on Writing in all Areas, Collaborative Scoring of Student Work), the researcher observed 20 teachers in their classrooms. Classroom observations were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed using a classroom observation protocol to indicate how frequently teachers implemented the five elements of the reform model. Of the five elements, the teachers in this study displayed three elements: (1) a focus on academic achievement, (2) a choice of curriculum, and (3) the frequent use of multiple assessments. This study suggests that in order for schools to improve student achievement, all five elements of the reform model should be practiced by teachers.

Keywords: teacher practices; classroom observations; student achievement

3.2 Background

Governmental reform models for school improvement have evolved to reflect the priorities of the administration of former President George Bush. Under the previous administration, school accountability among school districts was emphasized by focusing on standardized test scores. Consistent with the tenets of school accountability, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandates that school districts maintain high test scores on standardized tests. However, these requirements have created an achievement gap in urban school districts (Hall & Ryan, 2011). The student achievement data acquired through state standardized tests provided a rationale that allowed schools to receive governmental assistance or face possible consequences for poor performance on identified tests. Although districts have been faced with these standardized testing demands, schools also have been exploring a variety of data measurement methods to drive curriculum and teaching decisions (Tuncel, 2009). Adams and Seagreen (2007) have agreed that student achievement data are a key indicator of success and therefore have suggested that schools strive to identify the school processes that will help to make significant academic improvements in all school communities.

On the other hand, the current administration, led by President Barack Obama, has shifted its educational emphasis to teacher quality. The Obama Administration has implemented a program entitled “Our Future, Our Teachers” (United States Department of Education, 2010). This educational policy supports the fact that the quality and practices of teachers have more impact on school improvement than any other factors. According to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2010), effective teachers are essential to the school improvement process and necessary to “deliver an excellent education for every child” (p. 6).

Similarly, Tuncel (2009) has suggested that teacher quality and practices must be identified in order to improve student performance. For example, the Tuncel study identified from the perspective of students three teacher behaviors that most influence academic success: (1) provide help willingly, (2) listen attentively to questions posed by students, and (3) treat students equally and fairly. Tuncel concluded that the traits identified "all reflect a behavior that values the individual" (p. 18). In addition, Tuncel also has asserted that teachers must have an understanding of students' strengths and weakness. Consistent with Tuncel's findings, a study by Helterbran (2008) has outlined four aspects of teaching that are essential to increase student academic performance: 1) professional development, 2) communication, 3) personality, and 4) teacher ability or modeling. In Helterbran's study, the author articulates how teachers need opportunities for professional development that enables them to create a positive learning environment and promote school improvement. In addition to the essential components of education outlined by the authors and researchers mentioned above, DuFour, (2002), Hughes (2010), and Kennedy (2008) also have emphasized teacher quality and teacher practices as the most important element of school success.

Researchers such as Kennedy (2008) have attempted to address issues related to school improvement by rationalizing the popular interest in teacher quality and practices. Kennedy stated that there are three reasons for such an interest. The reasons are as follows: (1) evidence shows that teachers differ dramatically in their ability to raise student test scores and don't know why some teachers are better than others, so educators say the differences are due to teacher quality; (2) recent NCLB requirements focus on highly qualified teachers, so educators tend to think about teacher quality; and (3) advocates for equity often seek to ensure that schools serving lower-income students provide the same quality of teachers as those schools serving more

affluent students. Kennedy (2008), Helterbran (2008), and Tuncel (2009) have demonstrated the positive impact of effective teachers on school improvement and the qualities and practices of effective teachers. On the other hand, empirical studies have not addressed how teachers' conceptions of school improvement impact their ability to be effective in and out of the classroom. Russo (2004) has acknowledged the extensive research and empirical evidence that has resulted in improved student performance. For example, teacher practices that are advocated in the 90/90/90 model provide a clear example of school improvement in urban schools (Reeves, 2004). This study examines teacher practices that reflect elements of the 90/90/90 model. To identify teacher practices that reflect the 90/90/90 model, classroom observations were conducted. The criteria for the classroom observations were based on a Classroom Observation Protocol that was driven by the elements of the 90/90/90 model.

3.3 Hybridizing the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model and Tyler's Curriculum Theory

The ideas that led to the development of the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model for urban schools were originally conceived by Reeves (2004) at the Center for Performance Assessment after he first observed multiple schools in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, School District, an urban school district that serves students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Reeves' observational study spanned from 1995 to 1998. The focus of Reeves' study was to examine the connection between teachers' instructional practices and school improvement. Reeves discovered that the Milwaukee School district improved student achievement even though many of the students lived in high-poverty areas. Reeves identified the relationship between 90% of the students who scored proficient or above on standardized test and 90% of the students who were in low socioeconomic status and 90% of the students who received free and

reduced lunch. Thus, this school improvement model was labeled the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model.

Pate and Gibson (2005) have identified the schools and districts that have been implementing the 90/90/90 model and have improved students' scores on standardized tests, thus closing the achievement gap between poor students and their counterparts. The schools are as follows: (1) Wayne Township Metropolitan School Corporation of Indianapolis, Indiana; (2) Riverview Gardens and Hazelwood school districts of St. Louis, Missouri; and (3) Los Angeles and Orange County school districts. In addition, Anderson (2007), Reeves (2004, 2011), and Schmoker (2006) have contributed to the academic success of minority students by focusing on the five objectives of the model. They are as follows: (1) to focus on academic achievement, (2) to make clear curriculum choices, (3) to conduct frequent and multiple assessments, (4) to integrate nonfiction writing, and (5) to score assessments collaboratively. These five objectives of the 90/90/90 model can be implemented in order to replicate the success of the 90/90/90 schools, which is to improve academic performance among minority students (Anderson, 2007).

Although empirical evidence has shown that many urban school districts underperform and have been labeled as failing, schools implementing the 90/90/90 model often have exceeded the unfortunate norm that has been set in many urban districts (Anderson, 2007). Schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model have started to close the achievement gap among minority students (Freire, 2000; Jacob, 2007; Jehlen & Flannery, 2008). However, even though the 90/90/90 model has been successful on a pragmatic level, it is not clearly anchored within a curriculum framework focused on learning, and although educational research has focused on the success of the model, it has not identified a framework that guides this model.

The 90/90/90 School Improvement Model is objective-based (Reeves, 2004), but critics of the model have argued that the behavioral objective theory which Reeves was referencing to was first introduced by Ralph Tyler. The behavioral objective theory designed by Tyler (1949) has been naturally and appropriately used as a tool to assist schools in designing curriculum that leads to improved academic performance. The theory improves student performance by emphasizing the importance of identifying a clear purpose (Rooney, 2008). In order for schools to develop a clear purpose, Tyler (1949) has suggested that the following four questions must be addressed: (1) What educational purposes should the school seeks to attain? (2) How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives? (3) How can be learning experiences organized for effective instruction? (4) How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated? Tyler has pointed out that answers to these questions may improve academic performance within all schools.

Goodland (1995) has reminded educators that Tyler's (1949) four questions are essential to school improvement and consistent with the behavioral objective movement. Tyler (1949) has stated, "Many educational programs do not have clearly defined purposes" (p. 3). The implementation of behavioral objectives based on Tyler's four questions (1949) "demonstrates the kind of behavior patterns, values, ideals , habits, and experiences which will be aimed to improve the school's program" (p. 34). To select experiences that are likely to be useful in attaining the purposes is critical to the school improvement planning process, it is essential for schools to have a defined purpose and a coherent curriculum that matches the purpose; this alignment provides a clear picture of appropriate experiences that promote effective instruction for student achievement (Schmoker, 2006).

Dick and Cary (1990) have explained the importance of monitoring and evaluating the curriculum design in order to make effective educational decisions that enable schools to institute the necessary changes that lead to improved academic performance. These elements ordained by Tyler in the form of questions should be reflected in the vision and mission of the school (Schmoker, 2006). A school's vision and mission highlight the expectations and goals of the stakeholders of that school (Flowers, Wakeman, Browder, & Karvonen, 2009). In order to accomplish Tyler's purpose, clear behavioral objectives must be identified (Tuncel, 2009). The objectives may be identified by the stakeholders of a school or through an established reform model. Integrating behavioral objectives establishes a clear purpose for the school's program (Johnson, 2008; Lunenberg, 2011; Sanders, 2010). Establishing clear objectives (Reeves, 2004) conceptually aligns with Tyler's four questions for school improvement. The five objectives (Reeves, 2004) can be implemented to fulfill the purpose of the 90/90/90 model, which is to improve academic performance among minority students (Anderson, 2007).

The objectives of the 90/90/90 model focus on academic achievement and clear curriculum choices may be conceptually linked with Tyler's question, What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? These two objectives, a focus on academic achievement and clear curriculum choices are examples of clear educational purposes established by Reeves (2004) are examples of clear educational purposes. The 90/90/90 model uses these two objectives as indicators of its purpose. The third objective of the model, integration of nonfiction writing, is a clear example of Tyler's second question: How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining educational purposes? At least one empirical study has revealed that the writing portion of standardized assessments is based primarily on nonfiction writing (Moss & Newton, 2002). As a result, schools implementing the 90/90/90

model develop learning experiences that reinforce nonfiction writing (Anderson, 2007). The last two objectives of the 90/90/90 model include (1) conducting frequent and multiple assessments and (2) scoring assessments collaboratively. These two principles are aligned with Tyler's last question: How can the effectiveness of learning experiences been evaluated? Schools implementing the 90/90/90 model use multiple assessments instead of a single data source. In addition, multiple teachers evaluate the assessments, which is the opposite of the traditional practice of individual teachers scoring their own students' work. The alignment of Reeves' 90/90/90 School Improvement Model with Tyler's four questions for school improvement demonstrates that the 90/90/90 model is based on a clear purpose.

Various solutions have been implemented to improve student achievement, Various solutions to this ongoing challenge, such as having an effective principal to lead a school, integrating technology in schools to engage students, and hiring highly qualified teachers to provide productive learning experiences, has been discussed by scholars and demonstrated by empirical studies (Bracey, 2008; Jorgeson Learning Center, 2010; Oliva, 2009; Randolph, 2007). Although the various solutions differ in content and procedures, they share the need for a clear purpose and objectives. Tyler (1949) has explained that selecting objectives for school curriculum reflects "educational ends, that are results to be achieved from learning" (p. 37). However, increasing academic performance requires a clear purpose and objectives. There is little research on teachers' conceptions about improving student achievement based on the behavioral objective model. According to Duffy (2009), the conceptions of teachers about school improvement depend on their past experiences. In addition, exploring the conceptions of teachers reveals objectives that they believe are necessary to improve student achievement (Covey, 2009; Hill, 2009; Kennedy, 2008). According to Tyler (1949), it is important for schools to allow

teachers to make necessary decisions about the most appropriate objectives for their students. The objectives based on teachers' conceptions may align with reform models, such as the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model. The alignment provides support for various conceptions from teachers about school improvement.

3.4 Problem Statement

The 90/90/90 School Improvement Model is a well-respected model that has been designed to produce successful urban schools by addressing the needs of their individual student bodies, teaching staff, and school communities (Anderson, 2007; Reeves, 2004, 2011; Schmoker, 2007). In addition, implementing the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model has shown to be an effective method of overcoming common barriers faced by poverty-stricken urban school communities. The model includes the following five components: (1) a strong focus on academic achievement, (2) clear curriculum choices, (3) frequent assessment of school progress and multiple opportunities for improvement, (4) a focus on writing in all areas, and (5) collaborative scoring on student work (Johnson, 2008).

Historically, school districts have adopted many programs that were labeled innovative methods of eliminating the achievement gap between urban school and suburban school districts (Bracey, 2008; Jorgeson Learning Center, 2010; Oliva, 2009; Randolph, 2007). Although identifying a program that meets the needs of a particular school district is a key first step, the ongoing maintenance after the implementation of the program is vital to its effectiveness. Establishing criteria that clearly outline success goals can eliminate the haphazard selection of new "bandwagon" programs and prevent changes in reform initiatives that lack the evidence of success (Elmore, 2000; Jacob, 2007). In short, effective reform models and teacher practices should be implemented if schools are going to improve academic performance. Thus, the

research question for this study is as follows: To what extent do teacher practices in an urban school reflect elements of the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model?

3.5 Significance of Study

Documenting, analyzing, and interpreting the extent to which the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model is replicated in one urban school may illuminate ways that schools nationwide can effectively implement teacher practices that reflect elements of the 90/90/90 model (Rowan, Hall & Haycock, 2010). This study is of particular significance to urban schools that are striving to improve academic performance among minority students. This study will also illuminate how urban schools that are faced with numerous challenges can improve student achievement by implementing elements of the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model.

3.6 Methodology

3.6.1 Methodological Framework

The 90/90/90 Classroom Observation Protocol was developed and validated based on the 90/90/90 School Improvement Model success characteristics proposed by Reeves (2000). The 90/90/90 Classroom Observation Protocol was used in conjunction with 2009-2010 Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores to provide a valid analysis of student achievement. MEAP scores are widely recognized, and have been widely studied, as a predictor of students' academic achievement. The MEAP organization continually scrutinizes its instruments to ensure validity. The researcher obtained written permission from the principal at one urban school that allowed the researcher to have access to the test scores and use the data for the purposes of this study. In addition, the consent form developed for the school principal states that the 2009-2010 MEAP data will be used in this study.

To provide further confidentiality, the names of students and teachers associated with the test scores were identified in the research records by a code name or number. Data was collected via audio recordings, field notes, and a classroom observation protocol. The Classroom Observation Protocol, COP (see Appendix A) was developed for the purpose of this study and validated based on the 90/90/90 model characteristics proposed by Reeves (2000). During the observations of the participants, the observer wrote field notes in the form of a narrative based on school observation notes. Then the observer completed the COP to assess the ability of the urban school teacher to incorporate the elements of the 90/90/90 model. The scale of the COP is composed of the following identifiers: 1- Unable; 2- Moderately Able; 3- N/A; 4-Able; and 5- Very Able.

The protocol was used only as a guide to focus the school observations based on elements of the 90/90/90 model. The researcher observed 20 classrooms. The researcher ensured that the urban school was able to implement the following elements of the 90/90/90 model: (1) focus on academic achievement, (2) clear curriculum choices (3) focus on nonfiction writing, (4) multiple and frequent assessment, and (5) collaborative scoring of assessments.

3.6.2 Data Collection

To implement the classroom observation protocol, the researcher conducted 20 school observations, each of which lasted between one hour and two hours. These observations involved 20 school sessions that were audio-recorded and focused on the components of the COP (see Appendix A). In addition, the researcher made field notes during the observations. The researcher transcribed the audio-tape recordings in the form excerpts. The researcher then categorized the transcriptions into excerpts based on the themes that emerged from the data. The

researcher also wrote reflective narratives based on the classroom observations via audio-tape recordings and field notes.

3.6.3 Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed each audio-tape recording verbatim and critically analyzed them. The data transcripts were corroborated with the field notes, nonverbal cues were highlighted. In addition, narratives based on the school observations were analyzed by the researcher using the five-point scale of the COP. narratives based on school observations were converted into numerical scores. In addition, transcripts of the audio-tape recordings of the school sessions and the field notes recorded during every session were read and color-coded by researcher based on teacher practices that reflected the implementation of the 90/90/90 model. The researcher color-coded transcripts and field notes after the transcripts were read repeatedly and themes of the teacher practices that reflected the implementation of the 90/90/90 model based on COP were identified. Excerpts from teacher practices that demonstrated the elements of the 90/90/90 model were provided as evidence. Evidence from the school data was supported by evidence from the school data.

Coding, pattern development, and supporting evidence were corroborated until the researcher determined the extent to which teacher practices reflecting the 9090/90 model were implemented in the classroom until teacher practices that reflected the implementation of the 90/90/90 model were identified and developed from the data. Based on audio-tape recordings and field notes, a narrative was written following each observation. The narratives of each observation were analyzed using the five - point scale of the COP. The narrative was translated into quantitative measures using the 90/90/90 Classroom Observation Protocol (see Appendix A), which was specifically designed for this purpose. The conversion of qualitative data to

quantitative data will demonstrate teacher practices that reflected the implementation of the 90/90/90 model.

3.6.4 Reliability and Validity

The 90/90/90 Classroom Observation Protocol was developed and validated based on the 90/90/90 model success characteristics proposed by Reeves (2000).While there are many aspects of the 90/90/90 model, the five characteristics described in this study are factors that all schools implementing the 90/90/90 model are expected to incorporate. The results of this study may be of interest to schools using, or considering using, the 90/90/90 model. These results would also be of particular interest to schools whose demographics are similar to those of the participating school in this research study.

3.7 Results and Discussion

The observation data Analysis of the observation data was examined through the lens of the 90/90/90 model. Although the participating school has not claimed to adopt the elements of the 90/90/90 model, the researcher observed characteristics of the model that were evident in teacher practices during the classroom observations. The results of the COP based on a rating of a 4 (Able) or 5 (Very Able), revealed that the teachers consistently practiced three of the five elements: (1) focus on academic achievement, (2) clear curriculum choices, and (3) multiple and frequent assessments. These three elements were identified based on the COP Classroom Observation Protocol (COP), which was used to evaluate the transcripts and field notes taken during the classroom observations. Furthermore, the COP included five components that supported each of the elements (see tables 1-3). The outline of the results begins with a summary of each element, followed by the results of the COP table. The COP table is then supported with excerpts from teachers and demonstrates evidence from the classroom observations. The excerpts

are accompanied by interpretations that are supported by the literature. The excerpts are followed by an interpretation that is aligned with the literature that provides an analysis of the classroom observations.

3.7.1 Element # 1 –The Focus on Academic Achievement

The 90/90/90 model begins with the first objective, a focus on academic achievement. According to Reeves (2004), founder of the 90/90/90 model, a vital component of a focus on academic achievement is that an emphasis must be placed on what he refers to as "small wins" in order to successfully obtain the ultimate goal of school success for all students. To promote small wins, schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model recognize and display students' achievements throughout the classroom and school to improve academic performance (Wang & Holcombe, 2011). Additionally, school communities that have implemented the 90/90/90 model should be aware of the schools' goals and define academic progress as a series of incremental achievements towards desirable outcomes (Kahne, 1996). Schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model display their success in order to highlight the significant improvements demonstrated by their student body. The participating schools use multiple sources such as graphs, tables, banners and trophy cases to showcase their success throughout the school. A focus on improving academic performance is a top priority for schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model. Although student achievement serves as a key component of schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model, the focus of the model is also placed on how students demonstrate improvement during the course of the school year (Schmoker, 2004).

Table 3.0: 90/90/90 Objective #1: Focus on Academic Achievement

Frequency (f)	Classroom Observation Protocol (COP) (5 Components)
95% (19)	Developing student understanding
95% (19)	Promoting ongoing collaboration
80% (16)	Modeling academic expectations
90 % (18)	Providing a supportive learning environment
90% (18)	Recognition for high academic performance

3.7.1.1 Developing student understanding

Schools that focus on improved achievement emphasizes that success is a progression that take places over a period of time (Anderson, 2007). The incremental success can be illustrated in various forms, such as (1) summaries, (2) question-and-answer problems, (3) verbal responses, (4) technology-based activities, (5) projects, and (6) homework assignments. The purpose of the tools and programs is to evaluate the students' current knowledge base before progressing to the next level or concept (Johnson, 2008). The data gained from the results informs teachers of the students' performance level and helps them plan upcoming lessons. The results also help educators to decide which interventions are necessary to help students determine appropriate performance levels based on the expectations for each grade and curriculum. The opportunities that are provided for students to master the content for core subject areas lead to improved academic achievement.

3.7.1.1 Developing student understanding

Schools that focus on improved achievement emphasizes that success is a progression

that take places over a period of time (Anderson, 2007). The incremental success can be illustrated in various forms, such as (1) summaries, (2) question-and-answer problems, (3) verbal responses, (4) technology-based activities, (5) projects, and (6) homework assignments. The purpose of the tools and programs is to evaluate the students' current knowledge base before progressing to the next level or concept (Johnson, 2008). The data gained from the results informs teachers of the students' performance level and helps them plan upcoming lessons. The results also help educators to decide which interventions are necessary to help students determine appropriate performance levels based on the expectations for each grade and curriculum. The opportunities that are provided for students to master the content for core subject areas lead to improved academic achievement.

The proficiency acquired is based on students' level of mastery and performance ability (Anderson, 2007). Furthermore, the improved achievement is based on multiple results from various tools that determine the definition of success for each student. The progressive success that students experience when their work impacts their academic performance provides a log of academic achievement. The students are able to view their academic ability, which impacts their future performances, which have been built on their previous assignments, tests, and projects. The improved academic performance also serves as an informative tool that parents can use to track and understand students' progress. Overall, the fact that student effort leads to improved academic performance is a data-based concept that is practiced and evaluated in schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model.

3.7.1.2 Mr. Franklin's Excerpt

Excerpt 1

Mr. Franklin: The teacher emphasizes that a student working on a math problem show his work. The teacher tells another student that his is so close and should look at the remainder again and asks what's 30 – 21. (The student starts to find the remainder.) The teacher says that everything else is right except the remainder. The student returns with the wrong remainder. The teacher asks what 0 –1 is and tells the student to go back and solve that part first. (The student says he needs help subtracting 30 – 21). The teacher says to start with 21 and count up to 30 on your fingers. The student gets 9. The teacher says that's it--well done. The student works with another student to solve a division problem by reviewing. She says that 21 times 2 is 42. If you add 3 more to that you'll get the divisor. (The student goes through each step and solves the problem.) The teacher reminds the student to show his work.

The teacher's actions demonstrate strategies to develop the student's understanding during a math assignment. When the teacher emphasizes the need for the student to show his work while solving the problem, she demonstrates a strategy that helps focus on how the problem was solved. This strategy enables students to review their steps to make sure the appropriate decisions were made to solve the problem. Asking students to show their work requires them to pay attention to the each detail of the problem and provides evidence of students' thought processes. In this way, students are able to monitor their level of understanding as the teacher provides input. This excerpt reveals a level of academic growth and understanding for students as they move from struggling with the problem on their own to successfully working with other students to solve similar problems.

3.7.1.3 Promoting ongoing collaboration

The second element of the 90/90/90 model the researcher observed is composed of ongoing collaboration. Ongoing collaboration is multifaceted and can be demonstrated in various forms. For example, a classroom can demonstrate ongoing collaboration when the teacher and students work together to solve a problem or master a specific concept (Jacob, 2007). The

teacher can ask students to read a story and share summaries of what they read to introduce the literature to the class. The teacher's role is to ask questions as the students read to check for understanding and comprehension. The teacher can also collaborate with students by asking them to focus and reflect on individual meanings of an identified concept. For example, the concept of division can be interpreted and executed in different ways, and students can demonstrate the concept to the class. Typically, teachers provide students with a division problem, and the students decide which strategy will be used to solve the problem. Teachers reveal their strategy only after all of the students' strategies have been shared, and students are then able to use the technique with which they feel the most comfortable to solve the division problem. The collaboration between teachers and students builds students' academic ability by enabling students to take an active role in the learning process (Kagan & Kagan 2004).

The learning process is also enhanced by the collaborative practices students demonstrate when they work with other students. The term "cooperative learning" has been used to describe students when they work collaboratively or in a group setting (Kagan & Kagan, 2004). Collaborative practices promote shared academic performances on assignments and projects by a group of students. Collaborative practices also integrate a level of accountability among students in the group that encourages them to perform their assigned responsibilities (Johnson, 2008). For example, a group of students can be given a reading assignment that requires them to share the reading and discuss the story; then they conclude by answering questions as a team. Collaborative efforts enable the group to share ideas and responses that represent their achievement levels in the subject area. Group members also offer support to struggling students and encourage them to reread or retry assigned problems (Kagan & Kagan, 2004). This communal effort increases the chances that students will be successful on

assignments and tests with and without the assistance of their group members. This advantage is possible because of the knowledge gained and reinforced in a group setting (Reeves, 2004). The collaboration of students as they strive to improve their academic performance represents a shared effort that takes place in the classroom throughout the school year.

3.7.1.4 Ms. Taylor's Excerpt

Excerpt 2

Ms. Taylor: The teacher pulls students that need additional help with their problems into a small group. The teacher tells the group to look at the previous problem and see what they had at first. (The students reply "yes.") The teacher states that using that problem will help them solve the problem a little easier. (The students begin to solve the problems in small groups; the students are talking through the problems together to solve them.) The teacher gives feedback to students as they finish the problem. The teacher explains the answer to one student who doesn't see how they got their answer. (The student begins to erase his answer.) The teacher tells the student that it doesn't mean you have to erase the whole thing. I just need you to show me how you got your answer. (A small group of students are working on the computer because they are finished with their work.) The teacher asks the group what they are working on. (The student replies that he is playing a spelling game). The teacher replies that this is math class and that the student needs to go to a math program. (The student says "alright" and changes the website to a math program.). The teacher talks to another group and reviews how to multiply 45 times two. You can add 45 two times. The teacher then reminds the group to line up the problem. The teacher tells the group to remember to line up the decimals and that other than that, it looks good.

In this excerpt, students work collaboratively in small groups throughout the observations during reading and math time. The groups were organized based on students' performance levels as discussed in the excerpt. The first small group organized by the teacher includes students who needed additional help solving their math problems. As students worked in small groups, they were able to talk with each other and work together to solve the problems. These collaborative groups enabled the students to provide support for each other as they completed their assignments. In addition to groups that needed assistance, the teacher also organized groups of students who had completed the assignments. These groups of students were allowed to work on computers and solve similar problems that reinforced the skills taught during class. To provide

support for the academic progress of the groups, the teacher provided feedback to the groups. For example, the teacher reminded the group members to line up their problems as they solved their math problems.

3.7.1.5 Modeling Academic Expectations

In order to promote collaborative practices in the classroom, expected behaviors and norms should be modeled for students. The modeled behaviors provide a visual demonstration of appropriate behavior for not only cooperative groups but all areas of school (Senge, 2007). The responsibility to model the expectations of the classroom and school can be demonstrated by the teacher, students, administrators, parents, and other members of the school community (Pate & Gibson, 2005). For example, teachers can model to students effective test-testing skills and study skills.

Furthermore, students can model to other students how to behave in the hallway or lunchroom. The process of modeling takes place throughout the school day. Reeves (2004) have stated that modeling is an effective strategy to communicate the expectations, vision, and mission of the school. The classroom is a key place where behaviors and actions are modeled for students by the teacher, parent volunteers, and other students. For example, a parent volunteer can model how to solve math problems or write a letter. The opportunities for the school community to model appropriate behaviors in order to improve students' academic performance are endless.

3.7.1.6 Ms. Powell's Excerpt

Excerpt 3

Ms. Powell: Okay, let's move on, housekeeping. Today, as you can see on the schedule, we have a vocabulary test first thing, then art. And when we come back from art, we're going to have another solid testing hour. Now the problem now is that we only have some of the students that

are still doing DRA testing and the rest are done, and I'm worried about the kids that are done--can they sit and read for a straight hour because I will be doing the DIBELS reading test in which I can't be interrupted, alright. So you can do a combination or reading; don't do any writing because I've got time built in for that. You can do reading, you can do study time, you can do extra credit, but you can't talk, and you can't get up. That's why we're doing a bathroom break right before. Nobody will be out of their seats from 10:10 to 11:10.

The teacher demonstrates the use of multiple models of teaching by informing the students of their academic schedule, which included multiple subject areas, such as reading and writing. The time dedicated to reading was expected to take place when students completed their DRA testing. There were multiple lessons that were available to students as they completed their test. The multiple models also included opportunities to have study time and earn extra credit. The integration of tests, such as a vocabulary test and DIBELS reading test, was used to evaluate the multiple models of teaching.

3.7.1.7 Providing a Supportive Learning Environment

It is important for teachers to provide a supportive learning environment in order to focus their time and energy on teaching lessons to students (Jacob, 2007). As a result, schools have been charged with implementing strategies that are effective and that address any behavioral issues that may arise in the classroom. The strategies used to provide a supportive learning environment can consist of school-wide behavior expectations that are practiced, modeled, and reinforced throughout the entire school.

The advantage of having school-wide strategies to provide a supportive learning environment is that teachers, parents, administrators, students, and other school community members know exactly which behaviors are appropriate based on the shared-rules and expectations (Bainbridge & Laisley, 2004). For example, a student walking down the hall or having lunch can be reminded about the rules from any member of the school community. The shared strategies to provide a supportive learning environment provide consistency throughout

the school year and reinforce exactly which behaviors are appropriate on school grounds (Schmoker, 2007).

On the other hand, it is common for teachers to have their own rules for the classroom, which can be based on their experience, training, research, or developed by their students (Reeves, 2004). Teachers who use their experience to develop the rules often have tried multiple strategies during their tenure as educators and have learned which rules are effective and which rules are ineffective. As a result, they commonly implement a set of rules that fits the tone for their classroom. Teachers also use different rules and strategies that have proven to be effective based on workshops and training sessions. The adopted strategies to provide a supportive learning environment are usually demonstrated at the training sessions (Haycock, 2005). Furthermore, many research-based classroom management strategies are shared at these training sessions or in college courses to help teachers provide supportive learning environments in the classroom.

A supportive learning environment can be based on rules developed by the students in the classroom. Randolph (2007) has shown that rules that are developed by the students are more powerful because they focus on students' perceptions of order and empower students to establish behavioral norms for the classroom. Although there are various ways to provide a supportive learning environment, effective schools and classrooms utilize multiple strategies. Providing supportive learning environments enables teachers to implement strategies that work best for each student (Jacob, 2007). Moreover, teachers can find that one strategy is effective for one group of students while another strategy is effective for another group. As a result, teachers can implement multiple strategies to provide a supportive learning environment.

3.7.1.8 Mr. Kane's Excerpt

Excerpt 4

Mr. Kane: (A student asked the teacher if he had heard about the pictures of Bin Laden not being released. Yeah, and I think that was a very tough decision for the president, whether or not to release them. A lot of people want to see the pictures so they can... like... but at the same, time if you show the pictures... see, do you remember when you were a little, little kid and your mom would tell you about your little sister or little brother hit you, and you want to hit them back, but yourmomwillsaysomethinglike,'Don'tsinkdowntotheirlevel.' You know, that's what this is about; what we have is when a lot of the terrorists overseas will capture or kill a soldier, they take videos and do all kinds of horrible things, and it would be all over the T.V., and it's like them showing, 'Hey, look at this bad thing we did to you.' They're showing the pictures of whatever bad things the terrorists would do were part of the fun for them. So part of the thinking isifweshowthepicturesofBinLaden,it'sussinkingdowntothatlevel,andbynotshowing thepictures, it'sthepresident'swayofsaying,'Look,we'rebetterthanthat.' Yes ,we did this; he was our enemy, and now he's gone; now we got him, but we're not going to sink to his level and show pictures to show off.

A supportive learning environment allows students to feel comfortable in generating ideas, asking questions, and initiating topics for discussion. This excerpt provides an example of a student who initiated topics for discussion when the teacher was asked about the decision of the president not to release the photos of Bin Laden. The teacher answered the question and engaged the class in a discussion about the topic that had been initiated by their classmate. The teacher shared an analogy to support the discussion that compared the students not sinking down to the level of a sibling who hit them to the president not sinking down to the level of terrorists. Although the discussion initiated by the student was not a part of the lesson plan, the teacher allowed the class to have a discussion, which provided a supportive learning environment.

3.7.1.9 Recognizing Academic Performance

The emphasis on student achievement in schools is a key issue that is addressed using multiple measures to evaluate and analyze the performance levels of students (Sanders, 2010). Evaluation tools such as the MEAP test are used to determine if students have performed proficiently in core subject areas and therefore will dictate if that school has met adequate yearly

progress (AYP). Although the common practices focus on the groups of students that are not performing proficiently on standardized tests or making adequate progress when report cards are calculated, schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model acknowledge students who have high academic performances (Roscorla, 2010). The shift in focus from other ancillary issues to academic performance and growth represents an effort to influence students by recognizing the groups of students that are working at or beyond grade level. As a result, recognizing academic performance helps to improve student achievement (Anderson, 2007).

3.7.10 Mr. Harvey's Excerpt

Excerpt 5

Teacher 5: (Students are working on math problems. The students are working on division and multiplication problems independently). The teacher asks a student what he got for one of the answers and says, 'This is what I got.' The answers matched, so the student got the right answer. The teacher said 'good job' to the student. The teacher walks around while the students are working on the problem. The teacher is giving feedback, saying 'that's right, good job; now, let's go on to the next problem.' The teacher says the next one is going to be a little harder. The students write down the problem and begin to solve it (A student says he is done, and the teacher checks it [the answer] and says, 'Well done, and now go on to the next problem'). The teacher tells the class when they get the next problem correct that they may begin their homework, which is similar to the problems in class. The teacher continues to check students' work and says, 'Well done' to students when they get the problem correct.

The teacher recognized academic performance on many occasions during the class session throughout the school day. The teacher used words of praise such as "good job," "that's right," and "well done" to communicate that the students have demonstrated success on a given assignment or task. The academic success of students is acknowledged by the teacher and leads to continuous learning as skills are mastered. For example, after the student successfully answered the assigned problems, the teacher states that the next problem is going to be a little harder. The consistent recognition of academic performance by students is a strategy that promotes ongoing success throughout the school year.

3.8 Element # 2: Clear Curriculum Choices

Identifying key subject areas represents the second objective of the 90/90/90 model: clear curriculum choices. Marzano (2002) has stated that it is essential that schools are clear about what subject areas should be the focus for student learning. A clear curriculum enables schools to have a common and consistent vision for educational experiences for each classroom as well as the school as a whole (Adler, 2007; Stein & Kaufman, 2010). In addition, schools that make clear curriculum choices set the tone of consistency for the entire school community, which informs students and parents of the learning expectations. This clarity enables students and parents to support the school's curriculum plans through supportive practices, such as homework, library time, and tutoring.

A clear curriculum also empowers teachers to plan and instruct their students based on a criterion that is understood at the beginning of the school year and revisited on a daily basis (Conklin, 2009). Administrators can become more knowledgeable about the content that should be taught in each classroom, which is consistent with Marzano (2002), who supports the idea of a coherent curriculum that guides teaching and evaluating student achievement. Identifying a coherent curriculum provides clear expectations and a focus for student learning (Reeves, 2004; Schmoker, 2006).

Table 3.1: 90/90/90 Objective #2: Clear Curriculum Choices

Frequency (f)	Classroom Observation Protocol (COP - 5 Components)
95% (19)	Emphasizing the core curriculum
95% (19)	Integrating reading across all content areas
95% (19)	Using multiple models of teaching
85% (17)	Providing clear content expectations
90% (18)	Relating curriculum to real-world experiences

3.8.1 Emphasizing the Core Curriculum

The core curriculum of school districts has emphasized two subject areas: reading and math. Although additional subjects, such as science and social studies, are still taught in schools, schools are required to focus their time and expertise on core subject areas (Schmoker, 2007). The second component states that schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model ensure that students are receiving strong instruction in one subject area. The expectations are aligned with the development of the core curriculum by the state, which reduces the number of subject areas in order to provide schools with the opportunity to prepare students for college and the academic demands of standardized and school-based assessments (Randolph, 2007).

Implementing strong instruction in one subject area directs schools to have students attend a class that emphasizes reading and one for math (Reeves, 2004). The changes impact the traditional self-contained classes that required teachers to teach all subjects, including science and social studies. As a result, schools are able to focus their attention and resources on the two core subject areas by identifying teachers who are specifically qualified to teach the reading and math classes. According to Randolph (2007), adopting strong instruction in one subject area helps to focus students and emphasize the need for schools to have a plan to improve student achievement.

3.8.1.1 Mr. Franklin's Excerpt

Excerpt 1

Mr. Franklin: The teacher shares that while checking the reading quiz she noticed a lot of students got one problem wrong. She also shares that they were very close to the right answer. When I was checking your reading quiz because it got missed by a lot of students missed one of the problems. The teacher states that some of the answers were close but technically they weren't correct. A lot of students put fiction as the genre for number 2, which was incorrect, and it should have really been realistic nonfiction (students respond by saying "oh" and sighing). The teacher rereads the question and points out the difference between fiction and realistic nonfiction based on a student's example. She then goes to the next question, and students answer as a class with the right answer. The teacher asks students to provide an example of the topic from their notes. A student provides an example of a short story. The teacher and students continue to

review the responses to the quiz. Students point out that she highlighted the answers to questions 9 and 10 during a previous reading presentation and that she made sure to have students write the answers down. The teacher tells students to look for hints. The class answers the extra-credit problems together.

The core curriculum is required by all teachers in order to meet the state's standards and expectations of the district. In order to complete this task, teachers focus on the subject areas of reading and math. This excerpt describes the teacher reviewing a reading quiz that focuses on the genres of a story. By focusing on reading, the teacher reinforces the academic demands of the core curriculum. As the teacher reviews the quiz with the students, they are able to provide examples that evaluate their understanding of the subject area. The emphasis of the core curriculum enables educators to illuminate the key subject areas that are reflected on standardized tests. As a result, teachers are able to prepare their students for assessments and help them develop the skills required for academic success.

3.8.1.2 Integrating reading across all content areas

The focus on the core curriculum that centers on reading and math enables schools to develop a plan that promotes increased academic performance. Therefore, schools find creative ways to reinforce and master the key concepts and skills that are required in the core curriculum (Collins, 2001). One effective way to reinforce key concepts is to require students to practice reading skills in all content areas, such as math, science, and social studies. Expecting students to read in all subject areas reinforces the importance of the skill and the need for all students to practice and master the skill. Integrating reading into other content areas also helps students perform better on standardized tests, which are largely constructed using questions that require students to read in order to provide the answer (Matthews, 2004).

Reading expectations on tests are reflected in the subject areas of math, social studies, and science. As a result, schools are charged with ensuring that students have proficient reading skills in order to be successful in additional content areas. The strategies to integrate reading into the content areas can be demonstrated in various formats. For example, solving story problems is essential in the subject area of math, which is also reflected on standardized and school based exams. The change of incorporating story problems requires math teachers to review reading and comprehension skills in order to help students be successful.

3.8.1.3 Ms. Taylor's Excerpt

Excerpt 2

Ms. Taylor: The teacher tells the students to take out their science books and says, "Let's look at page 74." The teacher states that everyone should see that there are five bullet points, which are key points that the students must know before taking the test. The teacher states that in their reading today, she wants them to make sure that they are paying attention to those points and writing the response to them in their notebooks. She also says, "I also would like for you to provide any definitions that you did not get yesterday, and you should have highlighted them by putting a box or circle around them to make sure those words stand out in your notes." The teacher reads the vocabulary words to the students and emphasizes that they are in their notebooks because they need these definitions to do their homework and take the test. The teacher says that during this last hour, she wants them to read the lesson and make sure to look at the pictures and description if they need further clarification. She says, "I want you all to read from page 71 all the way to page 78. When you have done all of that reading, put the definitions in your notes, and complete the section review." The teacher states that there are six questions that should go in their notes. The teacher goes through each problem with the students and asks if anyone has any questions about the problems. The teacher states that if they complete these tasks, they will be right on target in preparation for their test.

The integration of reading in all subject areas was demonstrated in a science class that began with students reading assigned pages in their science books. This integration reinforces the skills that are taught in the core curriculum. As a result, the reading strategies that are utilized in the other classes help students to master the skills within the core curriculum that are expected to be mastered. This excerpt demonstrates a focus on reading vocabulary by the teacher, which is

an essential component on standardized and school-based assessments. Reading is a skill that is required within the core curriculum subject area. It can be integrated into all subject areas to develop a continuum of reading throughout the school year and evaluated for mastery.

3.8.1.4 Using Multiple Models of Teaching

There are various components of teaching that are used in the classroom, such as cooperative learning, technology, art, and physical activity. Browder, Flowers, Karvonen, and Wakeman (2009) have suggested that it is important for teachers to expand their teaching styles beyond lecturing and couple it with group presentations, group work, or other projects. According to Sparks (2000), the goal of these multiple models is to interest students and increase the likelihood of academic success. Integrating multiple models enables teachers to provide a productive learning experience for their students. The model most appropriate for any particular teacher can depend on their experience, training, and district requirements from (Easton, 2008). For example, districts and schools that emphasize technology will expect teachers to integrate such tools as computers, smart boards, netbooks, and iPads into the classroom. This technology can help deliver and evaluate lessons.

Using multiple models of teaching can also reveal students' learning strengths. For example, students who are talented in art will perform better if the assignments and projects require an artistic component. The fact that students' interests are taken into consideration increases the chances improved academic performance on assignments and tests (Flowers et al., 2009). Using multiple models of teaching excludes the practices of rote learning, lecturing, and direct instruction. As a result, schools are able to educate students using different strategies that are effective and collectively help to improve students' academic performance.

3.8.1.5 Ms. Powell's Excerpt

Excerpt 3

Ms. Powell: The students are watching a movie on the battle of the American Revolution. The teacher asks the students to describe the scene of the battle. (The students raise their hands; a student is selected and provides a summary of the battle.) The teacher pause the movie and states that he needs volunteers to role play a scene from the movie. (The students raise their hands.) The teacher states that he needs students to be British soldiers. He points out that there is going to be a little fighting and encourages them not to volunteer if they don't like violence. He states that the students are going to do a military re-creation. He then identifies six students to be British soldiers and tells them that they have to be lined up in a line. He asks for two additional students to be British soldiers and emphasizes that the British soldiers have to stay in line. The teacher states that that the British soldiers will march along the road and tells the students to start marching. (The student volunteers start to march.)

The teacher stops the "British soldiers" from marching and says that they are going to stay on route. He then refers to the colonists, whose roles will be acted out by the rest of the students from the class. (The students are excited and walk towards the teacher.) The teacher tells the colonists to get behind the furniture and book cases. He states again that one thing about British soldiers is that they had to march in line, so the teacher tells the students to follow him along the route. (The students are marching behind the teacher.) He states that when the British soldiers are walking in a straight line and when they walk by, the colonists would stand up and shoot(hetellsthestudentsjusttotakethepositionbutdon'tactliketheyareshooting)andhide again. (The students are laughing and engaged in the lesson.) The teacher states that this would be going on for 19 miles, people would be hiding on both sides of the river. He states that sometimes the British soldiers would chase after the colonists. He then asks the students where the British soldiers are staying (a student answers, "Boston.") The teacher states that Boston is 19 miles away. The teacher states that if the colonists run out of ammunition, they can go home, get some more, and chase after the British soldiers. The teacher then has the students return back to the carpet. The teacher acknowledges students returning to their seats quietly, saying "I like the way Student 1 is ready to go... I like the way Student 2 is ready to learn." The teacher then tells students that he wants them to keep track of how many soldiers were killed at the first little fight. (Students respond by saying, "Eight.") The teacher then says to watch the movie to see how many British are killed. (A student says that one of the British was wounded.) The teacher explains that it was like a flesh wound similar to a scratch. The teacher then continues the movie (Students watch intently.)

The researcher observed numerous instances of Ms. Powell using multiple models of teaching. One example was the lesson on the American Revolution that was introduced through a film that reenacted the war and provided historical background information about the key events. Showing a movie is a nontraditional model of teaching that engages students, especially when

students ask questions throughout the movie to increase clarity and understanding of the topic. In addition to the movie, the teacher incorporated role playing to help students understand the topic and reinforce the lessons from the movie.

Using student volunteers in a role-playing activity kept the students engaged and motivated to participate throughout the entire assignment. The teacher asked the students to reenact the marching of the British soldiers. The teacher then compared the 19 miles that they traveled during the battle to the distance between the River walk in downtown Detroit and the Detroit Zoo. The use of a realistic example of the distance helped students to get an idea about the geographic location of the battle. The use of multiple models, watching a movie, using role playing, and using real-world examples were effective strategies that effectively provided a learning experience that was productive and innovative.

3.8.1.6 Providing Clear Content Expectations

According to Sanders (2010), teachers should have clear expectations for every aspect of the classroom in order to improve student achievement. When students are informed and aware of the teacher's expectations, they experience consistency and a shared understanding of the behaviors and norms within the classroom (Rodriguez, 2010). Furthermore, these expectations can be reinforced if they are communicated throughout the school year and to all members of the school community. As a result, students as well as the community become more accountable for the learning process.

When students are aware of expectations within the classroom, they can practice them throughout the school year. Furthermore, these practices can then be shared with parents in order to reinforce and support the expectations within the classroom and in the school environment. The parents' support for these expectations helps hold students accountable for their actions

based on the classroom and school standards (Wherry, 2009). For example, schools that have expectations for students coming to school on time will be reinforced if parents are also aware and support the expectation of the school. The clear expectations set for students also enable teachers to praise students that are practicing the expectations throughout the school year (Reeves, 2004). The use of praise also encourages other students to practice the expectations of the class and of the school. Schools that have clear expectations for their students are much likelier to experience improved student performance because students are aware of their academic expectations and the practices and behaviors that are necessary to be successful.

3.8.1.7 Mr. Kane's Excerpt

Excerpt 4

Mr. Kane: Okay, I want to go around the room and see who is doing what when we come back. I will start over here. When I point to you, tell me what you are doing when we come back (teacher points to student). Okay, I'm putting the circle on the board. Okay, the circle is up; class, tell me how many people should be talking right now? (Students respond zero). The teacher points to a student again; tell me what you are doing when we come back from our bathroom break after art? Student responds DRA, writing, reading (teacher asks what book?). The student states the name of the book. The students take turns identifying their assignments when the teacher points to them. with the responses DRA, reading. Okay, those of you that are close to being done with DRA, you may need a book ready when you finish. Let's say if you finish DRA, do you get up and bring it to me? (All students respond, no). Don't bring it to me; just leave it on your desk because I have to keep my still working and done files separate. Leave your vocabulary test on your desk.

This excerpt illustrates that Mr. Kane provided clear content expectations at the beginning of each class by providing an overview of the subject areas and tasks that students covered each day. In this excerpt, Mr. Kane explained to the students that the goals for the day would be primarily to assess the content areas in reading through the use of the DRA reading test. The teacher asked students to repeat the content expectations for the day as they moved forward with their assignments and tasks. The clear content expectations prepared students for what they were required to do to during the class day. The teacher explained that students were

to move on to reading or writing when they had completed their tests in order to reinforce the content expectations of the class. These clear content expectations enabled the teachers and students to be unified and consistently work to complete the tasks that were identified on a daily basis.

3.8.1.8 Relating core curriculum to real-world experiences

The school day is filled with numerous lessons and activities that are geared to educate students about the core curriculum. Although students are exposed to various forms of knowledge, it is essential that schools attempt to create important teaching and learning opportunities that relate to real-world experiences (Schmoker, 2007). The process of determining the most important concepts to teach begins with the core curriculum that is required by the district and state (Anderson, 2007). As a result, the core curriculum must be taught by teachers using the most effective strategies in order to help improve academic performance. For example, a teacher who has developed a lesson on problem solving must employ strategies and activities that are most effective in delivering this instruction to students. In this way, teachers have been given the responsibility of selecting the most effective lesson plans that will help students to understand and master identified skills (Hoff, 2007).

Determining the most effective teaching strategies provides teachers with tools to instruct students and provide interventions. Making these determinations helps teachers to organize their strategies and plans so that the match the needs of the students (Reeves, 2004). Teachers can identify the most important aspects of any curriculum by discussing them with other teachers and administrators and then collectively deciding what strategies and lessons are best for their particular school. Teachers can also attend training that emphasizes the best practices in specific subject areas (Easton, 2008). The various options for teachers to determine the best teaching

strategies enable teachers to be prepared for the academic needs of the students as well as the requirements of the district. Determining the best strategies provides educators with opportunities to develop an effective plan that is evidence-based and helps improve academic performance (Tuncel, 2009).

3.8.10 Mr. Harvey's Excerpt

Excerpt 5

Mr. Harvey: The teacher asked if anyone had a conversation with their parents about what was learned in class. (A student responded that he had had a conversation with his mom about her jug of water that she put it in the freezer, so he said, "Mom, do you know the particles in the ice must overcome the motion in order for it to freeze?" She said, "That it was interesting and where did you learn that from, and I said my teacher". Theteachersaidthatwasgreatandthat'swhatshe says to do when you go home is to have a conversation about what you are learning. The teacher said that the student initiated that conversation about something that he had learned in class. The teacher said the students have to have more seventh-grade conversations (students are in sixth grade).

The teacher shared that she wants to hear about more conversations. Demonstrations of real-world experiences were clearly present throughout the observations and used as a tool to reinforce the skill being taught. This reinforcement was provided by using examples and activities that were relevant to the life of the student. The excerpt illustrates how the teacher asked the students to have conversations with their parents about real-world experiences related to the content of the class. The students shared examples of how they informed their parents about how science explains the student's mother's water freezing. The opportunities for students to incorporate real-world experiences into their learning help provide a deeper understanding of the topic because it then becomes relatable and relevant to their lives. Continuously incorporating real-world experiences helps students to grow academically in all subject areas because of the positive reinforcement that is provided. This reinforcement helps students to

understand concepts, which in turn improves their academic performance.

3.9 Objective #3 - Frequent Assessment and Improvements

The third objective promotes the evaluation students through a comprehensive lens that includes frequent assessment with multiple opportunities for improvement. This objective eliminates the common practice of one-shot opportunities for achievement by using a single assessment tool to make judgments about students' academic levels (Hoff, 2007). The flexibility of giving students additional opportunities to be successful promotes optimism and resilience about education (Reeves, 2004). The third objective is a representation of not giving up on students and the belief that they have more than one chance to display success in school. Schools that have implemented the 90/90/90 model, practice frequent assessments, and provide multiple opportunities to show improvement are developing the morale and esteem of students on a daily basis within the classroom (DuFour, 2002).

Good and Kaminski (1996) have stated that in order to implement frequent assessments and provide multiple opportunities, the measurement of success must be expressed in multiple formats and at various times throughout the school day and year. According to Reeves (2004), students should be assessed daily, weekly, and monthly to provide a comprehensive outlook of the evaluation process. Evaluating students at various times throughout the school year provides multiple opportunities for students to exhibit academic growth.

Multiple assessments include curriculum-based tests in the form of classroom assessments, common assessments, authentic assessments, and program-based assessments (Anderson, 2007; Hoff, 2007; Reeves, 2004). Integrating the various assessments provides a comprehensive perception of each student and enables teachers to make informed decisions that are based on multiple sources of data. Reeves (2004) have asserted that allowing minority

students to have multiple opportunities to show improvement is a proven way to improve academic achievement levels.

Table 3.2: 90/90/90 Objective #4: Multiple and Frequent Assessments

Frequency (f)	Classroom Observation Protocol (COP) (5 Components)
95% (19)	Assessing students' class work and activities
95% (19)	Probing students for their ideas
90% (18)	Checking for students understandings
95% (19)	Monitoring students' learning
80% (16)	Assessing writing in all content areas

3.9.1 Assessing Students' Class work and Activities

The shift to a core curriculum by districts has provided a clear formula that enables schools to focus improvement efforts and their plan to use evaluations to test students in the subject areas of math and science. Assessing students enables educators to determine whether students have mastered the core curriculum (Roscorla, 2010). In addition, using multiple and ongoing assessments promotes incremental improvements and short wins that enhance students' achievement levels. Unlike yearly standardized assessments, ongoing multiple assessments are based on the principle of integrating class work, assignments and tests throughout the school year. As a result, schools are able to develop a comprehensive outlook on a student's academic performance level (Joyner, 2008)**.** For example, schools that evaluate comprehension (a reading skill) will administer numerous tests to track the growth of students' academic abilities. Frequent and ongoing assessments of students' class work and assignments account for the content that is learned over a period of time compared to the single opportunity provided by

yearly standardized assessments. Yearly standardized assessments provide a narrow view of students' academic abilities. On the other hand, measuring students' academic abilities using multiple assessments promotes a multidimensional overview that is encouraging and yields success (Pate & Gibson, 2005). When students are able to track their academic growth and understand that academic growth equates to success, they are encouraged to do their best and not be labeled as "failures" because of one test score. Schools that adopt this practice are successful because they understand that success is a process instead of an instant event that determines their ability to improve academic performance (Reeves, 2004).

3.9.1.1 Mr. Franklin's Excerpt

Excerpt 1

Mr. Franklin: Today, as you can see on the schedule, we have a vocabulary test first thing, then art, and when we come back from art, we're going to have another solid testing hour. Now the problem is that we only have some of the students that are still doing DRA testing and the rest are done, and I'm worried about the kids that are done. Can they sit and read for a straight hour because I will be doing DIBELS testing in which I can't be interrupted, alright. So you can do a combination of reading; don't do any writing because I've got time built in for that. You can do reading, you can do study time, you can do extra credit, but you can't talk and you can't get up. That's why we're doing a bathroom break, right before; nobody will be out of their seats from 10:10 to 11:10.

The teacher assessed students' class work and activities in order to evaluate the skills that were taught in previous lessons. The teacher began the class by giving the students a vocabulary test. The teacher emphasized assessing students' class work and activities when he informed the class that a solid hour would be dedicated to testing. The frequent assessment of student class work and activities prepares students for what to expect before, during, and after the assessment period. For example, the teacher checked to ensure that students understood what was expected when they completed the DRA test. The teacher informed the students that they could engage in a combination of activities, including reading, study time, or extra credit, to continue the learning

process. In addition, the students were aware of the behavior expectations throughout the assessment period. The teacher reminded the students that they were not to talk or get out of their seat during the testing period. The expectations that are the result of the assessment of students' class work and activities support the implementation of the 90/90/90 element of frequent assessments in order to provide multiple opportunities for academic improvement.

3.9.1.2 Probing Students for their Ideas

Recently, scholars have been adopting and examining new and innovative strategies and programs to improve student achievement (Bracey, 2008). The trend is common and has been effective based on the strategy and each program's ability to utilize various measures to achieve academic success. Although multiple innovative strategies have been available, traditional techniques and programs also have been shown to be effective in improving student performance (Johnson, 2008). An example of an effective traditional strategy is using questions and answers to engage students. The objective of this strategy is to promote student engagement and inquiry so that students are able to master the skills of the core curriculum. Using questions and answers to engage students has been a common practice used by teachers to check for understanding of a specific content area.

The practice promotes the requirement for students to respond and justify their reasoning for selecting that specific answer. Therefore, student inquiry, which is a component of the higher-order thinking skills are reinforced in lessons and activities (Sanders, 2010). As a result, students are able to practice skills that are used in the core curriculum and additional content areas throughout the school year. In addition, the practice of question and answer to engage students can be demonstrated independently or in small groups. These skills also can be reinforced at

home through homework and encouraging real-world experiences. The question-and-answer method of engaging students is a common practice and an effective strategy for improving academic achievement (Roscorla, 2010).

3.9.1.3 Ms. Taylors' Excerpt

Excerpt 2

Ms. Taylor: On Friday, you will have another quiz. It will be short; you can expect at least two more quizzes before the card marking closes. We are then going to start off with #1, the results of the previous quiz. I want to go over the answer; then I want to give you a book assignment; we'll probably work on this assignment for the rest of the day. Then we will recap in preparation for Monday. You can take out your notebooks now, but start off first with the quiz; you can double check your answers. I also want to have a discussion on why some of the mistakes were made on the quiz; then we'll go from there. Worry about your own quizzes, not anyone else's quiz. (Students are discussing how many problems they got wrong.) The teacher tells students that if there are any problems marked wrong in error to please circle it, and she will reevaluate the quiz. Let's now go over our scores and see why we made the mistake. The first four questions were fill-in-the-blank questions. (Teacher reviews the first four questions and explains that they came straight from the notes).

The assessments administered to students provide an opportunity for teachers to probe students for their ideas. The students' responses to their assessments allow the teacher to gauge their level of understanding of each idea and topic. When teachers become aware of students' level of understanding, they can then have class discussions to probe why students chose to answer the test questions the way they did. Ms. Taylor's excerpt reveals a class session during which the teacher asked the students about their rationale for selecting the answers they chose on their quizzes. The teacher focused on the mistakes that students made in order to prepare to re-teach the lesson. Probing students for their ideas provides opportunities for teachers to evaluate students' understanding of a given topic or proficiency in a particular skill.

3.9.1.4 Checking for Students' Understandings

Integrating evaluations throughout the school year serves several purposes. In addition to identifying academic performance levels and displaying growth, the evaluations are used to identify the academic needs of students (Hill, 2009). An exam that assesses the mastery level of a skill is used to identify the various levels of the students and the next step that is needed to teach the content. The results of the exam identify the students who achieved the skill and the students who did not. As a result, teachers are able to provide necessary interventions that address the needs of the students. The needs of the students can be based on many elements that impact their performance on the exam (Anderson, 2007). One example of a need is for students to have test-taking skills. There are many cases in which students understand the content and demonstrate their knowledge on class assignments, projects, and homework, but when they are tested on the skill, they do not perform well on the test. Therefore, teachers can focus on improving students' test-taking skills to help students show their understanding of the topic when they tested (Reeves, 2004).

Another academic need can be a reading deficiency that prevents students from performing well on tests that require them to read a story, passage, or word problem (Allington, 2001). These students may do well on computational problems in math but struggle with problem-solving items. To address this need, teachers must utilize strategies that strengthen students' reading abilities, such as corrective reading programs, after-school tutoring, and additional practice in the classroom. When teachers identify their students' needs, they can increase their chances of success in school (Matthews, 2004). To achieve this goal, teachers can implement intervention services throughout the school year to help students make improvements based on their academic needs. Furthermore, when students and parents are aware of teachers' efforts to intervene and

make academic improvements that are based on the needs of individual students, they too can help foster school success.

3.9.1.5 Ms. Powell's Excerpt

Excerpt 3

Ms. Powell: The teacher reviews the lesson with the students. The teacher starts by asking, "British Soldiers marching out to do what ?" (Students respond that they are marching out to take the weapons from the Minute Man.) The teacher says, "Take the weapons from the Minute Man and the Minute Man hears about it from who?" (Students respond, "Paul Revere.") Paul Revere rides out and says, "Hey, they're coming; they line up, just a few of them. Somebody shoots--we don't know who. (A student asks, "Did the British shoot back?") The teacher responds, "Then the British shoot back and they keep going. (A student asks the teacher if he has more information about Paul Revere) The teacher says he has books about him and that they will get into more detail about him later. The teacher states that right now all they need to know is that he is the one that went out to warn everyone that the British were coming. The teacher asks the students, "If Paul Revere wouldn't have gone on that ride, the British would have just marched out, and would the colonists be ready for the British?" (A student responds "No, because the British would get to them without them knowing.") There wouldn't have been that little battle; they probably would have taken their weapons; who knows what would have happened? (A student asks if the teacher has pictures from the war) The teacher states that he does not have pictures from back then and asks the class if the actual video from the actual war (The students respond, "No.")

The teacher explains that this is just actors showing them what it was like during the war. Checking for students' understanding enables teachers to provide the necessary interventions to assist struggling students or challenge students who have mastered the course material. Assessment of understanding can be conducted informally, such as through an oral question-and-answer session, or it can be conducted formally by administering a test. Ms. Powell's excerpt focuses on the informal assessment of understanding when the teacher asked students questions about the movie on the American Revolution. The students' responses reveal the degree to which they understand the material. When the teacher asked the question about Paul Revere, the students provided the right answer, demonstrating their understanding of his role in the American Revolution. When the majority of the class responded with the right answer, the teacher was able

to informally check their understanding. The practice of checking for understanding enables teachers to plan and alter their lessons based on students' understanding in a subject area.

3.9.1.6 Monitoring students' learning

Effective schools understand that success is determined by various educational components that impact student achievement (Bracey, 2008). Historically, success has been measured by whether schools achieve adequately yearly progress as the result of student performances on state standardized tests (Bunche, 2011) Although using state standardized test continues to be common practice, there are many concerns about the negative impact on school success. One major concern is the inability of these assessments to evaluate the academic growth of students throughout the school year (Randolph, 2007). Instead, standardized tests evaluate the mastery of curriculum skills that are based on the culmination of instruction. For example, the MEAP test evaluates the curriculum skills of students that have accrued from their previous academic year. Therefore, a student in the fourth grade will be evaluated on the skills learned in the third grade. The skills are based on the content of the entire school year in one single assessment that is used to determine whether a school is failing or successful (Jacob, 2008).

While yearly standardized tests have been a staple in education, effective schools have been moving beyond this common practice and integrating multiple assessments to determine students' academic growth over a period of time (Joyner, 2008). As a result, schools have been able to base their success on students' actual progress instead of a single test score. The academic growth of students provides a working evaluation for teachers to determine if they are using appropriate lessons and strategies to deliver academic content (Sanders, 2010). Consequentially, teachers have been able to modify their lessons in order to better teach their students and contribute to their overall academic success.

3.9.1.7 Mr. Kane's Excerpt

Excerpt 4

Mr. Kane: The teacher stops the movie to ask students questions about the battle and explains that a musket ball is a bullet and that their guns were called muskets. The teacher then states that out of every 300, 1 was a hit; that's from the colonists shooting. The teacher asks the students whatthattellsthemaboutthecolonists.(Studentsrespondthattheydidn'thavegoodaim.) The teacher states that not only did they not have good aim but that their weapons were pretty crummy. He tells them that with the weapons they had, "If I were standing here, he couldn't probably hit that clock (clock was close to the teacher) with it." The teacher states that now with modern weapons you could hit that clock a mile away if you were really good, but with their weapons you have to be very close to hit somebody. He states that the colonists fired a lot of shots, but they were not very good shots. Theteacherthenasksthestudentswhytheyweren't very good shots. (Students raise their hands, and the teacher selects a student. The student responds, "Because they were farmers.")The teacher states that they were farmers, bakers, and shoemakers and that they weren't soldiers. The teacher says that they were like part-time soldiers, unlike the British; that's all they did. So they wasted a lot of ammo. (One student asks how the British soldiers could get in if they could not open the door.) The teacher says that they would kick them down because the doors back then were pretty easy to kick down. (Another student asks if the colonists hid in the bushes or behind their upstairs window). The teacher says
it is better to be up higher. (Another student asks, "What if they were hiding behind their window and a bomb were thrown up there.") The teacher states that it wasn't like that back then and that they had mostly single-shot weapons. (A student asks, "What do the colonists do if they run out of ammo?") The teacher says that they probably just back off for the day. The teacher starts the movie again. The teacher then stops the movie and lines the students up. The students are taking a test based on the movie, their notes, and discussion. The teacher is walking around and giving feedback to the students, acknowledging that students are struggling with the last two questions.

The teacher then allows the students to look back at their books when they are done but states that the students can't write anything if they look at their books. The students can correct only the last two problems if they need to after the book is closed. The act of monitoring students' learning is vital to developing interventions and preparing lesson plans. When teachers monitor students' learning, they are able to evaluate their progress on a given topic. Mr. Kane's excerpt demonstrates the teacher's ability to monitor the students' learning as they continue their lesson on the American Revolution. The teacher asks questions that were revealed in previous lessons in order to monitor the students' learning. In addition to asking questions, the teacher

also integrated a movie about the American Revolution to provide an additional source of information to augment the lesson. The teacher used the movie to monitor students' learning by pausing the movie and asking questions about the battle. The teacher continued this process throughout the movie and monitored students' learning as the questions were being answered. The teacher further monitored the students' learning by administering a test that evaluated their knowledge of the American Revolution. The evaluation enabled the teacher to re-teach the lesson and provide the necessary interventions.

3.9.1.8 Assessing Writing in all Content Areas

Writing is a skill that is required in all classes in order to address the academic needs of the core curriculum (Anderson, 2007; Reeves, 2004; Schmoker, 2006). The core curriculum focuses on subject areas and skills that are necessary to prepare students to be successful on state standardized assessments. In preparation for the assessments and to ensure that students effectively learn the skill of writing, multiple assessments can be administered throughout the school year. Furthermore, assignments, projects, and homework can be dedicated to reinforcing writing skills and help students to improve their writing ability. According to Allington (2001), the writing process is continuous and is also assessed through the use of technology.

According to Johnson (2008), some schools have adopted research-based programs, such as the Write-to-Learn program. These programs integrate computers, netbooks, and Smartboards. Using technology to administer writing assessments enables students to demonstrate their performance ability using an innovative technique that is engaging and promotes achievement (Harris & Herrington, 2006). For example, a computer program can evaluate a student's ability to write a procedural essay that is based on the criterion of the program. The program provides immediate feedback on the student's performance and provides student-friendly analysis on the

score or grade of the essay. The ongoing assessment of students' writing, whether the assignment is a technology-based assessment or pencil-and-paper assignment, helps prepare students to be successful writers (Reeves, 2004).

3.9.1.9 Mr. Harvey's Excerpt

Excerpt 5

Mr. Harvey: Now, I've got two bits of good news for you. First, after Writer's workshop, when you work on your 500-word essay, I've got lab time. So we will be going back to the same lab we were in yesterday, and you guys can work. I'm going to try to do the labs two more times, plus Monday and media time. So everybody who is working should have time to finish their essay and should have time to fix their mistakes. See, the thing is, when you are done, I don't want it. When you're done, I want you to fix it. If you're done, I want you to go through and read it, reread it, and re-read it again because what's the point in getting done and there are lots of mistakes, and you have a rubric to follow.

Using writing as an assessment in all content areas is reflected on standardized tests that require students to write in all areas, such as math and science. Incorporating writing assessments into daily lessons prepares students for the expectations of standardized tests. Mr. Harvey's excerpt demonstrates a teacher integrating Writer's workshop and a 500-word essay as strategies to prepare students and improve their writing skills. Mr. Harvey emphasized the need for students read their essays and revises their mistakes in order to develop a quality product. Mr. Harvey asked the students to re-read their essays multiple times to eliminate mistakes before submitting their final products. Using writing rubrics also prepared students for the criteria of standardized assessments that also use a rubric to score students' proficiency levels. Therefore, reinforcing writing in all content areas prepares students for the expectations of standardized assessments.

3.10 Implications

3.10.1 Developing Effective Teacher Practices

Teachers serve multiple roles in the classroom that typically have not been discussed in fundamental courses for teachers. In addition, adopting best practices and strategies needed to create academic success is not a skill that is inherently and intuitively learned on the job. As a result, teachers must experience a continuum of development throughout the school year. This study suggests that in order for teachers to develop practices that are vital to student achievement, they must participate in effective professional development. Professional development workshops and seminars serve as ongoing training that takes place in order to keep teachers abreast of new trends in education.

Easton (2008) has stated that an effective professional development experience supports and cultivates instructional skills of teachers and enables improvements in the classroom through the development, evaluation, and implementation of a coherent curriculum. According to Kist (2003), professional development of teachers requires a proactive approach that helps eliminate outdated and ineffective methods teachers have adopted. In addition, Kist has explained that students of the 21st century need a more innovative and cooperative approach to teaching if they are to be reached.

Incorporating the 90/90/90 model requires schools to prioritize quality professional development opportunities for students (Reeves, 2004). Quality professional development opportunities have been utilized to establish adequate strategies that aid in implementing the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model in order to produce school success**.** The results of this study suggest that teacher practices should reflect all five elements of the 90/90/90 model. Schools that implement the 90/90/90 model (Reeves, 2004) expect that the everyday challenges teachers face

can be addressed head on in effective professional development programs. Furthermore, the results of such a program can arm teachers with strategies and interventions that have been proven to work in schools.

The results of this study also provide evidence against that idea that professional development for teachers is irrelevant and time consuming. Dufour (2002) has stated that the majority of teachers use their professional development experience as a means to complain about the current conditions of the school. Professional development of teachers has continued to be a vital component within schools that implement the 90/90/90 model. According to Anderson (2007), incorporating effective staff development is an essential element of the 90/90/90 model that impacts the success of schools. The model reflects an ideology that attempts to eliminate the negative perceptions associated with professional development offered to teachers and rather seeks to implement the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model that have been proven to increase academic achievement.

CHAPTER 4: MANUSCRIPT #3

A PHENOMENOGRAPHY OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CHALLENGES

4.1 Overview

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine school improvement challenges. Twenty teachers were individually interviewed and the data were analyzed using phenomenography to develop common descriptive categories. The three descriptive categories of school improvement challenges are as follows: 1) student transiency throughout the school year; 2) staff restructure and transfers to different schools; and 3) lack of parent involvement in school and at home. The MEAP test scores of the participating school were also examined to compare the 2009 and 2010 results using the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test. The chi-squared goodness-of-fit test indicated a decline in the MEAP test scores in 2009 and 2010 school years. Thus, there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and expected (2009) MEAP test scores.

Keywords: school improvement; challenges; MEAP test; chi square test

4.2 Background

Urban school districts are constantly failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress **(**Wong & Sunderman, 2010**).** The failing schools face stringent consequences such as school closures, state takeovers and the termination of teachers **(**Jehlen & Flannery, 2008**).**The failure of schools is attributed to barriers such as poverty, violence, underperforming schools, and drug infested neighborhoods **(**Harris & Herrington, 2006). These barriers also prevent minority students from achieving academic success (Armstrong, 2010; Hughes, 2010). Furthermore, Bainbridge and Laisley (2006) demonstrate schools serving a large population of minority students struggle to achieve academically. Consequently, the plight of minority students leads many to believe school improvement in urban school districts is unattainable (Rowan & Haycock, 2010; Harris & Herrington, 2006; Jacob, 2007). However, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2006) suggests a comprehensive plan must address the No Child Left Behind Act's criteria for schools to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Oliva (2009) believes because the No Child Left Behind Act is a product of the standards-based movement, it will improve student achievement.

Despite the implementation of the NCLB Act, studies reveal an increase in unsuccessful urban schools (Rowan & Haycock, 2010; Harris & Herrington, 2006; Jacob, 2007). For example, Jacob (2007) demonstrates that best practices and prominent programs to address the demands of the NCLB Act are ineffective in urban schools. Although there are studies and reports (Bracey, 2008; Jorgeson Learning Center, 2010; Oliva, 2009; Randolph, 2007) that refute this plight by identifying tools for school improvement, these best practices and programs are ineffective because the NCLB Act ignores the negative plight of urban districts (Clewell & Campbell,

2007). Armstrong (2010) asserts that there are numerous challenges in an urban school that must be addressed, in order to improve student achievement.

This study, therefore, uses phenomenography to examine teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges. The teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges revealed what an urban school experience as they strive to improve student achievement. To address school improvement challenges on student achievement, MEAP test scores from the 2009 and 2010 school years were examined. The MEAP scores were analyzed using the chi squared goodness-of-fit test. The chi square test was used to test the null hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and expected (2009) MEAP test scores. The study provides a detailed interpretation of the results from the chi square test based on the MEAP scores.

4.3 Phenomenography

Phenomenography is a qualitative research tool developed in Sweden by Ferrence Marton in 1981 to map conceptions of individuals into an "outcome space" called "categories of description". The categories of description were based on their experiential relation to a particular phenomenon under investigation. The relations that occur between the conceptualizing individual (subject) and the conceptualized phenomenon (object) of a study are described by phenomenography (Lybeck, Marton, Stromdahl, & Tullberg, 1988). These authors emphasize Phenomenography shows a concern for both the subject (how) and the object (what) of learning (i.e., the act of conceptualizing and the meaning of the phenomenon as conceptualized). According to Marton and Booth (1997), the purpose of phenomenography is to "study how people experience a given phenomenon, not to study a given phenomenon" (p. 87, emphasis is

mine). That is, a dependent relationship is established between the person and the object in question. The researcher as a phenomenographer understands the qualitative different ways people experience a phenomenon influence their conceptions (Walker 1998). Therefore, there is a contextual determination of the conceptions (Säljö, 1988). The conceptions of reality for individuals are particular-to-particular context and problems raised within that context. As a result, conceptions of reality do not reside within individuals (intellectual capacity).

Phenomenography emphasizes the description the possible variations in conceptions held by individuals for a particular phenomenon. As such, Phenomongraphy is also known as variation theory of learning. Phenomenography adopts an epistemological perspective that the world is inherently multifaceted and open to variations in interpretation. The integration of the epistemological stance into phenomenography supports the belief that the world is seen through a particular 'lens' and that there is no such thing as common and unbiased reality to every human. Marton argues, "The most fundamental images of our world are always taken for granted and they are mostly not present in individual consciousness, but they are reflected in the way we organize society" (Marton, 1984, p. 45). Marton advocates that we must look beyond the individual in our search for understanding of the various ways in which people perceive a phenomenon.

The examination of individuals' conceptions reveals inter- and intra-variations. Commonalities in meanings are identified and developed into "phenomenographic categories" by the researcher (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004). The categories of description are ways of denoting the researcher's interpretations of individuals' conceptions of a particular phenomenon. Categories of description feature qualitative and quantitative aspects. The

qualitative outcome is the categories of description while the quantitative result is the frequency distribution related to the categories (Renstrom, 1988).

This study provides an analysis of intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions about student achievement. The intra-variations provide an opportunity to observe the variations present within the conceptions of one teacher, and inter-variations provide an opportunity to compare multiple teachers' conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997). This intra- and inter-variation analysis is important when attempting to identify beliefs and conceptualizations teachers have within a specific school (Anderson, 2007). The analysis enables schools to become aware of common and conflicting conceptions among teachers--conceptions that may help or hinder student achievement (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). Thus, this study suggests that intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions should be identified in order to develop shared conceptions about improving student achievement. Senge (2007) has explained that identifying and consolidating perceptions enable schools to achieve a common mindset that allows them to address the challenges that prevent student achievement. Schools that have identified common pedagogical ground are better able to overcome challenges because of the shared conceptions that lead to actions that reflect the needs and priorities of all stakeholders (Covey, 2009). According to Hoff (2007), this consensus allows the stakeholders of the school to become a team and work together to increase student achievement through a shared vision that is supported by the consolidation of conceptions (Hoff, 2007).

Phenomenography is an analytic tool that helps identify qualitatively different ways that individuals conceptualize a phenomenon. Phenomenography (Marton& Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004) provides the foundation for this study in its attempt to explore common conceptions of teachers about school improvements that lead to increased student achievement.

Phenomenography emphasizes the relationship between the subject and object (Lybeck et al., 1988). For the purpose of this study, phenomenography serves as an analytic tool to help explore the variation in which teachers conceptualize the process of school improvement. This methodological approach allows the researcher to construct the various descriptive categories related to teachers' conceptions as they strive for school improvement.

Phenomenography (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004) provides the underpinning theory for the article's examination of teachers' common conceptions of school improvements for student achievement. For the purpose of this article, phenomenography will explore the variation in the ways in which teachers (subject) conceptualize "school improvement for student achievement" (object). The various conceptions teachers relate are dependent on their own experiences with school improvement for student achievement.

4.4 Problem Statement

Reeves (2004) credit the success of the 90/90/90 model to teacher support and incorporating the five categories into each school. Anderson (2007) supports Reeves and believes the collaboration of teachers is essential to developing success and addressing the challenges of urban schools. In addition to implementing the principles of the 90/90/90 model, Senge (2000) argues the various conceptions that teachers have because of prior knowledge and experience must be elicited, in order to identify school improvement challenges. This disclosure may enable teachers to implement strategies that address the school improvement challenges. As a result, Adams and Seagreen (2007) believe teachers are more likely to contribute to the development and acceptance of common objectives to address the school improvement challenges. Collectively the teachers will develop objectives for school improvement that will lead to student achievement (Duffy, 2009). Thus, the research question for this study is as

follows: *What challenges do urban school teachers encounter during the school improvement process?*

4.5 Significance of Study

The identification of challenges of school improvement will help teachers to use proactive measures. The proactive measures will enable teachers to prevent challenges from negatively impacting the school improvement process. The prevention of challenges will help schools to implement strategies and programs that improve student achievement. As schools strive to improve student achievement, it is important to recognize the challenges of school improvement.

4.6 Methodology

4.6.1 Methodological Framework

Phenomenography is an analytic tool that helps to identify and develop qualitatively different ways an individual conceptualizes a phenomenon. Phenomenography (Marton& Booth, 1997; Marton&Tsui, 2004) provides the underpinning for this study's development of common conceptions of teachers about school improvement for student achievement. Phenomenography shows an emphasis on the relationship between the study's subject and object (Lybeck et al., 1988). The object of this study is the social phenomenon of school improvement. For the purpose of this study, phenomenography explores the variation in which teachers conceptualize school improvement challenges. The study constructs the various descriptive categories on teachers' conceptions as they identify school improvement challenges.

According to Marton (1986) and Marton and Booth (1997), the purpose of phenomenography is to "study how people experience a given phenomenon, not to study a given phenomenon" (p.87) The researcher as a phenomenographer understands the different ways people experience a phenomenon influences their conceptions of a specific subject and varies for each person (Walker 1998). Therefore, a dependent relationship is established between the person and object in question (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Karl Pearson (1900) introduced the concept to examine "how well observed data fit a theoretical model or hypothesized distribution" (pg. 80). The chi-squared goodness-of-fit test (Pearson, 1900) provides the underpinning for the study's evaluation**.** The chi-squared goodness-of-fit test is widely used to determine if an expected outcome of data is consistent with observed outcome of data (Neave & Worthington, 1988). Pearson (1900) asserts when the observed data (Ob.) matches the expected data (Ex.) then it is concluded that the "null hypothesis is assumed true" (p.80). More specifically, Pearson (1900) explains that the "purpose of the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test is to determine how well observed data fit a theoretical model or hypothesized distribution" (p. 80).

For the purpose of this study, the observed data (Ob.) is represented by the 2010 MEAP test scores and the hypothesized distribution or expected data (Ex.) is represented by the 2009 MEAP test scores. The null hypothesis for this study states that there is no significant difference between the observed and the expected MEAP test scores, thus the 2010 MEAP test scores are consistent with the scores from the 2009 MEAP test. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis states that there is a significant difference between the observed and the expected MEAP test scores, hence the observed data is inconsistent with the expected data. To determine the chi-squared test statistic, the following formula is used:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(\text{observed - expected})^2}{\text{expected}}$$

4.6.2 Data Collection

Twenty elementary and middle school teachers from an urban school district voluntarily participated in this individual interview process. The researcher of this study conducted the interviews over a period of three months from April to June 2011 during the preparatory and lunch time. Two teachers were interviewed each day, allowing an hour per teacher. Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The interview followed a conversational style (Ebenezer & Frazer, 2003) that enabled the interviewer to use follow up questions based on the teachers' responses. In this non-threatening environment, teachers were engaged throughout the entire interview process by answering the initial and follow-up questions about their conceptions of school improvement. Furthermore, the phenomenographic interview questions were not based on the first-order perspective, for example: What are the challenges of a school?" The answer to this question is based on test scores and report card grades, and would not necessarily reveal if the teacher understands the process of school improvement. Instead, the participating teachers answered questions of the second-order perspective, for example: "How do you address school improvement challenges?" A question of this kind requires the teacher to respond by sharing how they understand the school improvement process and enables the researcher to better understand conceptions of school improvement.

4.6.3 Data Analysis

The transcriptions of interview data were critically analyzed with the purpose of reviewing the teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges. A critical analysis of

interview transcriptions detailed a thorough examination that explored the variations of teachers' conceptions of school improvement. To achieve this outcome, the researcher implemented several steps. First, each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Second, each interview transcript was color coded and phenomenographic categories of conceptions were developed. Third, the developed categories were then assessed for variations in the data that represent different facets of the phenomenon. In addition, as a phenomenographer, I evaluated the identified categories multiple times for internal consistency to ensure the interview data are aligned with each category. In this study, the categories developed reflected the various experiences of teachers in relation to the phenomenon, school improvement challenges. Finally, an outline of categories discussed in each interview was developed to keep track of trending topics. Coding, pattern development, and supporting evidence were confirmed, until the intersections of teachers' conceptions pertaining to school improvement were grounded in data. Furthermore, interpretations, hunches, gestures, and non-verbal expressions were added in support of the common categories of conceptions. From the above data analyses, three common categories of teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges were developed.

4.6.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are essential components to a research study of a qualitative nature. The consistency and dependability of a research study reflects the criteria for a quality investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to address credibility, the phenomenographer established a relationship between the data and developed categories based on the excerpts from the interviews. The variations of how the participants experienced the phenomenon were based on the transcriptions of the interview data. According to Dahlin (1999), three factors must be considered to address the issue of validity in a phenomenographic study. As a result, the

researcher addressed the first factor, logic of the system of categories emerging from the analysis by reexamining the identified categories multiple times to ensure the interview data is aligned with each of the various categories (Dahlin, 1999). The second factor of validity was addressed because the developed categories from the study were consistent with empirical studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) on school improvement. The last factor, the probability of the categories to be considered, was also addressed by examining previous empirical studies to determine the likelihood that the categories are present in the research (Dahlin, 1999). The phenomenographer addressed the issue of reliability by having two phenomenographically trained researchers individually analyze the interview data to ensure it is consistent with the findings of the study (Marton& Booth, 1997).

To address the reliability and validity of the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test, two criteria must be addressed. The first criterion is that "no expected frequency should be less than 1" (Neave & Worthington, p.84). To address this criterion, the researcher combined categories that were smaller than 1 to develop a reliable and valid conclusion. For example, the MEAP test, reading grade 3 had an observed value of 0, thus the fourth column was combined with the fifth category to "avoid the small expected frequencies" (Neave & Worthington, p.84). In addition, the degrees of freedom were changed from 4-1 = 3 degrees of freedom to 3-1 = 2 degrees of freedom to test the significance. As a result, the results are reliable and valid. The second criterion that addresses reliability and validity for the chi-squared goodness-of-fit model is that "no more than a fifth of the expected frequencies should be less than 5" (Neave & Worthington, p.84). To address this criterion each of the expected frequencies, the researcher reviewed each of the expected frequencies and concluded that none of the frequencies were less than 5. By

addressing these two criteria the researcher was able to implement the appropriate modifications to test the null hypothesis of the study.

4.7 Results and Discussion

The qualitative results for this article were derived from the interviews of twenty teachers. The responses provided various conceptions of school improvement challenges. The conversation-style of interview that included follow-up questions enabled the researcher to probe and allow more in-depth responses to questions regarding school improvement challenges. Analysis of the individual interview data revealed the school improvement challenges presented in Table 1: 1) student transiency throughout the school year, 2) staff restructure and transfers to different schools, and 3) lack of parent involvement in school and at home.

Table 4.0: Frequency of Teachers' Conceptions of Challenges

Descriptive Categories	An example of teachers' experience	Frequency (f)
Student Transiency	Our biggest challenge is transient students because we have to take all students in our school even if they come in the middle of the school year, which means we have to adjust the students to our culture.	90% (18)
Staff Restructure	I think the constant changes in the staff are a real problem. This is a problem because we don't have consistency.	80% (16)
Lack of Parent Involvement in School and at Home	We work to keep our parents aware like giving them activities for students to do at home along with in school.	85% (17)

4.7.1 Descriptive Category # 1 - Student Transiency

The major challenge generated from the interview-dialogue between the stakeholders and the researcher is Student Transiency. The prevalence of student transiency in urban schools jeopardizes the productivity of schools and learning experiences of students (Schaft, 2005). As schools strive to improve student achievement level, the interruption of transient students provides an additional roadblock to addressing the needs of all students. The preparation that schools put in place during the previous or current school year is based on the documented and expected student population. The components of student transiency involve a large amount of students enrolling and then leaving schools only to repeat the process at another school. As a result, the student does not receive the necessary academic support because they are not aware of the classroom procedure or expectations. Ms. White ranked student transiency as a top concern for schools that are striving for success. She believes the inconsistency of transiency prevents schools from serving their entire community throughout the school year. Excerpt 1 provides an overview of Ms. White concerns about student transiency.

4.7.1.1 Ms. White's Excerpt

Excerpt 1

1.1 Researcher:	What do you consider as challenges of the school?
1.2 Ms. White:	Our biggest challenge is transient students because we have to take all students in our school even if they come in the middle of the school year; which means we have to adjust the students to our culture. This is not easy at times because students come with their own behaviors based on the previous school or schools.
1.3 Researcher:	You identified transient students as a challenge, how do you think that this challenge impacts school improvement?
1.4 Ms. White:	It's hard because they are not here consistently but we still have to teach them. How do we hold parents accountable for that? That is

part of our school improvement. If you have a student reading at a first grade level but only moves around from school to school then we can't teach them.

1.5 Researcher: You mentioned the lack of consistency of student attendance, what strategies does the school have in place to address transiency?

1.6 Ms. White: We're trying to see what other districts hold our demographics and concerns of truancy to see if they have something in place. We can then look at it and adopt it, because right now in our county, most schools don't have the type of demographics we have regarding transient issues. To address this challenge we also have packets available for when they arrive to the school, they can read our facts and expectations. Some classes also have new student buddies to help them adjust and learn what is expected in the school.

1.7 Researcher: Your school provides packets and student buddies for transient students, are these strategies effective in dealing with transiency?

1.8 Ms. White: I believe it has been helpful to new students. They are able to receive support by students and staff as soon as they enter the school. The new students are able to get a clear picture of our school. We are also able to talk to parents and provide the same information about our school. The student buddies have been great for the new and current students. The new students are instantly welcomed and the student helper is able to teach and model the expectations of the school.

The above excerpt reveals three intra-variations, which are (1) adjusting transient students to the school culture; (2) inconsistency of transient students impacts their academic performance; and (3) developing packets as a tool to communicate the expectations.

4.7.1.2 Adjusting Transient Students to the School Culture

Ms. White believes adjusting transient students to the schools' culture is a challenge. She also states that students enrolling at various times make it hard to learn, when they arrive at the middle of the school year (1.2). When students enter at the various times during the school year, they may arrive with behaviors problems that are not accepted at the school. Ms. White states

that the late arrival of students is not easy at times because they come with their own behaviors based on the previous school (1.2). She also points out that the student transiency negatively impacts school success because they're not in school. Furthermore, teachers can't teach the current curriculum if the students are behind academically.

4.7.1.3 Inconsistency of Transient Students

The inconsistency of transient students' attendance impacts their academic performance and the overall success of the school. According to reports (Wright, 1999) transient students' achievement levels are low and students are usually retained for one or more grades. Schools must continue to accept transient students throughout the school year (1.2). The teachers are also held responsible for educating students that are below grade level in core subject areas (1.2). The comparison of transient and non-transient students reveal achievement gaps in math and reading that prevents schools from successfully educating and preparing all students (1.4). Ultimately, transient students test scores are lower and their mastery levels of core subject areas are nonexistent, resulting in a record number being retained with a need for intervention services (Sanderson, 2003).

In addition to low student performance, Ms. White also stresses the concern of holding parents accountable for part of their child's academic performance. If they have a child reading at a first grade level but moves around from school to school then the teachers can't teach them (1.4). The poor academic performance by these students is then reflected on the current school. To address this concern, Ms. White's school seeks out other districts that are faced with the same challenge and have the same demographics and school culture. They then look for a school

model that successfully deals with student transiency and adopts their program or strategies as they strive to improve student achievement.

4.7.1.4 Packets as a Tool to Communicate the Expectations

The school also uses strategies such as packets as a tool to communicate the expectations of the school or class buddies for new students that will model and share the expectations and practices of the school throughout the school year (1.6). The purpose of the packets and classroom buddies is to provide abbreviated session to inform students and parents of the schools program. Ms. White believed the strategies were effective because they are able to receive support by students and staff as soon as they enter the school. In addition to the support, the new students are able to get a clear picture of our school. The strategies are beneficial to the parents in addition to the students because it informs them about the schools' culture and expectations of the school (1.8).

As the challenge of student transiency remains a staple in school systems, educators have strived to become successful regardless of the negative impact of mobility. Schools have tried many effective strategies such as classroom buddies for new transient students (1.6). The purpose of a classroom buddy is to inform the transient students of rules and procedures of the school. The buddy explains and models the key features of the school in the area of academics and behavior (1.8). The classroom buddy in some instances serves as a peer tutor to help the teacher continue the learning process for the other students. The classroom buddy strategy is effective because the transient student's peers are providing the assistance and interventions which creates a more inviting environment (Sanders, 2003).

4.7. 1.5 Mr. Watkins's Excerpt

Excerpt 2

2.1 Researcher:	What challenges do you think the school faces?
2.2 Mr. Watkins:	In our district we have a high transient population, with a lot of the students being At-Risk. This adds another element to the challenge because of these students is struggling academically or at times has behavior problems. We have all of those things working against us. So I think that all of those things combined, are really daily battles. They really are and we work hard to overcome them and it doesn't always happen, but those are challenges.
2.3 Researcher:	You stated that the high population of transient students is a challenge, how do you think this challenge impact school improvement?
2.4 Mr. Watkins:	I think that with the transiency of our students and I'll use my class as an example, there are probably only about four students that have been at our school for their K-6 experience. This means our class of students will change each year, which prevents consistent learning from our school over a period of time.
2.5 Researcher:	In addition to a lack of consistency, how else does this challenge impact student learning?
2.6 Mr. Watkins:	Considering that we have such a high turnover rate or transient population in our district and school, we can't fully help new students that are struggling academically. Then this challenge affects our test scores and our continuous need to help all students.
2.7 Researcher:	You mentioned that there is a high turnover rate, what are the other characteristics of student transiency?
2.8 Mr. Watkins:	You know we have students enrolling in the school almost every month. We also have students to go to another school or district, that's why we kept the sixth grade in our building this year to try to keep those students in the district.
2.9 Researcher:	In addition to students enrolling throughout the school year, what impact do parents have on transiency?

2.10 Mr. Watkins: Their focus is not on how they can best support their child's learning. Instead they take them out of school and move them multiple times throughout the school year. They are preventing the students from receiving the help that is needed to improve student achievement.

Although Mr. Watkins begins his conversation about students transiency being a challenge (2.2) for his school like Ms. White, his focus is more on transiency of at-risk students (2.2),inconsistency with student learning (2.4), and improving student achievement (2.10).

4.7.1.6 Transiency of At-Risk students

Mr. Watkins points out that student transiency is a concern on its own, but the element of at-risk students intensifies the negative influences on academic achievement. He explains that an at-risk students are not only struggling academically they also have behavior problems in school. As a result, the school has to focus on the students with behavior and academic concerns, adding to the challenges that work against the school's ability to be successful. He highlights that there are three components that a school must address with these students: (1) transiency of *at-risk students*; (2) poor academic ability; and (3) disruptive behavior, in order to be successful. He labeled the combination of the three components as "daily battles". The daily battles are added to the common school challenges that take place in a school throughout the school year. Mr. Watkins highlights that although the daily battles are challenges, his school really works hard to overcome them and become successful (2.2).

4.7.1.7 Inconsistency

He explains that components of student transiency such as, the enrollment of students in the school almost every month and students in his school going to another school or district creates a challenge for his school. He comments specifically about student transiency by using his classroom as an example of inconsistency. Mr. Watkins mentions that there are probably only

about 4 students that have been at his school for their K-6 experience. The classroom of students is composed of students that have enrolled from different school for the seven year span, kindergarten through sixth grade. He also explains that his class of students will change each year, which prevents consistency and learning from his school over a period of time (2.4).

He also points out that teachers are unable to effectively help students academically, if they enroll at various times during the school year. They enter the school at low academic performance levels. Mr. Watkins explains that when the teachers begin to help the students, the parents may remove the student and transfer them to a new school. He also states that the school may receive a new group of students which restarts the learning process before the help from teacher is able to work. The student transiency and impact of the at-risk students ultimately affects the test scores and schools' overall ability to be successful (2.6). Empirical studies (Gasper et. al, 2011) identify the majority of transient students as at-risk based on the common characteristics: (1) single-parent families; (2) perform worse academically has youth who do not switch schools; (3) higher rate of absenteeism; (4) lower grades, and (5) more frequent school suspension and delinquency. The common characteristics shared by transient students demonstrate behaviors that can prevent academic growth and success due to their inconsistencies in education (2.4). The negative effects of the student's unstable educational experiences impact the school's ability to provide a quality learning environment for all students (2.6). Therefore, schools are charged with educating a revolving door of students that enroll at various times throughout the year. Moreover, teachers are responsible for developing learning experiences that prepare students for exams and the demands of the upcoming school year (2.8). The added responsibilities to the teacher and school as a whole is present regardless of the academic and behavior performances associated with transient students.

4.7.1.8 School Improvement

Mr. Watkins highlights that although these are challenges, his school really works hard to overcome student transiency. He points out that the district kept the sixth grade in their building, instead of concluding elementary with fifth grade, in order decrease the student transiency (2.8). In previous years the school ended at fifth grade and students usually get promoted to sixth grade and leave the district. This year with the school keeping the sixth grade in the school, more students stayed in the district. Although the school is implementing strategies that deal with the challenge of student transiency, there is a need for parents to strive for the same goal. Mr. Watkins states that the parents focus is not on how they can best support their child's learning when they take the students out of school and moving them multiple times throughout the school year. This practice prevents the students from receiving the help that they need, in order to improve their academic performance and help the school to be successful (2.10).

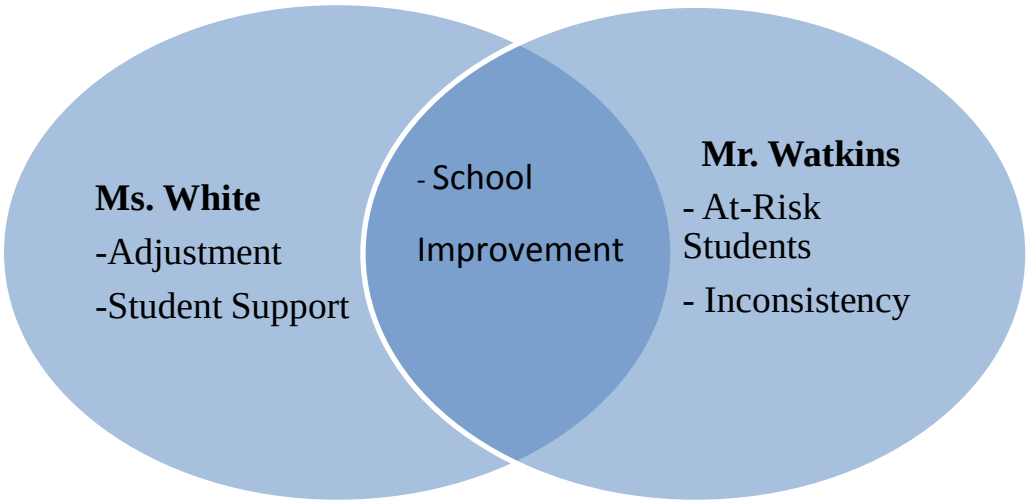
Although strategies such as the buddy system are effective, student transiency remains a concern for schools and districts. As a result, there is a need for additional strategies to address the challenges that accompany the achievement levels and behavior concerns of transient students (2.2). The shared responsibility by the school community to promote school success is required in order to prevent the negative influence of student transiency by implementing strategies and programs that effectively improve the academic performance of all students (2.10).

4.9 Intra- and Inter-Variations

Figure 4.0 represent the intra- and inter- variations between Ms. White and Mr. Watkins. From the intra-variation student transiency serving as a challenge to improve student, Ms. White identifies the need to have support for transient students. The moment transient students enter a

new school there is an adjustment that must take place in order to follow the established rules and procedures. The question then becomes how the student do fulfills the expectations of the school if they are unaware of what is expected by the school community. To address this need, schools adopt strategies to assist the transient students by providing a brochure or packet that identifies the key expectations and practices of the school. In addition, schools implement a buddy system to provide a partner whom models and informs the transient students of the expected behaviors and procedures of the school. Although schools integrate programs to help transient students adjust to the new school environment, the implementation of these strategies become burdensome due to the constant enrollment throughout the school year.

Figure 4.0: Intra- and Inter-variations of Ms. White and Mr. Watkins



Ms. White and Mr. Watkins exhibit inter-variation when they discuss negative impact of student transiency on school improvement. The school suffers when there is a revolving door of student enrollment throughout the school year. The challenge of student transiency impacts the overall success of the school. Hence, the academic ability of each student is a vital component that should be addressed as the achievement levels of students are examined based on test scores.

The inability to retrieve achievement levels of transient students from previous schools, hinder the process of providing the necessary interventions and programs for each student. Therefore school improvement measures are jeopardized by the lack of information that is needed to make sound educational decisions for each student.

Mr. Watkins's perception of student transiency illuminates the increase in transient at-risk students who have been infused in the school. The at-risk students are underperforming academically and/or have chronic behavior problems. Schaft (2005) explains that parents transfer their students that are underperforming -academically to suburban schools because they are perceived as being a better choice with more opportunities for their child to succeed. As a result, teachers are inconveniently charged with re-teaching lessons that are necessary for students to receive the required content as defined by the core curriculum and evaluated on state standardized tests. The additional preparation of transient students is a concern because of the teacher accountability that is associated with the No Child Left Behind Act that is based on standardized test scores.

On the other hand, at-risk students that demonstrate extreme and chronic disruptive behavior are transferred to different schools by parent(s) to avoid serious consequences such as expulsion. The at-risk student enrolls into a new school until the disruptive behavior becomes evident which results in another transfer by the parent. Sanderson (2003) states that the at-risk students negatively impact the school's culture and interrupt the management of the classroom that are based on established norms and culture.

4.7.2 Descriptive Category # 2 - Staff Restructure

The restructuring of staff in a school can be due to multiple causes such as; budget issues, school transfers, and seniority. The multiple causes prevent consistency is a school that is based on its staff and students. The lack of consistency impact the school improvement process that is prepared during the previous school year. The prepared plan is a reflection of the staff and students' needs. The established needs are based on data, perceptions of stakeholders, and mission of the school. The perceptions of stakeholders will change when schools are restructuring staff at the beginning of the school year. As a result, there is a need to evaluate the perceptions of the new staff members and revise the school improvement plan. The revisions of the school improvement plan are necessary to reflect the needs of the stakeholders. The needs of the stakeholders are then integrated into the mission and vision of the school that may be changed due to needs of the staff restructure. Ms. Boyer believes the challenge of staff restructure negatively impacts student achievement. Excerpt 1 explains what Ms. Boyer saw as a lack of staff consistency.

4.7.2.1 Ms. Boyer's Excerpt

Excerpt 1

1.1 Researcher:	What are the challenges of the school?
1.2 Ms. Boyer:	I think the constant changes in staff are a real problem. This is a problem because we don't have consistency. Whatever was planned the previous year is sometimes changed because the new and old staff has different ideas.
1.3 Researcher:	You mention there are constant changes in staff, what specific staff changes are taking place at the school?
1.4 Ms. Boyer:	We have to our building a new administrator. We had a staff assistant that recently moved into the classroom, we also have a new Title 1 person. We also have a lot of new teachers that have moved from different buildings within our district. There was a kind of shakeup this past June in our district.

1.5 Researcher: You pointed out the changes in administrators and other staff members, how do these changes in staff interfere with student achievement?

1.6 Ms. Boyer: Everyone had a different idea about improving student achievement. Some teachers think we have to focus on behavior first while others believe low parent involvement is the solution. Some teachers believe that just focusing on math and reading will do the job. Then we have to kind of hammer out all of those visions and blend them together, which was a little bit tough this year with the changes in staff.

1.7 Researcher: You stated that everyone has a different idea about improving student achievement can you elaborate on the concerns of the staff?

1.8 Ms. Boyer: When members of the school have different ideas, it's harder to improve student achievement. The meetings are longer and what we spent time planning the previous year is sometimes not used because we have a new staff. So instead of us just coming into the new school year and implementing the prepared plans from last year, we are basically starting from scratch in some areas.

1.9 Researcher: You expressed a concern with starting from scratch, how does this adjustment impact school improvement?

1.10 Ms. Boyer: Well I think it slows the process down, if we have to meet and come to decisions about school improvement that takes time and planning but we already had everything planned. Since we have a new staff instead of making improvements immediately based on our previous plan, we have to wait on the new plan and sometimes that takes into the middle of the year.

The above excerpt reveals three intra-variations, which are (1) reorganization; (2) different perceptions; and (3) school improvement.

4.7.2.2 Reorganization

Ms. Boyer believes a challenge for her is the constant changes of staff members for the school year. She states that this change is a challenge because the school lacks the consistency of having a staff that can agree to implement the plans from the previous year (1.2). More

specifically she points out that her school received a new principal which is a major change for a school. By having a new principal or administrator there are new expectations, procedures, and practices that should be learned and followed for the upcoming school year.

In addition, the school received a new staff assistant and Title 1 person which both are responsible for helping teachers in the classroom with their students by coming into the classroom or pulling out small groups for intervention services. Since they are new, the teachers, staff assistant, and title 1 person has to now learn how to work together and the best ways to carry out their roles as they strive to improve student achievement. There are also a lot of new teachers that have moved from other buildings within our district because there was a kind of "shakeup" this past June (1.4). The "shakeup" included administrators and staff being placed in different building to increase the chances of more schools being successful on the MEAP test based on meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Although the district identifies budget cuts and academic improvements as reasons to make the changes and reorganize the staff, Ms. Boyer believes it created a challenge that would prevent the school from being successful. The restructure of staff takes place for various reasons based on budget and academic concerns. The budget concerns are the result of low student enrollment which requires administrators to transfer staff to a school that needs additional members. Staff restructuring due to budget concerns usually take place during the school year and creates an environment that is unstable and inconsistent (1.2). Furthermore, staff members are apprehensive about preparing their classrooms and offices because the potential changes are unpredictable. Although, the majority of restructuring takes place with teachers, additional staff such as administrators, custodial, and support staff can also be impacted based on seniority and

the district's personnel needs (1.4). As a result, the staff of a school is different from the previous year which may negatively impact the improvement of student achievement levels.

4.7.2.3 Different Perceptions

She states that having a new staff created a conflict because everyone had a different idea about improving student achievement. For example, some teachers thought we have to focus on behavior first while others believe low parent involvement is the cause of poor academic performance by students, or some staff members believed just focusing on math and reading will do the job. As a result, the staff had to kind of hammer out all of those visions and blend them together which was a little bit tough this year with the changes in staff. The various perceptions and strategies that must be used to make improvements had to be consolidated. Ms. Boyer explains that when members of the school have different ideas, it's harder to improve student achievement.

She also mentions that the meetings are longer and what the old staff spent time planning the previous year is sometimes not used because we have a new staff (1.6). She also states that instead of us just coming into the new school year and implementing the prepared plans from last year they are basically starting from scratch in some areas (1.8). This practice was viewed as a waste of time for staff that was at the school in the previous year. She believes it slows the process down, because the development of a school improvement plan takes time and which was already planned but now must be revisited due to the new staff. She also acknowledges the time it takes to implement a new school improvement plan which sometimes takes place in the middle of the school year (1.10). The process takes more time and includes different factors that were not addressed in the previous plan which is necessary when a school with a new staff is striving to improve student achievement.

4.7.2.4 School Improvement

Improving student achievement for schools is based on a plan that is developed in the previous school year. The school improvement plan includes goals, strategies, and activities that outline how the school will achieve success. Furthermore, the vision, mission, and expectations of the school are developed collaboratively based on the elements of the school improvement plan. The development of the plan is a collaborative process where all stakeholders provide input that is based on the needs of the school. The needs of the school reflect the perceptions and concerns of the staff and stakeholders. Schools that restructured their staff will have to make revisions of the school improvement plan based on the voices of the new members (1.6). It is essential that schools involve all stakeholders in the development of the school improvement in order to develop a school culture that understands the task of improving student achievement is a shared responsibility.

4.7.2.5 Mr. Lowe's Excerpt

Excerpt 2

2.1 Researcher:	What are the challenges of the school?
2.2 Mr. Lowe:	I think the reorganization of the staff that schools went through this year was a problem, because we have a lot of changes to make. The old staff already developed a school improvement plan in the previous year. We also worked on the mission and vision of the school along with the principal. We now have a new principal and teachers that come in with a different mindset. Yes we want to all educate children, but how we do that was discussed and decided on, by the old staff, now we have to include the new staff.
2.3 Researcher:	You mentioned that the new staff has to now been included in discussions and decisions, what strategies did the staff use to include new staff members?

2.4 Mr. Lowe: We changed our committees to make sure everyone was apart and had a voice. The committees were then given a specific task to revise the school improvement plan, based on any new input or concerns. The new staff members were also able to give input during meetings and with surveys. The surveys asked staff members about what they expected from the school year. It also asked about and any concerns that need to be addressed in the committee or school improvement meetings.

2.5 Researcher: You stated that surveys were used for the staff, how did the surveys help with including the new staff?

2.6 Mr. Lowe: The surveys helped because it gave the new staff a voice and the ability to provide input. This also helped to build the morale of the school, by welcoming the ideas of the new staff to our school. The surveys also highlighted any new concerns that needed to be addressed and possible solutions.

2.7 Researcher: In addition to getting input from the new staff, how did the new concerns and solutions impact the school improvement plan?

2.8 Mr. Lowe: We had to spend additional time on the school improvement plan based on suggestions which were different from the original plan. We could not just implement what was decided during the last school year. The school improvement plan in some areas stayed the same such as improving behavior because the positive behavior intervention and support model is a program used at all schools in the districts. The areas that changes such as academic just had different interventions and programs that have been proven to make improvements by our new staff. The entire staff understood that we would only include the top strategies and programs that were agreed upon, before using them to improve achievement during the current school year.

Although Mr. Lowe begins his conversation about staff restructure (2.2) with reorganization throughout the school year like Ms. Boyer, his focus is more on developing committees for collaboration (2.4) and the development of surveys to gather input from the staff (2.6) in order to improve student achievement (2.8).

4.7.2.6 Reorganization

Mr. Lowe believes the reorganization of the staff is a challenge for his school. The reorganization of a staff means a lot of changes that must take place in order to improve student achievement. He points out that the changes in the staff require a new developing and implementation of a school improvement plan. In addition, the new staff has to develop a new vision and mission due to the fact that the school has a new principal along with new teachers. The vision and mission of the school is usually developed by the principal and the staff in order to promote ownership and ensure that it is practiced by all stakeholders. The collaborative development of the schools vision and mission is an effective strategy to communicate and practice the key components.

4.7.2.7 School Improvement

Although there is a common understanding that the vision and mission of the school should reflect the need to educate all children. A reorganized staff must now discuss and decide on how to accomplish this goal by including the old staff and the new staff of the school (2.2). Mr. Lowe acknowledges that more time had to be dedicated to the revising of the school improvement plan from the previous year to include recommended programs and strategies by the new staff members and stakeholders. The changes were integrated when necessary and some areas stayed the same in the school improvement plan. Mr. Lowe points out that the new staff had the same ideas as the old staff in areas such as improving behavior because the positive behavior intervention and support model is a program used at all schools in the districts. On the other hand, the new staff provided different interventions and programs that have been proven to make improvements in student achievement. The revision of the vision, mission, and school improvement plan included input from the new and old staff and reflected the top program and strategies that were decided upon by the entire staff to improve student achievement (2.8).

The revisions that are made during the development of the school improvement plan reflect the desire to educate all students and the different ideas that are shared during the meetings held by stakeholders (2.2). As a result, the development of the school improvement plan was created based on the diverse needs of the entire staff and covered areas such as academics, behavior, and parent involvement.

4.7.2.8 Committees/Surveys

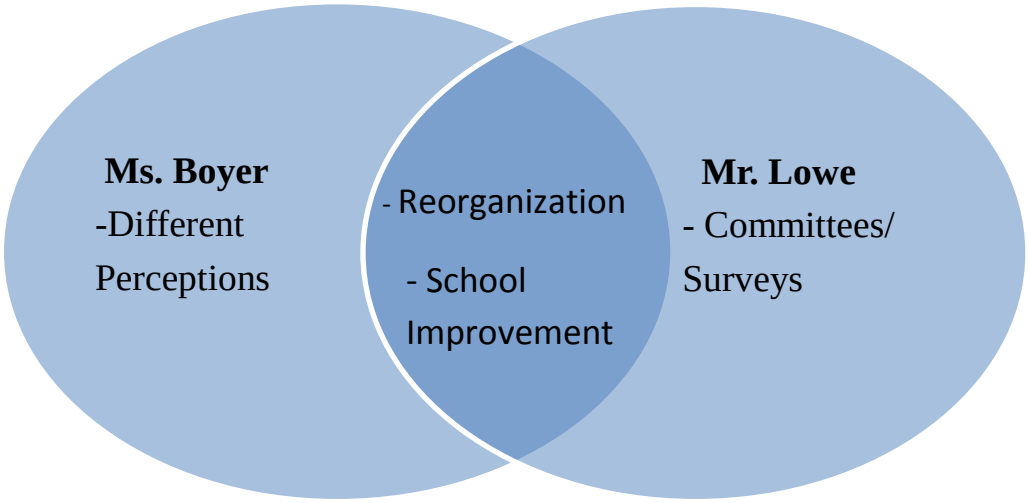
The discussions and shared decision making takes place during committee meetings that includes everyone to make sure the new staff is a part of the process and have a voice. Mr. Lowe explains that during the committee meetings, they were given a specific task to revise the school improvement plan based on any new input or concerns. The meetings served and essential component of the development of the school improvement plan because stakeholders were able to discuss their concerns and needs in their specific areas. Since there were new staff members the planning and discussions had to include their voice which took more time and required the use of techniques to get their input such as surveys (2.4). The use of tools such as surveys enables members to provide their input anonymously and immediately which shortens the added time to the development of the school improvement plan. The school strived to include all new staff and stakeholders by giving surveys. The surveys enabled participants to anonymously share concerns and expectations for the new school year (2.4). Mr. Lowe believes the surveys were effective because it gave the new staff a voice and the ability to provide input. She also points out that the surveys also helped to build the morale of the school by welcoming the ideas of the new staff to our school. The extra time put into the development and analysis of the surveys demonstrated that the new staff's input was important to the success of the school by highlighting any new concerns that need to be addressed and possible solutions (2.6). The input

received also provided an outlet for new staff members and promoted shared decision making to accomplish the goal of school success (2.6). The shared responsibility by all stakeholders works to overcome the challenge of staff restructuring by promoting a collaborative effort that is necessary to improve student achievement.

4.7.2.9 Intra- and Inter-Variations

Figure 4.1 represent the intra- and inter- variations between Ms. Boyer and Mr. Lowe. From the intra-variation staff restructuring as a challenge, Ms. Boyer emphasizes the different perspectives that staff members have about school improvement. Staff members that are transferring from different schools due to restructuring may have expectations and beliefs that are not be aligned with the established system of the new school. As a result, there is a need for staff members to merge their beliefs to develop a shared vision that reflects the new makeup of the school. This need to develop a shared vision may require schools to start over, in order to create a vision that comprehensively reflects the new staff in addition to the current staff. Therefore, the development of the shared vision may take additional time and should include the input by all staff members. As a result, the different perspectives that are held by staff members are consolidated for the purposes of improving student achievement and promoting school success.

Figure 4.1: Intra- and Inter-variations of Ms. Boyer and Mr. Lowe



Ms. Boyer and Mr. Lowe exhibit inter-variation when they discuss the challenge of reorganization within the school district. Reorganization reflects the staff restructuring that takes place as the result of budget cuts, low student enrollment, or seniority. As a result of the brand new staff, schools may have to start over with their plans to improve student achievement. Ms. Boyer and Mr. Lowe believe this is a challenge because the staff had already developed plans at their previous school and required to go through the process again at the new school with a new staff. This change requires that the school improvement plans be revised to reflect the input from the new staff as they shared strategies and programs that worked at their previous schools. Although there were many suggestions, the staff had to agree on what strategies and programs will work for the new school based on the new expectations. The school improvement plan is usually worked on in the previous school year but it had to be revisited to make sure it still fit the needs of the new staff, students and parents. This process is very important because the school improvement plan tells the staff and other stakeholders the goals and expectations of the school. Thus, the staff has to collaboratively work on the school improvement plan to prepare for a school year that reflects the needs of all stakeholders.

Mr. Lowe's perception of staff restructuring focused on the need to develop committees and work collaboratively for school improvement and the development of surveys to retrieve input from the staff to have shared-decision making. To acquire the input from all stakeholders schools hold meetings to have discussions on the concerns and needs that are pertinent to the process of improving student achievement. The meetings are designed to include all stakeholders and address all issues that reflect the elements of the school improvement plan. The meetings are divided into various categories that meet throughout the development process of the school improvement plan. For example, schools can have committee, grade-level, and subject area meetings that strive to adopt strategies and programs that best fit the needs of the school. The meetings review the previous plan and require additional time to make the necessary revisions that reflect the input of the new school community members.

4.7.3 Descriptive Category 3 - Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is essential to improving student achievement. The school community understands the importance of parent involvement and continues to implement strategies and programs to increase parent involvement. Parent involvement is needed to address the needs of the school improvement process. The shared decision making that is promoted in the school includes all stakeholders. The relationships formed between teachers and parents, creates a support system that is necessary to produce a successful school (Anderson, 2007; Reeves, 2004, 2011; Schmoker, 2006). Furthermore, the partnership developed by teachers and parents is supported by the fifth objective of the 90/90/90 model, a collaborative effort by all stakeholders (Reeves, 2004). Researchers, Bledinger and Jones (1997) examined the partnership that is developed when parents are involved and revealed the power in the relationship. The researchers

concluded that high levels of parent involvement improve academic achievement. Fearn (1993) believes schools that prioritize parent involvement programs exhibit academic excellence. Furthermore, the success of a school is not possible without a partnership shared with the staff and parents. According to Wherry (2009) one of a school's greatest strengths and are the parents. The absence of this vital resource creates a likelihood of a school that may struggle to achieve success for its school.

4.7.3.1 Ms. Rutherford's Excerpt

Ms. Rutherford believes parent involvement is important to the success of each student. She explains the importance of the school providing opportunities for parents to help their child and contribute to the improvement process. Excerpt 1 outlines Ms. Rutherford's beliefs about parent involvement.

Excerpt 1

1.1 Researcher:	How you think school may improve?
1.2 Ms. Rutherford:	Having communication with the parents and talking about ways they can help their child be successful at home. We have a lot of parent workshops to inform the parents about our plans for the school year, parent involvement in the school's activities (workshops, volunteering).
1.3 Researcher:	It seems that your school has various strategies to increase parent involvement, what are the challenges of including parents in the school improvement process?

1.4 Ms. Rutherford: If they have the parents, it is important that the whole team works together to improve student achievement. It has to be the whole village effect, it really does. Continuing to have parent support for the programs. We need parent support to help implement a lot of the things that we have scheduled for this upcoming year.

1.5 Researcher: In addition to understanding there is a need for parent support, what are the school's plans for the upcoming school year that will be impacted by parent involvement?

1.6 Ms. Rutherford: The school is planning to have a lot of programs to help struggling students that needs to be reinforced at home. The school is also asking parents to be more visible in the classrooms to assist their child.

1.7 Researcher: You mentioned that the school is planning to have a lot of programs, how does the school implement their plans with parent involvement?

1.8 Ms. Rutherford: They got to have good communication with parents. Parent involvement will be a little bit better it's tough to get the parents involved umm.

1.9 Researcher: In addition to having good communication, what can the school do to help parents become more involved?

1.10 Ms. Rutherford: We have to have resources available to their parents for accessibility, in case they have to help their child with projects or homework.

1.11 Researcher: You stated that school needs resources for the parents, what else do you need from parents in school?

1.12 Ms. Rutherford: I will like to see to see a little more going on at home in regards to parents reading to their child every night.

The above excerpt reveals three intra-variations, which are (1) communication; (2) collaboration; and (3) programs and workshops.

4.7.3.2 Programs/Workshops

Parent involvement is essential to improving student achievement. The school community understands the importance of parent involvement and continues to implement strategies and programs to increase parent involvement. Parent involvement is needed to address the needs of the school improvement process. In addition, schools offer parent workshops on the following topics: (1) academic support; (2) test strategies; (3) behavior support; (4) nutrition, and (5) financial management. The purpose of the parent workshops is to keeps parents engaged in their child's learning process and to provide support to the families of the school.

There is a great need for parent involvement to improve student achievement and promote school success. Parent involvement within the school contributes to the continuous implementation of key elements for the upcoming year: (1) school goals; (2) programs; (3) strategies; and (4) interventions. The implementation of these key elements by parents and other stakeholders are vital to the success of the school. For example, the school developed numerous

programs that help students that are struggling academically by providing strategies that can be used at home for reinforcement.

Ms. Rutherford's school understands such challenges and strives to have resources available to parents (1.4). The resources include programs such as Reading and Math Night that educates parents about the skills that students are learning in school. In addition the school offers financial literacy and opportunities for online classes to interested parents. The resources that are provided to parents promote their involvement outside of the school and encourage practices such as reading to their child as strategies to improve student achievement. In addition, it is important that parents receive support through resources, workshops and strategies on how to be involved in their child's school (1.10, 1.12). Parent involvement can be demonstrated by attending workshops, school activities, and volunteering in the classroom (1.4).

4.7.3.3 Collaboration

The shared decision making that is promoted in the school includes all teachers. The relationships formed between teachers and parents, creates a support system that is necessary to produce a successful school (Reeves et al., 2004). Researchers, Bledinger and Jones (1997) examined the partnership that is developed when parents are involved and revealed the power in the relationship. The researchers concluded that high levels of parent involvement improve academic achievement. Fearn (1993) believes schools that prioritize parent involvement programs exhibit academic excellence. Furthermore, the success of a school is not possible without a partnership shared with the staff and parents. According to Wherry (2009) one of a school's greatest strengths and are the parents. The absence of this vital resource creates a likelihood of a school that will struggle to achieve success for its school (Bledinger & Jones,

1997). Currently, parent involvement have evolved to being a key stakeholder and a part of the decision making process. Parents participate in the decision making opportunities when they select the option of joining the parent organization of the school. The collaboration by all school stakeholders to increase parent involvement is essential to improving student achievement. Ms. Rutherford referred to this practice as the whole village effect, an African proverb that places responsibility on the entire community to help children succeed. The parents provide input to decisions that are beneficial to the improvement of the school. Parental involvement is a partnership established with the school that is essential to student achievement (Emeagwali, 2009). This partnership is continuous, and goes beyond attending parent teacher conferences.

4.7.3.4 Communication

The assistance provided by parent volunteers is an example of good communication with the school. In order to schedule parents and integrate the help provided teachers must communicate the ways parents can assist the students based on their needs. The school must also communicate the expectations of the school and classroom so that parents understand how to support their child at home. Although the parent involvement at Ms. Rutherford's school is improving, she admitted that it is a challenge to get parents involved (1.2).There is a need for more parents to attend parent teacher conferences, workshops, and planning meetings. In addition, schools need more parents to help students with homework and projects that are assigned throughout the school year. According to Anfara and Mertens (2008), increasing parent involvement is a challenge due to the following barriers: (1) opposing perceptions of how parents should be involved in school; (2) parents feeling unwelcomed in the school and classroom; (3) lack of communication to parents about involvement opportunities; (4) the inability for schools to address the parents basic needs; (5) schedule conflict with jobs of parents; and (6) a lack of

resources. Although there is a need for partnerships between parents and teachers, schools recognize the challenges that exist in schools to build these relationships (Reeves, 2004). Schools must promote parental involvement in the classroom. The development of programs for parents to help struggling students and opportunities for parents to volunteer in their child's classroom are examples of strategies to increase parent involvement (1.6). According to Wherry (2009), the following tips also increase parent involvement: 1) contacting parents early on and before a problem occurs; 2) letting parents know how they can reinforce classroom learning at home; and 3) addressing parents' concerns head-on. Wherry (2009) explains that having good communication with parents are key to effectively implement the recommended tips (1.8).

4.7.3.5 Mr. Young's Excerpt

Mr. Young also believes it is the school's responsibility to inform parents on how to be involved in the school. In addition, he explains how increasing parent involvement is a collaborative effort shared by all teachers See Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2

2.1 Researcher:	What is your role in improving the school?
2.2 Mr. Young:	Looking at scores and putting packets together for parents especially at conferences. Like this is what we are doing in class and this is what I would like for you to do at home to enforce it. I have the same ideas I have in my classroom on a sheet of paper.
2.3 Researcher:	You mentioned that packets are developed for parents to enforce the skills that are learned in the classroom, what else is needed to increase parent involvement?

2.4 Mr. Young: We need parents getting on board looking to see what we can do better. We are still working on it also with parents we've had meetings with reading how you can help your child at home, we've held workshops for that.

2.5 Researcher: Although the school has workshops for the parents do you think there is still need to improve parent involvement?

2.6 Mr. Young: We need to improve parent involvement. If they're not here how do we teach them how we hold parents accountable for that that's part of our school improvement.

2.7 Researcher: You pointed the out the concerns with parent involvement, what are some strategies that you think helps to improve parent involvement?

2.8 Mr. Young: We've listened to parents as far as their needs things that are lacking at home so we went to the community to see how we can help this child and family, PTA has donated food and clothes teachers have donated money we look to see what their needs are we try to get as many parents involved.

2.9 Researcher: You stated that your school addresses the needs of the parents, how does the parent assistance increase parent involvement?

2.10 Mr. Young: When we send letters home because we have the food drives boots and coats during the winter lots of parents that are less fortunate come out to get help. This attention to the parents' needs increases parent involvement.

Although Mr. Moore begins his conversation about increasing parent involvement (2.2) to obtain achievement data like Mr. John, his focus is more on providing reinforcement of skills at home (2.2) workshops (2.2) and addressing the needs of parents.

4.7.3.6 Reinforcement at Home

To improve student achievement, parents should be aware of their child's current academic performance. Parents can gain access to this data by teachers sharing student test scores (2.2). Initially, the teacher reviews the results and provides an analysis for the parents that guide suggested interventions and practices. To assist with the necessary interventions based on student test scores, teachers develop homework packets that reinforce the skills that are taught in the classroom (2.4). The homework packets provide support materials such as key vocabulary, formulas, facts, and examples for parents to help their child at home. In addition to the packets, parents are given strategies to use at home to reinforce the skills. The strategies include: (1) note taking; (2) testing strategies; (3) real world connections; and (4) study skills. For example, a page on real world connections will teach fractions by having the student use measuring cups for a recipe. While a note taking page of the packet will include various graphic organizers such as outlines, Venn Diagrams, and story maps. The purpose of the packets is to provide a resource for parents that make it easier to help their child with their homework and academic performance within the classroom (2.4). The teachers provide outreach by sharing student academic performance and providing strategies to reinforce school lessons at home. The resources that are provided to parents are a reflection of what is being taught and practiced in the classroom. The support provided by teachers enables parents to effectively help their child and improve the student's academic performance. Teachers allow parents to visit the classroom to see first -hand what the students are expected to do in the classroom. In addition, the subject based resources

that are provided to parents by teachers help reinforce the skills that are taught in the classroom. The support for parents also includes parent workshops to help parents improve their levels of involvement. The parent workshops develop programs and activities such as read to a class day or classroom volunteer day that strive to increase the levels of parent involvement in the school.

According to Hoff (2007), parents are the student's support system beyond the school and it is necessary for parents to provide the educational consistency for students to be successful. The involvement of parents in the school environment is vital to student achievement.

4.7.3.7 Workshops/Meetings

Although, strategies such as providing support packets keep parents involved in their child's education, there is a need for additional involvement by parents. To address this need Mr. Young believes parents should reflect on how they can increase their involvement in the school. These opportunities for parents to reflect can take place at parent meetings that are held throughout the school year. The purpose of the meetings is to have parents discuss strategies to help students improve their academic performance.

For example, a parent meeting focused on developing strategies to help students with their reading levels. The parents agreed at the meeting that they would help their child read at home. The parent meetings translate into parent workshops (2.4). The workshops addressed the needs of the parents and families (2.4). To address this need, food, money, and clothing were donated by the stakeholders to provide assistance to families that were in need. The donations were based on the needs that were communicated by the parents at the meetings. Parents that received the donations were very grateful and continued to be involved in the school. The support for parents took place throughout the school year with food drives and winter wear

(boots and coats) donations. The entire school community participated in many programs that provide support to the families in need (2.10).

4.7.3.8 Parents' Needs

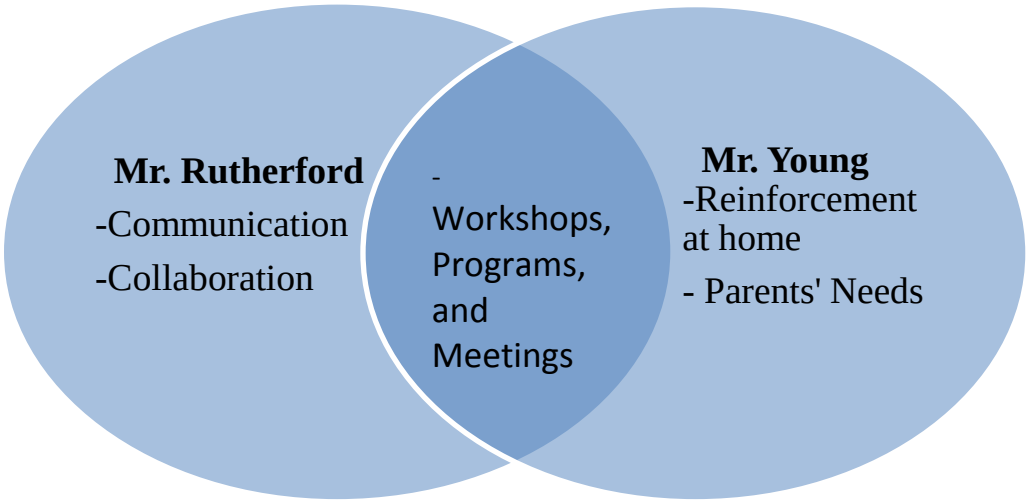
The author (Hoff, 2007) continues by stating that schools that teach students from a low socioeconomic background have to address the basic needs of their families to increase parent involvement. As a result, it essential that schools listens to all needs of their parents.

To address these basic needs such as food and clothing schools collect donations to implement charity drives such as (1) food; (2) clothing; and (3) winter wear (hats, gloves, and scarves). The support provided to parents is shared by the entire school community and addresses their basic needs in order to help them address their child's academic needs. When schools address the basic needs of their parents they are able to effectively programs and activities that focus on academic achievement.

4.7.3.9 Intra- and Inter-Variations

Figure 4.2 represent the intra- and inter- variations between Mr. Rutherford and Mr. Young. From the intra-variation increasing parent involvement to improve student achievement, Mr. Rutherford emphasizes the need for good communication with parents. This claim about having clear communication with parents to increase parent involvement data is supported by (Hoff, 2007) when he asserts there needs to be a more aggressive effort to communicate with the parents in order to improve student achievement. Wherry (2009) explains that when schools have clear communication with parents they promote involvement of programs and activities that support student learning.

Figure 4.2: Intra- and Inter-variations of Mr. Rutherford and Mr. Young



Mr. Rutherford and Mr. Young exhibit inter-variation when they discuss the need for schools to have workshops, programs, and meetings that provide academic strategies to support students at home (Wherry, 2009). The academic strategies provided to parents reinforce the core curriculum skills such as reading (2.4) that are learned in the classroom. Researchers (Georgiou & Tourva, 2009) support the concept of parental involvement has a positive influence on student achievement.

Mr. Young's examination of parent involvement varies from Mr. Rutherford's conception and focuses on the need for parents to practice with students and reinforces the skills learned in the classroom at home. The teachers provide outreach by sharing student academic performance and developing packets (2.2) to reinforce school lessons at home. The resources that are provided to parents are a reflection of what is being taught and practiced in the classroom. The support provided by teachers enables parents to effectively help their child and improve the student's academic performance. Hoff (2007) points out that a parent(s) is the student's support system

beyond the school and it is necessary for parents to provide the educational consistency for students to be successful.

4.8 MEAP Test Scores

The Chi-Squared Goodness-of-Fit Test will be used to analyze MEAP test data. In this test, the number of students who scored in each of the four levels of the MEAP test in 2010 will be compared with the number of students who scored in each of the four levels of the MEAP test in 2009. The four levels of the MEAP test, from lowest to highest, are 4: Not Proficient, 3: Partially, 2: Proficient and 1: Advanced.

The formula for the Chi-Square test is as follows:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(\text{observed - expected})^2}{\text{expected}}$$

In this formula, O represents the observed frequency and E represents the expected frequency. As a result, the goal will be to determine whether there is significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP Test scores. To make this determination, the chi-squared calculations for each MEAP Test scores are displayed in Tables 4.1.

4.8.1 Hypothesis

For the purpose of the study, the researcher developed the following hypothesis:

H-null: There is no significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP Test scores.

H-alt: There is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP Test scores.

Table 4.1: Chi Square Test/Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Math (Grade 3)

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3 + Level 4 (< 1)
Observed	Ob.	19	62	18 + 0 = 18
Expected	Ex.	35.7	57.1	7.1 + 0 = 7.1
Observed – Expected	Ob.-Ex.	-16.7	4.9	10.9 + 0 = 10.9
(Observed – Expected) ²	(Ob.-Ex.)²	278.9	24	118.8 + 0 = 118.8
Chi Square Test	(Ob.-Ex.)²/Ex.	7.8	.4	16.7 + 0 = 16.7
Standardized Residual	Ob.-Ex./√Ex.	**-2.8**	.6	**4.1 + 0 = 4.1**

X^2 = 7.8 + .4 + 16.7 + 0; X^2 = 24.9; df = 2; $X^2 \geq 5.991$; X^2 is Significant – Reject the Null Hypothesis.

Table 4.2: Chi Square Test/Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Math (Grade 4)

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3 + Level 4 (< 1)
Observed	Ob.	20	59	20 + 0 = 20
Expected	Ex.	26.5	66.3	7.2 + 0 = 72
Observed – Expected	Ob.-Ex.	-6.5	-7.3	12.8 + 0 = 12.8
(Observed – Expected) ²	(Ob.-Ex.)²	42.3	53.3	163.8 + 0 = 163.8
Chi Square Test	(Ob.-Ex.)²/Ex.	1.6	.8	22.8 + 0 = 22.8
Standardized Residual	Ob.-Ex./√Ex.	**-1.3**	**-.9**	**4.8 + 0 = 4.8**

X^2 = 1.6 + .8 + 22.8 + 0; X^2 = 25.2; df = 2; $X^2 \geq 5.991$; X^2 is Significant -Reject the Null Hypothesis.

Table 4.3: Chi Square Test/Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Math (Grade 5)

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Observed	Ob.	7	40	41	12
Expected	Ex.	4.5	35.2	50	10.2
Observed – Expected	Ob.-Ex.	2.5	4.8	-9	1.8
(Observed – Expected) ²	(Ob.-Ex.)²	6.25	23.04	81	3.24
Chi Square Test	(Ob.-Ex.)²/Ex.	1.4	.7	1.62	.3
Standardized Residual (Not Significant)	Ob.-Ex./√Ex.	-	-	-	-

X^2 = 1.4 + .7 + 16.2+ .3; X^2 = 4.02; df = 3; $X^2 \geq 7.815$; X^2 is Not Significant. – Fail to Reject the Null Hypothesis

Table 4.4: Chi Square Test/Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Reading (Grade 3)

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Observed	Ob.	19	54	18	9
Expected	Ex.	27.4	60.7	10.7	1.2
Observed – Expected	Ob.-Ex.	-8.4	-6.7	7.3	7.8
(Observed – Expected) ²	(Ob.-Ex.)²	70.6	44.9	53.3	60.8
Chi Square Test	(Ob.-Ex.)²/Ex.	2.6	.7	5	50.7
Standardized Residual	Ob.-Ex./√Ex.	**-1.6**	**-.9**	2.2	**7.1**

X^2 = 2.6 + .7 + 5 + 50.7; X^2 = 59; df = 3; $X^2 \geq 7.815$; X^2 is Significant. - Reject the Null Hypothesis.

Table 4.5: Chi Square Test/Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Reading (Grade 4)

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Observed	Ob.	11	57	27	5
Expected	Ex.	16.9	62.7	16.9	3.6
Observed – Expected	Ob.-Ex.	-5.9	-5.7	10.1	1.4
(Observed – Expected) ²	(Ob.-Ex.)²	34.81	32.49	102	2
Chi Square Test	(Ob.-Ex.)²/Ex.	3.2	.5	6	.5
Standardized Residual	Ob.-Ex./√Ex.	**-1.4**	**-.7**	**2.5**	.7

$X^2 = 3.2 + .5 + 6 + .5$; $X^2 = 10.2$; df = 3; $X^2 \geq 7.815$; X^2 is Significant. - Reject the Null Hypothesis.

Table 4.6: Chi Square Test/Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Reading (Grade 5)

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Observed	Ob.	23	47	23	6
Expected	Ex.	9.1	54.5	23.9	12.5
Observed – Expected	Ob.-Ex.	13.9	-7.5	-.9	-6.5
(Observed – Expected) ²	(Ob.-Ex.)²	193.2	56.25	.81	42.3
Chi Square Test	(Ob.-Ex.)²/Ex.	21.2	1	.03	3.4
Standardized Residual	Ob.-Ex./√Ex.	**4.6**	-.1	**-.2**	**-1.8**

$X^2 = 21.2 + 1.0 + .033.4$; $X^2 = 25.6$; df = $3X^2 \geq 7.815$; X^2 is Significant - Reject the Null Hypothesis

4.8.2 Analysis of Chi-Squared Results

Overall, there is strong evidence to support the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP Test scores. On the other hand, the data revealed that of the six MEAP test examined for this study, one test,

Math, grade five was not significant. Thus, we fail to reject the null and there is no significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP Test scores.

The following results reveal that there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP Test scores. The MEAP test math, grade 3 indicated significant difference between the observed and the expected frequency (chi-squared value = 24.9, df = 2). The MEAP test math, grade 4 indicated significant difference between the observed and the expected frequency (chi-squared value = 25.2, df = 2). In contrast, the MEAP test math, grade 5 did not indicate a significant difference between the observed and the expected frequency (chi-squared value = 4.02, df = 3).

The MEAP test reading, grade 3 indicated significant difference between the observed and the expected frequency (chi-squared value = 59, df = 3). The MEAP test reading, grade 4 indicated significant difference between the observed and the expected frequency (chi-squared value = 10.2, df = 3). The MEAP test, grade 5 did not indicate a significant difference between the observed and the expected frequency (chi-squared value = 25.6, df = 3). The result of the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test demonstrates that five out of the six MEAP tests' observed scores are inconsistent with the expected scores.

4.8.3 Standardized Residual

Chi-Squared tests calculations that are significant require researchers to calculate the standardized residual for each category. The standardized residual identifies the contribution of each category to the concluded relationship between the observed data (Ob.) and expected data (Ex.). The standardized residuals for each of the five MEAP test scores are displayed in Table 3. To calculate the standardized residual the following formula must be used:

$$\text{Standardized Residual} = \frac{\text{observed-expected}}{\sqrt{\text{expected}}}$$

Figure 4.3: Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Reading (Grade 3)

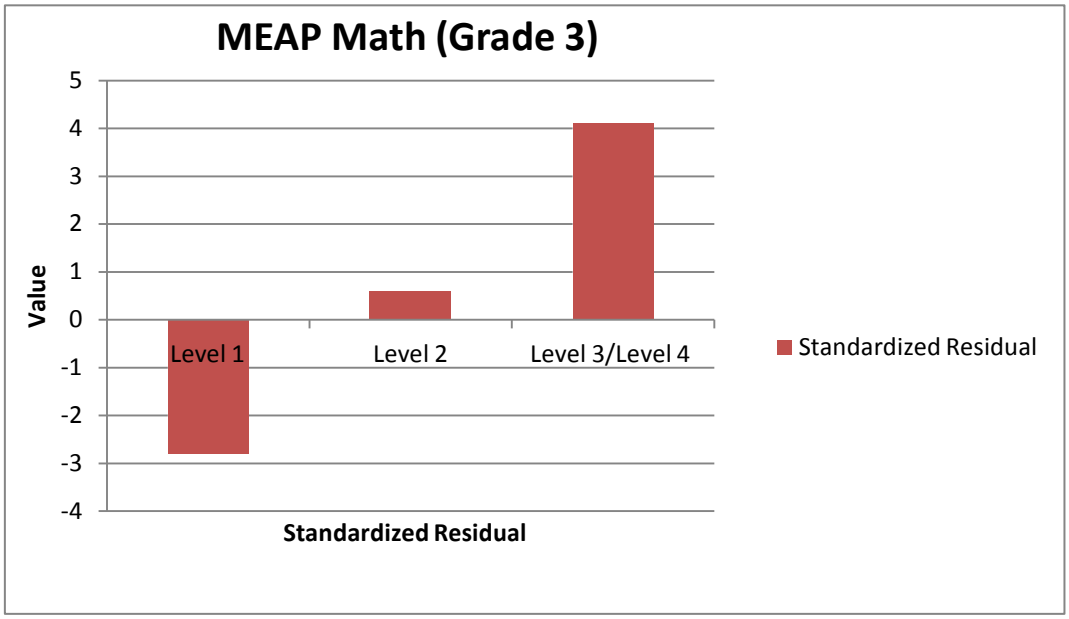
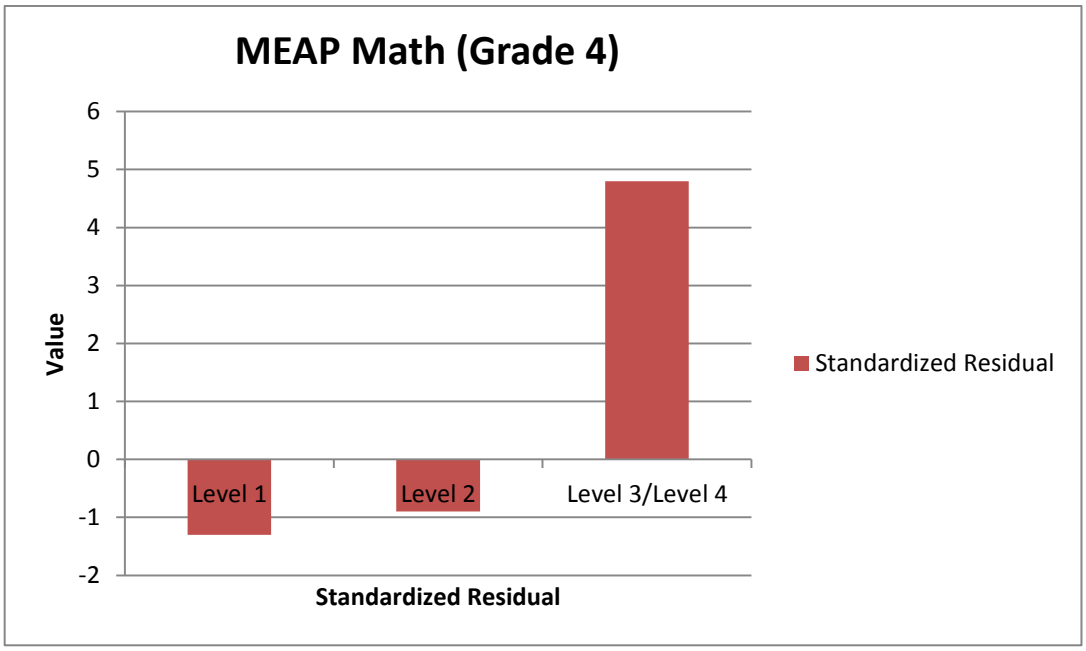


Figure 4.4: Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Math (Grade 4)



***MEAP Math (Grade 5) – Not Significant: Standardized Residual does not apply.**

Figure 4.5: Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Reading (Grade 3)

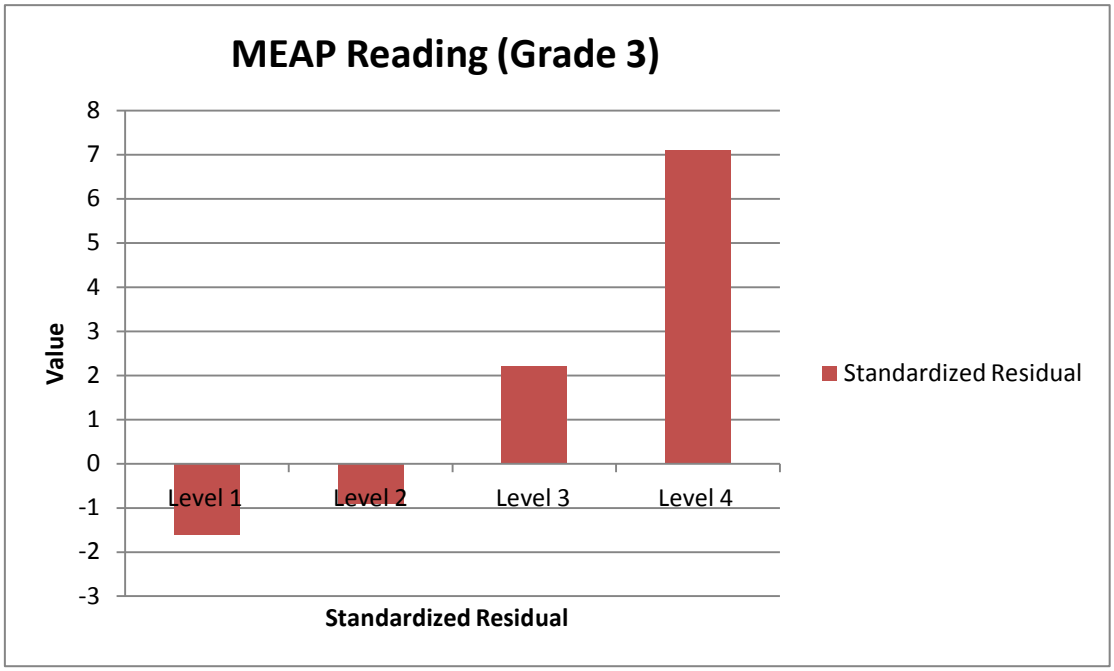


Figure 4.6: Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Reading (Grade 4)

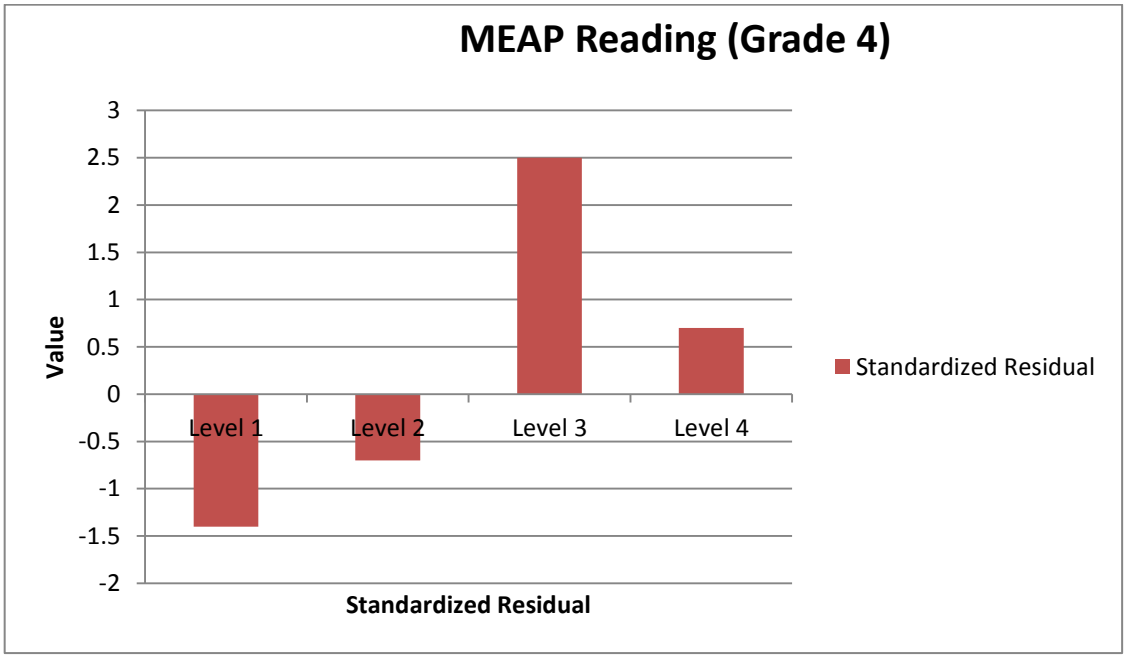
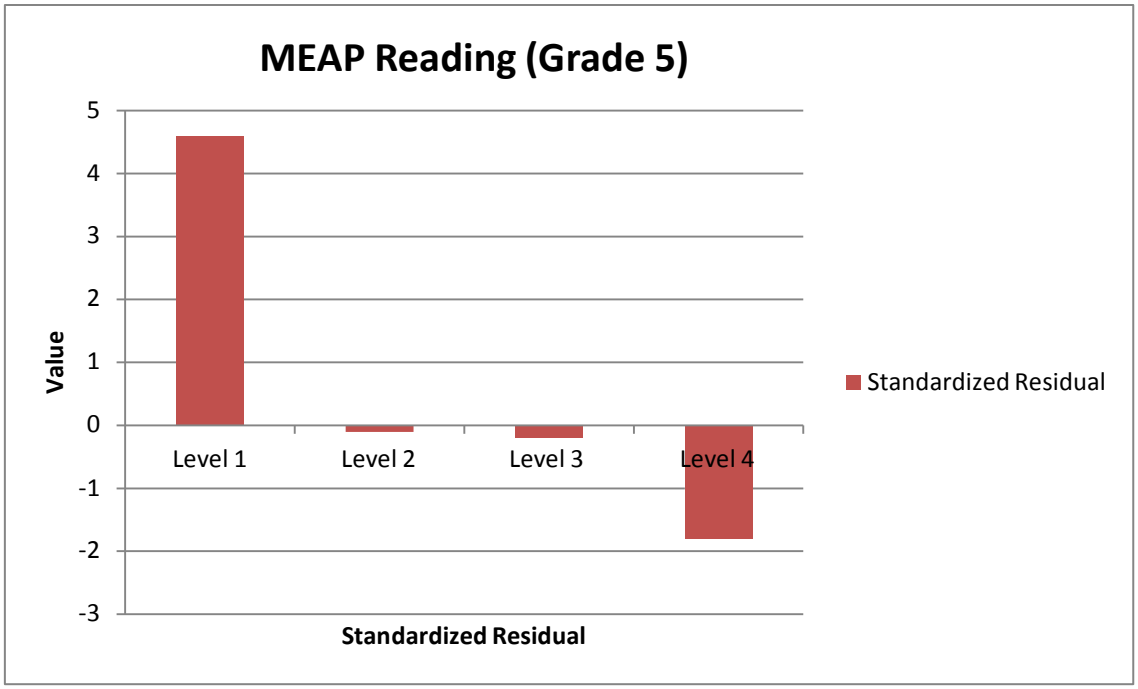


Figure 4.7: Standardized Residual Data - MEAP Reading (Grade 5)



4.8.4 Analysis of Standardized Residual Results

The calculated standardized residuals reveal an increase (+) or decrease (-) in each of the four categories. The values that are negative or demonstrate a decrease mean that fewer students tested in that specific level, contributing to the distribution in each category. For example, the Math MEAP Test, grade 3 show a standardized residual of -2.8 which means there is a contribution of negative 2.8 in level 1, above proficient, during the 2010 year compared to the 2009 school year. In addition, the results reveal an increase in the distribution performing in level 3, below proficient, during the 2010 year compared to the 2009 school year. The results reveal that although the chi-squared values are significant the distribution of students in the four levels may show an increase and decrease in categories that are not desired. Ideally, the positive standardized residuals should be in the higher levels (Levels 1 and 2) and the negative standardized residuals should be in the lower levels (Levels 3 and 4).According to the results of

this study, one of the five significant tests demonstrated and increase in levels 1 or 2. The MEAP test reading, grade 5 indicated a positive standardized residual value of 4.6. Although, this positive standardized residual is an increase in fifth grade students that performed at level 1 in reading, the remaining four significant tests showed a decrease.

Despite the decline in MEAP test scores for the 2009 and 2010 school years, the results does not evaluate the multiple categories of each of the levels or the academic growth that is examined when the state determines AYP for each school. Based on the proficiency level spectrum each of the levels is broken into three sub-levels. The three sub-levels are as follows: 1) Low; 2) Mid; and 3) High. For example, the expanded form of level 1, Above Proficiency, is 1 Low; 1 Mid; and 1 High. Hence, a student can test at various levels in each category. Therefore, the results from this study provide a broad overview of the school's academic performance based on MEAP Test scores. Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected, thus, there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP test scores.

4.9 Implications

4.9.1 The Perennial Challenges of an Urban School Community

The study revealed phenomenographic categories of teachers' conceptions about school improvement challenges. The categories were based on excerpts that presented evidence for three common categories. The categories for challenges are: 1) student transiency throughout the school year; 2) staff restructure and transfers to different schools; and 3) lack of parent involvement in school and at home. The common categories were established to identify the elements that teachers perceived prevented the improvement of student achievement. Although common conceptions were developed, the excerpts of teachers presented variations of the same

concept based on their past experiences. This study implies teachers' conceptions on school improvement challenges should be taken into consideration during the decision-making process.

When teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges are considered issues and concerns that have a negative impact but rarely are addressed will be revealed. These issues and concerns are rarely addressed because the decisions are made from the top leadership who may be out of touch with the issues that teachers encounter throughout the school year. Hence, the challenges that are identified by teachers may provide school districts with a comprehensive outlook on the challenges that may be hindering the school improvement process.

Johnson (2008) acknowledges the impact of school improvement challenges urban school districts. Russo (2004) also states that the negative characteristics that are associated with an urban area directly impact the school districts that are responsible for educating poor and minority children. Anderson (2007) points out that the achievement gap of schools serving poor and minority students has increased over the last ten years, contributing to the failing state of urban school communities. Bracey (1992) states that this widening achievement gap between minority and white students is reflected in graduation rates, standardized test scores and the overall educational experiences that are available in the classrooms. In order for urban schools to overcome the challenges that influence the achievement levels of their student body, these challenges must be addressed (Bainbridge & Lainsley, 2002).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to document, analyze, and interpret teachers' conceptions regarding student achievement. This study focused on teachers that work in an urban school setting. This study assessed whether a common theme existed with teachers' conceptions and scrutinized teacher practices. Teacher practices were monitored through a behavior objective lens and evaluated base on the five elements of the 90/90/90 model. After this researcher considered the teachers' conceptions, various school improvement challenges were investigated.

Teachers' conceptions about student achievement and school improvement challenges were organized into excerpts that were developed into common descriptive categories. Teachers were defined as the target stakeholder and served as the key data source for the study. In addition, the participating teachers of the study taught and implemented strategies to improve student achievement. Urban school communities confront challenges that encumber the school improvement process. Thus, my goal was to identify what practices and strategies were based on common conceptions used by teachers. Individual interviews and teacher observations provided the foundation for their school improvement experiences.

The data acquired from the individual interviews was organized into rich excerpts that followed a conversational format. The conversation format enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions that directed teachers to provide in-depth responses. The detailed interview data from the 20 teachers were clustered into common descriptive categories, interpreted and assessed for intra- and inter-variations. Furthermore, classroom observation transcripts were used to determine the frequency of teacher practices that reflect elements of the 90/90/90 model. The

clustering of observation transcripts were clustered into excerpts that reflect the elements of the 90/90/90 model. The examination of the observation data was based on the Classroom Observation Protocol that reflected the five elements of the 90/90/90 model.

To address the quantitative section of the study, the Chi-Squared Goodness-of-Fit Test was used to analyze MEAP test data. In this test, the number of students who scored in each of the four levels of the MEAP test in 2010 was compared with the number of students who scored in each of the four levels of the MEAP test in 2009. The data suggests that there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP Test scores.

Furthermore, the calculated standardized residuals were used to explore if there were an increase (+) or decrease (-) in each of the four MEAP categories. The results confirm that the chi-squared values are significant the distribution of students in the four levels may show an increase and decrease in categories that are not desired. According to the results of this study, one of the five significant tests established an increase in levels 1 or 2. The MEAP test reading, grade 5 indicated a positive standardized residual value of 4.6. Although, this positive standardized residual is an increase in fifth grade students that performed at level 1 in reading, the remaining four significant tests showed a decrease. The results from this study provide a broad overview of the school's academic performance based on MEAP Test scores. Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected, thus, there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP test scores.

In this chapter, each of the research questions is addressed and implications are discussed based on the data. The following sections present the research questions and conclusions of the study. This chapter also provides a summary of the 2009 and 2010 MEAP Test scores. The MEAP test scores are considered based on calculations from the chi-squared-goodness-of-fit test

and standardized residual. According the MEAP Test results of Wayne K-6 school, there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP test scores. Despite the decline in MEAP test scores for the 2009 and 2010 school years, the results does not evaluate the multiple categories of each of the levels or the academic growth that is examined when the state determines AYP for each school. Therefore, the results from this study provide a broad overview of the school's academic performance based on MEAP Test scores. Based on these results, there is a significant difference between the observed (2010) and the expected (2009) MEAP test scores.

5.2 Conclusions

The study investigates three research questions that explore teachers' conceptions and practices to improve student achievement. Question 1: What are teachers' conceptions of school improvements that lead to student achievement? To address this question, this study examined the intra- and inter-variations that were established based on the past experiences and perceptions of urban school teachers. In manuscript 1, the phenomenographic analysis provides a detailed examination of descriptive categories that illuminate teachers' conceptions about improving student achievement. The descriptive categories that teachers believed were necessary to improve student achievement were: (1) analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions; (2) a model to decrease disruptive behavior; and (3) high expectations for all students. These teachers' conceptions directly influence a school's test scores and student academic performance (Johnson, 2008). As a result, teachers participate in the efforts to develop common conceptions on school success, in order to improve student achievement. Acknowledging, teachers' conceptions is a major step forward in improving student academic achievement.

To further guide this study, the following additional research questions were considered: Question 2: To what extent, do teacher practices reflect elements of the 90/90/90 model? The 90/90/90 model generates successful urban school by addressing school community needs. In addition, the implementation of the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model: (1) a strong focus on academic achievement; (2) clear curriculum choices; (3) frequent assessment of school progress and multiple opportunities for improvement; (4) a focus on writing in all areas; and (5) collaborative scoring on student work has proven to overcome the common barriers of the poverty-stricken urban school community (Johnson, 2008).

The Classroom Observation Protocol (COP) was employed to observe teacher practices in an urban school. The COP is predicated on the five elements of the 90/90/90 model. Data confirmed that the participating teachers applied only three of the five practices during the observation period. The three practices were: 1) a strong focus on academic achievement; (2) clear curriculum choices; and (3) frequent assessment of school progress and multiple opportunities for improvement. Based on the results of the COP, the teachers failed to incorporate elements four and five of the 90/90/90 model. As a result, only 60% of the 90/90/90 elements were applied by the participating teachers.

The study also addressed Question 3: What challenges do urban school teachers encounter during the school improvement process? As the urban school attempts to develop common conceptions to improve student achievement, it is important to recognize the challenges of an urban school community. Since teachers pinpointed these issues, a school community can now address these issues in the school improvement process. Furthermore, the analysis of the existing challenges may contribute to a thorough understanding of the school improvement

process by exposing potential obstacles to upgrading minority students' academic progress. The analysis of school improvement challenges recognized the following common teachers' conceptions: 1) student transiency throughout the school year; 2) staff restructure and transfers to different school; and 3) lack of parent involvement in school at home.

5.3 Implications

The following five implications emerged from the data:

1. Illumination of Educational Practice through Theory;
2. Teachers' Conceptions as a basis for Improvement of Student Achievement;
3. Intra – and Inter-variation Analysis of Teacher Concepts;
4. The Development of Effective Teacher Practices;
5. The Perennial Challenges of an Urban School Community;

5.3.1 Implication for Illumination of Educational Practice through Theory

For the purpose of this study, I used the 90/90/90 school improvement model to evaluate academic achievement for minority students. Based on this objective, the researchers (Anderson, 2007; Reeves, 2004, 2011; Schmoker, 2006) claim that the 90/90/90 model improves student achievement. The emphasis on student achievement is a common objective to address the demands of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Brown & Clift, 2010).

This study is grounded in the 90/90/90 model. However, this model did not have a theoretical basis. Part of the study links were made between the 90/90/90 model and the behavioral objectives of Ralph Tyler (1949) because of the parallel between the model and the curriculum theory. This study implies a practical reform model such as the 90/90/90 model is necessary for school improvement and it should be anchored in a theory of curriculum so that it

could be used as a lens to view student achievement. A key principle of Tyler's curriculum theory is academic purpose and Kalima (2009) points out that a school should be aligned with the academic purpose. A purpose-driven school will drive a plan of action to improve student achievement (Schmoker, 2006). When a theoretical framework supports a reform model for school improvemen.it will develop clarity about theory and practice (Flowers et al., 2009).

Although the common objective of improving student achievement is prevalent in education, reform models are absent of a curriculum foundation that supports its effectiveness. This study now provides a model that is rooted in a curriculum theory. According to Goodland (1995) the contribution of the alignment between a model for school improvement and a curriculum theory enables districts to adopt reform models that reflect their intended purpose for achievement according to Goodland (1995). The selection of a model that reflects the purpose of the school helps educators to make the appropriate curriculum-based decisions to improve student achievement (Johnson, 2008).

5.3.2 Implication for Teachers' Conceptions as a basis for Improvement of Student Achievement

This study provides descriptive categories based on teachers' conceptions about student achievement. Hence, the study implies that in order for districts to improve student achievement in line with Duffy (2009) the input from teachers must be taken into consideration for curriculum-based decisions. The task of identifying teachers' concepts of school improvement used phenomenography (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004). This study developed meaningful descriptive categories based on teachers' conceptions of about student achievement. The categories developed identified the most important categories to improve student achievement as perceived by teachers. Although this study revealed the following three categories based on teachers' conceptions of school improvement: 1) student achievement data

for developing interventions; 2) a model for decreasing disruptive behavior; and 3) parent involvement for supporting children's learning, the categories fail to reveal any new objectives that are based on current trends and research to improve student achievement. The absence of fresh and innovative categories to improve student achievement implies that the conceptions of teachers reflect the practices of the established platform by the educational system (Adams & Seagreen, 2007). The established platform by most school districts follows a top down model that fail to incorporate the shared-decision making and collaborative efforts of teachers (Rooney, 2010).

Therefore, this study implies that school districts that continue to ignore the impact of teachers' conceptions about school improvement will struggle to improve student achievement like (Covey, 2009; Hill, 2009; Kennedy, 2008) state. This study clearly reveals the impact of the teachers' voice in the decision making process. The teacher is responsible for creating productive learning experiences for students that promote achievement (Hill, 2009). In order to effectively create the productive learning experiences, teacher input must be considered (Duffy, 2009). The input from teachers reflects their conceptions about school improvement and provides a plan for student achievement (Anderson, 2007). Although this study has developed meaningful descriptive categories using phenomenography, as mentioned earlier the results reveal the teachers are identifying elements that reflect the traditional objectives of the educational system. This revelation implies a need for schools to have opportunities for teachers to have intense discussions about school improvement in order to get to the root of their conceptions that are based on their past experiences. The discussions that take place will allow schools to develop a curriculum plan that is an authentic reflection of teachers' conceptions about school improvement for student achievement (Kennedy, 2008).

5.4.3 Implication for Intra – and Inter-variation Analysis of Teacher Concepts

This study provides an analysis of intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions about student achievement. The intra-variations provide an outlook of the variations that are present within the conceptions of one teacher and inter-variations is a comparison of multiple teachers' conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997). The intra-and inter-variation analysis is vital to identifying the perceptions and beliefs that are held by teachers of a school (Anderson, 2007). The analysis enables schools to become aware of common and conflicting perceptions of teachers that may help or hinder the improvement of student achievement (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). Thus, this study implies in order for schools to improve student achievement, the intra- and inter-variations of teachers' conceptions may be identified. Senge (2007) explains the identification and consolidation of perceptions may enable schools to address the challenges that prevent the improvement of student achievement with a common mindset. Schools that are on the same accord overcome these challenges because of the shared conceptions that lead to actions that reflect the needs of all stakeholders (Johnson & Pajeras, 1996). The stakeholders of the school become a team and work together to improve student achievement with a shared vision that is supported by the consolidation of conceptions (Hoff, 2007).

Schools that encounter conflicting conceptions that reflect inter-variations continue to work against each other as they strive to improve student achievement (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). The conflict prevents the school from addressing challenges as a union. As a result, there are additional challenges that arise based on the intra-variations of conceptions that are held based on past experiences. The need for schools to allocate time to deal with the intra-variations decreases the need time to focus on the inter-variations and the conceptions that are shared and essential to improving student achievement. Duffy (2009) argues that the use of shared

conceptions better prepare schools to successfully address the common educational challenges by understanding that improving student achievement is a shared responsibility.

5.3.4 Implication for Development of Effective Teacher Practices

Teachers serve multiple roles in the classroom that are not discussed in fundamental courses for teachers. In addition, best practices and strategies that are needed to create academic success is not a skill that is conclusively learned on the job. As a result, teachers should experience a continuum of development throughout the school year. This study implies that in order for teachers to develop practices that are vital to student achievement, they should participate in effective professional development. Professional development workshops and seminars serve as the ongoing training that takes place in order to keep teachers abreast of the new trends in education.

Easton (2008) states, that an effective professional development supports and cultivates instructional skills of teachers that enable improvements in the classroom through the development, evaluation, and implementation of a coherent curriculum. According to Kist (2003) professional development of teachers is a proactive approach that helps to eliminate the methods that are adopted by teachers that are outdated and ineffective for schools of the 21st century. In addition, he explains that students of the 21st century need a more innovative and cooperative approach to teaching in order to reach them.

The incorporation of the 90/90/90 model requires schools to prioritize quality professional development opportunities for students (Reeves, 2004). Quality professional development opportunities are utilized to establish adequate strategies that aid in the implementation of the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 model in order to produce school

success**.** Thus, this study implies that teacher practices should reflect all five elements of the 90/90/90 model. Participating schools of the 90/90/90 model (Reeves, 2004) expects that the everyday challenges faced by teachers are addressed head on in effective professional development programs. Furthermore, the results of such a program arm teachers with strategies and interventions that have been proven to work in schools.

The evidence provided that support the recommended strategies demystify the thought that professional development for teachers is irrelevant and time consuming. Dufour (2002) states that, the majority of teachers use their professional development experience as a means to complain about the current conditions of the school. Professional development of teachers continues to be a vital element in 90/90/90 schools. According to Anderson (2007) the incorporation of effective staff development is an essential element of the 90/90/90 model that impacts the success of schools. The model continuously work to eliminate the negative perception associated with the professional development offered to teachers, in order to implement the five characteristics of the 90/90/90 schools that have been proven to increase academic achievement.

5.3.5 Implication for Perennial Challenges of an Urban School Community

The study revealed phenomenographic categories of teachers' conceptions about school improvement challenges. The categories were based on excerpts that presented evidence for three common categories. The categories for challenges are: 1) student transiency throughout the school year; 2) staff restructure and transfers to different schools; and 3) lack of parent involvement in school and at home. The common categories were established to identify the elements that teachers perceived prevented the improvement of student achievement. Although common conceptions were developed, the excerpts of teachers presented variations of the same

concept based on their past experiences. This study implies teachers' conceptions on school improvement challenges should be taken into consideration during the decision-making process.

When teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges are considered issues and concerns that have a negative impact but rarely are addressed will be revealed. These issues and concerns are rarely addressed because the decisions are made from the top leadership who may be out of touch with the issues that teachers encounter throughout the school year. Hence, the challenges that are identified by teachers may provide school districts with a comprehensive outlook on the challenges that may be hindering the school improvement process.

Johnson (2008) acknowledges the impact of school improvement challenges urban school districts. Russo (2004) also states that the negative characteristics that are associated with an urban area directly impact the school districts that are responsible for educating poor and minority children. Anderson (2007) points out that the achievement gap of schools serving poor and minority students has increased over the last ten years, contributing to the failing state of urban school communities. Bracey (1992) states that this widening achievement gap between minority and white students is reflected in graduation rates, standardized test scores and the overall educational experiences that are available in the classrooms. In order for urban schools to overcome the challenges that influence the achievement levels of their student body, these challenges must be addressed (Bainbridge & Lainsley, 2002).

APPENDIX A

Observation Protocol/Field Notes Guidelines

90/90/90 Classroom Observation Protocol (Gardner & Ebenezer, 2010 developed based on the 90/90/90 model success characteristics proposed by Doug Reeves, 2000)

The 90/90/90 descriptors are possible indicators not a required "check-off" list. During the observations of the participants, the observer will write field notes in the form of a narrative based on school observation notes. Then the observer will complete the 90/90/90-SOP to assess the ability of the urban school community to incorporate the characteristics of the 90/90/90 model in comparison to the restructuring model of the participating school. The scale is composed of the following identifiers and rates the Urban School Community's ability to implement the following strands. Observation Protocol Scale: 1- Unable; 2- Moderately Able; 3- N/A; 4-Able; and 5-Very Able.

<u>90/90/90 Classroom Observation Protocol</u>

Element 1: The Focus on Academic Achievement

1. Developing student understanding	1	2	3	4	5
2.Promoting ongoing collaboration	1	2	3	4	5
3. Modeling academic expectations	1	2	3	4	5
4. Providing a supportive learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
5. Recognizing academic performance	1	2	3	4	5

Element 2: The Choice of Curriculum

1. Emphasizing the core curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
2. Integrating reading across all content areas	1	2	3	4	5
3.Modeling reciprocal reading	1	2	3	4	5
4. Implementing appropriate strategies for conceptual understanding	1	2	3	4	5

Element 3: The Frequent Use of Multiple Assessments

1. Assessing students' class work and activities	1	2	3	4	5
2. Probing students for their ideas	1	2	3	4	5
3. Checking for students understandings	1	2	3	4	5
4. Monitoring students' learning	1	2	3	4	5
5. Assessing writing in all content areas	1	2	3	4	5

Element 4: The Focus on Writing in All Content Areas

1. Practicing extensive writing using a common rubric.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Assessing writing in all content areas	1	2	3	4	5
3. Narrative writing is given greater emphasis.	1	2	3	4	5

4. Evaluating student needs in writing across the curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ongoing writing performance assessment program throughout the school year	1	2	3	4	5

Element 5: The External Scoring of Student Work

1. Teacher grades are based on shared Assessment	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers work collaboratively	1	2	3	4	5
3.Teachers work with a common rubric	1	2	3	4	5
4. Teachers have a common understanding of the rubric	1	2	3	4	5
5. There is an alignment of curriculum, assessment practices, and expectations	1	2	3	4	5

REFERENCES

Adams, J. & Seagreen, T. (2007).Distance Education Strategy: Mental Models and Strategic Choices. *Academic Leadership, 3(1), 1-13.*

Anfara, V. A. & Mertens, S. B. (2008).Varieties of Parent Involvement in Schools. *Middle School Journal, 39(3), 58-64.*

Allington, R. (2001). *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*. New York: Addison-Wesley.

Anderson, T. (2007). *High Performing, High Minority Elementary Schools: Where are they located and what do they have in common?* Retrieved from http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/hphm_anderson.html

Andrews, R., & Grogan, M. (2001). Defining Preparation and Professional Development for the Future. *Education Administration Quarterly. 38(2), 233-256.*

Armstrong, A. (2010). Myths of Poverty — Realities for Students: Teachers must consider how their own class biases affect their interactions and expectations of students. *The Education Digest.75(8), 49-53.*

Athanases, S. Z., & Achinstein, B. (2003).Focusing New Teachers on Individual and Low Performing Students: The centrality of formative assessment in the mentor's repertoire of practice. *Teachers College Record, 105*(8), 1486-1520

Bainbridge, W & Laisley, T. (2002). Poverty, Not Race, Holds Back Urban Students. *The Columbus Dispatch*. Retrieved from http://www.dispatch.com.

Bamburg, J. (2004). Raising Expectations to Improve Student Learning. Oak Brook, Illinois: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Beutel, D. (2006). The Nature of Pedagogic Teacher-student Interactions: A Phenomenographic Study. *Retrieved from The Australian Educational Researcher*.

Billman, N., Geddes, C., & Hedges, H. (2005). Teacher-parent partnerships: Sharing understandings and making changes. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 30(1), 44-48*.

Bledinger, J., & Jones, L. (1997).Selected ParentInvolvement. *Parent Involvement Research*. 89(10), 527-537.

Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S. K. (1992).*Qualitative Research For Education*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Boudette, K. & Steele, J. (2009).The Collaborative Advantage. *Educational Leadership*, 66 (4), 54-59.

Bracey, G.W. (1992).The Condition of Public Education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76, 115-127*.

Brown, A. B., & Clift, J. W. (2010). The unequal effect of adequate yearly progress: Evidence from school visits. *American Educational Research Journal, 47, 774-798*.

Burke, C. (2005). Student-Ready Schools. *Childhood Education. 81(5), 281-286.*

Capobianco, B. M.,& Joyal, H. (2008). Engineering best practice: An action research study. *Science and Children, 45(8), 22-26*.

Charalambos, C., &Silver, E. A. (2008).Looking at Student Work. *Educational Leadership, 6(6), 69-72.*

Chenoweth, K. (2010). Leaving Nothing to Chance. *Educational Leadership, 68(3),* 16-21.

Clewell, B. & Campbell, P. (2007). Good Schools in Poor Neighborhoods: Defying Demographics, Achieving Success, Urban Institute Press.

Collins, J. (2001). Good to great. *Fast Company, 51, 90–104.*

Cooper, C., Crosnoe, R., Suizzo, M. A., &Pituch, K. (2010). Poverty, Race, and Parental Involvement During the Transition to Elementary School. *Journal of Family Issues, 31*(7), *859-883.*

Corallo, C., & McDonald, D. (2001). What works with low-performing schools: A review of research literature on low-performing schools. Charleston, WV: AEL.

Covey, S. (2009)**.***The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change***.** New York: A Fireside Book (Simon and Schuster).

Creswell, J.W. (2007). Developing Publishable Mixed Methods Manuscripts, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research 1(2), 107-111.*

Cushman, K. (1996). Looking collaboratively at student work: An essential toolkit. *Horace 13 (2), 1-12.*

Dahlin, B. (1999). Ways of Coming to Understand: Metacognitive Awareness among First-Year University Students. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 43 (2), 191 -207.*

Dawsey, J. (2010). Detroit Students Score a Record Low on Standardized Test. Detroit Free Press, Retrieved from http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll.

DePlany, J., Coulter-Kern, R., & Duchane, K. (2007).Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Academic Achievement..*Journal of Education Research, 100 (6), 361-368.*

DeWalt, K. M., DeWalt, B. R., & Wayland, C. B. (1998).Participant observation, Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 259-299.

Dick, W. & Cary, L. (1990).The Systematic Design of Instruction, Third Edition, Harper Collins.

Duffy, F. (2009).Paradigms, Mental Models, and Mindsets: Triple Barriers to Transformational Change in School Systems. Retrieved from http://cnx.org/content/m26229/1.1.

DuFour, R. (2002). Pull out negativity by its roots. *Journal of Staff Development. 23(3), 27-30.*

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., &Eaker, R. (2008).Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Duke, N. (2004). The case for informational text. *Educational Leadership, 61, 40-44.*

Dyck, B. (2002). Fighting 1960s Mental Models of the Perfect Classroom – and the Perfect Mom. *Education World.* Retrieved from http:www.educationworld.com.

Easton, L. B. (2008). learning. Phi *Delta Kappan, 89(10), 755-761.*

Ebenezer, J. V., & Erickson, G. L. (1996). Chemistry students' conceptions of solubility: A phenomenography. *Science Education, 80,* 181-201.

Ebenezer, J.V. & Fraser, D.M. (2001).First Year Chemical Engineering Students' Conceptions of Energy in Solution Process: Phenomenographic Categories for Common Knowledge Construction. *Science Education,* 85, 509-535.

Ebenezer, J. & Gaskell, J. (1995).Relational conceptual change in solution chemistry. *Science Education, 79 (1), 1-17.*

Elmore, R.F. (2000). *Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Achievement.* Washington, D.C.: Albert Shanker Institute.

Emeagwali, N. S., (2009). Fostering parent-teacher collaboration in the classroom. Retrieved from http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Fostering parent-teacher collaboration in the classroom.

Essentials Learning from leadership. (2010). Principal effectiveness. ESEA reauthorization A teacher leader blog. What Finland can teach us. *The Journal of Staff Development.31(4),6 -13.*

Fan, X. T., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 13,* 1–22.

Fearn, G. (1993). Building the good school: participating parents at Charquin. Hayward, CA: Ohlone Press.

Fenstermacher, G. D., & Berliner, D. C. (1983) A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Staff Development, Santa Monica, CA, The Rand Corporation.

Flessa, J. (2008). Parental Involvement: What Counts, Who Counts It, and Does it Help? *EducationCanada.48 (2), 18-21*.

Flowers, C., Wakeman, S., Browder, D. M., &Karvonen, M. (2009). An alignment protocol for alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards. *Educational Measurements: Issues Practice, 28(1),* 25-37.

Fraenkel, J., & Wallen, N., (2003).How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education (5th ed). McGraw-Hill: New York.

Freire, P. (2000). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum Press.

Fullan, M. (2002). Beyond Instructional Leadership: The Change Leader. *Educational Leadership, 59(8), 16-21*.

Garmezy, N., & Rutter, M. (1983). Stress, coping and development in children. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Gasper, J., DeLuca, S., & Estacion, A. (2011). Switching Schools: Revisiting the Relationship Between School Mobility and High School Dropout. American Education Research Journal, 20 (10), 1-33.

Georgiou, S. & Tourva, A. (2007). Parental Attributions and Parental Involvement. *Social Psychology Education, 10 (4), 473-482.*

Gonder, P. (1991). Caught in the Middle: How To Unleash the Potential of Average Students. Arlington, Virginia: American Association of School Administrators.

Good, R. H., & Kaminski, R. A. (1996). Toward a technology for assessing basic early literacy skills. *School Psychology Review, 25, 215-227.*

Goodland, J. (1995). Ralph Tyler: The Educator's Educator. Educational Policy, 9 (1), 75-81.

Haberman, M. (1991). The Pedagogy of Poverty Versus good Teaching. *Kappan. 73(4), 290-294.*

Hall, J. & Ryan, K.E. (2011). Educational accountability: A qualitatively-driven mixed methods approach, *Qualitative Inquiry, 17*(1), 105-115.

Harris, D., & Herrington, C. (2006). Accountability, standards, and the growing achievement gap: Lessons from the past half-century. *American Journal of Education*, 112(2), 209-238.

Hatrick, E. (2008). *A Climate for School Success.* Retrieved from http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=4764.

Haycock, K.(2005).A Can Do or Can't Do Profession. *School Administrator, 62.*

Helterbran, V. (2008). The Ideal Professor: Student Perceptions of Effective Instructor Practices, Attitudes, and Skills. *Education, 129 (2).*

Hess, F. & Kelly, A. (2007). Learning to Lead: What Gets Taught in Principal-Preparation Programs. *Education Week.28, 10-13.*

Hill, B. (2009). *What is mental model assessment?* Retrieved from http://mentalmodelassessment.org.

Hoff, D. (2007). More Parental Power in Revised NCLB Urged. *Education Week.65(26).*

Howard, T. C. (2001). Powerful pedagogy for African American students: Conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy. *Urban Education36 (2), 179-202*.

Huang, G. H. C., & Mason, L. K. (2008).Motivations of parental involvement in children's learning: Voices from urban African American families of preschoolers. *Multicultural Education, 15(3), 20-27.*

Hughes, J. A. (2010). What Teacher Preparation Programs Can Do to Better Prepare Teachers to Meet the Challenges of Educating Students Living in Poverty. *Action in Teacher Education.32(1), 54 -65.*

Jacob, B.A. (2007). The Challenges of Staffing Urban Schools with Effective Teachers. *The Future of Children.17(1), 129-153.*

Jehlen, A. & Flannery, M.(2008). Is This What Failure Looks Like? How NCLB Gets it All Wrong. Retrieved at http://www.nea.org/home/7859.htm.

Johnson, J. (2008). The Principal's Priority 1. *Educational Leadership, 66(1), 72-76.*

Jorgensen Learning Center.(2010). Mental Models-a book excerpt. Retrieved at http://jorgensen learning center.com/virtual-learning/141-mental-models-a-book-excerpt.

Kafka, J. (2009). The Principalship in Historical Perspective. *Peabody Journal of Education. 84, 318-330.*

Kagan, S. &Kagan, M. (1998).*Multiple intelligences: the complete MI book.* San Clemente: Resources for Teachers.

Kalim, T. (2009). Curriculum: Theory and Practice. Retrieved from http://bdeduarticle.com/curriculum/39-uncatagorized/59-curriculum-theory-and-practice.

Kahne, J. (1996). The politics of self-esteem. American Educational Research Journal, 33,3–22.

Kaniskan, R, B., Reis, S., McCoach, D.,Little, C., &Muller, L. (2011).The Effects of Differentiated Instruction and Enrichment Pedagogy on Reading Achievement in Five Elementary Schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 48 (2), pg. 462-501.*

Kennedy, M. (2008). Sorting Out Teacher Quality. *Phi Delta Kappan, 90(1), 59 - 63.*

Kinicki, A.J., Jacobson, K.J. L., Galvin, B.M., & Prussia, G. E. (2011).A Multilevel Systems Model of Leadership. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 18, 133-149.*

Kirst, W. (2003). Student Achievement in New Literacies for the 21st Century. *Middle School Journal. 35(1), 6-13.*

Kirst, W., & Williams, T. (2006).*School Practices that Matter*. Retrieved http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1=143918551.html.

Kuhn, T. S. (1962). The structure of scientific revolutions, (3rd. ed). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lange, J. A. (2000).Excellence in English in middle and high school: How teachers' professional lives support student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 37 (2), 397-439.*

Lashway, L. (2003). Transforming principal preparation.. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985).Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Linder, C.J. (1993). A challenge to conceptual change. *Science Education, 77, 293–300.*

Linder, C., & Marshall, D. (2003). Reflection and Phenomenography: Towards theoretical and educational development possibilities. *Learning and Instruction, 13, 271–284.*

Littky, D., Diaz, N., Dolly, D., Hempel, C.,Plant,C. Price, P., & Gabrielle, S. (2004). Schools as Learning Communities. *Educational Leadership. 61(8), 6-11.*

Lunenberg, F.C. (2011). Critical Thinking and Constructivism Techniques for Improving Student Achievement. Teacher Education Journal, 21 (3), 1-19.

Lybeck, L., Marton, F., Stromdahl, H., &Tullberg, A. (1988).The Phenomenography of the 'mole concept' in chemistry. Improving learning: New perspectives. London:Kogan Page, 81 – 108.

Lyles, M., & Schwenk, C. (1992).Top management, strategy and organizational knowledge structures. *Journal of Management Studies, 29, 155-174.*

Malone, D. (1948). Jefferson the Virginian. Little, Brown And Company, Boston.

Marton, F. (1981).Phenomenography-describing conceptions of the world around us. *Instructional Science, 10, 177–200.*

Marton, F. (1986).Toward a psychology beyond the individual. Amsterdam: North-Holland, 45-72.

Marton, F. & Booth, S. (1997). Learning and Awareness. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Marton, F. &Tsui, A. (2004).Classroom Discourse and the Space of Learning. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass.

Marzano, R.J. (2002). In search of the standardized curriculum. *Principal, 81(3), 6-9.*

Matthews, J. (2004). Computers weighing in on the elements of essay; Programs critique structure not ideas. The Washington Post.

McGuinn, P. (2010). The National Schoolmarm: No Child Left Behind and the New Educational Federalism. *Publius, 35(1), 41*.

McIntosh, K, Campbell, A., Carter, D., & Zumbo, B. (2009).Differential Effects of a Tier Two Behavior Intervention Based on Function of Problem Behavior. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 11(2)*82-93.

Memory Mental Model. (2010). The Education Encyclopedia. Retrieved from httl=p://en.wikipedia.org.

Mesmer, E.M., & Mesmer, H.A. (2008). Response to Intervention (RTI): What teachers of reading need to know. The Reading Teacher, 62(1), 280-290.

Michigan Department of Education. (2010). *Common Core State Academic Standards*. Retrieved from www. mi.gov.mde.com.

Moss, B., & Newton, E. (2002).An examination of the informational text genre in basal readers. *Reading Psychology, 23, 1-13.*

Murphy, J. (2001). *Re-Culturing the Profession of Educational Leadership: New Blueprints.* Paper commissioned for the first meeting of the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation, Racine, Wisconsin.

Neave, H.R. & Worthington, P.L. (1988). *Distribution-Free Tests*. Academic Division of Unwin Hyman Ltd, London, UK.

Oliva, P. (2009). Developing the Curriculum (7th ed). Ally & Bacon.

Omotani, B., &Omotani, L. (1996). Expect the Best: How Your Teachers Can Help All Children Learn. *The Executive Educator 18 (8) 27- 31*.

Padgett, R. (2006). Best ways to involve parents. *Education Digest, 72(3), 44-45*.

Parsad, B., Lewis, L., & Farris, E. (2001).Teacher preparation and professional development, 2000. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Pate, J. & Gibson, N. (2005).*Learning Focused School Strategies: The Level of Implementation and Perceived Impact on Student Achievement*. Retrieved from http://www.usca.edu.

Pearson, K. (1900). On the criterion that a given system of deviations from the probable in the case of a correlated system of variables is such that it can reasonably be supposed to have arisen from random sampling. Philosophical Magazine, 50 (5), 157-175.

Petty, G. (2006) *Evidence Based Teaching: a practical approach*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes.

Polk, J. (2006). Traits of effective teachers. *Arts Education Policy Review, 107(4), 23-29*.

Porac, J. & Thomas, H. (1990).Taxonomic Mental Models in Competitor Definition. *The Academy of Management Review. 15(2), 224-240.*

Powers, J.M. (2005).High-stakes accountability and equity: Using evidence from California's public schools accountability act to address the issues in Williams v. State of California. *American Educational Research Journal, 41 (4), 763-795.*

Raffini, J. (1993) Winners Without Losers: Structures and Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation To Learn. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.

Randolph, J. (2007). Meta-analysis of the research on response cards: effects on test achievement, quiz achievement, participation, and off-task behavior. Retrieved from http:// www.accessmylibrary.com.

Ratner, C. (2002). Subjectivity and objectivity in qualitative methodology. *Qualitative Social Research.3(3),16.*

Reeves, D. B. (2004).Accountability in action: A blueprint for learning organizations (2nd ed.). Englewood, CO: Advanced Learning Press.

Reeves, D. B. (2011).*The 90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study*. Retrieved from http://www.leadandlearn.com/90-90-90.

Renstrom, L. (1988) Conceptions of Matter: a phenomenographic approach. Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Goteborg Studies in Educational Sciences 69. Dissertation.

Renyi, J. (2008). Student Motivation and English Achievement. *The Modern Language Journal, 92, 387–401.*

Roberson, T., Schweinle, W., & Styron, R. (2003).Critical issues as identified by aspiring, novice, and experienced principals.(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 482925).

Rodriguez, B.J. (2010). Is CHAMPS Evidence Based? In R. Sprick, *CHAMPS: A Proactive & Positive Approach to Classroom Management. Pacific Northwest Publishing: Eugene, OR.*

Rooney, J. (2008). What New (Young) Principals Need to Know. *Education Leadership. 66 (1), 84-85.*

Rooney, J. (2010). The Principal Connection / Meeting Teachers Where They Are. *Educational Leadership.67*(5), 85 - 86.

Roscorla, T. (2010). 2 Principals Lead School Learning Revolution. *Converge. Retrieved from http://www.convergemag.com.*

Rowan, A., Hall, D, & Haycock, K. (2010).Gauging the Gaps**:** A Deeper Look at Student Achievement. *The Education Trust.1-11.*

Russo, P. (2004) What Does It Mean To Teach For Social Justice? It Means Working To End the Cycle of Oppression. Retrieved from http://www.oswego.edu.

Säljö, R. (1988). Learning in educational settings: Methods of inquiry. In P. Ramsden (Ed.), *Improving learning: New perspectives*, (32-48). London: Kogan Page.

Sanders, B. (2010). Themes Found in High Performing Schools. *Academic Leadership, 8(2).*

Sanderson, D. R. (2003). Veteran teachers' perspectives on student mobility. *Essays in Education, 4* (Winter). Retrieved from http://www.columbiacollegesc. edu/essays/vol.%204%20winter%202003/sanderson.

Schafft, K. A. (2005, December 22). The incidence and impacts of student transiency in upstate New York's rural school districts. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *20*(15).

Schmoker, M. (2006).Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning. ASCD.

Schwenk, C. (1988), The Essence of Strategic Decision Making, Lexington Books, Lexington

Scott, S., & Cash, E. (2010). Collaborative Culture: A change in beliefs leads to a change in behavior — And improved student achievement. *The Journal of Staff Development*, *31*(3), 61.

Sebring, P. B., & Bryk, A. S. (2000).School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago. *Phi Delta Kappan. 81(6), 440-443.*

Seid, C. (2010). Data present a clear picture of time spent on instructional tasks - As a participant in the School Administration Manager (SAM) project, this principal in West Des Moines, Iowa, entirely reprioritized how she spent her time. *The Journal of Staff Development*, *31*(2), 40.

Senge, P., Dutton, J. & Kleiner, A. (2000). *Schools That Learn*. Nicholas Great Britain: Brealey Publishing.

Sims, F. (1992).The Challenge of Ethical Behavior in Organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics, 11(7), 510.*

Skiba, R. & Sprague, R. (2008).Safety without suspensions. *Educational Leadership 66(1),* 38-43.

Sparks, D. & Hirsch, S. (2000). *Learning to lead, leading to learn*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Suguai, G. (2009). Applying Positive Behavior Support and Functional Assessment in Schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 2(3),* 131-142.

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. (2006). School Restructuring Options under No Child Left Behind: Exploring *What Works When.* Retrieved from http://www.centerforcsri.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=311&Itemid=5.

Thompson, N. L., Franz, D. P., & Miller, N. (2009). Research summary: Looping. Retrieved from http://www.nmsa.org.

Tuncel, S.D. (2009). Determining effective teacher behavior contributing to students' academic success. *International Journal of Physical Education, 47(1), 17-20.*

Tushman, M. L., Newman, W. H., & Romanelli, E. (1986). Convergence and upheaval: Managing the unsteady pace of organizational evolution. *California Management Review, 29(1), 29–44.*

Tyler, R. (1949). *Basic Principles of Curriculum*. The University of Chicago Press. Ltd., London.

United States Department of Education. (2010). *Our Future, Our Teachers: The Obama's Administration's Plan for Teacher Education Reform and Improvement*. Retrieved from www.ed.gov/teaching/our-future-our-teachers.

Vernez, G., Karam, R., Mariano, L., & DeMartini, C. (2006). Evaluating Comprehensive School Reform Models at Scale: Focus on Implementation. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement**.** Retrieved from http://www.centerforcsri.org.

Walker, C. (1998). Learning to learn, phenomenography and children's learning. *Educational and Child Psychology, 15,* 25-33.

Wanderss, J., & Clary, R. *The Science Teacher. 74 (8), 56-63.*

Wang, M. T., & Holcombe, R. *(*2010*).* Adolescents' perceptions of school environment, engagement, and academic achievement in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47, 633–662.

West Virginia Department of Education. (2006). Retrieved from http://www.highbeam.com

Wherry, J.H. (2009). Is Parent Involvement Still Important? *Principal, Vol. 84 (4), 6.*

Wilkins, N., & Kuperminc, G. (2010). Why Try? Achievement Motivation and Perceived Academic Climate among Latino Youth. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 30*(2), 246-276.

Wong, K., & Sunderman, G. (2010). Education Accountability as a Presidential Priority: No Child Left Behind and the Bush Presidency, *Publius.37* (3), 333 - 350.

Wright, D. (1999). Student mobility: A negligible and confounded influence on student achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research, 92*(6), 347-353.

Ylimaki, R. M. & Brunner, C. C. (2011).Power and Collaboration-Consensus/Conflict in Curriculum Leadership: Status Quo or Change? *American Educational Research Journal, 48 (6),* 1258-1285.

ABSTRACT

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN AN URBAN SCHOOL COMMUNITY

by

JENDAYI JOHARI GARDNER

May 2012

Advisor: Dr. Jazlin Ebenezer

Major: Curriculum & Instruction

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

This mixed-methods study is represented by three articles that examine student achievement. The articles were developed based on the following purposes: (1) to examine teachers' conceptions about student achievement; (2) to examine teacher practices for school improvement that reflects elements of a reform model; and (3) to examine teachers' conceptions about school improvement challenges. Individual interviews were administered to examine teachers' conceptions about student achievement and school improvement challenges. The conceptions were then converted to excerpts that were grouped into common categories. Common descriptive categories were developed using the methodological framework, phenomenography. To examine teacher practices that reflect elements of a reform model, the researcher used classroom observations. The classroom observations were analyzed using a Classroom Observation Protocol that determined the frequency of teacher practices that reflect elements of the 90/90/90 Model. The study also examined MEAP test scores using the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test to compare the 2009 and 2010 results.

To address the first purpose of the study, three descriptive categories were revealed based on the data. The three categories were: (1) analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions; (2) a model to decrease disruptive behavior; and (3) parent involvement to support children's learning. To address the second purpose of the study, the results revealed that of the five elements, teacher practice displayed three elements: (1) the focus on academic achievement; (2) the choice of curriculum; and (3) the frequent use of multiple assessments. The third purpose of the study was addressed by the emergence of three descriptive categories from the data. The three categories are as follows: (1) student transiency throughout the school year; (2) staff restructure and transfers to different schools; and (3) lack of parent involvement in school and at home. In addition, the results of the chi-squared test revealed a significant difference between the observed (2010) and expected (2009) MEAP Test scores.

The following implications emerged from the results of the study: (1) a practical reform model for school improvement that is anchored in a theory of curriculum can be used as a lens to view student achievement; (2) school districts that incorporate teachers' conceptions about student achievement are able to make effective curriculum-based decisions; (3) school districts that identify the intra-and inter-variations of teacher conceptions enable schools to address challenges with a common mindset; (4) in order for schools to improve student achievement, all five elements of the reform model should be practiced by teachers; and (5) teachers' conceptions of school improvement challenges should be considered by educational leaders during the decision-making process.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Jendayi Johari Gardner has been an educator with Detroit Public Schools for ten years after receiving her bachelor's degree from Eastern Michigan University. To continue her professional learning, Mrs. Gardner received her Master's degree and Michigan Administrator's Certificate from Wayne State University. Mrs. Gardner has served as an educational leader and worked to develop, monitor, and evaluate the school improvement process of multiple urban schools for four years. Mrs. Gardner also serves as a data facilitator. In that capacity, Mrs. Gardner coordinates the collection and analysis of data to make sound educational decisions. Mrs. Gardner monitors the integration of data into the School Improvement Plan and Title 1 School-wide components.

Mrs. Gardner contributes to the school improvement team by consistently submitting well-researched data to the Detroit Public Schools. She facilitated school improvement meetings which fostered collaborative efforts by staff members. As school improvement chair, Mrs. Gardner has monitored the development of components of the school improvement plan. Mrs. Gardner has also served as member of the core team for the Detroit Public Schools Reform Initiative. In her capacity as core team member, she assisted with developing a new and innovative vision that focuses on Math, Science and Technology.