Examining One Principal's Leadership Processes and Procedures Used to Implement Educational Change in a Failing Middle School: A Case Study

Delmae Delores Darling
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EXAMINING ONE PRINCIPAL’S LEADERSHIP PROCESSES AND
PROCEDURES USED TO IMPLEMENT EDUCATIONAL CHANGE IN A FAILING
MIDDLE SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

By

DELMAE DARLING

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Delmae Darling defended this dissertation on July 13, 2015.

The members of the supervisory committee were:

Jeffrey Milligan
Professor Directing Dissertation

Patrick Mason
University Representative

Carolyn Herrington
Committee Member

Robert Schwartz
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.
This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Thelma and my grandmother, Vera from whence I came and was inspired during this journey.
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ABSTRACT

This case study explored the leadership processes and procedures one principal and her administrative team used to implement planned educational change at North Valley Middle School, a pseudonym given to a predominately African American populated middle school located in north-western Florida. Through the use of qualitative methods a purposeful sample of one school was selected and interviewed extensively. The study revealed themes that emerged from analysis of interview transcripts. These transcripts were used to explain, illustrate, and describe one principal’s leadership path, processes and decision-making to implement educational change.

In this study, I sought to develop and test a theoretical model for assisting educational leaders to devise a logical and systematic approach to reform schools. Specifically, I investigated a process and illustrated a leadership procedure that one principal used to implement planned educational change in a predominately African American populated middle school as suggested from a literature review. Those components were identified within five areas in the literature: (a) the Florida School Grading System, (b) leadership, (c) turnaround schools, (d) closing the achievement gap, and (e) planned educational change.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*Civil Rights Leader (1929-1968)*

Education in America is an extensive and complex entity that suffers criticism for its vastness and bureaucratic relations (Carter, 2005). With the rapid growth of minorities entering the nation’s schools, concerns pertaining to race and ethnicity are becoming a major issue (Kauchak & Eggen, 2008). Due to academic failure and alarming dropout rates, many educators have demanded significant changes in how children of color should be taught (Gay, 2000). Consequently, principals are challenged with discovering and implementing educational change that concentrates on creating, establishing, and maintaining the academic achievement of minority students, and African Americans in particular. Despite the severity of low achieving schools, some principals have been successful in improving these schools and demonstrating that there is hope for minority children (Cushman, 1997). The ultimate goal is to find a way to duplicate successful efforts that will close the achievement gap that exists among African American students and other student groups.

Historically, the initial problems of black education stemmed from slavery and the various injustices that Blacks experienced in America. Consequently, the number of black students failing was so great that researchers began to conduct investigations to understand such failure (Blascoer, 1915; Coleman, 1966; Odum, 1913). Findings indicated that poor health, poverty, and low socio-economics were the primary cause (Blascoer, 1915; Coleman, 1966;
Odum, 1913), but this narrow scope of inquiry observed in most of these early studies illustrated an illusion of the reality of black schools across the country. Such reports became the basis for beliefs that blacks needed a special type of education, isolated from the majority to correct and answer the troubling question, “why aren’t these children learning” (Ryan, 1971).

Educators began to adopt reforms such as intelligence testing, ability grouping, and exclusionary curricula to ameliorate the magnitude of underachievement among African American children (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Unknowingly, this effort only produced a segregated education which negatively affected minority students even more (Gay, 2000). The emergence of scholars’ research, investigations, and debates exposed the effects of these reforms on African American students, gradually evoking a major shift in education for African American children. No longer did the concept of “blaming the victim” seem like a viable option for study or excuse; instead, addressing the cultural perspective of the child became the new vision of interest.

**Statement of the Problem**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Census (2000), by 2020 almost half of the nation’s school population will consist of members of non-Caucasian cultural groups. Unfortunately, the exact opposite is occurring in the teaching profession today. A national survey conducted by the National Education Association (2002) documented that approximately 90 percent of teachers are white and female; five percent black and the remaining percentage represents other races respectively. This current trend with minority children and teachers has caused concern (Kauchak & Eggen, 2002). The fear is that teachers may not be prepared to address the multitude of cultural, linguistic, and academic issues that they face in the classroom. In an attempt to improve student achievement among African American students, much research has been
conducted on variables that include teacher quality, instruction, and retention. Little effort, however, has gone into understanding how culture influences the content or processes of educational leadership.

It is imperative that educational researchers move beyond the more familiar leadership strategies and begin to analyse the procedural methods of leadership to deal with the issues of African Americans in education. Research on the leadership process and how leaders navigate through different scenarios experienced in a school is scarce. Further studies are needed to explore the dynamics of leadership process when attempting to understand school improvement and reform for predominately African American students.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership processes and decision-making of one principal and her administrative team that implemented planned educational change to ‘turnaround’ a predominately African American populated middle school. The study is based on the premise that leadership process and decision-making in highly minority populated schools can be instrumental in helping to close the achievement gap among minority students; in particular, African Americans. Therefore, the focus of this research is aimed toward describing and designing the leadership processes and procedures exercised by this principal to provide an understanding and model of planned educational change that led to school improvement.

A case study was selected to understand in depth the leadership processes and procedures of a principal striving to make educational change in a predominately African American populated middle school. Semi structured interviews, observations, and archival documents were used to capture and create narratives from the participants involved in the study. The data were
structured by the participants’ roles, conversations about their experiences within those roles and the researcher’s application of qualitative strategies to interpret and identify patterns to produce a portrait of what was discovered. Bushnell and Rappaport’s (1971) Six Stages of Planned Change was also used as a conceptual framework to assist in structuring, gathering, and analysing the data for this study.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was what processes and procedures does a principal use to “turnaround” a predominately African American populated middle school? From this, three subsidiary questions were formulated:

1. What target areas does a principal identify as urgent and needing immediate attention?
2. What processes or procedures does a principal implement to address the selected targeted areas?
3. In what ways is the principal’s implementation plan consistent with the Six Stages of Planned Change Model?

Significance of the Study

Given the urgency of school performance expectation, much policy and educational improvement research has focused on schools that serve challenging student populations, but are still able to meet or exceed their performance goals (Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008). Insight has also been provided from research on school reform efforts and comparisons of high-and low-performing schools, but the actual leadership process principals are using to obtain this success is limited in the literature. The significance of how the school leader systematically makes sense of these socio-political and socio-cultural issues in schools becomes critical since most school
leaders are not taught or trained to handle socio-political or socio-cultural matters; nor are they knowledgeable of their role and influence in shaping and defining meaning on issues of race, class, gender, and other areas of difference for and with other school members (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 2003; Young & Laible, 2000).

Educational researchers are concerned with providing a basis for improving education through leadership. In search of other alternatives, this research explored educational leadership and change through a procedural methodology (Heathers, 1974). The finding of this study may provide a framework in which to examine and explain the leadership process that middle school principals use to make change in a predominately African American school.

**Significance to Educational Leadership**

This study is significant given its focus and the potential to enhance existing knowledge about principal leadership and the processes and procedures that can be used in predominately African American populated middle schools to ‘turnaround’ and close the achievement gap between ethnic groups. Further, by exploring the experiences of a particular principal and school, practical examples and strategies can be provided for existing and aspiring educational administrators. The findings of the study presented explanations, leadership processes, decision-making and strategies that illustrated how planned educational change can be implemented to turnaround a predominately African American populated middle school. The findings of this study will also contribute to the discussion from a procedural perspective to increase understanding and interest toward developing change in prospective roles and positions that serve African American students.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Bushnell and Rappaport’s (1971) Six Stages of Planned Change Model. This model is theoretically propelled by the educational planned change literature.

Educational Planned Change

People generally go through a series of stages before they mature. Mohan (1993) believed organizations such as schools evolve the same way—through stages or life cycles. If this is true, there could be distinct stages that principals perform to improve student achievement or school grades in low-performing schools. The pressure that is associated with leadership can cause one to implement all kinds of strategies to create change. Mohan (1993) believed aligning cultural assumptions, values/norms, and personal meaning among employees within a school can lead to educational transformation. Dawson (1994) identified three major determinates that were used to explain and analyse the process of change in schools. These factors included substance of change, politics of change, and context of change.

Bushnell and Rappaport (1971) stated it would be wise to find the existing structure and process within an organization (school) and use that structure to rearrange the patterns of power, association, status, skills, and values of individuals to gradually achieve change. In addition, when a plan of change is familiar and non-intimidating to the stakeholders involved, it eliminates the immediate chaos that occurs due to unfamiliarity. Other researchers have also emphasized that learning the cultural practices appropriate in a particular context is a key element to developing an educational environment that is geared toward positive growth and successful change (Buchanan, 1974; Hofstede, 1990; Mohan, 1993; Van Maanen, 1975).
Bushnell and Rappaport (1971) indicated that the extent to which this system analysis approach can be tied to improvements in schools has to be explored further. However, it is a unified theory of planned change that can be used effectively for change. Therefore, it is under these theoretical notions and the literature review that the model above is tested in this study. The proposed conceptual model is depicted visually Figure 1. It illustrates a Systems Approach that views leadership through merging rational planning and reason with the actual concern of people. The conceptual model determines to what degree the system (school) is malfunctioning and what set of planning tools were needed to analyse and correct the situation. In this proposed model, it incorporates the ability to diagnose research, prescribe, and test alternatives to implement and understand a process of change.
Assumptions

In conducting this study, I assumed the participants would answer questions honestly because they volunteered to participate in the study. All participants were notified that their identities would remain anonymous and all personal identifiers removed. It was also assumed that their experiences would be similar to others who were involved within the leadership team. A theoretical model was established and confirmed from the chapter two literature review and it is assumed that the findings of this study have added to the development of the model.

Scope, Limitations, Researcher Role, and Delimitations

The scope of this study included qualitative data collected for this case study. The participants in this study ranged from different levels of the administration to the department heads of various subject areas at North Valley Middle School. The researcher conducted several observations and extensive one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant. This case study approach provided a method for analysing the data collected to reveal emerging themes from and among participants.

Considering this is a qualitative study, there were several limitations one being the researcher due to the primary responsibility of gathering and analysing data. Mistakes can be made, opportunities missed, and personal biases can interfere (Merriam, 2001). In the case study approach, the number of “key actors” is a significant limitation to the research. The restricted time frame due to the requirements of this degree and the possibility of distorted truth due to the researcher’s role and presence can also alter the research setting. However, it is important to note that the findings of the study could still be subject to multiple interpretations regardless of these limitations.
As an outsider, African American researcher, I have become intimately familiar with the
details of the principal, teachers and administrative team at North Valley Middle School. Care
was taken on the part of the researcher to minimize any biases or preconceived ideas when
interpreting the data. Strategies used to minimize possible biases included: 1) triangulation-using
multiple sources of data, methods, or participants to confirm the emerging findings; 2) member
checks-taking data back to the people whom they were derived and ask them if the results were
plausible; 3) long-term observation-repeated observations of the same phenomenon and
gathering data over a period of time to increase the validity of the findings; 4) peer examinations-
asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge; and 5) participatory modes of
research-involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the study to
writing up the findings.

In this study, I sought to extract, illustrate, and describe a leadership process from a
principal who implemented planned educational change in a predominately African American
populated middle school. The sampling was purposeful; therefore, the participants were essential
to providing an accurate account of the school’s history, leadership practices, and progress made
during this specific time period. It was an opportunity to “span a topic by extracting meaning
from the people and events selected by the researcher to yield information that is rich with
respect to the purposes of a study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 19).

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions of terms and concepts are used throughout the course of the
study. Understanding their meaning (as it applies) helps to clarify their relevance to this study.
Cultural sensitivity: Knowing that cultural differences as well as similarities exist without assigning values, i.e., better or worse, right or wrong, to those cultural differences (Texas Department of Health, National Maternal and Child Health Center on Cultural Competency, 1997).

Leadership: The ability of an individual to influence, motivates, and enables others to contribute the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members (House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, Dorfman, Javidan, & Dickson, 2006).

Leadership activities: Strategies, skills, and techniques that principals or other school leaders perform to get the mandatory goals and objectives of the school accomplished or implemented.

Planned educational change: A consumer-centered approach that may or may not involve the adoption of innovations. It is the idea of identifying the needs and seeking solutions for improvements in a local educational agency (Heathers, 1974).

School Grade: The process of rating schools based on state indicators (e.g. test scores, suspensions, attendance) that are weighted to determine yearly progress. It is also an implicit way to measure student achievement in the schools.

Transformative change: The implication that a person or group, that is the target of change, must unlearn something as well as learn something new (Schein, 2004).

Turnaround School: A specific restructuring option—a district-managed replacement of a school leader and staff relevant to the school’s failure. It is a drastic change in performance created by various improvements within an educational institution (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal & Steiner, 2006).
Summary

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the study, its purposes, research questions, significance, and theoretical basis. Chapter 2 provides an overview of related literature. Chapter 3 details the methods used to conduct the study. This chapter is followed by manuscripts, which capture the essence of the study including findings implications, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has played an intricate role in changing accountability in the American school system. Since the passage of the NCLB Act in 2002, the federal government has revised the existing accountability system to do a better job of monitoring students’ learning and providing exclusive specifications for schools not meeting the state’s proficiency targets. However, after several years of its existence, there are still persistently low-performing schools that face strict consequences for failing to improve student achievement (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, & Steiner, 2006).

The accountability movement has also become such a pressure on educational institutions that teachers are finding themselves ‘teaching to the test’ in hopes of achieving the academic requirements mandated by the national and state authorities (Anfara, Roney, & Mahar, 2003). Current state policies and school accountability systems are constantly emphasizing policymakers’ beliefs that it is a good idea for schools to be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in educating the students. Therefore, school personnel are being compelled to change their professional practice in ways that focus on school improvement initiatives more than ever (O’Day, 2002).

Within the last 20 years, a distinct effort to improve the nation’s schools and raise student achievement within all grade levels has been imposed. Content standards for Mathematics, Science, English, and Social Studies have been put in place in almost all states. Mastery of state-wide testing and assessments have become the requirement for high school graduation. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is part of Florida’s overall plan to increase
student achievement by implementing higher standards. Reduced class sizes and performance-based accountability (A+ Plan for Education) have been mandated for all schools to increase student achievement. Despite all this activity and attention, significant improvement has been gradual among African American students (Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001).

While the improvement has been gradual, there has been improvement. Scores on the National Assessment of educational Progress (NAEP) have risen slightly. The percentage of high school seniors enrolling in universities and colleges is higher than ever (Paige & Witty, 2010). National and state focused school-improvement initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and Florida’s A+ Plan for Education have produced measurable gains in student performance. However, performance disparities still persist among African American students (Mazzei, 2009). A need for stronger school leadership that focuses on identifying and confronting primary barriers to advance the cause of African Americans in education is imperative (Paige & Witty, 2010).

**Florida’s School Grading System**

In 1998, the State of Florida enacted the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test or FCAT to test specific knowledge of students and the effectiveness of the Sunshine State Standards (SSS). This study was conducted during the 2011-2012 school year. Since then, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and will be using the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments for the 2015-2014 school year. The use of the FCAT will be phased out at that time. While these are important developments for the State of Florida, they are not addressed in this study.
However, the implementation of the FCAT invoked schools to become more accountable for teaching within a standard. Schools are graded annually based on the academic performance of students in grades 3 through 10. Schools with grades of C and below must create and complete a plan of action to bring their average student population scores to a B or above (Mazzei, 2009). Three factors contribute to the school grade: percentage of students tested, points earned, and adequate progress in reading. Adequate is defined as the minimum required score a school must obtain in a given section by its students on the FCAT to receive a certain school grade. This score can vary based on the grade a school receives. This score is measured by performance and learning gains that total a possible 800 points that can be earned (Croft, 2009).

For example, to receive a grade of A, a school must test at least 95 percent of registered students, score 410 or above and must meet the “adequate progress in reading” standard. Points are also awarded for both gains in overall student scores as well as students tested. For instance, one point is awarded for each percentage point of students meeting or exceeding standards, making gains, or being eligible to test in math, reading, and writing (McKenzie, 2007).

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was designed to improve the public school system and make these schools more accountable for their students’ academic achievement. By the 2005-2006 school year, Florida students’ high school graduation was dependent upon the successful completion of the FCAT testing (Mazzei, 2009). This resulted in a set of problems that would affect all of our students in the public school system; especially, minorities.

Over the last decade, the percentage of schools receiving A’s and B’s has more than tripled from 21 to 79 percent. The proportion of D and F schools dropped from 28 to 7 percent (Mazzei, 2009). Conversely, critics believe these numbers only show that students are getting
better at taking the FCAT and not actually learning the necessary content to become productive citizens (McKenzie, 2007; Mazzei, 2009). In addition, educational officials are constantly using low-achieving schools as scapegoats for why the achievement gap is still widening and Florida’s high school graduation rate is still amongst the lowest in the nation (Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001; McKenzie, 2007; Mazzei, 2009; Paige & Witty, 2010). Paige and Witty (2010) contend that these concerns can no longer be viewed in this way. They must be viewed as a leadership problem rather than a student academic problem for progress to be obtained.

Tackling the concerns of the achievement gap through the leadership perspective is not saying that students do not play a significant role in their academic performance, but it is a conglomerate of individuals and entities that participate to affect the overall outcome of this issue. Therefore, bridging the achievement gap must begin with strong and authentic leadership on the part of the principal. Fullan (2006) stated that there is no way schools can move from low to high performing unless this type of leadership is exemplified. He believes the failure that exists is a direct result of the poor leadership strategies currently being used. Therefore, such leadership can only produce at best temporary and superficial results while leaving the main problem—the achievement gap—to become more pronounced.

By investigating the processes and procedures used in predominately African American populated middle schools and low performing schools, this may reveal a way to complement or include other leadership strategies that will assist in implementing educational change to restructure schools and increase academic performance among African American students.

**Leadership**

Historically, the concept of a leader has been synonymous with the sagas of heroic figures who managed to lead their people to physical or spiritual victory over enemies time and
time again. Those ancient images are still with us and continue to inform our images of leadership, even though this ideology no longer applies to the challenges of our time (Bolman & Heller, 1995). The development of school leadership, the idea of the “principal” initially took the form of the principal teacher, who was needed to provide small managerial functions in one-room school houses established during the 17th and 18th centuries (Cuban, 1988).

As time progressed, the significance of the leader and the type of leadership exemplified evolved. This advancement from industrial betterment to scientific management; welfare capitalism/human relations to human relations; systems rationalism to contingency and institutional theories; and organizational culture to the present, produced new challenges that required alternative practices to accomplish the goals of educational institutions (Barley & Kunda, 1992; Perrow, 1986). As a result, private sectors were sought to assist in providing options for dealing with the complexities of management.

The “scientific management” model, which was developed in the late 18th century by Frederick Taylor, was used by many business consultants who advised struggling organizations to adopt because it demonstrated scientific techniques that systematically observed and experimented with management to produce dramatic gains in efficiency and productivity (Bolman & Heller, 1995). Many of the methods necessary for this approach automatically placed an importance on the manager when there was no need. This emphasis on the leader has been encouraged and perpetuated so much that most people think of a school principal in terms of what he or she can do and the amount of work that can be accomplished with the power and freedom given within the school (Sarason, 1996). The person “in charge,” is perceived as the individual who gets the job done no matter what restrictions may be attached to the appointed responsibilities. Their personal worth is judged by how smoothly things go.
The important role of the principal is being recognized by state leaders as well. As district, state, and local policymakers consider trying to improve Florida’s schools, they are discovering that principals are essential to this endeavour. Principals are central to school improvement (Deal & Peterson, 1998), restructuring (Newmann & Associates, 1996), and school effectiveness (Levine & Lezotte, 1990). They help promote change, lead reforms, and support good teaching. As a result, major reform groups, researchers, and policymakers are rediscovering the importance of principals in leading schools (Peterson, 1998).

In Hallinger and Heck’s (1996) reassessment of the principal’s role in school effectiveness, they discovered that principal leadership does make a difference in student learning and it was through the influence of internal school processes that were directly linked to student learning. These internal processes range from school policies, academic expectations, student opportunity to learn, instructional organization, and academic learning time. In addition, the type of leadership that principals exercised varied because it was based on the different facets of the school’s economic environment.

Beckman (1993) proposed that “principals are key factors in successful schools, and the degree to which they meet the current and future challenges determines the degree to which these schools can be effective” (p. 395). One could argue whether or not the principal is the most influential person in a school, but, Sarason (1996) believed that the characteristics, the traditions, and the history of the school is what initially places the principal in a role of importance; in addition to principals having the regular task of always implementing change within the school.

It is clear that successful management of a school is important to achievement; however, there must be actions that move beyond models of accommodation and assimilation to
developing an approach that is transformative. This form of leadership should offer a process that identifies and confronts major problems to further the advancement of targeted groups or individuals facing failure in schools (Paige & Witty, 2010).

Lomotey and Swanson (1998) described effective leadership in low-performing schools as transformational leadership. There is often a belief that such schools are stricken with problems that seem insurmountable. Dillard (1995) argued that such leadership should be called “transformative political work” (pg. 560) because much of the leadership in low-performing schools call for principals to pay attention to social justice and inequality issues. Today’s principals exemplify a little of both. They tend to create a sense of urgency and educational crisis in the school to initiate change for issues such as: low achievement, inequalities between affluent and poor schools, and low expectations for students (Wallace, 2004).

While transformational leadership is what many may characterize effective leadership to be, Tichy and DeVanna (1986, 1990) studies indicate there should be a focus on leadership processes that carry out successful change in organizations. They interviewed 12 CEOs in large corporations to find out how these leaders carried out the change process under challenging conditions, social and cultural changes, and increased competition. A three-prong process was discovered that was used to manage change in those organizations. The process involved being able to recognize the need for change, creating a vision, and institutionalizing the new changes.

Because leaders differ in leadership style, cultural background, and professional experiences, it is essential that researchers direct attention to the “how” of leadership in order to develop pathways that will assist aspiring principals for the future. The results of various national, state, and district assessments of K-12 education in the United States indicate that
minorities are among the lowest category in academic achievement. In recent years, the response to this complex issue has been a proliferation of policies and plans designed to alleviate the problem. However, the success of these policies and plans can be questioned because they simply do not address the depth of the problem (Stevens, 1993).

Fullan (2006) confirmed this notion by indicating that several of these plans only produce superficial results; therefore, leaving the economic and education gap in an unimproved state. He posited that as a country “we are beginning to see the large-scale consequences of failed reform—health and well-being costs are rising, economic prosperity is becoming jeopardized, and the social cohesion of society is weakening to dangerous levels” (p. 7). Some kind of change needs to occur that will establish conditions to guarantee sustainability, accountability, and reliability within low-performing schools for the long term.

Scholars have theorized as to how and why culture and education should be linked to remedy this situation as well. However, educators must continue to put into practice the knowledge that they have acquired to assist in preparing those who are involved in the arduous task of actualizing change to ensure that “No Child is Left Behind.” This notion of leaving “No Child Behind” begins with discovering ways to close the achievement gap for African American students. In the next section, I will discuss turnaround schools and how the achievement gap can be closed in further detail.

**Turnaround Schools**

The term ‘turnaround’ in the NCLB Act (2002) is referred to as a specific restructuring option—a district-managed replacement of a school leader and staff relevant to the school’s failure. In the general literature, ‘turnaround’ is defined as a drastic change in performance
created by various improvements within an educational institution (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal & Steiner, 2006). The turnaround research focuses on organizational change that has occurred in a short period of time with the replacement of leadership or other staff. In contrast, the change literature focuses on continuous incremental improvement over a long period of time with existing staff (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003).

With 63% tenth graders, 53% ninth graders, and 46% eighth graders in Florida’s public schools not meeting some portion of the FCAT requirements, public schools are the main targets for these turnaround attempts (Mazzei, 2009). They are the institutions that are failing by the most measures and need the most improvement (Gibson & Billings, 2003; Hammel, 2000). Therefore, the challenge is discovering a consistent process that educational leaders can use to produce a dramatic increase in student achievement in a limited amount of time.

Public School Turnarounds

Many successful turnarounds occur in business, but far fewer in the public school or non-profit sectors (Hammel, 2000; Russo, 2005; Teerlink & Ozley, 2000; Ziebarth, 2002). Approximately two thirds of the states have laws enabling districts or states to implement turnaround efforts by replacing leaders and staff (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, & Steiner, 2006). This effort has brought order and stability, an increase in parent and community involvement, as well as, improved teacher accountability in some schools. However, academic progress among turnaround schools is mixed (Brady, 2003; Kelleher, 2000; Ziebarth, 2002). Some examples of public school turnaround efforts include the following Chicago, Houston and Prince George’s County, Maryland:
• **Chicago**- In June 2000, five of the city’s worst high schools were taken over and temporarily shut down to replace leaders and staff to implement a new school plan. Overall, there was a strong local resistance, marginal improvement in student achievement, and little change in instruction (Kelleher, 2000; Russo, 2005).

• **Houston**- Rusk Elementary School was one of Houston’s lowest performing schools. The superintendent initiated a major overhaul where teachers had to reapply for their jobs and the school principal was changed. As a result, the school has become a model for turnaround schools in Texas consistently gaining acceptable or higher on the Texas grading system (Ziebarth, 2002).

• **Prince George’s County, Maryland**- Maryland instituted an aggressive change that involved state monitoring of persistently failing schools, district schools reapplying for jobs, and replacement of principals and teachers. The results of the three-year turnaround effort were mixed: Test scores at two of the six schools increased higher than the state’s average with only one school able to exit the state’s watch list (Brady, 2003).

Despite the above turnaround initiatives, several schools around the country are making and sustaining successful progress. However, it is imperative that researchers seek to understand why these results are so mixed and the successes are not widespread.

**Key Success Factors and Key Challenges**

Several factors influence the success and failure of school turnarounds. The first being governance which is the management of the turnaround process at the district level. Secondly, environmental factors which are the external factors that may or may not affect the success of a turnaround attempt. Thirdly, leadership factors which are those characteristics, actions, or
qualifications needed to initiate a turnaround effort. Lastly, organizational factors which are those things that galvanize old and new stakeholders under new leadership (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, & Steiner, 2006).

**Governance and Environmental Factors**

The evidence is strong that governance or good leadership from the district on down to the principal makes a big difference in student learning in school settings (Kanter, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Reisner, 2002; Waters et al., 2003). However, understanding how high-performing school leaders’ processes are used to create success is very limited. In addition to support and freedom from the district level, there are environmental factors that the school and district must consider. Research has shown that during the implementation phase of turning a school around, developing community involvement is essential to moving forward with change (Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Hirschhorn, 2002; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Roberto & Levesque, 2005). Making it clear why change is necessary and allowing all stakeholders to see the consequences of failure minimizes the chance of resistance and disruption in the community (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Roberto & Levesque, 2005). This is a way to encourage ownership and inclusion with those individuals who want a stake in the success of the school.

**Leadership and Organizational Factors**

Research documenting turnarounds in public schools indicate that selecting effective leaders is crucial to the success of school change (Bossidy, 2001; Buchanan, 2003; Joyce, 2004; Reisner, 2002). Leithwood et al. (2004) supported this with a hypothesized model of school leadership which included three broad categories: setting directions, developing people, and
redesigning organizations. Waters et al. (2003) also confirmed through a hypothesized model that defined leadership effect on student learning, effective school practices and leadership adjustment during different levels of change.

Hassel et al. (2006) indicated that turnaround change is extreme in that it is like starting from the beginning. Before this type of change can be implemented, the organization has to be failing and old practices are not working. Therefore, new practices, ideas, and actions must be created to ensure success. In this start-up situation, success must come quickly before the organization loses patience with change (Buchanan, 2003). Turnaround leaders must decide what matters the most and through a speedy process of trial and error drop those tactics that are not successful and keep those that work (Kanter, 2003). Basically, it is about figuring out what causes big results and doing more of those activities. Joyce (2004) noted multiple case studies revealed effective public turnaround leaders use strategic visions, communication, and employee empowerment to perform some of these above mentioned duties.

Finnegan and O’Day (2003) supported the previous points but felt organizational factors such as staff replacement, training, and changes in the school’s structure or culture also determine the success of a turnaround effort as well. Research suggests that staff replacement is not necessary but may be essential in schools where the staff is a clear cause of failure (Goldstein et al., 1998). The NCLB Act (2002) only requires the replacement of staff that is relevant to the school’s failure. However, there are some down sides to this. Research suggests that the replacement staff tends to have less experience and fewer credentials than those employees asked to leave (Rice & Malen, 2004). Malen et al. (2002) indicated that staff replacement does not guarantee more capable and committed staff either.
Gadiesh et al. (2003) indicated when replacing staff, leaders have to focus on the organization’s culture more than ever. The ability to align new and old employees’ habits and values in an effort to get them to support the goals of the organization is crucial to achieving successful change. Based on the effective school literature, characteristics that are needed to achieve this effort in schools are a clear vision, a safe and orderly environment, strong connection with the community, high expectations, and leadership that maximizes the effectiveness of instruction (Carter, 2000; Hassel & Hassel, 2005; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Marzano, 2003). These factors and characteristics show that successful turnarounds can dramatically improve results. However, further research is needed to analyse the common elements and leadership processes of the most successful turnaround leaders and schools across the country.

**Closing the Achievement Gap**

Schools hold the major obligation for educating children. They share the responsibility for student failure as well. Fullan (2006) discussed the tragedy of under-achieving students and the repercussions of such a group if something is not done soon. The economic and education gap has improved but not enough. “It is not like we do not know what needs to be done, but there is neither sense of urgency nor the strategic commitment to do the hard work of accomplishing large-scale, sustainable reform” (p. 6). Paige and Witty (2010) agree but believe the achievement gap can be closed through a perspective that does not blame student academics, but center efforts on providing effective leadership. For example, educational officials working to create a committed leadership structure that will take charge and attend to all the elements necessary to internalize and promote the idea that, yes; we can close the achievement gap is imperative (Paige & Witty, 2010).
In a nationally, representative survey study, Ainsworth-Darnell and Douglas (1998) found that Black students report more optimistic occupational expectations, view education as more important to their future and maintain more pro-school attitudes than do their White counterparts. However, while they are believers, Black and Latino students are not all achievers (Carter, 2005). Because standardized test scores are used as an academic indicator, for most students, the test score gap has become a constant reminder of achievement for many Blacks and other minorities (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Studies continue to confirm the persistent disparities among all minorities (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Massey et. al, 2003).

Carter (2005) discovered that students who come from a variety of backgrounds benefit most when they are able to interact with people who are multi-culturally adaptive and fluent. Such relationships provide, “schooling that goes beyond the cursory recognition of student differences helping and showing them how to bridge culturally their environment to the white-collar world in which they aspire” (p. 14). Scholars believe involved stakeholders can say “yes” to close this gap for African American students.

Opportunity to Learn

Stevens (1993) contended that students’ opportunity to learn should be investigated. Carter (2005) stated one way to do this is by assessing and developing the cultural capital that exists within the student. Bourdieu (1986) defined cultural capital as those resources needed to help students’ social and professional success. It is the schemes of appreciation and understanding obtain by an individual through his or her experiences or social environment. For example, taste in music, literature, art or sports. Depending on the degree to which one is familiar with these resources, the student can use them to gain access to necessary information,
opportunities, and privileges in hopes of improving their possibilities of success (Carter, 2005). Oftentimes, African American students have little familiarity with the dominate society’s body of cultural capital; therefore, their ability to navigate through the school system successfully is affected.

Conventional formulas for academic success prescribe that students must accrue this dominant cultural capital in order to interact with teachers, apply to colleges and universities, and participate in extracurricular activities that will enhance one’s chances of getting into college (Lewis, 2003). However, many students of color are at a disadvantage because they do not possess or have limited access to dominate cultural capital that is so important in the school system. In other words, students must be able to culturally assimilate to the necessary norms, styles, language, and interactions of the dominate group in society. Without sufficient social and economic resources, the consequences are that African American and Latino students will not be able to maximize their opportunity to learn while in school (Norguera, 1996).

Others argue that it is the teacher-student relationships that are established in the classrooms or the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy that are playing a major role (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 1994; Lee, 1995). Howard (2001) noted the numerous shortcomings of interventions and misguided practices in the past and pleaded a case for researchers to direct their attention toward the voice of the students. When students talked about their views of school, they centered on three key themes: (1) positive relationships between teachers and students affected academic achievement; (2) teachers’ responsiveness to students personal lives and positive feelings generated that led to increased effort in school; and (3) preferred teachers who allowed them to express their own ideas about assignments and in class discussions (Slaughter-DeFoe & Carlson, 1996; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).
In addition, a number of studies on culturally responsive instructional strategies for African-American students have been conducted illustrating an opportunity to learn as well (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipman, 1995; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). The use of these practices may help to close the achievement gap and improve the opportunity for African American students to learn.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The relationship between culture and education is another perspective that is widely researched and believed to play a role in closing the achievement gap among African American students. Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

A theoretical model that posits effective pedagogical practice through addressing student achievement, helping students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequalities that schools perpetuate (p. 469).

Hefflin’s (2002) study illustrated culturally relevant pedagogy in operation. In the attempt to engage students into reading literature, she discovered three theoretical principles when considering teaching children of color. First, the curriculum must tap into the content of students’ lives by representing the culture and background they know and live. Second, the methods must relate to the home and community patterns that are familiar to students’ learning and relationships outside of school. Third, the materials must intertwine the cultural patterns of students’ everyday lives.

Hefflin’s way of ensuring those items were occurring within the classroom was by developing a vigorous guide for selecting quality culturally conscious African-American children’s literature, using familiar communicative social patterns such as “call and response” to involve the students; and conducting continuous self and group reflection of the task.
Sims (1993) defined culturally conscious literature as that which highlights the experiences of growing up in a minority group by portraying that particular perspective and lifestyle. The students who were involved were more interested in the literature that exemplified their cultural experiences, they were better able to extend and apply their learning when the literature and themes related to their own lives, and overall learning increased because culturally relevant materials were implemented (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Along with providing opportunity to learn and implementing cultural relevant curricula, McParland & Schneider (1996) found that developing positive teacher-student relationships and establishing positive caring interactions are critical to maintaining cohesion within schools. Madhere (1998) introduced a model of cultural “nesting” which defines how this relationship between teachers and students may occur. “Nesting” is the idea that culture involves the association of both visible or assigned characteristics and psychological dimensions. For example, race/ethnicity, origin, or speech is probably the most common way in which people identify an individual’s cultural frame of reference. How the individual interprets one or all of these factors determine whether or not he or she is familiar or comfortable enough to have a relationship with the other and to what degree.

The model of cultural “nesting” is a 3-parameter structure that analyses culture by linkage (line of ancestry), language (cognitive perspective), and origin (homeland) as the factors that determine an individual’s cultural frame of reference. Madhere (1998) further theorized that the combination of these characteristics will account for the strongest commonalities and the most visible differences among and between people, thus, providing another perspective about a person’s culture, experiences, and lifestyle. While all the above concepts have some type of
connection in closing this achievement gap among African American students, the question still
remains how does a principal successfully create, develop, and implement these activities within
the school environment that he or she serves?

Based on the above studies, a life-changing experience seems to be what an individual
may have to go through if they decide to embark on this endeavour. The involved persons must
be willing to acknowledge and change their own differences, biases, and prejudices in order to
align and understand what it is that their students need and bring to the classroom (Phillips,
1998). This is why studying the process or procedure that successful leaders use to obtain and
maintain such changes can be beneficial to educational leadership. Bushnell and
Rappaport (1971) stated that educational planned change is a conduit by which researchers can
conceptualize a framework that to can explore and extract leadership processes used to develop
change in low achieving schools. It is this six-staged change model that will help the researcher
to analyse the immediate target areas and describe the leadership process that assigned
committees and staff members used to achieve the prescribed goals of educational change within
a low achieving middle school.

**Planned Educational Change**

Planned educational change is a consumer-centered approach that may or may not involve
the adoption of innovations to establish change in schools (Heathers, 1974). It is not a product
driven approach that implies that improvements in the schools are to be seen as the result of a
program of some kind. The goal is to identify the needs for improvement then seek solutions that
meet those needs.

For the most part, schools sit in the midst of a community and every community has its
own values, beliefs, expectations, and evaluative criteria. Within these educational institutions,
there is a school faculty which is comprised of teachers, aides, staff, counselors, and administrators. The individuals that make up these subgroups have their own life experiences that they bring and must mesh with the different experiences of that community. It is the level at which these cultural connections are aligned that some researchers believe plays a role in determining to what degree a principal may be able to implement change efforts in a school (Nicotera et al, 2003; Mohan, 1993; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Lindsey et al, 2003).

Discovering a procedure or process through planned educational change to illustrate how a principal navigates through the mandates of a low performing school to improve and close the achievement gap of low performing students may be an asset.

The concept of change must be clearly defined if all involved stakeholders are to understand what is expected during this process. Before any kind of change effort begins, mechanisms must be developed to cope with potential obstacles, and other problems that may be identified during the initial phases of change (Timperley & Parr, 2005). The process of change is described in three timeframes: 1) conception of a need to change—which is the initial awareness of a need to change, 2) process of organizational transition—which is the complex process of managing the transition that happens, and 3) operation of network practices and procedures—which refers to the implementation of change, new organizational arrangements, and systems of operation that begin to emerge (Dawson, 1994).

In order to explain and analyse the process of change Dawson (1994) believed the following determinates must be used. First, the substance of change which refers to the type and scale of organizational change; second, the politics of change which refers to the political activity of consultation, negotiation, conflict and resistance; and finally, the context of change which refers to the past and present external and internal operating environments.
Nicotera, Clinkscales, and Walker (2003) discovered that the complexity of change can also be understood through investigating the very systems and structures that drive human interaction. However, this investigation requires a structurational framework that focuses on connections among people and organizations. These relationships are achieved through the communication of those individuals or entities involved in the process of change, thus, creating an organization that recognizes its differences to move toward a targeted goal.

Mohan (1993) declared another viable approach to understanding this entire process of change is through the concept of culture. The notion of uncovering shared conceptualizations and hidden assumptions challenges stakeholders to reveal ignored facets of organizational life. The inability to do this stifles self-expression and diversity which is essential to long-term growth in organizations. Dimmock and Walker (2005) believe that this ‘reframing’ of traditional ways to analyse leadership and change agents from a cultural perspective is fairly new. They further explained the emergence of culture as a conceptual framework for theory building and the analysis of practice in educational leadership and management. Despite the demands that are put on educational institutions, let us not forget that educational change is slow, difficult, and will always lag behind the pace of change in the world (Fullan, 2006). The issues involved in understanding leadership used to implement planned educational change in a cultural and procedural perspective is complicated.

When implementing change efforts, principals need to also give careful attention to establishing staff in-service procedures that are both ongoing and responsive to the immediate needs of classroom teachers. Teachers involved in change efforts need time to plan, revise, discuss their problems, tryout new techniques, and rethink their instructional practices. An effective planning process requires a timetable, task assignments, and lines of accountability for
different components of the plan, clearly articulated review, and decision-making mechanisms. Every change effort should be a tailor-made strategy designed to resolve a problem or issue in a way pertinent to the district’s specific educational setting and political milieu (Dawson, 1994).

A systematic approach to school improvement requires both a structure and a process. The structure or “system” requires a network of communication links between teachers and students, teachers and administrators, and community. This type of network also satisfies learning needs, conveys information, and helps pass bond issues. It is a network that functions as part of a communication cycle involving a consumer and a supplier of information (Bushnell & Rappaport, 1971). Note that any significant change in human organization involves a rearrangement of patterns of power, association, status, skills, and values. Consequently, this can cause some individuals and groups to benefit, while others to lose. Some may even view this anticipated change as “threatening” and reject it. In any case, change involves risk and fear (Bennis, 1966).

Lindsey, et. al. (2003) wrote a manual for school leaders in their efforts to make change from a cultural perspective. The book provides a profound understanding of the importance of cultural proficiency to guide long-term improvement in schools and classrooms, to ensure diversity is never to be ignored in the haste of principals creating and implementing change wherever needed. Other studies that have been conducted to address those difficult issues experienced in failing schools. Anfara, Roney, and Mahar (2003) conducted a case study design using both qualitative and quantitative data to document school improvement efforts at one middle school. Brooks (1996) ethnography explored the successful role of leadership in initiating and sustaining a major process of change. Cushman (1997) confirmed the importance of leadership when implementing educational change in a predominately Spanish-speaking school.
Dantley (2005) presented a faith-based theory of leadership that could be used to deal with social injustices in urban schools.

All of these studies remind us that educational change is a complex system that begins with the leader and his or her ability to influence individuals who are directly involved in making change in educational institutions. Dimmock and Walker (2005) believe that any change strategy should consist of diagnosis, definition, initiation, implementation, monitoring of instructional and support environments, monitoring of instructional effects and provisions for stabilizing the program within the district over time. If this is the case, then our university programs must focus on preparing educational administrators with the skills posited by these scholars. It is necessary that university programs move away from the traditional organizational theories and philosophical orientations to embrace the new demands of the time.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods used to collect data to explore answers to the research questions posed in this study. This study was designed to describe and illustrate the processes and procedures of a principal who implemented planned educational change in a predominately African American populated middle school for school improvement purposes. Qualitative research methods and the philosophical assumptions based in ethnography were used. Participants were encouraged to share their stories as a way to reveal a deeper meaning of their roles, processes, and involvement in administration at North Valley Middle School.

Further, Bushnell and Rappaport’s (1971) Six Stages of Planned Change Model was used to gain a better understanding of how change occurs and can be depicted in educational institutions. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the rationale behind using qualitative methods, specifically a case study approach and the inclusion of Six Stages of Planned Change into the research design. Additional topics in this chapter include the limitations of using a case study research design, the setting of the study, methodological procedures, data collection; and data analysis.

**Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative research methods were used to gather information for this study. Qualitative research functions under the key assumption that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds, therefore, qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed or how they make sense of the world and the experiences within them (Merriam, 2001). Patton (2001) presents a similar perspective when he notes that qualitative
analysis is a way of understanding phenomena in its natural state with direct quotes and
descriptive data. The purpose is to allow the researcher an opportunity to depict the participants’
view of their social reality, which in turn, allows the researcher to be a central role in the
generation of data (Hammersley, 1992). Qualitative research also involves an interpretive
naturalistic approach to studying phenomena in terms of the meaning that people bring to them.
To understand the leadership process one middle school principal uses to generate positive
change within a predominately African American populated middle school, it is evident that
qualitative research is necessary.

The use of the qualitative methodology brought forth the vision and voice of a leader that
has taken on the task of transforming one middle school with low school grades. It also assisted
in targeting those areas or themes selected and used to direct the principal’s leadership decisions
and actions to implement her educational plan. Schein (2004) declared that conducting any kind
of research could be difficult to a novice researcher. Thus, it behooves researchers not to “rush to
measure things” until it is known what is being measured. Various research methods elicit
certain dimensions of what is being studied; therefore, the correct methodologies must be
selected to obtain the in-depth understanding needed when investigating a phenomenon.

Qualitative research varies from user to user and from time to time but, Bogdan and
Biklen (2003) indicated that there are some characteristics that are familiar to the qualitative
researcher: (1) conducting a study in the natural setting, (2) writing data collected in descriptive
form rather than numbers, (3) focusing on process not outcomes, (4) analysing data in an
inductive fashion, and (5) capturing accurate perspectives to present a clear understanding of
what is being studied. With that being the case, Schram (2003) believed the researcher should
keep these general assumptions and qualities in perspective because they are not absolutely
definitive in that they say all there is to say about a qualititative stance.

**Qualitative Method Rationale**

The purpose of this study is to understand, describe and illustrate the leadership process
one principal used to implement planned educational change in a predominately African
American populated middle school. Qualitative research methods allow participants to share and
explain their experiences, perceptions, and constructed realities through conversation and
recollection. Due to the nature of the study, qualitative research is invaluable because the
researcher can attempt to gain a full understanding of the experiences of the participants by
focusing on one situation to reconstruct events in which the researcher did not participate (Yin,
2003).

A quantitative research design, on the other hand, would have restricted the scope of this
study, by limiting the depth and width of the participants’ responses to predetermined categories
based on standardized questions (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the quantitative researcher tends
to use cause and effect variables, questions, and hypotheses in predetermined instruments to
gather statistical data that can be compiled to arrive at conclusions (Creswell, 2007). Bogdan
and Biklen (2003) posit that quantitative research uses fixed-design methodology to produce
numbers and statistics to answer research questions. However, numbers alone do not illustrate a
rich picture of participant experiences as qualitative research does. Quantitative research
methodologies fail to capture the emotions of the lived experiences of the study participants
(Merriam, 2001).
According to Schein (2004), the choice of a research methodology should be determined by the topic being investigated and the research questions. However, it is understood that quantitative and qualitative research is useful and has its own value for dissimilar reasons. In this case, leadership process is a concept that needs more exploration; this study warranted detailed description and thus lends itself to a qualitative approach.

The Six Stages of Planned Change Model and Qualitative Research

In addition to the use of qualitative research methods, this study used the Six Stages of Planned Change Model as a conceptual framework. This model assisted the researcher in visualizing, explaining and understanding the stages of planned educational change in an educational institution. Dimmock and Walker (2005) indicated that ‘reframing’ the traditional ways to analyse leadership and change agents from a cultural perspective is fairly new. However, using models like this can help with further understanding the various systems and structures that are in place when dealing with human interactions to develop change. For this study, the Six Stages of Planned Change Model aids in better conceptualizing what the idea of leadership process is.

Case Study Approach

Yin (2003) stated that a case study is an “empirical inquiry that specifically investigates a contemporary phenomenon that deals with distinct situations in which there are many variables of interest, and relies on multiple sources of evidence to develop theoretical propositions and guide data collection and analysis” (pg. 14). The case study method was ideal for the researcher because it allowed the individual to conduct “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject known as a case” (Bogdan & Biklen 2003, p. 54). Stake (1995) described this case as a
“specific and a complex functioning thing” (pg. 2) that can be classified as a person, group, or program.

Stake further declared that these unique cases can be categorized or determined by three kinds of case study – intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The intrinsic case study is when the case is given and the researcher has no choice at all. Therefore, the interest that is presented is not because the researcher wants to learn about some general problem but because there is a need (Stake, 1995). An example is a teacher deciding to study a student who is having difficulty in class. The instrumental case study is a research question, an interest of some kind, or a need for general understanding and insight used to investigate a particular case. The collective case study is the same as the instrumental case study but the researcher chooses to use multiple cases to learn about the inquiry (Stake, 1995).

Merriam (2001) believed that researchers should consider these variations of the case study because they are “useful approaches for studying educational innovation” (p. 41). However, Korth (1998) warned that case study research is not just one specific methodology; it is an avenue by which multiple views can be gathered toward an object of study. For these reasons, the instrumental case study identified by Stake was employed for this study. Yin’s (2003) case study template was also used to ensure that the researcher focused on one case, giving attention to all its boundaries, examining collected data through multiple lenses to strengthen the reader’s confidence in knowing the data that was collected, and producing a final product that is clear and engaging.
The use of this approach enabled the researcher to develop a body of knowledge that assisted in understanding leadership processes/behaviours geared toward improving predominantly African American middle schools.

**Setting and Participants**

**Setting**

The school selected for this study is North Valley Middle School, the pseudonym name given for a predominately African American populated middle school located in the North-western part of Florida. It has an African American student population of ninety-two percent out of 515 reported in the school during spring of 2012. Ninety-three percent of the entire school population is eligible for free and reduced lunch. Full-time employee data shows that the selected site has approximately 30 teachers and there are approximately 15 students per teacher.

This school site was selected based upon the following criteria: 1) majority African American student population (70% or above), 2) initial school grade of “C” or below at the start of the principal’s tenure, and 3) 70% or more students receive free and reduced lunch. Note that the school grade was used to assist in identifying a principal for this study. It was not used to indicate a form of student achievement. North Valley Middle has a history of low school grades, high teacher and student turnover rates, and unsuccessful principals. At the inception of this school, it would be hard to believe that the founder would have expected his legacy to be described as such. The mission during the early 1960s was to “be on the move to train and educate every young adult that enters the building...because students are worth it!” However, it must be echoed that this situation did not happen overnight.
Participants

The researcher used purposeful sampling of six participants at North Valley Middle School. Purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling where the researcher selects information-rich cases for in-depth study. Four administrators and two department chairs were purposefully selected as participants for the study (Patton, 2001). A small sample size is typical for qualitative researchers (Yin, 2003) because it is such a rigorous and systematic methodology. Due to the nature of this study, six participants were chosen because it is a recommended sample size for a case or phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003). Each participant represented a part of the principal’s leadership team.

The administrative team consisted of the principal, assistant principal of curriculum, assistant principal of discipline, and the dean of discipline. Teacher leaders that were included were the math and science department chairs/coaches. The terms math and reading coach refers to highly qualified subject area specialists who provide ongoing job training and support for teachers in the school to build their capacity and effectiveness as reading and math teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Participants were selected and requested by the principal for the study. The criterion used was based on the highest leadership level held by the individual within his or her department. The participants’ profiles are highlighted in a profile matrix (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Administrative Ranking</th>
<th>Years as an Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Anita Hill</td>
<td>High-Level</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. John Poindexter</td>
<td>Mid-Level</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Ken Howard</td>
<td>Mid-Level</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. James Carter</td>
<td>Low-Level</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Teaching Position</th>
<th>Years as a teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Gabe Kaplan</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. George Jefferson</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Procedures

To identify potential participants, assistance was sought by the principal of North Valley Middle School. Once identified, an appointment was scheduled to review the details of the study, and how it would be used. Once a participant agreed to participate in the study, an Informed Consent form was hand delivered by the researcher to each participant to read and fill out. A Biographical and Institutional Data form was used to construct biographical profiles, gain background information prior to the interview and generate code names for the participants.

An Informed Consent form was used to gain final approval and to confirm their participation acceptance for this study as prescribed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All relevant guidelines as required for the protection of human subjects by the IRB were followed. Prior to participant contact, the study was approved for implementation with human subjects by the University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

Figure 2 Data Collection Model


**Data Collection**

Once a participant granted their final approval an initial interview date was scheduled. Open ended interview questions (both semi-structured and informal in depth) were the primary method of data collection. The researcher used an audio recorder to obtain and ensure interview data accuracy. Each participant was interviewed at least twice. Each interview began with the researcher explaining to the interviewee the dynamics of the study, which were derived from a thorough review of the literature. All interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Field notes were kept to document the descriptions, thoughts, and interpretations of the interviews. Both the audio recordings and field notes assisted in the follow up interview and the analysis phase of the dissertation process.

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording into a Word document verbatim and hand delivered to each participant so the transcripts could be reviewed, verified, and validated (document review). Follow-up interviews were conducted for member checking, clarity, and data validation. Member checking is a term used to determine the trustworthiness of the data analysis. By participating in member checking, study participants have the opportunity to review the researcher’s conclusions to ensure that they accurately depict the participants’ personal experiences (Creswell, 1998).

Once the interviews were completed, several precautions were taken to protect the original data. Copies were made of the original audio recordings as data files on the researcher’s flash drive. In addition to making multiple copies of transcripts, data were saved in three different locations: (a) private file cabinet at home, (b) computer hard drive, and (c) on a computer flash drive.
Interview Protocol

Each participant agreed upon a time and place for the interview. The process was informal and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The questions were developed in advance to target an area of interest, the sample of respondents, and a number of factors to inspire analysis and interpretation for this study (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The purpose of this type of method is to identify, clarify, and verify central domains and factors that may occur in the study. Merriam (2001) declared that semi-structured interviewing is a “technique that can be used when conducting intensive case studies on a few selected individuals…” (p. 72).

It afforded the researcher the opportunity to gather data communicated by the participant in order to develop insights that illustrated actual interpretations of things in their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The heart of this study was to obtain the emic and etic perspectives because it is these realities that are critical to explaining leadership behavior (Wallace, 2004). Creswell (1998) stated that any research portrait must incorporate both views- the emic (insider’s) perspective which comes from the participant and the etic (outsider’s) perspective which comes from the researcher. The researcher asked a series of questions. These questions were developed to obtain a descriptive account of the principal’s leadership process used to implement planned educational change. Table 2 below is a chart that shows the relevance of the questions contained in the interview to guide the research questions. The research questions were used to initiate discussions on several aspects concerning leadership process. As a researcher, probing deeper into the participants’ responses was important to developing a clearer understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to data that is collected by the researcher. It is a process that actually begins as soon as the framing of research questions. Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that this analytic process typically falls into seven phases: 1) organization, 2) familiarization, 3) generation of categories and themes, 4) coding, 5) interpretation, 6) searching alternative understandings, and 7) writing the report. However, Miles and Huberman (1994) summarized those phases into three actions steps: *data reduction, data display,* and *conclusion drawing and verification.* Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the collected data. It must be reduced and simplified in order to make the data more readily accessible and understandable (Merriam, 2001). Data display is used to organize the collected data in such a way that it permits conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The last component of the data analysis process is conclusion drawing and verification.
Table 2 Interview Questions and Relevance to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Guide Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What target areas does a principal identify as urgent and needing immediate</td>
<td>(1) How did you identify the areas that needed immediate attention in your school? (2) What changes have you made since you have been at this school? (3) What was the most difficult to change? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attention?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What processes or procedures do a principal implement to address the selected</td>
<td>(1) What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded your leadership process? (2) If you had to describe the leadership process used, what would you say? (3) What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process of making effective linkages with your school? (4) What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process of making effective linkages with your parents? (5) What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process of making effective linkages with the community at large? (6) Describe your process for decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>targeted areas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In what ways is the principal’s implementation plan consistent with the Six</td>
<td>(1) How do you formulate objectives to address the selected targeted areas in your school? (2) How do you identify constraints that may occur during the process of problem solving those problems that have been diagnosed? (3) How do you select potential solutions to the problems that have been diagnosed? (4) How do you evaluate and select alternatives to selected solutions that are not working? (5) How do you know if you achieved success from your leadership process? (6) How would you describe or illustrate the leadership process that you used to create the desired change in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stages of Planned Change Model?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Miscellaneous</td>
<td>(1) What would you share with those aspiring to be educational leaders in schools; in particular, highly African American populated schools? Rural? Suburban? (2) What advice would you give a new educational leader coming into a school like this? (3) Talk more about the events, activities, or factors that have enhanced and developed your leadership process. (4) Elaborate on what skills and strategies you have found to be most effective in your efforts to turnaround a middle school that has a large percentage of African American students. (5) Comment on those leadership characteristics that you think should be most commonly used in a middle school like yours. Explain why. (6) As you look forward, how might you want to train the next generation of principals? (7) What are some of the most important elements a principal needs to know when leading a school with this student population?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the collection of data, there should not be any definitive conclusions, and preliminary conclusions should be verified during the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once the interviews were completed and all other data had been collected, participant code names were changed, information was separated into color-coded folders, and all other possible identifiers were removed. This aforementioned method is introduced in order to minimize potential bias in analysing and interpreting data. Afterwards, each interview was transcribed verbatim, the researcher engaged in data reduction to better analyse and code transcriptions for themes. Wolcott (2001) contended that the analysis should be systematic, sequential, verifiable, and continuous. Following this path provides a trail of evidence that increases the extent of dependability, consistency, and conformability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1990).

The first step to providing a trail of evidence is using a clear procedure of data analysis so that the process is clearly documented and understood. Interviews were separated into segments by reading and re-reading the transcripts thoroughly for readily identifiable themes and patterns as related to the phenomenon. Notes were generated in the margins and categorized as the analysis transitioned into the second step — coding. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), developing a coding system involved several steps: the researcher must search through the data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics the data cover, and then one must write down words and phrases to represent those topics and patterns. The words and phrases were used as coding categories. They were a means of sorting the descriptive data obtained in data collection so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. (p. 171)

Once initial codes were developed, audio recorded interviews were replayed while following transcripts in order to understand and recapture what was being discussed in the interviews. Close attention was paid to the comments and the manner in which they were stated.
Further, transcribed interviews were reviewed multiple times for emerging patterns and themes. Following the procedures outlined by Merriam (2001), the researcher extracted significant statements from each transcript and organized those statements into clusters of meanings (vertical analysis).

An initial analysis, or summary, was written for each individual interview and given back to the participants for member checking purposes. Once the initial analysis for each participant was reviewed, all significant statements were analysed across interviews (horizontal analysis). The clusters of meanings were then identified as fitting into two separate categories, textural or structural. The textural cluster described what happened (Creswell, 1998). The textural cluster was the content information and a structural cluster was what described how the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 1998). Once this process was employed through each transcript, data matrices were formed, the researcher combined the clusters from all transcripts by theme (textural and structural), conclusions were drawn, and interviews underwent cross comparisons for verification. The individual descriptions were used to develop composite descriptions of the meanings and essence of the experience that represents the sampled population (Moustakas, 1994). Below is a chart that visually organizes and summarize the data analysis process used for this study.

**Table 3 Data Analysis Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis Chart</th>
<th>Rossman &amp; Rallis (2003) Seven Steps for Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organizing the data</td>
<td><em>Use note cards to inventory gathered data.</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>Put names, dates, events, and locations on recorded transcripts and field notes.</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>Label folders will to separate the various data.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. Familiarizing self with data | • Repeatative reading of data  
• Transcribing the data  
• Repeatative listening of recorded data |
| 3. Generating Categories & Themes | • Creating concept maps to brainstorm recurring ideas.  
• Look for recurring words that participants use to describe something.  
• Talk with colleagues, professors, and research participants. |
| 4. Coding | • Attempt to initially code data into 5 large categories. These ‘big chunk’ categories could be the major section of report.  
• Format word processor with wide margins on right hand side.  
• Bracket specific data and write a word representing a category in the margin  
• Highlight categories with markers. |
| 5. Interpretation | • Taking gathered data from field  
• Transfer it to text  
• Put in narrative form for audience  
• Provide the participants,’ commonsense and theoretical perspectives. |
| 6. Seeking for alternative understandings | • Member checking, searching the literature, and asking colleagues.  
• Demonstrate how my interpretation is sound, logical, and grounded. |
| 7. Write the report | Conti. Table 3 Data Analysis Chart |

The researcher acknowledged these qualities and considerations as essential but understood there was a different perception that unfolds for each qualitative study that is created, developed and put into action. Therefore, the researcher allowed all the above points to drive the investigation for this study, but with the understanding that qualitative meaning must emerge on its own. When facilitating these procedures, the researcher continued referring to the conceptual framework, research question(s), and research members to “synthesize the material into shorter formulations” (p. 279) to ensure accurate understanding. The findings of these methods are included in the next chapter.
Traditional qualitative research uses a case study design. The fundamental idea of defining what the “case” is was important. This is called the unit of analysis. It is the one or multiple phenomenon that the researcher selected to understand in-depth, regardless, of the number of sites, participants, or documents for the study. In this study, the unit of analysis was the principal’s leadership practice and process. All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. However, researchers conducting any type of qualitative investigations must maintain rigor in their qualitative study. The researcher developed a consensus as to the appropriate criteria for assessing validity and reliability in this study. Developing that consensus came from using different research methods and investigating various participants. It is understood that qualitative research does not use the same terms to describe and maintain rigor as quantitative research.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) offered alternate terms in describing and maintaining this necessary rigor in qualitative research. Rather than using the terms internal validity, external validity, and reliability which are traditionally used in quantitative educational research, this study uses the terms “credibility” for internal validity, “fittingness” for external validity, and “auditability” for reliability. These are the qualitative terms, which will be used to ensure truth, applicability, and consistency in this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

**Validity and Auditability**

The strength to qualitative research is credibility. The internal validity of this study is high because it is participant driven. The interviews were conducted in a natural setting, thereby allowing for sufficient time to refine assertions and recheck the conclusions of the participants’ responses. Moreover, the interviews allowed the use of language that is familiar to the
participants, thus allowing the opportunity for participants and the researcher to clarify meanings. The participants also had the opportunity to validate participant responses after they were transcribed from audio recordings.

Further, the researcher provided sufficient time and opportunity for participants to clarify their perceptions and individualized meaning of events in their administrative roles via email and through one-on-one member checking in the follow-up interviews. External validity was not a goal of this qualitative research design. The researcher was interested in the comparability and translatability of the findings. Therefore, the internal reliability is dependent upon the presentation of the study’s results and external reliability relies upon the researcher’s ability to provide complete disclosure.

**External Validity/Fittingness**

Fittingness seeks the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the actual case study. It questions to what extent the results of a study can be applied to another situation (Merriam, 2001). The purpose of qualitative case studies is to understand in-depth a particular phenomenon. The intent or goal of this research was not to generalize or state what is generally true across populations. It is to consider replacing the notion of generalizations with Cronbach’s (1975) and Patton’s (1990) idea of “working hypotheses.” According to Patton (1990), these “working hypotheses,” “provide a perspective rather than truth, empirical assessment of local decision-makers theories of action rather than generation and verification of universal theories, and context-bound information rather than generalizations” (p. 491).

In an effort to answer the aspect of “fittingness” or external validity in this study, the researcher included the following in the research design: 1) a rich and thick description of place,
context, community, principal leadership practices, and culture; 2) extensive and intrusive data collection that allowed the researcher to make comparisons and informed narratives about selected topics; 3) selection of different types of participants (teachers, the principal, and other staff members) to maximize diversity, replication, and provide greater range of my phenomenon; and 4) used participants’ language, an instrumental case study approach with ethnographic data gathering techniques, and a grounded theory analysis(Strauss, 1989).

**Credibility**

During the course of the study, the researcher took measures to ensure the credibility of the data developed within the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is achieved by using various activities to increase the likelihood that credible findings will be produced. Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher utilized three ways to achieve credibility. First, there were peer debriefings as part of the research process with those who were knowledgeable about the research topic. The researcher’s personal experiences of the study were shared with them. Meetings were scheduled to discuss progress and updates, while questions were encouraged regarding the research question, methodology, ethics, trustworthiness, and other research issues. They were also invited to make pointed observations and suggestions and pose as —devil’s advocate at their discretion. Notes of these interactions are described in the researcher’s field notebook. Second, the use of triangulation was employed to increase the confidence, or validity, of the methodological plan. Data triangulation was used by checking each interview transcript against the researcher’s written field notes that were either developed during or after the interview itself.
As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) this process improves the probability that the findings and interpretations of the study will be found credible. Finally, there was an employed process of member checking in which each participant was asked to partake in during the course of the initial and follow-up interviews.

Upon their agreement, each of the research participants was given a summarized data analysis and transcripts of their individual interview once completed. Participants were encouraged to offer comments on any of their statements they wish to expound on, whether or not they felt the data was an accurate representation of what was discussed, and if the interpreted manner was congruent with their own experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that member checking is —the most crucial technique for establishing credibility (p. 314). Member checking documents were delivered to participants in person before face-to-face follow-up interviews were conducted.

**Limitations**

It is important to disclose the limitations of a study to maintain ethical practices. Due to the type of research questions; a case study approach was selected. The limitations are as follows: 1) a case study is limited in scope and in the number of “key actors,” 2) the researcher was restricted on time due to the requirements of this degree, and 3) the researcher’s role in this research altered the research setting. The degree to which this occurred depended upon how much the researcher differed ethnically and culturally from the people being studied, the people’s perception of social distance, and the researcher’s ability to conceal or camouflage the research agenda. The observer’s effect on the site or area being observed also limited this study.
It was difficult to apply conventional standards of reliability and validity to the subjective nature of qualitative data (Burns, 2000). Although in qualitative research, a researcher can gain an insider’s view of the phenomena in question; the documented interaction with each participant in a case study cannot be replicated (Burns, 2000). Additionally, due to the lack of a random selection process for the sample population, there was a decreased generalization of findings. Further, the data from this study may not be considered applicable to all principals. Lastly, because the study used qualitative research methods, the findings are subject to other interpretations.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

When I began this study, I knew that I wanted to design a leadership process model that described a principal’s procedures used to implement educational change in a predominately African American student populated middle school. I was not sure whether my interview questions could unearth the information needed for me to construct and interpret such an obscure phenomenon. As I progressed through this journey, I discovered that the educational plan the principal was so diligently working to maintain was not her own but a prescribed agenda mandated and implemented by the state and district.

The initial purpose of my conceptual framework was to determine whether or not the six stages of the planned education model existed or if it was consistent with what I observed being used in the leadership process. This revelation motivated me to take a closer look at my study and make an adjustment. This adjustment resulted in changing the six stages in my conceptual framework into interview questions. Thus, allowing me to focus my study by targeting the leadership process that the principal used to maintain the prescribed plan rather than an educational plan that she did not devise or implement.

This chapter reveals the results of repeated interviews with a selected principal and her leadership team on the topic of leadership process and implementing planned educational change in a predominately African American populated middle school. As detailed in Chapter Three, a case study approach was selected for the study as the best method to explore the phenomenon. The investigator served as the primary instrument of data collection using semi-structured in-depth interviews to explain, describe and illustrate the shared meaning of leadership process and
educational change. Data for the study resulted from interviews between the researcher and participants as each individual shared personal accounts concerning their leadership roles and the dynamics in which the leadership team collaborated to implement educational change. Each of the subjects in the study was interviewed in their own working environment (natural setting).

The conceptual framework was obtained from the review of relevant literature regarding planned educational change. I expected to use The Six Stages of Planned Change model to see what consistencies occurred in the implementation of a principal’s educational plan in a predominately African American student populated middle school. However, I discovered that an educational plan was already in existence due to the performing status of the school. The state and district officials had already mandated and implemented an educational plan that they deem would reform the school and the leadership team followed those guidelines. When I realized this, I changed the six stages proposed in the model into interview questions to verify the consistency within the principal’s leadership process instead of the implementation of her educational plan. This allowed me to focus my study more toward the leadership process of the principal than the educational plan that she did not put into place.

The focus of this chapter is in four parts: (a) overview of the school; (b) the participants; (c) the findings that emerged from the research questions; (d) a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experiences and (e) a diagram of the leadership process used to implement planned educational change at North Valley Middle School.

**Overview of North Valley Middle School**

North Valley Middle School is located on the southwest side of town. It was built in 1960 to accommodate a junior high school population. There was a faculty of six and a student
population of 150 seven graders. In 1962, North Valley added an eighth grade class and became a full-fledged junior high. By 1965, ten classrooms, a band room, a business education suite, and a gymnasium had been constructed; and two sections of 10th grade students had been included in hopes of making the institution into a high school. However, in 1970, the North Valley School District took on the middle school concept and a final decision was made to convert it to a middle school housing grades 6-8. It was a school that established a mission statement to always train and educate every young adult that entered the building.

This school is in the midst of two universities, a community college, and a vocational technical school. The community has several parks, churches and recreational centers available to the public. Student enrollment varies due to students moving from one zone to another or moving out of the district. However, over the years with the community population changing, gentrification occurring, and resource depletion, North Valley has struggled to uphold its mission.

North Valley Middle has been labelled a title I, low-performing at-risk school. It has obtained a bad reputation due to pass actions that several principals have tried to change over the years but could not. North Valley District administers a state-wide test that is used to determine whether a student is above, on, or below level. Results are used to determine school grades, student achievement, and student placement. Prior to and when Anita Hill took on the principalship of this school, there were high rates of failure, tardiness, fights and absenteeism. Her description was as follows:

Chaotic! In terms of student discipline, there was no system in place, nothing to correlate data of what had been done or hadn’t. The school was physically disarrayed. The building
was in need of major repairs and to be updated. In other words, the environment was
totally not conducive to learning...The building was not clean; the yard not mowed and
trash in the front. Image is everything! If it looks like a prison, why would you want to
send your child here?

Mr. Ken Howard provides numbers from the discipline data to illustrate the students’ conduct at
the time:

    When I first got here the tardy bell would ring and there might be 75 kids in the hallway.
    By tracking our data in regards to discipline issues in the beginning there were 180
documented fights. So, just changing our overall climate of the school, we have cut our
fights in half and now there may be one or two students in the hallway.

Mr. Poindexter summarizes the school’s situation by stating:

    This school was just in raw form. There was a lot of turnover and no structure. However,
despite all of that, the kids were receptive to something new.

Regretfully, the academic success of students suffered and the instructional system was at the
bottom. North Valley was receiving low school grades because of an overall drop in students’
test scores and for having low enrollment. Specific to the needs of the troubled North Valley
Middle, in August 2008, the school district made significant strides toward improving the middle
school. With the School Board’s approval, the Superintendent of Schools promoted an
elementary school principal from one of the surrounding counties with proven leadership to
serve as the Lead Principal.
Clearly, no routines were established at North Valley Middle. Crises were handled as they arose. Teacher turnover was high and student achievement was low. Children ran the halls, caused class disruptions, and failed to listen to teachers. As teacher and parent morale deteriorated, student morale decreased with the expected results of increased disciplinary problems. Enrollment decreased partly because of safety issues and inability to provide effective educational programs for the students. With a new leadership team in place, the challenge that existed was whether or not this administration could implement a planned educational change model that would work to turnaround North Valley Middle School.

Meet the Participants

Anita Hill

Anita Hill is an African-American female who is in her early 50s. She currently holds a high level administrator position at North Valley Middle School. Mrs. Hill was hired approximately five years ago to take on one of the district’s most struggling schools. She has been openly applauded and criticized for boldly proclaiming her ability to quickly turnaround North Valley Middle School. Despite the outcome, her determination, persistence, and commitment to children have not dampened her spirits towards achieving the goals set before her. As a veteran of twenty-two years in administration, she is an individual who has no problems taking full responsibility for what goes on at her school.

Hill references one African American male mentor who is instrumental in her being the administrator that she is today. He gave her extended opportunities beyond the classroom to participate in different leadership roles which inspired her to go into administration faster than
she had planned. Hill’s ultimate goal is “I do not want any child left behind. I do not care where they fall everybody has room for improvement!”

Hill attributes her work ethic as an administrator to having great mentors, several years of experience in different capacities of education, and a combination of all her mistakes. She also views herself as a lifelong learner that is continuously striving to improve her craft as an administrator. According to Hill, it is important that each stakeholder on the leadership team understand their value, worth and connection as a whole. “It’s like a body! I can’t do this process without my hands and they are my hands! We’re all in this together!” In her opinion, this is paramount to achieving success at a school like North Valley Middle. Despite the reputation that has been placed on the school throughout the years, she still remains optimistic that change is going to come.

**John Poindexter**

John Poindexter is an African-American male in his early 30s. He currently holds a mid-level administrator at North Valley Middle. He is the youngest in the district to possess such a position. He states that his age has sometimes been a hindrance in making effective linkages throughout North Valley and the district because people tend to under estimate his abilities as a young black male in administration. However, Poindexter has been able to stand firm and do well in his position at North Valley Middle School. He jokingly mentions his guardian angel being one of his white veteran teachers of twenty-four years and how she is his biggest advocate in letting the new teachers know about him and what to expect from him as an administrator. She clears up all the misconceptions that they may have.
Despite the constant dismantling of stereotypes, Poindexter describes leadership like going to the doctor. “The doctor doesn’t look at you and prescribe antibiotics because you look like you need them. He does a series of tests to diagnose what the situation is...and that is what we do here at North Valley Middle School.” Mr. Poindexter takes pride in building relationships with the students, teachers, and staff to delve deeper into understanding what it will take to achieve success.

Ken Howard

Ken Howard is one of the city’s home grown. He went to elementary, middle, high school and college in the city that he works. Mr. Howard is a white male in his mid-30s about 6’3” who is in a mid-level administrative position at North Valley Middle School. Although he has taught for 10 years, this is his first time ever working at a school like North Valley. This is also his first administrative position. Howard states how blessed he feels to have such an opportunity because the experience has given him skills and leadership opportunities he never thought were possible. He further indicates that he enjoys coming to work every day because he feels he is needed by the students. Discipline is his area on the leadership team and his ultimate goal is to change the overall climate of the school.

He believes the climate of the school is extremely important and speaks for itself. When the kids feel safer, teachers can teach, learning is taking place and success is easier to achieve. But, “It must start at the top; one must have support from the principal and with that. It’s a team effort. This change cannot take place from one or two individuals. You got to create a team of individuals that are on board or on the same page. It has to be a total team effort!” Mr. Howard has designed North Valley’s discipline plan and he says they are finally seeing the results.
James Carter

James Carter is an African-American male in his early 40s currently in the dean of students position. He was born and raised in a small town approximately 27 miles east of the city he works in. He received his degrees from the two local universities that surround North Valley Middle School. Carter held this same position for five years at another school located on the opposite side of town; however, he just finished his first year at North Valley Middle School. He proudly proclaims, “Despite the school grade received, the students had more fun this year. They felt safer and the campus climate was awesome! There was something about this school year that went beyond that grade. Unfortunately, that is not what is important but I think we really did a great job!”

Carter feels privileged to be a part of this experience regardless of what people think. Carter also noted that there is nothing that they have dealt with at North Valley that he has not dealt with at another school. Children are the same everywhere. Therefore, it is essential to remain optimistic at all times, if success is to be achieved.

Gabe Kaplan

Gabe Kaplan is a white male in his second year as science teacher. He is in his mid-twenties and is currently serving as the subject area coach for his department. Kaplan believes North Valley Middle is a work in progress making tremendous strides in the right direction. He claims there is uniqueness about the student population that the school demographics or the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch on paper could never describe. Kaplan feels classifying children by how much their parents make, where they live, or what color they are is a grave mistake. It tells you nothing. Mr. Kaplan has made a name for himself in the science
department as being a great science coach. He takes pride in Mr. Poindexter seeing him as an ace in the hole. He is very humble and direct in articulating how things are done at North Valley. “Here, we have an administration that supports us, a dedicated team of people that are reliable and have bought into the vision of doing whatever it takes to make this school successful. The administration also does a good job of letting everyone know that they are integral parts of the machine. Every part is needed for it to run. You need every part working to its maximum potential and working collaboratively is a big part of it.”

George Jefferson

Mr. Jefferson is an African American male in his early 30s. He has been a math teacher for six years and is currently the math coach at North Valley. Before I interviewed Mr. Jefferson, I was given the opportunity to sit in on a math department meeting. There were approximately 5-8 teachers in attendance. It was informal and the teachers were very nice, fun, and cordial. The meeting addressed some last minute items dealing with testing that needed to be completed that week. In addition, it was Mr. Jefferson’s last day due to some travelling plans outside of the country.

Mr. Jefferson can be described as a very cheerful and energetic individual who loves his job. He indicated that it was a high teacher turnover rate prior to him coming to North Valley. He was the fifth teacher to hold his position within the year that he was hired. Despite that he said, “I saw very bright students that needed love and guidance. They had all the capabilities; all the tools but they needed to be told what to do. They needed to be taught the fundamentals of math so they would have something to build upon. All they really needed was to see you believe in them and they would give back 100% effort.”
From a leadership perspective, Mr. Jefferson believes looking at the data is primary and then getting to know the student. With those two components one is able to identify weaknesses, look at trends, and discuss reasons and solutions for the problem. He says, “I am always striving for the best! So, watching great leaders like Mr. Poindexter and the reading coach, I try to implement some of the things they do to help me become a better educator. Overall, I really like the leadership that is going on in this school. I have watched this progress over the last four years. It is like a chess game. I have watched it go where it needs to be with the right people in the right position doing the right thing! We are going in the right direction!”

Findings

A number of themes emerged during the data analysis that provided insight into the leadership processes and procedures used to implement planned educational change at North Valley Middle School. The primary themes were verified by the six participants’ transcripts for the most part. However, the categories presented are not concrete representations of each participant in the study because no two conversations were the same. Neither can the interactions with each participant be replicated in a case study (Burns, 2000). Therefore, the approach is to place narratives in the most appropriate context to provide a clear illustration of the findings by using criteria for the best fit (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Research Questions

In this study, three subsidiary research questions were constructed to answer and explain the overarching research question of what processes and procedures does a principal use to “turnaround” a predominately African American populated middle school? Each of these questions serves as a category that will be discussed in more detail to describe the leadership
phenomenon in question. However, there were a few additional questions that I deemed necessary to include because it provided a better understanding of the leadership process the principal used at North Valley Middle School. The data was gathered and organized into various themes. Descriptive statements and direct quotes were used throughout the discussion to give a richer context. In addition, the participants’ verbatim interview responses served to support my interpretations of the phenomenon.

The Concept of Leadership Process

*Question One: How would you define leadership process?*

The concept of leadership process within an administrative team and among the teachers is a category that captures the different meanings of how each member perceived and defined leadership process. From the participants’ perspective they often shared their thoughts, feelings, and views of leadership process based on what they thought it looked like, their leadership role and position held at the school. When I asked about leadership process and its meaning, all participants mentioned a different perspective of what they thought leadership process meant to them. Most of them gave responses that referred to team effort, leadership style, strategies or routines executed in their job positions at the school. According to Anita Hill, the day-to-day things that must be done are considered processes. She provides a vivid picture of what she means through the examples in the following excerpt:

Showing up to work and making sure children are in class those are processes. Those are the things you are required to do. It’s not leadership; it’s a process. I can come here and just do that process everyday but not get into the real nitty-gritty of what the school needs as far as leadership. So, I look at process as just those day-to-day things that you just do.
Hill distinguishes between the two comments by explaining what she means by the nitty-gritty of leadership:

Nitty-gritty! I would say are classroom walk throughs, looking at student data, looking at teacher data, looking at performance, reviewing continually test scores, and looking at lesson plans. Deciding what pacing guides should we (teachers) be on? Formulating the focus calendar and determining whether we (teachers and students) made it here or not? That’s the nitty-gritty! It’s going and digging deeper.

Mr. Kaplan summarized the term with one word but feels it is difficult to define because it is a complex philosophy that depends on leadership styles. Here is his interesting excerpt:

I’m sure you have heard the word a million times already COLLABORATION. Collaboration is what it’s all about. There isn’t a single person here that can lift this school up by themselves. But, when we (teachers and students) all work together we can do anything. So, it’s just collaboration and working with everybody, identifying who has what strengths and taking advantage of them. I mean that’s how we (the school) do it. However, that’s a difficult term to define. There are so many elements to it...Lord! I think leadership process is a philosophy on how to achieve a goal. To fully answer your question you have to understand what kind of school we are and what our goal is. There are lots of different leadership styles but it’s all about teamwork, collaboration and using the tools you have. The leadership process should be to identify who the school leaders are, identifying their strengths, and making sure that they’ve bought into the vision so that they can handle those things the way they should be handled.
Unlike Kaplan, Mr. Poindexter gave a definition for leadership process instead of a one word description:

It is a process to make decisions or lead an organization step-by-step. It is a system, shared vision, or having a common thread that works with or without principals.

While Mr. Howard did not give a definition, he believed team effort best described the leadership process being executed at North Valley. He shares his experience:

It starts at the top. You have to have the support from your principal and with that. It has to be a team effort. This change cannot take place from one or two individuals. When I first got here, I tried to do it with just me and the dean. We saw some improvements being made but it wasn’t anywhere near where we needed to be. So it starts with you getting support from your principal, and then creating a team of individuals that are on board or on the same page. And it takes a total team effort. In other words, the leader who is spearheading his or her leadership process have to be effective enough to lead the school in the direction of the vision; otherwise, success will be difficult to obtain.

The majority of participants differed in what they believed leadership process to be, it is clear that this is very complex and elusive because it is dealing with human beings. The participants supported the idea that there are several ways to describe this phenomenon, not to mention their consistent echo that change is gradual and will take at least 3-5 years before a desired goal is reached. There were several themes that emerged from the participants answering the above question; however, there are four that will be discussed in more detail. These themes include administrative support, communication, cooperation, and shared responsibility.
Administrative Support

All participants reported that one of the most important components in their leadership process was having administrative support. Administrative support means having a leadership team that communicates and tends to the needs of involved stakeholders, assumes all responsibility regardless of the situation, and ensures that students are top priority at all times. For the administrators, that meant providing assistance in any capacity to ensure all contributors would have what is necessary to implement and execute the mandated educational change. However, before any component can be considered, each participant indicated that everyone must be consistent. Mr. Poindexter describes his experiences as it relates to empowering others to perform the expected duties of the school.

Not everybody can teach here. Bottom line not everyone can deal with our clientele. Students at this age can sense when you are new, uncomfortable, or do not have that background training to guide them. Our kids will attack that! Therefore, we have to train our teachers to be ready at all times. Regardless, if they are not a team leader or the principal, they have to know this school backwards and forward. And so we try to inspire our teachers to be leaders by having them work in several capacities other than their original positions. So that when they are approached with a situation they do not have to come back and say Mr. Poindexter what should I do with this situation? We try not to micro-manage. We try to empower them to be leaders on the campus and this has been a great help to the overall staff.

Mr. Howard describes how the participation of the principal is imperative to enhancing team support within the school.
Mrs. Hill is a member of the supervision team. Any initiative we try to do as long as it is for the betterment of the school and we are putting the kids first that is a good thing. All those issues like horse play, tardiness, class disruptions, etc. I just meet with my principal and oftentimes she is very supportive of everything. She makes herself a part of it and that is how it works. It starts with her and her support.

Mrs. Hill spoke on the importance of developing support with teachers and staff through providing professional development.

When you enter my doors, I consider you as a person who may not know. So, I treat you as if you don’t know. Even my veteran teachers! So, I start all over! We start in the summers and we go over what we need to know. It is to fine tune what is already in place. Learning never stops! The idea is to improve your craft and weaknesses. Right now! I am getting workshop opportunities, out-of county travel and out-of-state travel ready for those going on trainings. It is not one person on my staff who has told me no we are going to take a vacation in lieu of going to a training and it’s not mandatory! My administrators I challenge them daily, weekly, monthly to step it up. That is the key! They (leadership team) should be able to step into my role at anytime.

From a teacher’s perspective, Mr. Kaplan provides an example of how administrative support plays a big role in the improvement of the science department.

When I started here there was not a lot of guidance in the science department. There was not a lot of cohesion among the team. There was not a lot of collaboration, teamwork, or support. The structure was kind of weak. As the science coach, I think I was fortunate! I was able to pick pretty much a whole new staff. Mr. Poindexter and Mrs. Hill basically
said, “Here is the list of people who applied. Go ahead and interview if you think they are the right ones bring them to us.” Having the opportunity to do this, I was able to select people who were willing to make a sacrifice and wanted to work for the betterment of the kids. With me it was not about whether they could teach science or not it was about whether the teachers had the charisma needed so the kids would want to work for them. You can learn science. With the right people in place, it was not hard for teachers to buy into the mission and begin to work together to make things happen. Mr. Poindexter is over our department. If we have an idea or a project we want to do. They are pretty good about getting us funding, getting us time, or getting us whatever we need. This is critical! Mrs. Hill is excellent at finding money for stuff. It’s ridiculous! The things that I have asked for; she has always provided it! This makes it a little bit easier to do our jobs!

Like Kaplan, Jefferson describes the resourcefulness of his colleagues and the administrators to illustrate how supportive they are of one another.

I have been blessed with the opportunity to work around a pretty good staff and a great administration team that has an open door policy at any time. As far as teachers, we can go into each other’s classes while classes are still going on. You saw Mr. Haywood in here. He has a class right now. Students are not going to get up and do anything. He came over and asked if we can talk for a couple of minutes when I am done. Cool! I will go into his class later while he is teaching and assist him in any way I can. It is the same way with my administrative team. Mr. Poindexter truly is wonderful! He is truly a gem to have and has a vast book of knowledge. I go to him and pick his brain all the time. Not daily sometimes hourly! I may have a presentation. I go to him and ask, “What should I
do? Should I give out handouts? What kind of pointers can you give me?” and he always have something constructive that will help. That’s how it is here.

Mrs. Hill summarizes this entire concept with the following statement.

My philosophy is doing what’s right for the children. If you love your kids, you will make it right! I try to let my teachers, students and staff know nobody is perfect or alone in this endeavour. Whatever you got on your plate I am going to help you do it. My leadership style is that we’re all stakeholders in this. So, I’ve always tried to help individuals understand how valuable and important they are. It’s just like a body. I cannot do this process without my hands and you all are my hands. We’re all in this together. I’m not going to give you any more than what I would do or not do. But, if you see me working hard, then I need you to work as hard as I’m working.

Communication

Many of the participants in this study spoke of communication and its effectiveness within their leadership teams. Discovering and providing ways to communicate among one another proved to be a vital part in directing the school’s leadership process for implementing planned educational change. Some administrators spoke candidly of their experiences. Mr. Carter describes a situation in relation to a teacher and a disruptive student.

A teacher may come to me in reference to a disruptive child in his or her classroom. First, I will speak with that teacher. Second, I will speak with the child. Third, I will speak with the parent(s). The purpose for doing this is to illustrate leadership, cooperation, and communication among all parties. Most importantly show communication and a shared responsibility so everyone can feel validated in addressing the problem appropriately.
Mrs. Hill conveys the importance of establishing communication lines with all stakeholders. She shares how parental involvement has improved since all means of communication is used to get in contact with them, thus making it easy for the parent as well as the school. Mrs. Hill indicates the following:

Parental involvement is key! However, parental involvement doesn’t necessarily mean you need to come to the school. There are many ways that you can help your child, promote parental involvement and make a difference within the school and never come to the school. You have to be creative and think out of the box regarding those kinds of issues. There are several things we do to work with the parent outside the school to keep it moving. We phone, email, use face book, and even text parents. We allow them to use the same means as well to contact us. So the child knows we are communicating and as long the parent supports us. It makes a world of a difference!

When speaking of communication as being one of the components in this leadership process, Mr. Howard describes how communication is essential for the supervision team to be effective when students are transitioning to class.

We have created a team called the supervision team. It is a twelve member team that includes the principal, the assistant principals, P.E teachers, the dean of students, reading and math coaches, gear up coach even the executive secretary in the front office. Every time our students transition from one class to another we get on the radio to remind each other to go out to our spots. In addition, the teachers stand at their doors. Now you’ve got 12 additional staff members monitoring behaviours in the hallways. When the kids see us (supervision team) and we got our clipboards in hand. They know that consequences can
be given on the spot. This works well for us but we must communicate and be on the same page at all times.

Like Howard, Mrs. Hill believes communication is paramount but not only with the leadership team and staff but with the students as well. This is what she had to say.

Communication! Communication! Lack of communication is one of the biggest flaws that you can have in a middle school. Middle school students are social. Very social! Therefore, to find out what their (students) social activities are you have to begin to communicate with them. Once you draw them in then you can teach. But, you’ve got to meet them where they are. They are not coming to you so you’re going to have to go to them. By engaging in conversation, the students will not feel that you are afraid of them or don’t want to be around them. You are not their peer but you need to be in the middle of their conversations to understand where they are coming from.

Mr. Poindexter agrees and summarizes this entire concept by stating, “Communication must occur among all involved parties the teachers and staff, the parents, the students, and the community.” He shares the following.

The community that surrounds this school has gotten a lot better! Definitely! Since I have been here; in particular with these convenient stores that are over here. They are so supportive to the point that they would call or come to the front office and let us know when students are skipping out over there. So to have community members who may not have gone to college, high school or middle school? They understand that this is where they are right now but they don’t want to see the kids fail. Having this type of communication between our school and the community show a real community effort to
make sure our kids succeed. That is powerful! We’ve even created a duty post after school across the street. So we don’t cut off our boundaries at the gate of the school. I am over there! I’ll stand right over at the Crab Shack until everybody is gone home, picked up by parent(s), or on the city bus. Mr. Poindexter is right there!

**Cooperation**

The participants spoke of their understanding pertaining to the leadership process used to implement North Valley’s planned educational change. While administrative support and communication were important to the process many of them indicated that none of the other components can exist if everyone is not willing to work together or cooperate with one another. Mrs. Hill talks about resistance that may occur and how she handles it because everyone is not always on board with what an individual may be trying to do. Thus, this is what she had to say.

People can be a big hindrance to the execution of your leadership process. For example, they may not understand your vision; they may not want the school to be successful or they don’t like change. We got to change this philosophy. You can be in the same family and sometimes your family may not like you. So that can hinder or hurt sometimes. I try to work with resistance by focusing on coming in everyday, doing my job and not looking to the left or to the right. I just look up and keep it moving. However, when that doesn’t work I exit you! At the end of the day, the kids come first. We must realize that these are somebody’s kids and if their families don’t care we care! This means I have to have people that are working toward the desired goal.

Mr. Poindexter explains how they (leadership team) work to build relationships with the staff and community to develop the idea “we all are in this together.”
We have a system in place where the leadership teams schedule trainings based on the school and teachers’ needs. We make sure the selected training(s) have a purpose. Our goal is to build relationships within the school and among the staff to develop the essence that we are one. If someone has passed away, we make sure that they are not isolated and that we are there for support. We celebrate birthdays and other accomplishments as a team and school. All this is done to build a close knit family atmosphere to where we are not doing things separate from one another but striving to work together as one.

On the other hand, Mr. Kaplan explains as a science coach how easy things become when planning properly so that everyone understands what is expected of them.

I am not going to lie. I’ve been very lucky in that the teachers we have in the science department are very understanding of the mission. I haven’t had any resistance as far as getting things done. Basically, over the summer we highlighted what our science plan was going to be, how we were going to work with each other and the administration to make sure things got done. Once that was established, for the most part, things ran pretty smoothly. By doing this, it really saved us from going through a lot of challenges or barriers. We kind of eliminated them by doing the proper planning from the beginning.

Like Kaplan, Jefferson confirms as the math coach that being able to hear and see the different departments of the school on one accord working together to achieve the same goal can be a tremendous adventure. Jefferson excitedly describes his experience.

I have a great teaching staff! Just speaking within my department, the math department, the teaching staff is like one in the same. Everyone works well together. Everyone is on the same page. Everyone is trying to meet the same goal. I can honestly say, I don’t see
individuals here who try to outshine each other or try to have their own objective in mind. Everyone here is for the student. Everyone here puts the student first. It’s kind of like the old saying, “It takes a village to raise a child!” I mean if the student doesn’t understand with one teacher, then it is nothing for the teachers to come together, discuss what is best for that child and move them into someone else’s class because it may be a better fit. It’s all about the motivation and the progression of the student here. The teachers are wonderful! I love it!

Mr. Howard notes the importance of cooperation and its effects on the leadership process.

The process it takes to improve a school is easier said than done. There is a lot of work that goes into a process to achieve this. You need to have the entire team on board; they must also be willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve the goal because if everyone is not on board, it makes it very difficult! One of the advantages here at North Valley everybody is on board! Whenever we (administrative team) make changes or add processes that can take us to the next level, we call a faculty meeting, introduce it and the teachers are on board. It’s amazing!

**Shared Responsibility**

Another factor articulated or implied by several participants revolves around shared responsibility or the understanding that everyone must follow and be involved with the leadership process implemented by the principal to accomplish any desired goal for the school. Many of the participants of this study provided many implications, examples, and statements supporting responsibility being shared within their departments and the school. Mr. Carter shares his idea of what he believes shared responsibility should be.
Shared responsibility is having a balance! This balance will depend on your leadership style. For example, if you are a person that focuses on the human side of things, then the data aspect of the job may be difficult for you. On the other hand, some people are like robots; therefore, the human aspect of the job may be harder for them to deal with. You got to assess your own leadership style and balance your weaknesses with other individuals who are better in those areas. Basically, create a staff that will balance you (the leader) out or strengthen your weaknesses. Think of this like a body. It has to depend on each part to function properly.

Like Mr. Carter, Poindexter agrees that within the leadership team everyone must understand each other’s leadership style in order for the leadership process to work smoothly.

We did an exercise at the beginning of the year. You had to select the leadership style that fit your personality. What Mrs. Hill, Mr. Howard, and I discovered was that we had different leadership styles from one another. I think that goes to show you have to have various types of leadership. You can’t just come in and say, “I’m going to do distributive leadership; this is how it operates and never use anything else!” You have to find a way to gel the different leadership styles. It can never be it’s my way or nothing! It always has to be a shared responsibility of what’s in the best interest of the kids and teachers.

Despite the difference, we (leaders) have to also know that we all have something strong to bring to the table. So, if someone comes up with an idea, we communicate with each other and come to an agreement. We support it and kind of rotate the leadership role. These are the kinds of things that I think makes our leadership team much stronger.
Mr. Howard shares an example that illustrates how this shared responsibility happens in North Valley.

Our in-school suspension room was fairly weak before we (the leadership team) created the supervision team. We concluded that we didn’t need just one instructional aide type person in there all day allowing the kids to sleep and talk. Those types of things cannot go on and have a strong in-school suspension room. So with this room we created a rotation system with the supervision team. Our principal opens up and starts out the day. She sets the tone for the behaviours in that room and that shared responsibility has been huge for us!

From a teacher’s perspective, Mr. Jefferson describes how the math department shares responsibility.

We come together in the summer. The district math person has already put together the pacing guide for the next year. We (math teachers) dissect that pacing guide and tailor it to fit the needs of our students here. For example, we may need a little more time than the guide gives on integers so we make adjustments to create that extra time. After we get our pre-planning stage done, we enter the implementation stage at the beginning of the year. Then, we (math teachers) meet weekly! Every Wednesday as a department and discuss what’s working and what’s not. Basically, we make those necessary adjustments to the curriculum to help the students better. Having that camaraderie to work together and share the responsibilities concerning the students, it helps us out a lot as a department.

Like Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Kaplan describes his experience in the science department.
We created a system that is very structured and rigid so that the students can know on this
day they are going to do this and then the next day and then every two weeks they
(students) take an assessment. It’s graded the next day and the following Monday the
teachers are starting to go over their data and the cycle repeats. In order for this to work
like it does, we (teachers) have to work collaboratively with the administration and one
another.

Mr. Carter concludes in expressing what he feels the entire leadership team does and need to
continue to do in order to reinforce and accomplish the goals for North Valley.

To move a school like North Valley in the right direction, I think as a leader you have to
be strong. You have to communicate and tend to the needs of your teachers and students.
You have to be willing to take total responsibility for whatever actions that may occur in
your school, regardless of the situation. Be a man or woman and face the music! Last,
you have to support your teachers and keep in mind that you are always working in the
best interest of the children. When everyone is aware that they have an administrator that
is supporting of them, I believe you are in great shape!

A majority of the participants in this study exemplified a strong desire to do whatever it takes to
get North Valley Middle in the right direction. However, it is a lot of hard work and it is
imperative that as a school everybody involved must communicate, cooperate, support and share
the responsibility. Kaplan best sums up this point in stating the following:

Our school is a work in progress. I think we have made a lot of strides in the right
direction. Now we got the right people in place and the students are starting to come into
the right mind set. So, yeah! We are up and coming!
The participants’ definition of North Valley’s leadership process was actualized by their commitment to their positions held, the duties assigned to them, and their perceptions of what they wanted people to see and believe about their school. None of the participants were able to explain their actions in sequential steps. However, their idea of leadership and the procedures used to obtain the goals for North Valley was very difficult to observe through a structured lens. I discovered the best way to understand such an elusive and complex term is to let its meaning emerge into whatever it was going to be. In unravelling of this experience, I felt it mysteriously mimicked how the participants meandered through their everyday duties to make this school what they believed it to be - great!

**Identified Urgent Target Areas**

*Question Two: What target areas does a principal identify as urgent and needing immediate attention?*

Participants in this study described how observation (analysing the data), research, and surveys were used to identify target areas that needed immediate attention and feedback. The application of these acts led to the following objectives needing immediate attention at North Valley: (1) physical landscape, (2) curriculum design, and (3) instructional practice. However, to better understand the leadership process of North Valley, the above question was asked to retrieve their thoughts and ideas on identifying urgent target areas. The emerging themes varied from the observation of the physical landscape to the use of surveys to identify best instructional practice. The following themes are: *physical landscape, curriculum design, and instructional practice.*
Observation of Physical Landscape

This theme refers to those external target areas that can be identified by the eyesight of an individual; for example, the physical appearance of the school, and the school climate or teacher/student relationships. Thoughts and views were shared that the physical landscape (an external target) was the first and foremost target area that needed attention. Mrs. Hill describes and gives her thoughts about what she observed the first day she came to North Valley Middle School:

When I first came, I had to multi-task in my school because so much of it needed immediate attention. I had to break it down! First off, I came to a building that wasn’t clean and the yard not mowed. Image is everything! It looked like a prison. If it looks like a prison, why would you want to send your child here? Why would you want to send them to a nasty school with trash all in the front? I couldn’t get you through the door until I cleaned up the place. We had to start at different phases and this is where I started. I wanted this building clean! Spic ‘n Span! I wanted the windows, the yard, and the bathrooms cleaned. I wanted to see my face in the windows. I didn’t want to see paper in the yard. I didn’t want to see dirty bathrooms. I had to start from the outside before I could get you on the inside.

While Mr. Howard did not deny that the school needed a facelift, he was adamant about the importance of improving the overall feeling or atmosphere of the school environment. He shares his thoughts on what was done to improve the school climate which was an immediate target that needed attention as well.
How did we identify them (target areas)? Well, just by looking at the climate of the school. You can see when students are in the hallway horse playing or you can see visually when they are in the cafeteria, not sitting down, and running around their tables playing. That is very disruptive behaviour. We had to address those minor offenses with heavy consequences and by doing that we changed the climate of the school. Now, we are in a much better place!

Mr. Carter agrees wholeheartedly with his colleagues; however, he believes in addition to those components getting the students to have a positive attitude towards learning was paramount and needed immediate attention.

Changing students’ attitude towards learning and developing a positive attitude towards education is a very difficult thing! It has been an on-going battle. However, we have worked hard at showing them (students) that this is the path that they need to attend to—attend to your academics, make good grades, and just have a good feeling about learning and about their school. I feel if they start off with the right attitude, about learning, and about schooling, then all of the other behaviour issues wouldn’t be a problem.

Mr. Poindexter concluded that having teachers that can do the work that is needed in a school like North Valley was an immediate target area and ensuring that everything possible is done to weed out or nurture those individuals was essential to the success of the school.

Bottom line! Not everyone can teach here and deal with our clientele. From year one to now, we have created a solid core. We have several (teachers) that are still here and we have several that have been added along the way. So, the majority of our teaching staff have been with us for at least two years and that has made a BIG difference in terms of
consistency...So, we have tried to prepare them for any and everything. We provide opportunities and tried to inspire all our teachers to become teacher/leaders. We try not to micro-manage and so empowering them in this way has been a BIG help to our staff overall. We still have a few in training but a majority have been able to succeed in becoming an integral part of how we work here.

Analysing the Data for Curriculum Design

Considering the principal and her leadership team were mandated by local, state and national mandates to turnaround North Valley Middle School, the theme curriculum design is another urgent target that needed immediate attention. By analysing the scores of the past and present state test (FCAT) that is administered to the students each year, the participants revealed that there had to be a consistency in the curriculum. Mr. Poindexter describes and tells his experience as to how this urgent target was identified and dealt with:

We started with the test scores! The first year here we (leadership team) looked at the comparative scores of students who went from level 4 and 5 to level 1. We asked ourselves what happened. Next, we started asking teachers that were still here. What was taking place? We were doing that background investigation because we did not want to come in and just change all this stuff without doing some research first. We were trying to find out what was working versus what was not. The one thing we found did work for our children was performing arts. So, immediately we began building our marching band, the athletic program and other programs related to the arts. This was positive so we kept those things and then cleaned house on the things that did not work. The reading program was not consistent. You had teachers teaching reading different ways; therefore, the
reading scores tanked! The math programs were not consistent. Academically, there was a missing piece within the departments. Basically, teachers were given that freedom to do what they felt worked best for the kids, but when you saw the results it was not working! As a leadership team, we had to make some decisions. So, we made some strict changes to where we did implement some non-negotiable items. For example, in terms of how we approach reading, how we approach math and science and those things. Even with the non-negotiables we had to get buy-in from the department heads by providing trainings for them to be able to demonstrate and not tell the teachers how they needed to teach the program being used for that particular subject area. We had to observe the teachers and tell them, “Here are some goods and bads! Ok, this section of the text or this section of the curriculum is not as strong. Let us pull this stuff out and use it here until we develop our pacing guides and our curriculum maps around what is going to work best for our children.” Because what the teachers were using before it was not working. Now that we have our system in place after several years of working hard, there is a BIG CHANGE! Scheduling is easier; everyone is familiar and knows what is expected of them-right down to the students.

Mr. Kaplan and Mr. Jefferson both give credence to this theme. When asked about identifying their urgent targets analysing the data accounted for much of the academic changes that occurred in their departments. For instance, Mr. Kaplan said the following:

When we (the teachers) looked at the data, immediately we realized there had to be some changes! We were not performing! Our kids were smart enough, the teachers knew the content, but there was problems between what the teachers know, what the kids knew, and how were the teachers going to transfer the information. Designing and
implementing a system of data-driven instruction where we used bi-weekly assessments to track student progress that was a HUGE THING! Being able to pinpoint exactly what the students learned within the section of the curriculum that was taught in two weeks was AWESOME! You could identify the things you taught and whether or not the students mastered one, two or three of those benchmarks. It helped us by showing what needed to be revisited in the lessons. Then student individual plans were created based on what the data told us the students knew and did not know. With that, we implemented a station-rotation system where you could look back and say, “This many did not get this; therefore, I have to reteach.” If six students did not master a concept, then a station was created for that concept. We (teachers) demonstrated the process and then the kids. Everybody could go to the station(s). Everybody got the material for that day. The kids that already understood; they got extra practice and the kids that did not get it now they were getting the help and learning it.

Mr. Jefferson’s experience is a little different in his department, but his practice in the classroom was still based on analysing the data. This is what he had to say:

I am data-driven! I do everything based on the data. Dealing with the data, I get to know the students on a personal level. I am able to identify students’ weak and strong areas. So, I keep data notebooks for each student. Math has five strands-Number Sense, Algebraic Expressions, Geometry, Algebraic Thinking and one more. I look at the five individual strands that make up that student’s score and look to see where the student is lacking. I do this for my class as well as the whole department. Then, I look for trends. Over the last five years, the trend has been low in the area of measurement. Therefore, I go into the classrooms and analyse the students to see why measurement is an area they are not
mastering. I say, “Oh! Okay!” Conversions! They are not good with fractions. I can then target those areas and put preferences on those areas while keeping up with the pacing guides and curriculum set for us to accomplish.

Mrs. Anita Hill agrees with the other participants when it comes to targeting areas that need immediate attention. However, she believes analysing the data is essential to curriculum design and any other aspect of academic or school improvement. This is what she concluded:

Outside of the physical landscape, we had to look at the curriculum, test scores, deficient areas, and those urgent areas that needed immediate attention. We based it all on the data! We based it all on what the test scores looked like! We looked at the trends over the previous years, narrowed down the trends, and started looking for quick fixes. What I mean is we looked at the areas where the trends said the students did well and could give us some bonus points. I knew that the quick fixes would make some systematic instant changes; however, they weren’t going to be the ones that would sustain over a long period of time. We were in a hole and some way we had to at least try to get out so that we (leadership team) could have the opportunity to put in some long term structures that needed to be put in place. Looking at the positive first started the students to tasting a little success but with each success we put a weakness in. We followed and paced this so that we could see the trends. So, we would say to the students, “Well, you did really well here! Look at your scores! And we highlighted it and put a whole wall up of success. Guess what? With success you don’t want to go down and so we further fuelled this success by giving everybody in the school a certificate for something. We found out where the students were doing well at and we started there. It was the beginning of moving them in the right direction academically.
Researching Best Instructional Practices

Another theme that emerged from the data is that of best instructional practices. When asked about urgent target areas that needed immediate attention, all participants spoke of the curriculum and instructional practices that needed to be consistent within the departments. Mr. Poindexter sums up the purpose for having consistency and best instructional practices in place:

Considering our high mobility rate, since August, I have gotten 120 students and I have lost 115. So our numbers have stayed about the same school wide but it is not the same 500 kids we started with. Therefore, the easiest transition for a new student coming in at the middle of the year in terms of scheduling and their placement is consistency within the core academic subject areas. It helps a lot when a student can move from teacher A to teacher B and they do not have to learn a whole new system. Because of this consistency, wherever I put the student I know that they are going to get their needs met. Every class is grouped by a lexile score. Lexile scores are used in reading and quartile scores are used in math. So, every teacher teaches a range or bracket based on those scores. For example, if a new student comes to our school, he or she will get a placement test and based on that score they will get a class schedule in reading, math, and writing. Therefore, those teachers that are good with teaching below grade level kids and have that range; I will assign them to you and so on. This way kids are not misplaced and teachers are not put at a disadvantage. We try to make sure our teachers have what they need in order to teach and pull their own weight versus me just giving them a reading class in seventh grade. We considered the teachers’ strengths as much as we can when we assigned these different brackets. Since we have done this we have seen a BIG CHANGE!
Mrs. Anita Hill talks about teachers making a difference and what it takes for best instructional practices to work:

Our goal is to stir the potential that these students have in the right direction. We do this by putting adults who are nurturing, caring, and who understands the curriculum with these kids. What I mean by understanding the curriculum? Good instructional practices is not just opening a book and saying I need to teach this. It is knowing what you are teaching. How it transcribes? How do you differentiate the instruction within the classroom when you have a student who is on the second grade level and one on the tenth grade level? Knowing how to take the same curriculum and teach both of those students in your class. And not just say oh...well...he can’t read; therefore he won’t understand. It is making sure that the curriculum is aligned to meet the needs of the student and what the state standards say they should know. This is what makes a difference. I can deal with anybody who wants to come here and doesn’t know but is open to learning how to do it. It is okay you don’t know it. Let me know and we can work with you from there. This is the type of environment that I have tried to create here. So, it has been a lot of research and professional development provided throughout the years. And you can see it in the fifth year. We got it!

Other participants revealed while best instructional practices are researched, suggested, and implemented, looking at the data is used to evaluate students’ performance and whether or not the instructional practices teachers use work. Mr. Jefferson had this to say:

I am data driven! I do everything based off the data. I get to know the student on a personal level. I identify what areas students are weak in or what areas they are strong in.
I keep data notebooks of all our students. By doing this, I am able to analyse student progress and look at trends that may be occurring. I also use it to assist me and others in teaching. Based on the data, I can predict the classrooms that may have some problems teaching certain areas of math. Therefore, I will go in for that particular lesson and model to the teacher the best practices possible to get the best results. And that’s pretty much it!

Mrs. Anita Hill concludes by emphasizing the importance of data and its connection to best instructional practices.

When I say data it is important that everyone knows what I mean. What data look like? What are you looking for in the data? Well, let’s sit down and talk about it! Let’s look at it! Let’s break down the data and see what it looks like in this department. Out of 100% of your students 74% of them failed this test. Let’s go back and look at the test. What were they tested on in this particular test? Was it main idea? Okay! Was it vocabulary? Was it reference and research skills? So, when I say data it is not just me giving you a bunch of numbers and you have no idea of what those numbers relate to or equate to. They equate to this and this is what it looks like. Therefore, understanding the data is important. It informs me and everyone involved in helping our kids be successful. It drives leadership strategies, instructional practices, and curriculum design. It let us know what we need to go back and work on. Basically, that is how it is done!

All the participants noted the importance of identifying and managing those target areas that need immediate attention. The four target areas identified as urgent and needing immediate attention are: 1) the physical landscape of the school, 2) the school climate, 3) the curriculum and 4) the teacher instruction. The physical landscape of the school is the first point of perception
that the individual experiences about the school. This is also the most important area of restoration for the principal because it determines whether or not anyone enters the school. The second target is the school climate which pertains to a person’s ability to feel or believe that the school they have entered is safe and provides an environment that is conducive to learning for their child. This is another deciding factor of whether or not a child attends the school. The third target is the curriculum which is considered an internal affair used to convince parents that there is an academic program that provides rigor and college prep opportunities for students of all levels. The fourth target is teacher instruction. This is another internal affair that parents inquire about to ensure their children are receiving teachers that are certified and qualified to teach the standard curriculum mandated by the state and district. Mrs. Hill shared that when all these areas are addressed properly there is a higher chance that success can be achieved.

**Procedures to Address Target Areas**

*Question Three: What processes or procedures does a principal implement to address the selected targeted areas?*

Mrs. Anita Hill adamantly believed that data should drive the school’s agenda. She noted that to find and address target areas one must first look at the curriculum and test scores of the students. By looking at the data, it allowed the participants to discover and observe important trends that were occurring in their areas of discipline. This information was used to generate “quick fixes”. Quick fixes in the sense of putting structure in place where there was none. Interestingly, I made an inference that this was a method used to target weaknesses only to discover Hill used it to find the successes of the students first. In this statement she explains the reason why:
Yes, we used the information from the trends to implement quick fixes to provide structure where there was none, but we also used it to find the successes of the students. We focused on those areas and used them to make the kids feel good about themselves. Within their successes, we began to put in a weakness. We tracked and paced the results so everybody could see the trends. Actually, the students did well!

Along with Mrs. Hill, Mr. Poindexter felt there was always room for improvement. And, another way to address those targeted areas was through research and professional development. Here Poindexter is talking about how that process is used to gather important information.

The first year we started with the test scores. In looking at the students and comparing their scores, we began to wonder what happened to the students that scored 4s and 5s and now they were at 1s? I started doing research to find out what did not work. In determining that the reading program was not consistent enough, we began to provide professional development opportunities for our teachers. In addition, we started encouraging our teachers and leadership team to read research articles, conduct some research, and share what was being learned with the rest of the school to assist in educating us on stuff that was happening elsewhere or in education.

The implementations that were assigned by Mrs. Hill were observation and analysis of test data, professional development, and a check and balance system that prompted research, review or removal of strategies that may or may not work toward achieving their mandated goals of the state. With the constant use of these procedures, all of the participants believed that North Valley was pointed in the right direction and that their goals for the school would be met. This
Consistencies with the Six Stages of Planned Change Model

Question Four: In what ways is the principal’s implementation plan consistent with the Six Stages of Planned Change Model?

![Six Stages of Planned Change Model Diagram](image)

The Six Stages of Planned Change Model was used as my conceptual framework in this study. The purpose was to help guide the researcher in observing and confirming whether or not these stages existed and whether or not they were being used in Mrs. Hill’s implementation plan at North Valley. I discovered that an educational plan was already in existence before Mrs. Anita Hill got to North Valley Middle School. The objectives were already formulated, approved and
proposed by the state and district officials. Therefore, all Mrs. Hill and her leadership team had to do is figure out how they were going to achieve these guidelines without compromising the actual needs of the school. All the stages of the model were observed in action during my study. Consequently, I purposively changed the six stages in the Planned Change Model into interview questions to delve deeper into understanding how the leadership team was using them within their process to achieve the goals communicated in the study. My initial idea of leadership led me to immediately seek qualities of the individual that would classify Mrs. Hill as a leader. However, I later discovered that leadership was a lot more complex; especially, at a school like North Valley.

In this study, leadership was observed in various forms, participants were documented using different strategies to address different situations; in addition to, constantly exchanging from the role of leader to follower between one another to achieve the demands rendered by the state. There were many unexpected, activities and components that came into play while conducting this study, thus making it harder for me to describe this phenomenon from a procedural perspective. Therefore, I had to investigate North Valley’s leadership from a function of the entire situation rather than one group or person. This allowed me to focus my study better.

Due to the circumstances that North Valley was in, Mrs. Hill indicated it was obvious what the problem(s) were; it was just a matter of deciding what had to be done first. As far as constraints, the participants agreed that funding, district support, and full cooperation from colleagues were sometimes a hindrance to the leadership process. Mr. Poindexter shares his experience with constraints that sometimes hindered the leadership process:

We are a non-traditional school. Mrs. Hill and I are the only original members of our leadership team. We’ve had several changes due to the new district rules and regulations.
For example, we are required to have reading, math, and science coaches. When we first got here there was no such thing. The district requires us to use a database called Data Director. This is a system that allows us to document and monitor our students’ performance based on district assessments given every nine weeks. We also have to conduct data checks weekly, bi-weekly or monthly based on assessments the school administer to the kids. These things are great but once we get acclimated to one set of rules here comes another set and sometimes these changes hinder the progress we have made. I understand the district may want to keep everything as streamlined as possible but that is not always good; especially, not for the type of kids and school that we serve. I believe the purpose for the district doing this is to ensure that the majority of the schools fit into a certain box so it is easier for them to understand what is going on in the schools. We definitely try to fit into that model but some things we just have to do differently. It is not that we don’t want to follow the rules. It is just we may find something that can get the job done better. However, when we present things that are different and make a good case for it; the district normally will fight us first and then say okay. They do not really have people in place that understand schools like North Valley. Therefore, they go through all these steps and chains of command that are sometimes unnecessary before things are approved. Sometimes, this hinders our progress. We constantly have to show results from our decision to get them to see the program is working. I think the district need a few people that truly have experience with schools like ours. It would help tremendously!

Most of the participants implied or stated that at schools like North Valley there are always constraints but the key to conquering them is to have other alternatives in position for times
when there is no support or something is not working. Mrs. Anita Hill demonstrates her strong support concerning this by saying, “I believe we have to do what we have to do for these kids bottom line!” Poindexter adds, “This is why we, the administration, teachers, and staff have to be prepared for whatever comes our way! Everyone needs to see that we are speaking and doing the same things, and it is then people will begin to believe North Valley is heading in the right direction!”

With this type of agenda, I began to understand that Mrs. Anita Hill could not impart leadership, but had to be the conduit through which the situation was brought to solution if any success was going to occur. Hence, my emphasis became the leadership process and not leadership qualities. The phrase ‘leadership process’ called attention to the interplay of all the factors involved at North Valley which told me more about Mrs. Hill’s role as the principal. Her characteristics were indicative of her experiences and current reality at North Valley which illustrated that the leadership team she selected did not act because of her being the leader but they balanced her to help them do their assigned duties. In other words, Mrs. Hill met a critical need. Those skills and abilities that she possessed had a functional relation to the needs of North Valley and all the participants involved; therefore, making administration a primary component to the leadership process at North Valley. Figure 5 provides a visual of this phenomenon:
There was no doubt that Mrs. Hill’s implementation plan was consistent with the Six Stages of Planned Change Model. However, the revelation that she did not devise or create her own educational plan, lead me to redirect my study. This change caused me to use my conceptual framework to verify whether or not the six stages existed in her leadership process and to design North Valley’s Leadership Process Model.

**A New Lens: North Valley Leadership Process Model**

This model illustrates four themes (administrative support, communication, cooperation, and shared responsibility) that emerged from the data and how it connects with the administrative team of North Valley to implement the planned educational change mandated by

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**Figure 4 North Valley Leadership Process Model**

Key: 4 Components of the Leadership Process
- AS: Administrative Support
- C: Communication
- Co-op: Cooperation
- SR: Shared Responsibility
the state. The top half of the model is considered the internal part of the school. The internal concerns are the daily affairs within the school that requires teachers, parents and students to seek various supports, services, or advisement from the administrative core to sustain the operational functions and duties of the school day. Some examples are student discipline, teacher instruction, and parent involvement. The bottom half of the model is considered the external part of the school. The external concerns are the affairs outside of the school that are imposed or prescribed to the administrative core by the community, the district or sponsors that aids North Valley in accomplishing the mandates given to them as a result of their situation.

These components in the model are not static. They rotate and flow in and out between the administrative core and each internal and external entity. This movement that is depicted by arrows rotating outside the circle and pointing from the administrative core to the outer line of the internal and external parts of the model displays a give and take situation. It exemplifies Mrs. Hill receiving and giving information to and from the internal and external entities, thus, determining how to release that information into activities, events, or requests to peak the ambitions of her leadership team to execute the interests of the school. Most of the participants indicated that teamwork and group cooperation was how they accomplished the goals of the school. This leadership activity that was observed in the study, Murphy (2003) described as integrative leadership. This type of leadership operates as a function of the situation, which responds to modes of behaviour that come from the participants involved.

Modes of behaviour are the participants’ description of what they experienced and believed was necessary to get the job done. In this study, the participants supported this idea by the way that they described the characteristics of Mrs. Hill whom they regarded as a successful leader. Some examples are “she gets the job done;” “she supports us in everything as long as it is
for the kids;” “she is easy to talk to;” “she takes full responsibility for the things that goes on at this school.” Based on Murphy (2003), these activities are not leadership traits because they are evoked by a situation and are responses to it.

Traits only group these responses under a label or category. The phrase, “she gets the job done,” can be labelled as “efficiency.” “She is a hard worker,” can be categorized as “diligence.” “She takes full responsibility for the things that goes on at this school,” can mean “commitment.” Mrs. Hill’s reaction to the total situation embraces all these elements as well as meets the needs of her leadership team. Therefore, the participants take pride in doing whatever it takes to execute the planned educational plan provided for North Valley. They desire administrative support, open communication, full cooperation, and shared responsibility.

Based on the participants’ responses, Mrs. Anita Hill exhibits these so called traits but in actuality they are the descriptions of what the leadership team needs to accomplish the duties of the planned educational change at North Valley. The above model provides a visual of how the internal and external entities have certain needs and requests that must be met. The administrative core responds to those situations by providing activities, events, or advice that is deemed appropriate. Those activities or events are then perceived by the participants as qualities or desires that may or may not motivate the whole team into performing the accustomed duties necessary to successfully carry out the planned educational change.

In summary, the leadership activities that were observed, described and documented in this study were a result of the factors that emerged out of the conditions of North Valley. Those conditions called for Mrs. Hill to exhibit abilities and to have a drive that had to be influential to her leadership team. The solutions that were discovered throughout the leadership process
marked new stages that would make way for new types of leadership to secure new results. Therefore, it was imperative that individuals were constantly being developed for leadership to correspond to the situational demands of the internal and external entities of North Valley. By providing material resources, listening to others’ viewpoints, and catering to the desires and needs of the leadership team, that created an atmosphere that was bound to put North Valley back on top.

However, most participants said that obtaining and sustaining progress at North Valley was very difficult because of the constant changes that occurred from the state and district levels. These mandates were imposed often and unexpectedly sometimes; therefore, it interfered with the rate at which progress could have been accomplished at North Valley and that became frustrating at times. Mr. Poindexter gives an example:

Our first year, North Valley jumped from an ‘F’ school to a ‘C’. There were several things that we had done to make this happen. If you recalled that next year, we plummeted back down to an ‘F’. That was the year that one of our neighboring middle schools closed. Without much warning and preparation, we (the leadership) found ourselves having to accommodate another school’s students. This was a challenge because it threw our entire system into chaos. That was a year we could have used all of the support we could get. However, it is what it is. That year was a difficult year, but we made it!

Other participants talked about the inconsistencies in the state assessment score requirements; how the student level scores increased and all year teachers prepared students under one assessment score only to find out later it had changed. This hindered North Valley on a couple of
occasions from obtaining a school grade necessary to get them off of the failing list. Participants further stated that such changes encouraged the incessant misconceptions, and stereotypes held in the minds of community members and school officials masking the tremendous job that was being done at North Valley.

Mr. Poindexter confirmed his colleagues’ responses by indicating that this negative press and stereotypes imposed on the school from the past was an immediate target that needed to be addressed. “Misconceptions are probably the biggest thing. There are community members who have never been through our doors or on our campus. They don’t know the changes that have occurred; yet they have this perception that North Valley is a school infested with fights, gangs, broken windows, no technology, etc. Maybe that was the case when we first got here. It was pretty bad! But, no longer is that the situation here. I guess negative press is something we will always have to deal with because of our past. So, having to dismantle those stereotypes is the biggest!” Mr. Carter concluded by saying, “improvement is the idea of moving forward; regardless to the amount. Unfortunately, incremental change does not count. Regardless, I am proud of our students, teachers, and staff. We really worked hard this year!
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The study was designed to investigate the leadership processes and procedures used to implement planned educational change in a predominately African-American student populated middle school pseudo-named North Valley Middle School. Case Study was used as the qualitative method to guide the inquiry. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, explore and develop narratives from the participants’ responses. The data were structured by the participants’ explanations of their experiences and the researcher’s interpretations of those accounts. In this study an ethnography approach was used to discover the thematic meanings of the leadership experience as articulated by the participants.

In this chapter, I present, reiterate and summarize the findings of the inquiry. The entire body of accounts consisted of approximately 22-hours of in-depth, semi-structured, and transcribed interviews with six participants. In this chapter, the emergent themes from the participants’ interviews, the conceptual framework, the study’s findings, recommendations for future research and conclusions will also be included.

Study Overview

This research was a case study that explored the leadership processes and procedures used by one principal and her leadership team to implement planned educational change at a predominately African American populated middle school pseudo-named North Valley Middle. The study addressed (1) the meaning of leadership process; (2) the target areas that needed immediate attention and how they were identified; (3) the proposed process model designed by findings. The study also used the Planned Educational Change Model as an analytical tool to
investigate the findings in order to gain a better understanding the processes and procedures of implementing planned educational change in a predominately African American populated middle school. I chose this particular site as a sample because of its academic and administrative history. A proposed process model of planned educational change was designed from the responses of the participants to describe the phenomenon.

**Statement of Problem**

The problem was academic performance in schools that serve challenging student populations. Scholars have researched school reform efforts and comparisons of high-and low-performing schools, but the leadership processes principals are using to obtain school success is limited in the literature. The significance of how the school leader systematically makes sense of these socio-political and socio-cultural issues in schools is critical. However, most school leaders are not taught or trained to handle socio-political or socio-cultural matters; nor are they knowledgeable of their role and influence in shaping and defining meaning on issues of race, class, gender, and other areas of difference for and with other school members (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 2003; Young & Laible, 2000). Educational researchers are concerned with providing a basis for improving education through leadership.

**Research Questions**

The overarching research question for this study was what processes and procedures does a principal use to “turnaround” a predominately African American populated middle school? From this, three subsidiary questions were formulated:
1. What target areas does a principal identify as urgent and needing immediate attention?
   - Physical landscape of the school
   - School climate
   - Curricula design
   - Teacher instruction

2. What processes or procedures does a principal implement to address the selected targeted areas?
   - Continuous observation and analysis of test data
   - Research and Professional development efforts
   - Check and balance system for the change strategies implemented

3. In what ways is the principal’s implementation plan consistent with the Six Stages of Planned Change Model?
   - Conducting observations and analysing the data to find the problem(s)
   - Establishing objectives
   - Discovering alternatives to alleviate the constraints
   - Figuring out ways to implement those alternatives within the guidelines of the district and state
   - Encouraging research and professional development efforts for learning purposes, improvement, and application
   - Constantly checking and balancing the systematic change strategies used to improve and achieve the goal(s) of the school

**Thematic Discoveries**

The participants offered open, in-depth, and honest responses of their experiences and roles as leaders in their various positions. Within this context, the idea of implementing planned educational change focuses on four research questions pertaining to leadership process, areas that need immediate attention, processes and procedures used to address the selected areas, and the consistency of the Six Stages of Planned Change Model with the principal’s leadership processes utilized to “turnaround” a predominantly African American populated middle school.
Within each research question, sets of themes served to structure meaning, there are four themes that describe the participants’ perceptions of leadership process. These are (1) administrative support, (2) communication, (3) cooperation, and (4) shared responsibility. The essence of the second research question-identified urgent target areas- consists of three themes: (1) physical landscape, (2) curriculum design, and (3) instructional practice. These themes emerged as a result of asking what target areas needed immediate attention. The essence of the third question-procedures to address target areas-consist of three themes: (1) observation and analysis of test data, (2) research and professional development, and (3) a check and balance system. These themes are discussed together to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon investigated in the study.

The essence of the fourth research question-consistencies with the Six Stages of Planned Change Model-consists of a diagram constructed from the data gathered in comparison of the researcher’s conceptual model.

**Essence of Meaning**

Creswell (1998) stated that, “researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the underlying meaning of an experience by looking at the outward appearance and inward consciousness of the memory, image, and meaning of individual” (p. 52) To obtain this essence, the researcher examined the transcripts of the participants to declare textual and structural significance of their responses to the interview questions. Then the research attempted to present the meaning of what the participants thought, felt, or experienced.
Perceptions of Leadership Process

Participants viewed leadership process as a routine or an activity performed within their position held at the school. Their reactions and responses illustrated an unexplainable perplexity and elusiveness to the concept ‘process.’ For the majority of the participants, the thought of explaining the dynamics of planned educational change from a procedural perspective had not crossed their minds. Consequently, the participants articulated what was familiar to them or considered understood dialogue. By doing this, the challenges they really experienced to sequentially order and describe their leadership process was masked or lost in the interview. Most of the participants were clear about what needed to be done, what was being done and the willingness to get it done. However, administrative support, communication, cooperation, and shared responsibility were constantly mentioned by the participants as crucial components needed for them to accomplish the mandated requirements of North Valley Middle School.

Identified Urgent Target Areas

According to all the participants in this study, it was important that everyone multi-task and take various target areas because so much needed immediate attention at North Valley Middle School. Therefore, the target areas had to be broken down into two major categories-internal and external affairs. Internal affairs are those concerns within the school that pertained to the teachers, students and parents. For example, the teachers’ instruction, student discipline and curriculum design. External affairs are those concerns that pertain to the district, the community, and sponsors. It may also be things that affect the outer appearance or perception of the school. For example, the physical landscape of the school, negative press and the school climate. Mrs. Anita Hill believed in order to get students in the door, “the exterior of the school had to be clean. Otherwise, why would you want to come or send your child to a nasty school? So we had
to start at different phases and that’s where I started from. I had to start from the outside before I could get you on the inside!”

Students at North Valley are of low socio-economic status and displaced often among other relatives rather than their parents. Therefore, Mr. Ken Howard felt gaining control of student discipline was paramount to providing a school climate that was safe and conducive to learning. He says, “When there is approximately 25% of your school at any given time disregarding your expectations that is a problem. This is not a handful of kids. That is a considerable amount of kids! Therefore, this posed a major problem that needed immediate attention!”

Poindexter confirm his colleagues’ responses but indicated that dealing with the negative press and stereotypes imposed on the school from the past was an immediate target that needed to be address for him. “Misconceptions are probably the biggest thing. There are community members who have never been through our doors or on our campus. They don’t know the changes that have occurred; yet they have this perception that North Valley is a school infested with fights, gangs, broken windows, no technology, etc. Maybe that was the case when we first got here. It was pretty bad! But, no longer is that the situation here. I guess negative press is something we will always have to deal with because of our past. So, having to dismantle those stereotypes is the biggest!”

The participants in this study made it clear that what was being said was not spoken to speak disparagingly of North Valley Middle School, but it was to provide a picture of their experiences concerning the urgent target areas that needed to be addressed before any process of turning the school around could even begin. The participants identified four components that they felt must exist in their leadership process to ensure everyone’s confidence in achieving the
vision of North Valley. They identified communication, cooperation, administrative support, and shared responsibility. Below is a proposed model constructed from the data illustrating the participants’ idea of how these components worked together to assist the leadership team at North Valley in implementing and achieving its planned educational change.

This model also answered the overarching research question of this study in the following way. Leadership is the process that provides direction in social activity; otherwise there is chaos. An administrative core that provides support, communication, shared responsibility and cooperation to others for achieving mandated requirements, is paramount for evoking leadership activities that can be used to ‘turnaround’ a middle school that is predominately African American populated. These leadership strategies or procedures occur as a result of the interaction of factors that emerge out of the situation at hand, thus, redirecting motivation back into the system as a control to get involved participants to achieve the goals mandated by state officials. I discovered that leadership is more than just a leader’s personality; it is having the ability to change as the situation does. The leader’s abilities and drives, the involved participants, material resources, desires and needs are vital to developing a series of influences and changes that evoke a condition of readiness within others to get the job done despite the situation.

![Figure 5 Dynamics of North Valley’s Leadership](image)

**Figure 5 Dynamics of North Valley’s Leadership**
Advice to Educational Leaders in the Field of Education

Participants shared several aspects that could strengthen the field of educational leadership. Based on their experience, participants felt that all educational leaders should have some prior knowledge or work experience in the type of school that they are assigned to. As a matter of fact, they suggested 3-5 years before even applying for such a position. This helped with understanding the environment and the culture in which one can be subjected to as a leader. All the respondents agreed that a lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness can be detrimental to the students and the school. Therefore, it is imperative that the educational leader understands what he or she is getting into. Second, finding a mentor or establishing a buddy system to share ideas with and receive advice from can be refreshing considering administration can be an overwhelming and stressful job.

According to the participants, educational leaders must be versatile, aware of every aspect of their school, and have a “toolbox” that is appropriate for the place being served. This “toolbox” is developed through experience, continuous learning, and communication with others. Respondents feel in order for schools like North Valley to rise to its highest potential, these elements must be reflected, communicated and encouraged in the classrooms of the universities across the country.

Recommendations for Future Research

The investigator in this research project used semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the leadership process and procedures used to implement planned educational change in a predominately African American populated middle school. Due to the nature of the inquiry, generalizations cannot be made from the study. However, the study has contributed to the scholarship of leadership and planned educational change. The new developments worth
considering for future studies are on the leadership process modelled in a predominately African American middle school. Upon completion of the study, the following recommendations for future research are made:

1. In regard to methodology, rigorous and systematic comparative studies are needed that take full account of what leadership process is and described as among principals who are implementing planned educational change in failing and successful schools. Perhaps frameworks and dimensions of leadership process can be authenticated, validated or created to be piloted in different school regions, with different demographics, and socio-political situations to see what works. With Dimmock and Walker (2005) verifying that empirical studies on leadership process in the field of education is relatively few, it is necessary to chart a future research agenda concerning this concept.

2. In regards to this study, continue to examine the factors that contribute to the understanding of leadership process by encompassing a holistic approach exploring the values and culture conveyed by parenting, environment, curriculum, teaching, learning, school organization, and leadership to determine its effect on whether or not those factors can improve the process and procedures educational leaders use to implement planned educational change in schools with a higher population of minorities.

3. Due to the fact that generalizability is a limitation in this study, I feel that the leadership model that was designed for this research project should be re-examined and tested in hopes of developing a standard model that can be used for the enhancement for educational leadership and policy studies research.
4. Taking a closer look at politics and power within the district level is needed to provide an understanding of how such levels of authority can improve or hinder the leadership process and procedures that a principal uses to implement planned educational change in schools like North Valley.

5. To examine the leadership process of principals on a larger scale through the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods for all school types and demographics to determine ways that will assist all stakeholders in becoming more effective in educating all children.

Conclusion

The concept of leadership is often depicted as one person delegating rules and regulations to a group of people. Such perceptions allude to one trying to determine qualities that may classify an individual as a leader. However, Wolcott (1973) describes this concept best:

A manager may also be a leader—but it is not necessary that he be one. The principal is a manager’s task. Yet there is no question that some principals exhibit more capacity for leadership than others. They create a sense of purpose among a majority of those with whom they interact. They seem able to capitalize on the potential of the institution while others are rendered helpless by its limitations. I am not ready to go so far as one principal who insisted that the principal “makes all the difference” in a school, but neither would I ever argue that he makes no difference at all. pg. 325

It is evident that leadership can appear in various forms and can be inconsistent in results at times. The fact that approaches used by principals can be irrelevant at any time makes them vulnerable to the rise and fall of success. Therefore, leadership becomes abstract and difficult in concept to define. Because leadership is not a psychologically simple concept, the study calls for a situational approach.
Leadership is not one person it is the product of an entire situation. Therefore, depending on the situation, there may be a need for a certain type of action. Understanding that leaders are the instrument by which a situation is brought to a solution, giving attention to leadership process is imperative. The word “process” calls attention to how factors connect to assist an organization in helping its leader to act. In other words, the leader must meet a critical need just like a doctor. We go to the doctor because of an illness not the other way around.

The purpose of this study was to explore one principal’s leadership processes and procedures used to implement planned educational change in a predominately African American middle school. The focus was to understand, describe and illustrate the leadership process phenomenon in a predominately African American middle school. The participants in the study represented all the major components of the leadership team at North Valley Middle School. Six participants were given in-depth interviews that consisted of four domains. This resulted in 22 hours of transcribed data pertaining to their shared thoughts, experiences, and actions of implementing planned educational change as a leadership team. The findings of the study provided an opportunity for the reader to see and understand the leadership process and phenomenon used to make change in a predominately African American middle school.

The Six Stages of Planned Change Model was used as a conceptual framework in the study to provide structure and guidance to the researcher and study. This model assisted the researcher also in constructing the leadership process used at North Valley Middle School. The perspectives of one principal and her leadership team in their own voices provide critical insights into various aspects of the leadership processes and procedures necessary to implement planned educational change in a predominately African American middle school.
Therefore, the study may have significance for both practitioners and researchers in the field of educational leadership. The findings, when kept in context, can prove to be helpful when training new educational administrators that may be involved in serving different demographics of students, regions, and socio-economic situations. For researchers, the results of this study provide an additional component and perspective to understanding what it may take to ‘turnaround’ a middle school that is predominately African American or minority. This study also provided a platform in which the participants could reflect on their roles and experiences as a leadership team to implement planned educational change serving a predominately African American populated middle school.

In closing, as the racial and cultural demographics continues to grow in the United States, it is important that educational leaders recognize and understand that turning around a school depends on how well the different components of leadership and stakeholders can relate to each other, serve the existing needs, and work toward the goal put forth to be accomplished.
APPENDIX A

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL

Use of Human Subjects in Research - Approval Memorandum

Human Subjects <humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu>

Thu 3/2/2012 11:23 PM
Deflated Beach

To: Delmae Darleg
Cc: humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu

1 attachment (399 KB)
2012-02-05 11:23

Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-6673 - Fax (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM (for change in research protocol)

Date: 3/12
To: Delmae Darleg

Dept.: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research (Approval for Change in Protocol)
Project entitled: A Path for Educational Change: What Processes and Procedures Does a Principal Use to "Turnaround" a Predominantly African American Middle School?

The form that you submitted to this office is regard to the requested change/amendment to your research protocol for the above-referenced project has been reviewed and approved.

If the project has not been completed by 2/28/2013, you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairmen of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is: 1380000166/IRB number IRB010004446.

Cc: Judith Invis, Advisor

HSC No. 2012-0081
Use of Human Subjects in Research - Approval Memorandum

Human Subjects <humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu>

File 3/2/2012 7:33 PM

To: Delmae Darling

Cc: jinkin@fsu.edu <jinkin@fsu.edu>

1 attachment (69 KB)
2011.5813 ICT.pdf;

Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 • FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 3/2/2012

To: Delmae Darling

Dept: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

From: Thomas J. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
A Path for Educational Change: What Processes and Procedures Does a Principal Use to “Turnaround” a Predominately African American Middle School?

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and one member of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR 46.116(f) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 2/28/2013 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. If a protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as necessary to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance number is FWA00000166&/IRB number IRB00000446.

Cc: Judith Irvis, Advisor
HSC No. 2011.5813
Dear Ms. Darling,

The Leon County Schools Research Review Board has determined that the findings of your proposed study could be pertinent to our efforts and so we are initially endorsing your request for the research mentioned above. Conditions are:

- Clarifications — Communication between you and Leon County Schools personnel regarding this study, are considered an integral part of this initial consent and subsequent approval.
- Principal's Consent — Initial consent by the Research Review Board does not in itself constitute permission to carry out the research. You may contact principals of the schools in your study. The principal has the final decision relative to research at each school. If it is your responsibility to return to this office, if the enclosed Principal's Consent for Research Participation, signed by the principal(s) is to be received, prior to the start of any research.
- Clearance — Leon County Schools is under contract with Florida State University for researchers. You are required to contact Jessica Milton (454-3563) who will work with you to obtain security clearance, including fingerprinting, and proof of health and liability insurance. Ms. Milton will inform Leon County Schools when your clearance is complete.
- Approval — Once your signed Principal's Consent forms and clearance are in place, you will receive approval for this study. You will be included in the weekly listing of individuals approved to enter the respective schools. Notify us if you are finished with data collection and you no longer need to be in the schools.
- Time Period — Your data collection period is January 16 to May 16, 2012. Should you desire to extend for the next school year, you must submit a Progress Report Form available on the LCS website. If you intend significant changes or amendments to the procedures or design, you must resubmit the Request for Research Form.
- Submit Results — Leon County Schools is interested in your research partly due to the potential benefit the district may receive from your findings. Therefore, we expect that you will send this office an executive summary with purpose, methods, results, and discussion directly after completing your study. We will place this information in our on-line research library.

We look forward to receiving your results.

Linda M. Dean, Ph.D., Chairman, Research Review Board
C. Randy Proctor, Griffin middle school principal, and major professor Dr. Judith Irvin

1501 West Pensacola Street • Tallahassee, Florida 32301 • Phone (850) 487-7007
http://lcsresearch.leon.k12.fl.us/default.aspx

Building the Future Together
No person shall be denied access to or participation in, or be denied benefits or services of or be subjected to discrimination by Leon County Schools on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, age, or disability.
APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT/PROCEDURE

I will explain who I am, and communicate the purpose of the interview. I will explain why the person (principal, assistant principal, administrative staff, and teachers) being interviewed is important to the study. I will explain the consent form, have the participant read, ask questions, and sign. I will give the participant a copy of the signed consent form.

Domain One: Dynamics of the School

1. How would you describe this school?
2. How would you describe the students that attend this school?
3. How would you describe the teaching staff that teaches your students?
4. How would you describe the community that surrounds this school?
5. What changes have you made since you have been at this school?
6. How did you identify the areas that needed immediate attention in your school?
7. What was the most difficult to change? Why?
8. How did you decide who would assist you in the implementation of your educational plan for change?

Domain Two: Leadership Process

1. What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded your leadership process?
2. What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process of making effective linkages with your school?
3. What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process of making effective linkages with your parents?
4. What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process of making effective linkages with the community at large?
5. How would you describe your leadership process you use at this school?
6. Describe your process for decision-making.

**Domain Three: Application of Six Stages of Change Model**

1. How do you formulate objectives to address the selected targeted areas in your school?

2. How do you identify constraints that may occur during the process of solving those problems that have been diagnosed?

3. How do you select potential solutions to the problems that have been diagnosed?

4. How do you evaluate and select alternatives to selected solutions that are not working?

5. How do you know if you achieved success from your leadership process?

6. How would you describe or illustrate the leadership process that you use to create the desired change in your school?

**Domain Four: Future Advice for the Field of Educational Leadership**

1. What would you share with those aspiring to be educational leaders in schools; in particular, highly African American populated schools? Rural? Suburban?

2. What advice would you give a new educational leader coming into a school like this?

3. Talk more about the events, activities, or factors that have enhanced and developed your leadership process.

4. Elaborate on what skills and strategies you have found to be most effective in your efforts to turnaround a middle school that has a large percentage of African American students.

5. Comment on those leadership characteristics that you think should be most commonly used in a middle school like yours. Explain why.

6. As you look forward, how might you want to train the next generation of principals?

7. What are some of the most important elements a principal needs to know when leading a school with this student population?
Dear Prospective Participant:

I am requesting your participation in a research study entitled, “A Path for Educational Change: What Processes and Procedures Does a Principal Use to “Turnaround” a Predominately African American Middle School?” The data collected from this study will be used for education and publication purposes, only.

Prior to 2008, (the selected school of choice) had been rated low-performing for several consecutive years. After almost four years under a new principal’s leadership, outcome data reveal that the school made a number of gains. With that in mind, the purpose of this research is to understand the principal’s leadership process used to implement planned educational change to ‘turnaround’ this middle school. I would like for staff members and administrators to share with me their personal experiences, reflections, and observations related to how they have assisted the principal in her leadership process to ‘turnaround’ this middle school during the 2008-2011 time period.

I plan to conduct semi-structured interviews with the Lead Principal, the Associate Principal, an Assistant Principal, selected staff members or committees that may have played a role in the leadership process to ‘turnaround’ the middle school. I will ask a series of open-ended questions relative to the culture of the school and leadership process from an Interview Questionnaire. The duration of the interviews should not exceed an hour, and will take place in a location of your choosing. I will use a tape recorder so that your responses can be transcribed later. However, at your request, I will turn the recorder off at any time. Strict confidentiality will be maintained; pseudonyms will be used and information will be reported that will specifically identify individuals. The name of the school will not be reported. I will be the only person with access to the tapes, and they will be stored at my home in a locked file cabinet. The tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the research study.

I sincerely hope you will consider supporting this research project. Your participation will add value to the field of educational research by increasing the understanding of educational practitioners in the identification of principal leadership processes, practices, and skills that are key to turning around challenging schools.

Sincerely,

Delmae Darling
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor Judith Irvin in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, College of Education, Florida State University. I am conducting a research study entitled A Path for Educational Change: What Processes and Procedures Does a Principal Use to “Turnaround” a Predominately African American Middle School? The purpose is to understand the leadership path a woman principal uses to implement educational change in her middle school.

Your participation will involve interviews, observations, and document collection. Interviews may last up to 45 minutes each. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and location will not be used. Your interview will be tape-recorded by the researcher, the researcher will keep these tapes in a locked filing cabinet, and only the researcher will have access to these tapes as well as to their transcriptions. All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed by December 31, 2012. The information you provide may be used for additional research at a future time. All your answers to the questions will be kept confidential and identified only by a participant code name; your true name will not appear on any of the results. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and location will not be used and information obtained during the course of the study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you agree to participate in the study. Information obtained during the course of this study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is contribution to the general knowledge in the field of leadership especially at the district level.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please call Judith Irvin at 850/644-6777 or via email jirvin@fsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Delmae D. Darling

*******

I give my consent to participate in the above study. I understand that I will be tape recorded by the researcher. The researcher will keep these tapes in a locked filing cabinet. I understand that only the researcher and directing professor will have access to these tapes and that they will be destroyed by December 31, 2012.

____________________________ (Signature) ________________________ (date)

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Delmae Darling

Delmae Darling earned her Bachelor of Engineering degree in Materials Science and Engineering from the University of Florida in 1995. She received her Master of Arts degree in Special Education in 2000 from South Florida University. In 2002, she joined the doctoral program in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at Florida State University. Dr. Darling has been a recipient of numerous honors and awards including the UCEA Barbara L. Jackson Scholar Award and a Florida State College for Women Scholarship. She was also a recipient of a Leslie N. Wilson Assistantship.

While pursuing her degree, Dr. Darling worked as a teaching assistant for the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies; and taught several introductory courses in education. She furthered her level of experience by also teaching mathematics at Tallahassee Community College. Dr. Darling is currently a full-time certified Middle school Mathematics teacher at Griffin Middle School.

Dr. Darling has presented at several national conferences such as the Middle Level Essentials and National Middle School Conferences. It was there that she presented papers on the topic of Diversity and Struggling Adolescent Readers. Dr. Darling’s dissertation entitled, “A Case Study: Examining One Principal’s Leadership Processes and Procedures Used to Implement Educational Change in a Failing Middle School.” was supervised by Dr. Jeffrey Milligan.