MAKING SENSE OF STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES WITHIN
TEACHER EVALUATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF ILLINOIS
PRINCIPALS AS IMPLEMENTING AGENTS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Across the nation the teacher evaluation process has significantly changed to incorporate a model for measuring student growth (Doherty & Jacob, 2015). The Student Learning Objective (SLO) process is a commonly used student growth model, including in the state of Illinois (Lacireno-Paquet, Morgan, & Mello, 2014; Milanowski et al., 2016). This process is proclaimed as universally applicable to all teachers (Gill, English, Furgeson, & McCullough, 2014; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014), versatile for use with meeting student growth policy requirements (Gill, Bruch, & Booker, 2013), able to improve teacher and principal collaboration, and useful at promoting reflective thinking that can generate professional growth (ISBE, 2014a). Principals, centrally positioned in schools as primary evaluators for teachers and key policy implementers, are charged with making sense of SLO policies while incorporating the SLO process into the practice of evaluating teachers.

This qualitative case study examined principals' sensemaking of SLO policy implementation in one Illinois school district. The following questions guided the research: What meanings and understandings do principals construct regarding the SLO process and how the process is implemented? How does the sensemaking of teachers, principals, and central office administrators affect the operationalizing the SLO process? Which dimensions of implementing the SLO process influence the school practices of teachers and principals? To provide analysis of data a conceptual framework was established using the cognitive framework (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002), sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), and the distributive cognition theory (Halverson & Clifford, 2006). Interviews, observations, and an artifact analysis generated the main forms of data for the study. Across all grade levels, multiple semi-structured

interviews were conducted with nine school principals/assistant principals, six teachers, and three central office administrators.

The findings demonstrated training experiences varied for principals, which led to different experiences with principals' sensemaking and implementation within their schools. Principals believed accountability was the intention of policy makers, although this intention did not fully transfer to application of the policy and the SLO process is often completed solely out of compliance. Principals relied on the district SLO guidebook as an essential artifact for completing the SLO process. Principals reported overcoming challenges with implementation, preferring observational data compared to SLO data and relying on conversations with teachers when questioning rigor of goals. The principals believed the process had become yet another requirement for them to complete, further adding to the increasing complexity of their administrative roles. Principals and teachers have found SLOs improve assessment-writing skills, increase collaboration time, and require a significant amount of time for completion.

Noted implications highlight the importance of intentionality when selecting and crafting the student growth model. Districts should consider all options for growth models, seek guidance from more experienced sources, and create a policy that balances the legal requirements with the need for universal application while remaining user-friendly and aligning to school improvement initiatives. Principals need specific training and ongoing professional development as they work through the sensemaking process and operationalize the growth model. In practice, principals complete the SLO process out of compliance and they miss an opportunity to promote collaborative conversations and professional development on assessment writing and the associated use of student data. Recommendations are included for policymakers and for practical applications with principals.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In response to the federal Race to the Top (RttT) grant competition, the process for evaluating public school teachers has dramatically shifted across the nation to require incorporation of measured student growth. Forty-three states require public school districts to incorporate a student growth component into their teacher evaluation systems (Doherty & Jacob, 2015). Illinois state law required school districts during the 2017-2018 school year to make the student growth component 30% of teachers' final evaluation rating. Although numerous student growth models exist, the Student Learning Objectives (SLO) process is widely used in 30 states (Lacireno-Paquet, Morgan, & Mello, 2014). In Illinois, RttT school districts and School Improvement Grant (SIG) recipient districts were required to implement a growth model earlier than other districts, and over 90% of those early implementing districts selected the SLO process as their method for incorporating student growth measures into teachers' evaluations (Milanowski et al., 2015). The Illinois state model plan for implementing student growth measures, which districts could optionally select to use, recommended SLOs for meeting the student growth requirement within the teacher evaluation process (ISBE, 2013a).

Evaluation is already a high-stakes process for educators, and now principals, as the primary evaluators in schools, face the challenge of quickly learning to navigate, comprehend, and integrate the SLO process into their districts' restructured teacher evaluation systems. Despite the overall critical importance of teacher evaluations in promoting professional growth and school district accountability for professional performance, little evidence is available regarding how principals implement new student growth teacher evaluation policies and transition to include SLOs into the teacher evaluation system.

Teacher evaluation is a complex process that historically has evolved alongside the development of modern day school systems. The purpose for evaluating teachers has changed significantly over time, and has included the following: promoting professional growth and school professional development decisions (Peterson & Comeaux, 1990); providing summative, formative, and organizational improvement (Maslow & Kelley, 2012; Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985); making personnel and continued employment decisions (Master, 2014); determining compensation, promotion, and merit pay awards (Donaldson, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008); and influencing school accountability (Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985). Beginning in the mid-20th century and continuing into the 21st century, educational researchers Madeline Hunter, Robert Goldhammer, and Charlotte Danielson significantly influenced contemporary teacher evaluation systems and processes (Danielson, 2013; Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1969; Hunter, 1982).

In recent years a growing belief has developed that teacher evaluation processes are ineffective at distinguishing between high- and low-quality teachers (Glazerman et al., 2010; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Weisberg et al. (2009) reported that, across the nation, 99% of teachers were rated as satisfactory or better, while our nation's students have continued to lack mastery at such high levels. Shortly thereafter, the federal RttT grant competition provided incentives for state officials to modify the process for evaluating teachers. Within the Great Leaders, Great Teachers section of this grant, state education leaders were encouraged to develop methods for "improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance" and to design teacher evaluations that use student growth information as a substantial component (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 9). The result was a rapid shift toward the development of evaluation systems that include Student Growth Models (SGMs).

Although multiple forms of SGMs exist (Gill, English, Furgeson, & McCullough, 2014; Goldschmidt, Choi, & Beaudoin, 2012), one popular method for measuring student growth is the SLO process (Milanowski et al., 2015).

For those 19 states awarded RttT grants, educational leaders in state department offices and school districts addressed the challenge of how to effectively, accurately, and equitably incorporate SGMs into the teacher evaluation process (Dragoset et al., 2015). Selecting the type of SGM to utilize is a noteworthy undertaking because numerous models and variations exist, and questions and controversy are abundant (Kersting, Chen, & Stigler, 2013; Schochet & Chiang, 2013; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). In 39 states, including Illinois, the local school district has authority to select and design the SGM (Doherty & Jacob, 2013). Although state policymakers may provide some general guidance regarding SGM processes, the freedom of each district to develop its own model means that there will be varied processes and practices in place across each state. The shifting of authority to local school districts to provide development and application of the teacher evaluation model offers a unique opportunity to study how, at the local level, principals implement state policy changes within their schools and school districts.

Meeting the federal preconditions for the RttT competition, in 2010 the Illinois legislature passed the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA). PERA stipulated that a minimum of 30% of principals', assistant principals', and teachers' overall evaluation ratings be derived from a measure of students' growth. PERA required school districts to use a standards-based model of evaluation. The PERA statute specified that each district form a Joint Committee (JC), comprised of equal numbers of teachers and administrators, charged with developing the district's evaluation plan. Responsibilities of the JC included deciding what type of SGM to adopt and the types of acceptable assessments for use with the SGM. PERA established the state

Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC). This group of public educators and other interested stakeholders advises ISBE officials on the development and implementation of improved performance evaluation systems and supports.

PERA (2010) required teachers to demonstrate growth by selecting two of three student assessment types know as Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3 assessments. Type 1 are often standardized assessments given to students in states across the nation. Type 2 are often considered district assessments because they are developed, adopted, or approved by the school district and used on a district-wide basis. Types 3 are known as being individual teacher assessments. Type 3 assessments are required to be rigorous, aligned with the courses or grade-level subject curriculum, and the evaluator and teacher collaboratively determine how the assessment measures student learning. The PEAC recommended Illinois school districts use the SLO process for incorporating Type 3 assessments into the evaluation process (ISBE, 2013a).

School district implementation of the PERA requirements was staggered throughout the various districts within the state, based upon a schedule developed by ISBE. Therefore, when this research study began, selected school districts were much further along in development and implementation, compared to the majority of Illinois school districts. In September 2012, the Chicago Public School (CPS) district was one of the first districts required to use a SGM for teacher evaluation purposes, employing this approach in 300 of their schools. The remaining CPS schools began using SGMs by September 1, 2013. The lowest performing 20% of Illinois school districts were required to implement SGMs by September 1, 2015. Six school districts awarded a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) also were required to begin using SGMs by the date specified within each grant agreement. Similarly, 34 RttT grant awarded school districts, not including CPS, were required to begin using SGMs by the date specified in the RttT grant

agreement for each district. The remaining 819 school districts throughout Illinois, and individual special education co-operatives, were mandated to adopt a SGM before September 1, 2016 (ISBE, 2013b).

The Student Learning Objectives Advantage

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are unique compared to other SGMs because they require a "participatory method of setting measurable goals" (Race to the Top Technical Assistance, 2010, p. 1). SLOs are teacher created and approved by the teacher's assigned evaluator, who is typically the school principal or assistant principal. Lachlan-Haché, Cushing, and Bivona (2012a) described five steps in the SLO process: (a) identifying core concepts and standards, (b) gathering and analyzing student data, (c) determining the focus of the SLO, (d) selecting or developing an assessment, and (e) developing a growth target and rationale. The SLO process is proclaimed to offer many advantages, including being applicable to any teacher at any grade level or within any subject content (Gill et al., 2014; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014); being versatile at fulfilling the student growth requirement (Gill, Bruch, & Booker, 2013); and being able to improve collaboration between teachers and administration, promote reflective thinking, and allow for consideration of individual students' needs in the classroom (ISBE, 2014a; Longchamp, 2017). These claims are largely untested by educational researchers because principals who evaluate teachers have just recently begun to make sense of the SLO process.

The Role of the School Administrator in the Teacher Evaluation Process

A growing body of research confirms that the role of the school principal is becoming increasingly complex (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Zepeda, 2014). The principal's responsibilities range from building manager, student disciplinarian, instructional leader, community builder, to change agent. Among an exhaustive list of duties, principals and

assistant principals are also the formally appointed administrators responsible for conducting formative teacher supervision and completing summative teacher evaluations. In the role of teacher supervisor and evaluator, the school administrator assumes many specific duties, including the following: observing classrooms, reviewing teacher assessment data, and providing meaningful formative feedback, and completing summative evaluations (Maslow & Kelly, 2012). School administrators appear to operate with their own unique personal and complex decision-making models when making evaluation decisions (Jacob & Legren, 2008), and many factors influence their decisions. These factors include: the principal's skill level with the supervisory process; his/her ability to provide supportive feedback, the effectiveness of the district evaluation instruments; the establishment of a positive and supportive school environment; and his/her ability to motivate and influence staff to work together (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009).

School administrators encounter many concerns when engaging in the process of teacher supervision and evaluation. The principal, as an overseer of various systems within a school, often is challenged to find adequate time to provide high quality instructional supervision (Burke & Maurice, 2013; Glanz, 2000). Given the many situational challenges school administrators face daily, researchers have determined that teacher evaluation often takes place in less than ideal conditions (Maslow & Kelley, 2012). Completing classroom observations and summative evaluations, even prior to the introduction of SGMs, has been an ongoing concern for many principals (Derrington & Campbell, 2015; Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1985). With the introduction of teacher evaluations derived from student assessment data, principals now have another significant factor to consider when evaluating teachers (Au, 2011). Although these evaluations require significant time demands, school administrators also must develop mutual trust and maintain positive relationships with teachers, because a key factor for

effective instructional improvement in the evaluation process is supportive dialogue and collaborative discussion (Burke & Maurice, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

The embedded student growth component of the teacher evaluation process, coupled with the diversified demands of the principalship, have generated policy implementation challenges for school administrators across the nation, including within Illinois. In response to state policy changes, every public school district in Illinois now includes a student growth measure in the teacher evaluation process. The SLO process is the state of Illinois' recommended model for measuring growth with Type 3 assessments (ISBE, 2013a), and 64% of early implementing districts surveyed in Illinois reported using some variation of the SLO process for all or part of the student growth teacher evaluation component (Milanowski et al., 2016). There is little empirical research reporting how principals, as key implementing agents and evaluators of teachers, make sense of the SLO process as they incorporate SLOs into teacher evaluations. Researchers have not analyzed the aspects of SLO policies that principals emphasize or devaluate, and little is known about the effects of the SLO process on instructional practices. The SLO process is complex, and it is unknown which factors contribute to principals' decision-making processes when accepting or rejecting a teacher's SLO goal.

Educational policy implementation is a unique phenomenon that plays an important role in the adoption of the SLO process in Illinois school districts. Implementing new policies is a social practice, which occurs within the boundaries of the implementer's cognitive understanding and will (McLaughlin, 1987). It also involves the implementer's individual cognition, situational context, and representations of meaning assigned to the changing practices (Spillane et al., 2002). Policy analysis through a distributive cognition lens, originally introduced by Hutchins (1995)

and further developed by Halverson and Clifford (2006), demonstrates the important role implementation tools have on implementers' sensemaking processes. Sensemaking is a process of actively constructing meaning by redrafting ideas through the interaction between the individual and the element providing the uncertainty (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Each principal or assistant principal is a policy implementer of his/her district's new SLO student growth evaluation process. He or she uses his or her own sensemaking abilities and processes to form beliefs and to shape the outcome of the SLO policy implementation process within the school. Researchers have yet to analyze how school administrators make sense of the SLO process and serve as policy implementers.

Purpose of the Study

Using a case study approach focused on one Illinois school district, this study sought to identify and understand the sensemaking of principals involved with the SLO implementation process, how such sensemaking affects the operationalization of the SLO process, and the influence on current school practices. The study determined how school and district administrators applied their own cognitive frames, including the use of artifacts in the form of tools for engaging in the SLO process, to work with their professional staff to explain and implement the new SLO policies adopted within the school district. The study contributes to the field of educational leadership by analyzing principals' perspectives concerning SLO policy implementation and the effect on school practices. The timely nature of the study and the focus within an early adopting school district provides insights for other school district officials and principals who have recently begun to implement SLO teacher evaluation policies.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following three research questions:

1. What meanings and understandings do principals construct regarding the SLO process and how the process is implemented?

2. How does the sensemaking of teachers, principals, and central office administrators affect the operationalizing the SLO process?

3. Which dimensions of implementing the SLO process influence the school practices of teachers and principals?

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), and distributive cognition theory (Halverson & Clifford, 2006) to analyze the perspectives of principals as they implement the SLO process. The study incorporated Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking to analyze the perspectives of district and school administrators. The sensemaking involved was directly related to educational policy implementation; hence, the cognitive framework for policy implementation developed by Spillane et al. (2002) was utilized as well. This cognitive framework is appropriately situated within the specific context of educational policy implementation, and it centers upon the individual policy implementer's progression of understanding for the given policy. Aspects of the sensemaking process naturally intertwine into the cognitive framework. Additionally, the distributive cognition theory was applied to the study so that analysis of multiple artifacts used to complete the SLO process could be analyzed.

The cognitive framework takes into consideration the implementer's sensemaking abilities and analyzes cognitive influences that affect her/his decision making when executing a policy. The implementing agent's sensemaking is central to the framework. Influences that affect the implementer include the following: (a) how he/she interprets the embedded messages within the policy, (b) his/her misunderstandings of the message, and (c) his/her focus on "superficial features" of the policy (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 400). According to Spillane et al. (2002), the

implementer's feelings and emotions, as well as the social context within the organization, affect the implementation process. The final influential factors for the policy implementer are his/her interpretations of the policy messages generated within written form and the verbal communication throughout the organization about the policy.

The cognitive framework does not include the examination of how cognition is shared through the use of artifacts; therefore, distributive cognition theory fills this void. The theory provides analysis of physical evidence that demonstrates the implementer's cognition as it takes place in the actual operating environment (Hutchins, 1995). Halverson and Clifford (2006) explained, "Reform-based teacher evaluation artifacts provide a unique opportunity to examine how the hopes of policy design meet the realities of existing practice" (p. 580). SLOs include the use of several artifacts that guide school administrators and teachers through the process, and such artifacts provided additional data for examination. While the distributive cognition theory alone is insufficient to drive the analysis within this case study, it is an additional instrument to interweave into the cognitive framework.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for SLO policy implementation.

Overview of Research Methodology

This research utilized a single-site case study involving multiple school administrators and teachers within an Illinois unit school district containing grades K-12. Of the 41 RttT and SIG school districts that implemented the student growth component years prior to the September 2016 state deadline, 21 were identified as K-12 unit school districts and potential locations for this study. Through a review of publicly available information on the Illinois School Board of Education website and individual school district websites, the list of potential school districts that were implementing SLO process was narrowed down further to 10 districts.

Through email and phone calls, I proceeded by attempting to contact 10 central office administrators within each of the early adopting school districts that were implementing SLOs. I inquired about the length of time the school district had used the SLO process and solicited interest in study participation. Two respondents expressing a possible interest in study participation were received from two central office administrators in two separate school districts. After further communicating with these administrators, I learned that staff members within one of the school districts served as leaders to other school districts officials by sharing their personal insights regarding the SLO process at a forum sponsored by their Regional Office of Education. I selected this district, the Jackson School District (pseudonym) in Illinois, as the single site for the case study.

Case study methods allow researchers to analyze a process or event involving individuals, and case study is useful at helping to develop in-depth understanding within a system (Creswell, 2013). Beginning in May 2017, data collection was ongoing over the course of 6 months and it involved numerous interviews with nine principals and assistant principals, six teachers, and three district-level leaders. Additionally, I conducted artifact conferences, reviewed over 100 pages of relevant artifacts used to complete the SLO process, and observed two district-level JC meetings.

Seeking to explore the mental constructs of the implementing agents who engage in the SLO process required the use of a method of study that allowed an in-depth exploration of the participants' perceptions and beliefs. Case studies can employ a mixture of research collection methods and allow for depth of exploration (Yin, 2009). The interviews provided insights into a variety of implementing agents' understandings of the incorporation of the SLO process into teacher evaluations. I collected and analyzed a variety of related SLO artifacts that principals and

teachers used to complete the SLO process. The artifacts provided further insight into principals and teachers sensemaking. Multiple administrators voluntarily provided a wide variety of SLO related documents, including copies of the district guidelines packet, non-used SLO templates, previously completed and approved SLO goals, a list of assessments authorized by the school district, and electronic copies of the goal setting form. On-site artifact conferences were conducted with two school administrators in their school buildings and of two separate JC meetings. During two artifact conferences, two school administrators shared SLO artifacts they personally use to maintain a system of organization and management while completing the SLO process. Evidence was gathering during these conferences that provided data on the use and application of the various SLO forms and tools.

Limitations

Several elements can affect the findings from qualitative research and provide limitations to research studies. The single-case study design, and the small number of participants within the study, limits the generalizability of the study. The school district that was selected for the case study site represented only one district that has implemented the SLO process. Focusing on a single Illinois school district over a brief amount of time also can affect the findings. Furthermore, the SLO process is subject to adaptation and individualization by school districts, and the adopted SLO process within the studied school district may be unique to only the district studied or to a small subset of Illinois school districts. The study was further constrained by interviewing only a sampling of educators within the selected school district; this small sample size further affects the generalizability of the findings.

The risk of participants not replying candidly or completely was another limitation within the study. Teacher evaluation is a topic that can be charged with high emotion and sometimes

fear (Conley & Glasman, 2008). Although I attempted to develop a high level of trust with participants, it is possible the participants did not answer with complete candor. Participants' self-reporting on the SLO implementation process may not have revealed their full perspectives on the challenges involved when incorporating SLOs into the evaluation of teachers. In addition, individuals' perceptions represented only their own personal truths and may or may not reflect a majority viewpoint of the school district educators.

Delimitations

This study is delimited by the criteria in which the school district was selected for study, including that the district was an early adopter of the SLO process in Illinois. I sought to obtain the knowledge and experience of administrators and teachers who more experienced with using the SLO implementation process than the majority of K-12 educators throughout the state of Illinois. By seeking a school district with personnel who were more experienced with the SLO implementation process, the participants had more insights and a deeper understanding to offer as data for the study. I also selected a school district that had personnel who demonstrated advanced knowledge, understanding, and leadership regarding SLO implementation. These characteristics were evidenced when personnel from the district spoke at a local regional of education sponsored event to support and train administrators in other Illinois school districts.

Definition of Key Terms

The following working definitions were used for this study.

Cognitive framework for implementation. The cognitive framework for implementation focuses upon the beliefs, understandings, and attitudes of the individuals responsible for implementing policy. It considers multiple aspects embedded in the sense making process for the implementing agents, including the following: (a) individual beliefs, (b) situational

understanding, and (c) representational messages within the policy. The framework is "meant to characterize the way that natural sense-making processes can lead to the types of challenges observed in reform efforts" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 389).

Distributive cognition theory. A theory of understanding each individual's cognition in the context of her/his environment. The theory focuses on how individuals use tools, known as artifacts, in their environment to distribute the cognitive load when making decisions (Hutchins, 1995). In schools the use of artifacts shapes the practice and provides insight into implementing agents' cognitive processing or sensemaking (Halverson & Clifford, 2006).

Joint committee (JC). A legally required district committee, which is formed of equal numbers of teachers and administrators. The committee is charged with developing and maintaining the district's teacher evaluation plan, including the SGM component.

Implementing agents. The teachers, school administrators, and central office administrators involved in putting the SLO process into effect in the state of Illinois.

Sensemaking. Sensemaking is constructed in a social setting and is the process of assigning meaning based upon the individuals' beliefs, assumptions, values, and interpretations (Weick, 1995); it often occurs during times of change or crisis (Evans 2007). In the moment, the sensemaker uses past experience to fill in gaps of information and a cycle of retrospection allows further meaning to unfold for the individual within the larger organization (Weick et al., 2005).

Student growth model (SGM). A range of assessment and measurement tools involving student performance sores over the course of a minimum of two points of time (Castellano & Ho, 2013a). The method for measuring student growth demonstrates "a change in in a student's or group of students' knowledge or skills, as evidenced by gain and/or attainment" (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules Part 50, 2014)

Student learning objective (SLO). A defined process used to demonstrate evidence of student growth over a set period of time. The assessments and measurement model are determined within the individual SLO and agreed upon by the educator and evaluator. In this manner, the SLO process is known as a planning tool for measuring student growth (ISBE, 2014a), participatory (Race to the Top Technical Assistance, 2010), and customizable (Gill et al., 2013).

Summary

This chapter provided a general overview of the research study. The chapter identified the problem, defined the purpose of the research, and presented the guiding research questions. The chapter also outlined the conceptual framework used to concentrate the analysis of the data within the study. The chapter concluded with limitations, delimitations, and key terms within the study.

Chapter Two highlights a review of literature within the focus of the study. The chapter explores the gaps in research and knowledge in the following areas: (a) student growth models, (b) the SLO process, (c) practices involved with the evaluation of teachers, (d) the cognitive process and sensemaking involved with policy implementation, and (e) distributed cognition theory. The chapter concludes with representation of scholarly framework within the study. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the methodology and design of the study. The chapter includes an explanation of the research design, the selection process for the population and sampling techniques, the data collection process, and the methods used for analyzing the data. Chapter Four presents the findings derived from the data set, interviews, artifact conferences, and artifact analysis. Chapter Five provides a summary of the findings and an

analysis of the findings through the lens of the conceptual framework. Additionally, implications

and recommendations are stated for policymakers, implementing agents, and researchers.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This chapter focuses on the evolution and implementation of newly adopted state teacher

evaluation policies and practices that include a student growth component. Using teacher

evaluations with the SLO process as a central focus of policy implementation, this review

encapsulates six main topics. First, I present a brief history of the significant approaches for

conducting teacher evaluations and mentalities involved in evaluating teachers. Second, an

analysis of the role of principals as supervisors and evaluators denotes the centrality of the

principal's position within the evaluation process. In addition, the principal's role as a key actor

in implementing school policy is highlighted. Next, the requirements of student growth models

are defined, and the SLO process is explained and critiqued. Finally, a conceptual framework

that incorporates and merges policy implementation theory using sensemaking, a cognitive

framework, and distributive cognition theory is described.

A Brief Historical Overview of the Teacher Evaluation Process

Since the inception of the one-room schoolhouse around 1840, the evaluation of teachers

has changed in many ways (Tracy, 1995). In its earliest form, the evaluation process lacked a

formal structure and often relied upon a local community leader, frequently a member of the

clergy, to make judgments of the teacher's abilities (Tracy, 1995). The community held the

teacher responsible for ensuring instruction matched the direct needs of the community, and

community members decided when a teacher was acceptable to employ or needed to be

dismissed (Shinkfield, Stufflebeam, Dwyer, Horn, & Hunter, 1995). Moving from a one-room

schoolhouse model through the common school period during from the 1840s to the 1880s,

teacher supervision became synonymous with inspection (Burke & Maurice, 2013; Glanz, 2000).

Inspectors gave attention to adherence of rules and protocol. In large cities, the responsibility of

classroom inspection often fell to a local superintendent, who provided oversight to multiple school systems (Glanz, 2000; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Tracy, 1995).

As the responsibilities of superintendents began expanding after the 1880s, principals, head teachers, and other school officials were hired in some larger school districts to inspect teachers' performance (Tracy, 1995). A common belief at this time was that many teachers— who had little, if any, formal preparation—were inept or not worthy of teaching. The primary role of the inspector was to "achieve quality schooling by eradicating inefficiency and incompetence among the teaching force" (Glanz, 2000, p. 4). Teacher inspections were not standardized and judgments were based solely on what the evaluator or inspector perceived as quality or poor teaching (Tracy, 1995).

When teachers trained in the normal model of schooling began to comprise a large portion of the teaching work force at the turn of the 20th century, an evaluation approach based upon a factory model of inspection and control began to emerge in larger U.S. cities (Burke & Maurice, 2013). Methods, loosely termed as scientific, were established to measure the productivity of teaching techniques in relation to student outcomes. Throughout the period of 1900 to the 1920s teachers often were evaluated in five categories: preparation, presentation, association, generalization, and application (Klienbard, 2004). Supervisors typically rated teachers with report cards, which indicated performance ratings and areas of improvement (Burke & Maurice, 2013; Glanz, 2000; Marzano et al., 2011).

From the 1930s to the early 1950s, the teacher evaluation process continued to evolve. Because the demands for the principal as a building supervisor increased and expanded beyond supervision of teachers, less emphasis was given to direct supervision and observational feedback of teachers (Burke & Maurice, 2013). Building principals' responsibilities became

extensive and included managing multiple aspects of the school (Marzano et al., 2011). Burke and Maurice (2013) defined the principal as a supervisor of multiple systems within the school, and teacher evaluation became a very small portion of the principal's instructional supervision duties.

In the mid-20th century, as the principal began to have expanded managerial responsibilities, supervisory efforts turned away from observing teachers' instructional approaches and attention shifted toward a role of teacher guidance (Tracy, 1995). At this time, the systematic and scientific approach to evaluation waned, replaced by a humanistic approach as the principal began to support teachers and offer guidance instead of instructional criticism (Tracy, 1995). Emphasis was even placed on supporting teachers' emotional needs (Marzano et al., 2011).

As the pendulum continued to swing, the period between the 1960s through the 1980s became known for the development and popular focus on clinical supervision. This period included an increased reliance on scientific and instructional methodology to drive teacher evaluations (Shinkfield et al., 1995; Tracy, 1995). The supervisor or evaluator used a systematic approach to work in conjunction with the teacher to analyze the teacher's performance (Tracy, 1995), and evaluation followed a predetermined model and cycle. Goldhammer et al. (1969) defined the clinical supervision process as including a preobservation conference, classroom observation, analysis, supervision conference, and postconference analysis. Coupled with Madeline Hunter's (1982) model for lesson design, teachers and supervisors began to have clearly defined steps for the act of teaching and methods for instructional supervision and evaluation (Marzano et al., 2011). During this clinical supervision period of evaluation, a positive relationship between the supervisor and the teacher was viewed as necessary for

effective instructional improvement because dialogue and discussion were integral to the process (Burke & Maurice, 2013). The need for strong interpersonal skills on the part of the evaluator, and personal reflection on the part of the teacher, became apparent during this era of evaluation (Tracy, 1995).

The 1980s and early 1990s were an interesting time in the evolution of teacher evaluation processes. William Glatthorn (1984) created a developmental model of teacher supervision that considered the career and skill stages of teachers. Thomas McGreal (1983) and Carl Glickman (1990) promoted differentiated professional development linked to teacher evaluations to maximize teacher improvement, with the intention to positively influence student performance (Marzano et al., 2011). Individual teacher improvement also meant overall school improvement as a whole organization (Tracy, 1995). The release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) began to increase the spotlight on accountability, testing, and quantifiable measures of schools' success (Lavigne, 2014). Teacher quality became the focus for school improvement, and the approach for enhancing teacher quality came in the form of states adopting teacher competency tests and increasing teacher certification or licensure requirements (Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985). Teacher evaluation came to be viewed as a potential component for increasing teacher quality. The RAND group set out to study evaluation models being used in 1985 and to provide further recommendations for districts (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1985). Districts with successful evaluation models established a method for evaluation that matched the local community and district-level goals, management styles, conceptions about teaching, and community values. Most models, however, lacked "uniformity and consistency within a school system" (Wise et al., 1985, p. 22), leading to

inconsistency in evaluator judgments, not only within schools but also across schools in each district.

With an increasing call for accountability from the public and policymakers, the next significant period for refinement of teacher evaluations involved researchers addressing how to measure and evaluate teachers for effectiveness (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Transitioning into the 21st century, Danielson (1996) and Peterson (2000) pointed out that previous teacher evaluation models were not accurate at identifying differences in effective and ineffective teaching skills. Many researchers began studying specific teaching behaviors that determined best teaching practice, along with practices leading to student academic improvement (Danielson, 2013; Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). Summaries of multiple research studies produced identified characteristics of quality teaching.

In 1996, Charlotte Danielson created a rubric-based Framework for Teaching to help teachers and administrators understand standards for teaching performance linked to student learning. Initially the framework was not designed for summative evaluation purposes, but rather for formative purposes to help teachers improve teaching practices (Danielson, 1996). Danielson's model was described as a standards-based framework for identifying teaching practices. This teaching framework is now used in numerous school districts and states to rate teachers' performance, and a positive correlation between high student test scores and positive teacher ratings has been identified (Borman & Kimball, 2005). Another popular standards-based model is Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model (2011); currently, both models are widely used throughout the nation (Coulter, 2013; Donaldson, 2009). Standards-based teacher evaluation models provide teachers and evaluators defined levels of performance across many specific

aspects of teaching performance. Some researchers, however, question inter-rater reliability among evaluators using the same rubric (Herlihy et al., 2014; Lavigne, 2014).

Demands for Teacher Accountability

A rising call for accountability in public education generated the most recent changes to teacher evaluation models. With the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and the 2009 Race to the Top (RttT) initiative, public schools and teachers faced an increasing demand for positive school outcomes in the form of higher student achievement scores. The RttT competitive federal grant program shifted school accountability measures to teacher evaluations (Hallgren, James-Burdumy, & Perez-Johnson, 2014; McGuinn, 2012). The RttT grant program was designed to improve student achievement by improving and reforming schools (Mangiante, 2011). Among other requirements, in order to receive grant-funding states needed to restructure their teacher and principal evaluation systems to include student growth data as a significant factor in educators' performance ratings (Race to the Top Technical Assistance, 2010).

Calls for teacher accountability today remain a driving force behind the adoption of new teacher evaluation models (Derrington & Campbell, 2015; Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014; McGuinn, 2012). While the creation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 has lessened the importance of student tests scores within teacher evaluations, most states continue to have a student growth portion imbedded into the teacher evaluation process (Sawchuk, 2016). A significant change in the process for evaluating teachers involved the incorporation of Student Growth Models (SGMs), which purport to link teacher effectiveness to student academic performance as measured by student performance over the course of time between a minimum of two assessments. Forty-three states require teacher evaluation systems to include a SGM as part of each teacher's summative evaluation (Doherty & Jacob, 2015). In Illinois, all public school

districts were required to adopt a student growth component that comprised 30% of a teacher's summative evaluation rating by the 2017–2018 school year (PERA, 2010).

Purposes of Teacher Evaluation

Reviewing the purpose for conducting teacher evaluations is fundamental to understanding the complexities involved in the process and for determining the perception of those who implement new SGM teacher evaluation models. The opinions of teachers, principals, researchers, and policymakers vary on the central purpose for teacher evaluation (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013; Shinkfield et al., 1995). Teacher evaluations can serve the following purposes: (a) generating systemic and organizational improvement (Maslow & Kelley, 2012), (b) determining the performance status of the whole school (Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985), (c) informing and supporting teacher professional development (Papay, 2012), and (d) providing a measure of teacher accountability in regard to student growth (Murphy, Hallinger, & Heck, 2013; Ovando & Ramirez, 2007). Consistently, however, the purpose of teacher evaluation is described as providing formative or summative feedback to the teacher (Holland & Adams, 2002; Maslow & Kelley, 2012; Popham, 2013). Summative evaluations serve as a method for determining a final teacher rating and often lead to decisions regarding the continuing educator's employment status in the school district. Such personnel decisions might include pay raises, continuation or termination of employment, or the development of a remediation plan. Bridges (1990) argued for a system of evaluation that streamlines the process for dismissing underperforming teachers who continually fail to improve. In contrast, a formative approach to teacher evaluation focuses on teachers' professional growth and improvement (Maslow & Kelley, 2012).

The duality of the two purposes for teacher evaluation (e.g., formative and summative) adds to the challenge of performing the process well, and it can lead to tension and stress. In order for teacher evaluations to be completed well, some have argued that the purpose should be singular and clearly defined by the school district (Wise et al., 1985). Popham (2013) proclaimed it is impossible to help a teacher fully develop while also deciding on the teacher's fate as an employee, perhaps because a great deal of trust and relationship building is necessary for a teacher to reflect deeply enough to recognize his/her instructional weaknesses and to have the courage to discuss such factors with the evaluator. Maslow and Kelley (2012) found that a supportive and collaborative environment for evaluation facilitates professional growth; yet, some may find it difficult to imagine a supportive environment in the case of teachers facing employment termination based upon poor evaluation ratings. The juxtaposition of supervision for formative growth and evaluation for summative purposes makes it difficult for evaluators to develop and maintain trust when providing constructive feedback (Zepeda, 2014).

Despite an opportunity to provide both formative and summative feedback, some research suggests that, in practice, principals hesitate to give constructive criticism, and they often exclusively highlight positive aspects of teachers' performance during the summative observation conferences (Halverson, Kelley, & Kimball, 2004). This is further evidenced by the fact that 99% of teachers receive satisfactory or higher evaluation ratings (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). According to Sartain, Stoelinga, and Krone (2010), "a 2005 report by the Illinois Small Newspaper Group found that 83% of the state's school districts had never rated a tenured teacher as 'unsatisfactory'" (p. 2). Over 10 years later and after implementing teacher evaluations that are intended to be more rigorous, researchers discovered a similar trend when analyzing teacher effectiveness ratings from 2014-2015 with teachers in Michigan. It was

determined that 97% of teachers received effectiveness ratings of effective or highly effective (Lenoff, Pogodzinski, Mayrowetz, Superfine, & Umpstead, 2017). These phenomena may indicate principals generally favor the formative aspect of teacher evaluation over the duty to provide summative feedback to teachers. Fear, fatigue, and misinterpretation are three reasons why supervisors avoid having difficult and challenging conversations with employees (Abrams, 2009). The lack of constructive criticism also may be due to a principal's lack of expertise and proficiency to provide informative feedback (Marshall, 2005; Milanowski & Heneman, 2001).

The School Principal as Implementing Agent and Teacher Evaluator

The role of the school principal involves many responsibilities that range from being an instructional leader to managing multiple functions within the school day. The principal has a myriad of duties that necessitate his or her attention, including but not limited to student discipline, facilities management, interactions with staff and students, supervision, and evaluation. Knapp, Copland, Plecki, and Portin (2006) pointed out the importance of principals providing leadership for learning. A learning leader positively influences student learning through engaging the faculty in collaborations designed to analyze student data (Knapp et al., 2006). The learning leader focuses on the continuous development of the school organization by emphasizing the importance of effectively using data to make informed decisions (Copland, 2003). Hallinger (2005) described the principal as an instructional leader who provides direction, builds a culture of high expectations, supervises instruction, supports development of curriculum and instruction, and remains goal oriented.

Principals as policy implementers. Principals hold considerable positional power as their schools' formally appointed leaders. They are charged with enacting the requirements placed upon them by state policy mandates, school board officials, district-level administrators,

and the public. When new policies must be implemented within schools, the principal plays a significant role in making the policy take form and influence teaching and learning (Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Within the school environment the principal is faced with many competing interests, initiatives, and policy mandates. Principals are known to be selective at coupling new policies to organizational routines (Spillane et al., 2011) and intentional by embracing some aspects of the mandated policy and ignoring other aspects (Koyama, 2014). Principals are known to modify the intent of policy by interpreting the policy through their own personal lens of understanding (Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006). How the principal makes sense of the policy throughout the implementation process affects his/her actions and the outcome within the school. Sensemaking is on-going and involves a series of actions that provide comprehension, construction of meaning, or the development of a common understanding within the organization (Weick, 1995). The principal's will and capacity to sustain the challenges faced with implementing new policies affect the quality of implementation, as he/she is the primary actor implementing policy at the building level (McLaughlin, 1987), and they must overcome complacency and resistance from those opposed to the change in policy or routine (Alexander, 2013). The principal's attitude toward the policy being implemented can affect how teachers approach the change; thus, he/she often needs to demonstrate a positive demeanor to counter opposition and hesitation (Hope, 2002).

Although the principal's power and authority to implement policy and bring forth change comes from her/his unique position within the school and district, the traditional school organization presents a structural barrier for highly sophisticated changes. Schools are steeped in institutional rituals and traditions, and despite accountability measures in the form of policy change that were designed to ensure equitable learning outcomes for all students, schools often

reproduce social structures and inequalities (Carpenter & Brewer, 2012). "Redistributive policies" (Fowler, 2009, p. 277) that require fundamental changes to instructional practices are more difficult to implement successfully than less sophisticated changes. In this regard, a principal's range of influence is limited. It is much easier to implement reform that is simple and requires only administrative authority to initiate and mandate the change. This concept is explored further in a subsequent section.

Some research has explored the role of principals as policy implementers, relative to the effects of implementing high accountability teacher evaluations. To aid in the successful implementation of a new teacher evaluation process, Derrington and Campbell (2015) discovered principals have a need for ongoing and open communication with the overseeing district office administrators who are knowledgeable of the new practices being implemented. Because principals often are concerned with the amount of time necessary to complete a teacher evaluation that contains a student growth component (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012), district supervisors should work to reduce any unnecessary time burdens imbedded within the evaluation process (Derrington & Campbell). Additionally, principals are often situated in the middle of the organizational hierarchy, with central office administrators and teachers affecting the fidelity of implementation with new policies. Central office administrators often heavily guide new policy implementation (Derrington & Campbell), and teachers may not implement polices as intended by the policy maker or the principal who serves as an implementing agent (Spillane et al., 2002).

Principals as evaluators. The principal's attitude, beliefs, and approach to the teacher evaluation process influence how the evaluation practice influences teachers (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003). The critical role of the principal's leadership in the successful implementation of teacher evaluation processes is noted throughout the research. In particular,

when the principal believes and approaches the evaluation process as means for promoting teacher improvement, teachers are more accepting of feedback (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003). Principals determine whether to view teacher evaluation as a necessary part of a bureaucratic process or embrace it as an opportunity for professional learning and organizational improvement (Davis, Ellett, & Annunziata, 2002). Zimmerman and Deckert-Pelton (2003) also found that teachers reported the accuracy of teacher evaluations is partially determined by the principal's approach and perceived role of the evaluation process. A principal who enthusiastically embraces the evaluation process as a method for helping teachers improve is perceived to assign more accurate summative evaluation ratings (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton). A principal's motivation to conduct teacher evaluations also is based upon the perceived benefit he/she places on completing the process (Painter, 2000).

Principals note multiple challenges with evaluating teachers. It is difficult for principals to provide teacher ratings that are accurate at assessing the effects teachers have on student achievement (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009; Murphy et al., 2013; Peterson, 2000). Despite this evidence, principals tend to project a high level of confidence regarding their ability to serve as evaluators (Painter, 2000). Principals also spend a great deal of daily instructional time completing classroom observation as part of the teacher evaluation process (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010). The lack of time to dedicate to the evaluation process is also cited as a significant challenge for many principals (Milanowski & Heneman, 2001; Murphy et al., 2013).

Principals also face powerful opinions from teachers regarding the how the teacher evaluation process is completed (Gregoire, 2009; Milanowski & Henenman, 2001). Teachers naturally want a process that is fair and desire evaluators who treat them respectfully (Gregoire, 2009). While administrators might feel significant pressure to complete multiple observations

and evaluations throughout the academic year, teachers are most concerned with how they are treated during the process (Gregoire, 2009). Teachers favor reassurance, timely feedback, and consideration for the subject, grade level, or students being taught (Milanowski & Henenman, 2001). Principals find themselves in the unique role of serving as an expert capable of distinguishing between levels of instructional proficiency across multiple grade levels and subjects while maintaining the balance of promoting teachers' processional growth and simultaneously assigning a summative evaluation rating.

Student Growth Evaluation Models

In response to sweeping legislative and policy reforms generated by the federal RttT competitive grant challenge, 43 states were using a student growth component built into the teacher evaluation systems by the 2016–2017 school year (Doherty & Jacob, 2015). This shift to SGMs adds a layer of complexity for principals. Principals and teachers tend to not favor SGMs for the sake of teacher accountability (Goe, Wylie, Bosso, & Olson, 2017). The SGMs range in design and produce various challenges with implementation at the building level. Many researchers have attempted to categorize, define, and summarize the array of SGMs available or under development (Castellano & Ho, 2013a; Gill et al., 2014; Goldschmidt et al., 2012).

The terms and definitions related to SGMs vary depending on the source that is explaining the terminology. In an official letter to the states soliciting applicants for the RttT competition, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan wrote:

> *Student growth data* means data regarding the change in student achievement data (as defined in this notice) between two or more points in time. Student growth data from summative assessment components must be reported in a way that can be reliably aggregated across multiple students at the subgroup, classroom, school, LEA, and State levels and over a full academic year or course. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 18178)

An all-encompassing definition of SGMs is necessary because many states and districts within each state are adopting varied models. The continuum of models with extreme and minute variations makes it challenging to define SGMs in specific terms. Even within Illinois, a broad and open definition is given. The Illinois School Code provides a separate definition for student growth and for the measurement models:

> **Student growth** is a demonstrable change in a student's or group of students' knowledge or skills, as evidenced by gain and/or attainment on two or more assessments, between two or more points in time.

> **Measurement model** is the process in which two or more assessment scores are analyzed to identify a change in a student's knowledge or skills over time. (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules Part 50, 2014)

In Illinois districts were required to assemble a district Joint Committee (JC) that determined the type of SGM to use and how to attribute student growth data to teachers' performance (PERA, 2010).

Mathematicians, psychometricians, and quantitative researchers have developed multiple statistical methods for producing SGMs (Goldschmidt et al., 2012; Lockwood et al., 2007; Schafer et al., 2012). The type of SGM selected makes a difference in terms of the data produced and how the data are attributed to the teachers (Castellano & Ho, 2013b; Schafer et al., 2012). Gain score models are the simplest to understand mathematically, as they offer a comparison of students' test scores from an initial assessment to a post-instructional assessment (Schafer et al., 2012). Another commonly used model is the regression model, which provides a comparison of data points between students' past scores to norms reference or a criterion referenced scores (Sanders, 2000). Multivariate models are also used and consist of multiple layers of regression and multiple comparison points (Castellano & Ho, 2013a). In this regard, multivariate approaches are some of the most mathematically complex and sophisticated models available.

Districts using multivariate models often must rely on an outside agency to assist with the design and implementation of such mathematically complex evaluations (Gill et al., 2014).

Many researchers recommend caution for the use of SGMs tied to high-stakes teacher evaluations because the validity and reliability of complex SGMs are questionable (Kersting, Chen, & Stigler, 2013; Kimball & Milanowski, 2009; Newton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, & Thomas, 2010). In practice, principals tend to dislike the incorporation of SGMs into teacher evaluation models (Dodson, 2017). SGMs weigh individual questions differently on assessments, leading to inconsistent results and teacher ratings (Lockwood et al., 2007). The actual assessments tied to the model have an effect on scores, as well. When two different assessments that assessed the same content area were administered to a group of students, the teacher's value-added ratings varied significantly, even when the same SGM calculation metrics were employed (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011).

Reliability With SGMs

Some researchers claim that SGMs that rely upon statistical calculations can be unstable from year to year (Sass, 2008; Schochet & Chiang, 2013). In fact, Sass (2008) analyzed the results of teacher ratings based on SGM results from a 2-year period and discovered that 10-15% of the lowest performing teachers were rated in the highest quartile the following year. Teachers often are unable to attribute dramatic changes from year-to-year to any one factor; they believe their teaching quality does not change as much as the reflected scores may indicate (Amrein-Beardsley & Collins, 2012). Yet, Goldhaber and Hanson (2010) found teachers' value-added ratings tend to remain consistent over time and teachers' ratings earlier in their career tend to remain the same post-tenure. It is apparent the reliability of complex SGMs remains unsettled, given the conflicting reports found in the empirical research.

Teachers and principals may express apprehension about using complex SGMs for high-stakes accountability purposes, such as in teacher evaluation. Conley and Glasman (2008) noted that fear is a common emotional response because teachers perceive little control over outcomes of the accountability mechanisms. Feeding their fear of not having control over the outcome, some teachers are aware of situations in which other teachers, perceived as being high-quality teachers, have been dismissed as a result of low SGM ratings (Amrein-Beardsley & Collins, 2012). The combinations of uncertainty in how scores are generated with SGMs, along with the natural response to resist professional evaluation, and the stories of perceived injustices with veteran teachers being fired, understandably produce some hesitation to use such models.

Student Learning Objectives

Many states and districts do not solely rely upon sophisticated SGMs to fulfill the student growth component of the new teacher evaluation policies (Gill et al., 2014; Lacireno-Paquet, Morgan, & Mello, 2014). The term "alternative growth model" is found within the literature to describe models outside of the scope of complex SGMs (Gill et al., 2014; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014). Alternative models also have unique strengths and weaknesses for implementing agents that utilize such an approach. SLOs are one of the most common forms of alternative SGMs, and they are the most popular choice of SGM for early implementing districts across the state of Illinois (Milanowski et al., 2015, Milanowski et al., 2016).

Defining SLOs. SLOs have been called the customizable student growth measurement because they are tailor-made by the teacher and approved by the evaluator (Gill, Bruch, & Booker, 2013). The SLO model is one option for measuring student growth for teachers of all content areas. Researchers point out that many grade levels and academic disciplines do not have standardized state assessments to use for SGM-based teacher evaluations (Gill et al., 2014;

Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014). SLOs can address this deficiency and allow all teachers to be evaluated with a SGM. As a result, SLOs are gaining in popularity as more than 30 states allow, or in some circumstances require, school districts to use some form of SLOs (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014). In Illinois, SLOs are part of the state default model, which is required if districts fail to develop their own local models (ISBE, 2014b). Of the 35 early adopting RttT districts in Illinois, over 90% use the SLO process for at least a portion of the student growth teacher evaluation rating (Milanowski et al., 2015).

A SLO model has unique characteristics. SLOs are also known as a "participatory method of setting measurable goals" (Race to the Top Technical Assistance, 2010, p. 1). SLOs are different from other SGMs in that they are teacher created and require approval from the local evaluator, generally the principal or assistant principal. Lachlan-Haché et al. (2012a) defined a five-step SLO process that involves multiple documents used throughout each step.

The ISBE (2014a) guide on the SLO process outlined five key elements of the SLO process that are addressed in the six recommended steps of the SLO cycle. Element one was the learning goal to which teachers direct their focus upon what students will be able to demonstrate growth towards achieving the goal. Element two focused on the assessments and scoring procedures involved in determining how to monitor student growth. The emphasis of element three was on the growth goals that are set for students, and element four defined the actual outcomes and final student growth performances. Lastly, element five centered upon determining the teacher rating from the derived student outcomes.

The five elements involved in the SLO process develop through multiple steps involving the teacher, evaluator, and completion of appropriate SLO forms (ISBE, 2014a). The teacher begins the process by collecting baseline data using approved assessments and determining a

student-learning goal to focus upon. Once baseline data are determined the teacher generates

growth targets using the appropriate SLO form or template, the teacher then meets with the

principal during the initial review of the SLO. Once the evaluating principal grants approval of

the SLO the teacher proceeds with instruction and the principal and teacher meet again during

the mid-point of the SLO cycle. At the mid-point of the SLO cycle, the teacher and principal

meet to examine the data collected and decide if students are on track to meet their growth goals,

and whether the growth goals need to be modified due to over- or underestimation and/or

justifiable conditions for specific students (ISBE, 2014a). The teacher makes any necessary

adjustments to the goal and proceeds by adapting the student instruction to further support

student growth. The last steps require the teacher and the principal to document the actual

student outcomes during the end of the cycle and to review the teacher's corresponding student

growth rating (ISBE, 2014a).

The SLO model differs from the types of growth metrics and assessments used vary

across districts or states (Lachlan-Haché, Matlach, Reese, Cushing, & Mean, 2013). For example,

the previous SGMs discussed, such as multivariate and regression models, can be used with SLO

models as the growth calculating metric. When a district utilizes a complex SGM model as the

calculating metric within the SLO process, the district often works with an outside agency

capable of assisting with the mathematical design and data warehousing process (Gill et al.,

2013). In Illinois the simpler, gain score metric is primarily used to calculate student growth

(Milanowski et al., 2015). Since SLOs are subject to local and state variations, it may be easier to

consider the SLO model as a process, and not an actual model, for incorporating student growth

into the system for evaluation (ISBE, 2014a). Some states and school districts utilize an SLO

approach known as shared attribution that requires teachers within a common grade or school to use a common goal and metrics for their student growth goal (Gagnon, Hall, & Marion, 2017).

For the SLO process to occur, teachers must use a minimum of two assessments to inform their decisions about goal setting and instruction. An important step designed into many of the district- and state-recommended SLO processes includes an optional mid-point assessment, bringing the total of assessments needed to three. Assessments used in the process can include state-level assessments, commercially purchased assessments, or local assessments. After selecting an assessment upon which to base the SLO goal, the teacher administers the assessment and analyzes the student results to begin forming a goal (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2013). In this manner SLOs are unique and specific to each teacher, their content area, and grade level. SLOs are extremely adaptable, which is often portrayed as a strength of SLOs (Lachlan-Haché, Cushing, & Bivona, 2012b).

Similar to comparative SGMs, some SLOs require grouping students into various levels of ability based upon assessment data, and then constructing learning targets for each group of students. The evaluator may help set appropriate target levels for each student group or may simply approve the teachers' suggestions (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2013). A basic example of such student groupings involves assigning students into levels of low, medium, and high based on the original assessment. The SLO process requires the teacher to set a goal for what level of growth each student will reach by the end of the evaluation cycle. The process also includes a determination of the requirements of each of the possible rating levels for the teacher established during the early phases of the process (ISBE, 2014a). Throughout the process the evaluator and the teacher meet frequently to clarify and negotiate the involved steps (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2013). The evaluator and teacher will determine what amount of growth students must attain to

produce the defined ratings for the teacher, such as excellent, proficient, needs improvement or unsatisfactory. At the end of the evaluation cycle teachers are then assigned an evaluation rating based on the results of the students' growth as noted by the student performance on the final assessment and their projected target (ISBE, 2014a).

The research gap regarding SLOs. Research currently available on SLOs lacks depth and breadth. Empirical research regarding SLOs is limited compared to the body of work produced in relation to other SGMs, such as multivariate models. After all, with Sanders and Horn's introduction to multivariate SGMs in 1994, researchers have had more time to explore nuances of these models. SLOs are relatively new to teacher evaluation systems and are beginning to gather more attention as they grow in popularity. Yet, only a few studies were published in peer-reviewed journals (Brodsky, DeCesare, & Kramerwine, 2010; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012), and only one dissertation with a limited focus on SLO validity was located (Hu, 2015). Another more recent dissertation is restricted to data collection methods involving primarily the perspectives of teachers and not principals (Longchamp, 2017). With a lack of empirical research, researchers interested in SLO implementation often rely on reviewing state- or district-level reports (Gill et al., 2013; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014).

The few empirical studies focus upon the use of the SLO process in districts that implemented performance pay models (Brodsky et al., 2010; Gill et al., 2014). The primary focus is often pay-for-performance models and the SLO component is the lessor, secondary focus. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) and Denver Public School systems piloted pay-for-performance models that included SLOs used to evaluate teachers' ability to demonstrate student growth (Brodsky et al., 2010; Gill et al., 2014; Schafer et al., 2012). The most notable and longest running application of the SLO process began in Denver in 1999 as part

of ProComp pay-for-performance plan (Hu, 2015). Other studies focus on SLO implementation

in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; the state of Indiana; and the state of Tennessee (Gill

et al., 2014). The SLO process is relatively new to the practice of evaluating teachers and despite

a limited number of research studies on the utilization of SLOs within the field, school districts

across the nation, including Illinois, are beginning to require SLOs as measure for incorporating

student growth in the evaluation process.

Problems exist with the few studies conducted on the incorporation of SLOs because they

were designed to focus primarily on the pay for performance models of which SLOs were a

portion of the performance-rating model; data on SLOs were a secondary derivative of the study.

In such studies, questions regarding participants' beliefs about the SLO component of the

program were not separated from their perceptions of the performance pay system (Burns,

Gardner, & Meeuwsen, 2009; Community Training and Assistance Center, 2013). Participants'

perceptions of the SLO process could possibly be influenced by financial incentives provided

within their districts. It also is important to note that participation in performance pay programs

is voluntary in some districts, such as in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (Community Training and

Assistance Center, 2013) and AISD (Burns et al., 2009) school districts. Biases regarding the

SLO process may exist, depending on whether the teacher attains or does not attain the pay

incentive.

Issues of SLO validity. Despite the legal requirement for incorporating SGMs into

teacher evaluation, Illinois educators should not accept the validity of SLOs without careful

consideration. Considering the validity of SLOs raises the question: Does the SLO process

accurately measure the growth of students? To answer this question of validity, we can turn to

quantitative research that offers comparisons of other available forms of measuring student

growth. For lack of a better measure, multivariate SGMs are one source of comparison used (Hu, 2015). Making comparisons of student achievement results from state assessment data of tested grades is another option (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Lachlan-Haché, 2015).

District-level correlational studies help answer the question regarding how SLO achievement relates to other measures of student achievement. Looking at Denver Public Schools, Gill et al. (2013) cited a study by the Community Training and Assistance Center in 2004, reporting that teachers meeting two SLOs tended to have higher student test scores than other teachers not meeting their SLO goals. A study conducted in the Denver Public Schools was not as conclusive (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012). Only one study was located regarding the interrelation of complex SGMs and SLOs within a school district. Hu (2015) undertook the challenge of comparing correlations between multivariate SGMs and teachers' SLO scores used within a large district in North Carolina. He determined a low correlation between teacher scores in multivariate models and SLO quality. While teachers who obtained high ratings with the multivariate model generally met SLO goals, the relationship was not as strong as predicted. Hu (2015) suggested teachers who write obtainable SLOs goals may be more skilled at writing easy goals for students to obtain than they are at helping students perform on high-stakes assessments used in complex SGMs. This assumption needs further exploration and research.

Although researchers continue to investigate various measures of student achievement to teacher SLO achievement, the casual observer should not overlook the role that test selection plays in the validity of SLOs. In a study conducted regarding the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system with an incorporated SLO process, 49% of principals expressed a desire for better training in using appropriate pre- and post-assessment data for the SLO process (Slotnik, Bugler, & Liang, 2014). The results of SLOs are only as good as the quality of

assessments upon which goals are based. Assessments used for SLO writing must be valid, designed to measure student performance on clearly defined learning objectives. For these reason, principals and teachers often question the approval process designed within SLOs (Gill et al., 2013; Lachlan-Haché, 2015; Slotnik et al., 2014).

Directly related to the issue of validity of the SLO process is the fact that teachers are assessing their own students' work, and they have a corresponding interest in performing well on their evaluation. Twenty-one states require an administrator or evaluator to approve the SLO goals that teachers design (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014). Teachers, however, generally independently monitor their progress toward student mastery of SLO goals and report their results to the overseeing evaluator (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014). Other SGMs, which rely upon high-stakes assessments, do not have this limitation because an external, non-biased assessor scores high-stakes assessments for state examination purposes. Some researchers even point out that SLOs allow for teachers to grade themselves because they have control over the SLO goal-setting process (Gill et al., 2013; Johnson, Lipscomb, Gill, Booker, & Bruch, 2012). In other cases, principals acknowledge approving SLO goals that lack rigor or clarity (Proctor, Walters, Reichardt, Goldhaber, & Walch, 2011).

Practitioners' perceptions of validity. Another measure of validity is to analyze teachers' and principals' perceptions of whether the SLO process serves as an accurate measure for evaluating the teachers. Within the body of SLO research, there are some examples of teacher and principal perception of the SLO process. In Maryland all districts implemented the Teacher Principal Evaluation (TPE) system that contains a SLO-based student growth component. A survey of principals and teachers found that principals perceived the SLO process more favorably than did teachers (Slotnik et al., 2014). In Rhode Island, 10% of teachers, compared to

35% of principals, agreed that SLOs provide a credible link between a teacher's craft and student learning outcomes (Slotnik et al., 2013a). Donaldson et al. (2014) discovered that in Connecticut, approximately only 58% of teachers and principals believed teachers' summative evaluation ratings based partially upon SLO scores were accurate. In contrast, in 2012 the Tennessee Department of Education discovered teachers viewed the SLO portion as the least effective component of the teacher evaluation system (as cited in Gill et al., 2013). In research conducted in Connecticut, 55% of principals believed their feedback to teachers on SLO implementation would change teachers practice, and only 44% of teachers agreed that feedback promoted instructional change (Donaldson et al., 2014).

     Issues regarding SLO reliability. Reliability means that an assessment produces similar results when given multiple times or to multiple groups of students. When considering the reliability of SLOs embedded into teacher evaluation, we can also look at consistency. It is important to consider how the SLO process is used for all teachers across the state or within the local district. The SLO implementation process at the district level is neglected in the research. As previously noted, a few peer-reviewed articles that address district SLO implementation are a part of larger pay for performance plans that were studied (Brodsky et al., 2010; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012). Whether the reports focus on the district- (Gill et al., 2014) or state-level design (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014), the focus of the research is often on the type of SLO models being used or the details of the specific SLO process throughout the state.

     An additional component to consider with reliability is the number of actual SLOs required within district or state teacher evaluation plans. Gill et al. (2014) found that three of the four districts studied required two goals for each teacher, and the fourth district required a minimum of one SLO goal with teachers having the option to write more. In Rhode Island

teachers create one SLO and an additional complex SGM rating is created for most teachers (Slotnik, Smith, & Liang, 2013b). The requirement of multiple SLO goals produced more data points for administrators to consider when determining teachers' summative evaluation ratings. No research could be located that looked at principals' or teachers' perceived advantages or disadvantages to having multiple SLOs.

Empirical data suggests reasons to question both the reliability and validity of the SLO process. In Rhode Island, 89% of surveyed teachers disagreed with the statement, "SLOs provide comparability of rigor in measuring teacher impact on student outcomes" (Slotnik et al., 2013b, p. 10). In Maryland, "most interviewees grapple with understanding what constitutes a high quality SLO" (Slotnik et al., 2014, p. 3). Donaldson et al. (2014) reached a similar conclusion in studying SLO implementation throughout Connecticut: "Some teachers or administrators are selecting far too challenging targets while others are choosing far too easy" (p. 6). At the very least, principals and teachers are still trying to make sense of how to ensure reliability and validity while using the SLO process.

SLO district and school implementation. Perhaps the low numbers of principals and teachers who view SLOs positively is partially attributable to the lack of training or the need for high quality training in the implementation process. Routinely, teachers report feeling unprepared for SLO implementation (Slotnik et al., 2013b), the need for more guidance (Gill et al., 2013), and more clarity on the goal-writing process (Donaldson et al., 2014). Many teachers report a desire for better communication surrounding the SLO process (Lachlan-Haché, 2015). A study done by the AISD found that "staff attitudes were more positive when the principal was supportive of the program" (Gill et al., 2013, p. c-4). Development, application, and

implementation of newly designed teacher evaluations are complex processes that require careful planning within each school district.

Although only a few Illinois school districts have implemented SLOs for more than 3 years, research suggests the longer the SLO process is in use, the greater the likelihood that teachers reach their SLO goal (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012). Studying Denver's ProComp SLO model, Goldhaber and Walch (2012) observed teachers' success rate increased with SLO goal mastery from 77% to 84% 4 years later. As well, positive perceptions and understanding of the SLO process increased for implementers in the second year of implementing the SLO process in Maryland (Slotnik et. al., 2014). Based on these findings, it appears that it takes time for principals and teachers to make sense of the SLO process.

Sufficient training is required for both teachers and principals to improve reliability. Numerous researchers and policy centers share this concern and formally recommend detailed trainings for all administrators and teachers involved with implementation of SLOs. Organizations that made this recommendation included the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (Holdheide, Browder, Warren, Buzick, & Jones, 2012), the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (Marion & Buckley, 2011), and the Institute of Education Sciences (Gill et al., 2013).

Principal knowledge and training. In addition to high-quality training, principals must have adequate levels of content knowledge and grade-level instructional expectations to reliably approve the various SLO goals that teachers craft. Although SLOs have their advantages, due to the ability to tailor to individual teachers, it may also provide challenges for principals seeking to hold teachers to the same standard. Researchers have discussed the importance of evaluators' subject content knowledge (Wise et al., 1985), and critics have questioned how administrators

accurately evaluates teachers within content areas for which they lack expertise (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003). By approving a wide range of goals for teachers of different grade levels or content areas, comparability of the rigor inherent in each approved SLO is nearly impossible. For example, holding the art teacher to the same high standard of SLO as the math teacher may be challenging for principals. Ironically before the implementation of student growth initiatives, 53% of principals felt that evaluation should not be differentiated to teachers (Fisicaro, 2010). No research has looked specifically at evaluators' sensemaking in regard to how to differentiate to each teacher's SLO goals and maintaining a standard level of approval for various SLOs.

The issue of time. Research demonstrates that principals were concerned about the amount of time required for teacher evaluations, even before the inception of SGM mandates (Milanowski & Heneman, 2001; Murphy et al., 2013). Time plays an important role in the question of reliability because accurate and fair assessment of teachers' SLO plans takes time. Principals historically have expressed concern about a lack of time to complete evaluations along with other job responsibilities (Donaldson, 2014; Goldstein, 2004). According to RttT documents, a notable downside to using SLOs is that they require "significant time and attention from administrators and evaluators" (Race to the Top Technical Assistance, 2010, p. 3). Principals in studies conducted in Denver, Indiana, Connecticut, and Ohio expressed concern over the amount of time involved with approving SLO goals (Gill et al., 2013; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Slotnik et al., 2013).

Policy Implementation

In Illinois, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) and Senate Bill 315; Public Act 96-086 were enacted on January 2010 (PERA, 2010). Included within the many stipulations within PERA is the requirement that student growth become a "significant factor" in determining

the evaluation rating of principals, assistant principals, and teachers in every public school district by September, 2016. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) identified policy implementation on two levels: the macro and micro level. At the macro level Illinois legislators, responding to the RttT initiative, mandated districts utilize an SGM teacher evaluation. The micro level involves school districts and schools that operate within the implementation level. Thus, at the micro level, each school district has the autonomy to determine the specific applications of the SGM teacher evaluation selected by the district's joint committee (PERA, 2010).

Research on educational policy implementation dates back to the 1950s and 1960s when a significant amount of effort and funding from the federal government were directed to address the needs of disadvantaged children in the War on Poverty (Fowler, 2009). At that time, government officials were surprised to learn that despite millions of dollars being poured into reform efforts, little to no change was actually occurring at the implementation sites (Fowler, 2009; Honig, 2006). The belief that a change in policy is simply enough to elicit a change within the educational organization is not only dispelled in the previous example but also by numerous policy implementation researchers highlighted in this section (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Hill, 2006; Honig, 2006). Scholars agree that challenges faced in policy implementation fall into similar categories. Honig (2006) described the challenges as people, place, and policy; Fowler (2009) categorized them as people, setting, or program; and Alexander (2013) described challenges as human (people), institutional (setting), and process or structural (program).

Implementation of educational policy is a complex process that centers upon the implementers or organizational actors within the school or district. Weatherly and Lipsky (1977) coined the phrase the "street level bureaucrat" to describe the individuals within the government organization who are charged with implementing policies. They argued that the most important

persons involved with policy implementation are the persons at the ground level who actually implement it (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). Similarly, Coburn and Stein (2006) observed, while policy is often constructed at the state or federal level, it is the local implementer who must manifest the policy into action and incorporates it into practice.

One of the most important aspects of policy implementation is how the problem is framed so that the policy is designed to be the solution (McLaughlin, 2006). Once the policy issue is framed, the implementers' personal acceptance of the policy is significant to how it is implemented (Firestone, 1989; Hall & McGinty, 1997). Hall and McGinty (1997) described how the transformation of intentions is part of the social context and policy chain. Actors interact with each other in a social process and form linkages as they "collectively use, reject, or create conventions, utilize resources, and resist or further intentions" (p. 462). Firestone (1989) pointed out the importance of the alignment of the educational leader's vision and the policy goal, as he/she has the potential embrace or reject the policy. Successful implementation also depended on the implementers' own personal knowledge and expertise (Cohen & Ball, 1990). Loeb and McEwan (2006) claimed that the implementer's capability and cognitive capacities affect the outcome of how well policies are implemented. Indeed, principals as key district policy implementers play a critical role in determining the outcome of policy implementation.

The unique context and characteristics of the organizational setting also play a large role in the implementation outcome. State policymakers rarely differentiate policies to accommodate the varying differences, needs, and problems faced by districts throughout the entire state (Louis & Miles, 1990). In response to federal education polices there is a "wide degree of variability across local settings" regarding how actors within individual district respond (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988, p. 35). Local school districts face unique challenges and obstacles that hinder

policy implementation. Louis and Miles (1990) describe contextual influences within individual schools as external and internal conditions that affect the change process. External conditions relate to the outside community and school district setting; internal conditions describe the school culture, organizational structure, and staff members' beliefs. The school environment within principals and teachers operate influences how they implement policy (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988).

Structural Nature of the Policy

The nature of the policy influences how actors within the organization implement it. Honig (2006) explained the key aspects of the policy include goals, targets, and tools. Goals define the focused intent of the policy or the intended problem the policy is designed to solve. The target identifies the organizational actors who will need to change behaviors and routines in order to effectively implement the policy. In respect to the SLO teacher evaluation process, the principals and teachers serve as the target. The tools used within the policy define the levers or actions involved in application of the policy (Honig, 2006).

The language used within the policy text and by the implementing agents while engaging in the process of implementation transforms the outcome (Hill, 2006). Hill (2006) analyzed the effects of language in four elementary schools while implementing the same state-mandated mathematics instructional policies. She discovered precision of language used within the actual text of the policy at the larger state or district level helped determine how local district and school implementers constructed their own language and understanding of the policy. Words have meaning in context and part of the context for implementers comes from the school and district environment within which they operate. These "discourse communities" interpret and

apply meaning to policies, and in turn, rephrase the policy with new or refined language specific to their working environment (Hill, p. 65).

Certain phrases are utilized with great frequency, and principals and teachers respond to the policy based upon their understanding of the terminology. Hill (2006) demonstrated how this effect led to implementing agents claiming they have modified an existing practice to fulfill the requirement of the new policy. Some even stated that they already were doing what the policy required, and they effectively dismissed the policy without changing their practice. Such dismissal, or making a claim that the practice is already in place, demonstrated a lack of understanding on the part of the policy implementers (Spillane et al., 2002). Hope (2002) stated that teachers are resistant to change when they "(a) do not understand the implications of a policy, (b) have not received sufficient information regarding its purpose, and (c) do not know how it is to be implemented" (p. 41).

In general, the student growth portion of the teacher evaluation process appears to challenge the understandings of many teachers. In Illinois, Milanowski et al. (2015) discovered in 97% of studied school districts the vast majority of teachers report they do not have a strong understand of student growth measures. It is unclear which aspects of the new SGM produced the most confusion and created complications for implementing the new evaluation policy. Perhaps the challenge rests within the structure of the policy or the language used by the implementers at the district or school level. Fowler (2009) recommended before implementing new policy, leaders should ensure they have adequate support and appropriate resources for implementation, including money, time, personnel, space, equipment and materials. Bryson (2011) argued successful implementation involves "the development of a clear understanding by implementers of what needs to be done and when, why, and by whom" (p. 288).

Sensemaking

The review of literature up to this point has summarized research highlighting the intricacies involved with teacher evaluation, SGMs, SLOs, and the implementation of policy. The individual implementing agent's ability to makes sense of these topics is the key to understanding how principals actually use a teacher evaluation system that includes the SLO process. Much is involved in the sensemaking process. Karl Weick, a well-known leader in the field, reported that sensemaking occurs both at the individual level and the collective or organizational level (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). For the purpose of this study, I employed aspects of individual and organizational sensemaking to analyze implementation of the SLO process throughout a school district.

As theorized by Weick (1995), sensemaking is a unique process of literally "the making of sense" (p. 4). Sensemaking involves the process of actively constructing meaning, as opposed to discovering meaning, and is therefore, distinctly different from the process of creating an interpretation. Weick explained the seven properties of the sensemaking process as being (a) grounded in identity construction, (b) retrospective, (c) enactive of sensible environments, (d) social, (e) ongoing, (f) focused on and extracted by cues, and (g) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Whether the level of analysis is focused on the individual or the organization, sensemaking begins with identity construction. In order to make sense of a situation, an established identity is necessary so that the sensemaker can confirm or adjust their beliefs (Weick). Meaning is constructed with the help of retrospection as sensemakers access current knowledge and incorporate the knowledge into newly occurring experiences (Weick). Sensemaking must take place in a sensible environment as action within an environment allows us to construct meaning both simultaneously and retrospectively. By acting within the

environment, sensemakers change and influence the environment through the redrafting of ideas and the establishment of meaning. In this way the process is ongoing with no beginning or ending. Furthermore, perception relies on one's individualized constructed meaning that is determined within the social setting. The accuracy of one's perception rests solely with the individual and is difficult, if not impossible to quantify; thus, sensemaking is driven by plausibility and not definitive outcomes (Weick).

In reference to implementing SLO policies, many reasons exist for understanding the sensemaking process within the scope of this study. The implementation of policy can bring forth organizational change, and sensemaking is known to occur during times of change or crisis (Evans, 2007). SLO policy implementation occurs because of the actions of district and school implementers; it is a social process that incorporates perceptions of organizational identity. The SLO process requires retrospection, which is a key tenant of sensemaking. In the moment, the sensemaker uses past experience to fill in gaps of information and a cycle of retrospection allows further meaning to unfold for the individual within the larger organization (Weick et. al., 2005).

Frameworks for Policy Implementation

For this study, I merged and subsequently applied three theoretical frameworks: the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), and the distributive cognition theory (Halverson & Clifford, 2006). Spillane et al. (2002) introduced a cognitive framework for understanding policy implementation that focuses on the individual's cognition within the content of the operating environment and with considerations to how the policy is represented. The cognitive framework served as the primary theoretical lens through which to view the qualitative research in this study. Halverson and Clifford's (2006) distributive cognition framework was the secondary framework utilized within the study. Both frameworks

incorporate aspects of sensemaking and are applied to the findings to help discern principals'

sensemaking.

Cognitive Framework for Policy Implementation

Naturally, the more complicated and complex the reform that is driving policy

implementation, the more challenging it is to implement (Fowler, 2009). Sophisticated and

multifaceted policies that require a major change in professional practice are more challenging to

implement. Honig (2006) described how policies designed to address the "core of schooling—

teachers' relationships with students, their subject matter, and their work places—pose

fundamentally different implementation challenges" (p. 14). Designing and implementing a

teacher evaluation system that incorporates a SLO as a student growth model requires a high

degree of engagement by the policy-implementing agents.

Spillane et al. (2002) designed the cognitive implementation framework to explain

difficulties within the implementation process at the local level for implementing polices

constructed to address fundamental and complex change within schools. The framework is built

upon the work of cognitive psychology and sociology; yet, the overall lens used in the

framework is often focused specifically upon policy implementation within educational arenas.

Spillane et al.'s analysis of implementation uses a cognitive perspective to question "whether,

and in what ways, implementing agents come to understand their practice, potentially changing

their beliefs and attitudes in the process" (p. 387). Time and effort are required for the teachers

and principals involved with policy implementation to more fully understand the deeper meaning

embedded within the policy (Fowler, 2009). The Spillane et al. framework provides a lens to

focus analysis on how individuals process new policy regulations, and it allows insight into how

the process of implementation is affected by the organizational environment.

Spillane et al. (2002) posited the individual policy implementer makes sense of the policy through three core influences: their own individual cognitive structure, their situated cognition, and the role of representations regarding the policy. Individual cognitive structures include a person's experience, opinions, emotions, values, and schemas. These cognitive structures are the viewpoint through which individuals make sense of, interpret, and respond to policy stimuli. Situated cognition provides the social and organizational context in which implementers interact with the policy; however, it is not just the setting in which the policy unfolds. It is more robust and multifaceted than a single element, such as setting, and it encompasses the social environment, organizational structure, personal and professional identities, historical context, and various layers within the community. The third component, the role of representations, describes how the policy is presented in several components and forms (Spillane et al.).

The implementing agent's prior knowledge. Applying the framework, Spillane et al. (2002) emphasized the importance of considering multiple aspects involved within an individual's cognition. Prior knowledge is a significant factor in the sense making process because a person's prior knowledge affects how new information is understood and applied (Spillane et al.) When individuals encounter new information, they use their current knowledge base to make sense of the new information. The new information may require that the individual adjust previous schemas to now accept and utilize new information in the future (Spillane et al.; Weick, 1995). When change or reforms are intended to occur through new policy implementation, prior knowledge can also hinder the process as individuals struggle to make sense and adapt to the change in practice (Spillane et al.). Because each individual has her/his own degree of knowledge on various subjects, different interpretations of the same message can often occur.

Policy implementation is often hindered because implementing agents do not recognize the newness of ideas within the policy, which can inhibit the change in practice. This phenomenon occurs because "people encode new information by adapting it to fit what is known; or they encode it without exploring the implications of the new ideas for what they already know" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 398). Spillane et al. (2002) pointed out that it is rare for people to totally restructure their knowledge based upon new leanings. With individuals relying so heavily upon what they already know and understand, it is not surprising that an implementer's attention is often directed to "superficial features" of the policy, and the implementer ends up "missing deeper relationships" (Spillane et al., p. 400). When new features of policy are represented, implementers naturally gravitate to aspects of the representations that already make sense to them because of their prior knowledge. They cue in on these familiar features, regardless of the significance of the information, and the result is an incomplete understanding of deeper meaning within the policy (Spillane et al.).

The implementing agent's affective state. Implementing agents' values, emotions, and motivation interplay with their cognitive reasoning as biases stem from the agent's own self-image (Spillane et al., 2002). An example of this effect is evidenced when the policy targets an aspect of instruction that a teacher believes does not need changed because he or she interprets the current practices as being of high quality. The teacher's beliefs and emotions bias him or her to look for evidence that the practice does not need changed (Spillane et al., 2002). Combining this effect with the previously mentioned effect of implementers clinging to superficial details, can lead to implementing agents not understanding the meaning and purpose of the policy. The result is implementing agents may believe that practices intended to change by the policy are already in place (Spillane et al., 2002).

Emotions influence memory, reasoning, and responses. When implementing agents' core practices are challenged by policy changes, agents are likely to respond emotionally, and at that time their responses influence reasoning and judgment (Spillane et al., 2002). People tend to gravitate to behaviors that have led to positive outcomes or allowed them to avoid negative experiences; therefore, teachers may cling to past practices and avoid the risk involved with reform. Affective responses are also involved because people tend to protect their own self-image. If a teacher strongly associates with past classroom practices, and a policy change projects past instructional methods as being incorrect, the teacher becomes less accepting of the change (Spillane et al., 2002).

The implementing agent has situated cognition. Although much of the sensemaking process relies upon the individual implementing agent's prior knowledge and affective responses, the individual is not operating in an isolated environment. The context of the environment provides many influences upon the individual sense maker. Spillane et al. (2002) use the term "situated context" to describe multiple factors, which affect the individual implementer. For example, an implementer's position in the organization generates a defined schema regarding how a person within the specific role might respond to a stimulus—a principal may have preconceived beliefs on how he or she should act in the position of principal. This expected response generated by the situated context influences the actual response. The principal must implement new policies within the context of the district environment. Principals benefit from the support of central office administrators (Derrington & Campbell, 2015), and the principal's role during implementation is often to ensure teachers understand and apply the policy as intended.

Institutional norms factor into the implementation equation, as well. Such norms have developed throughout the history of the organization, and they may include behavioral norms, organizational rules, or definitions of key terms (Spillane et al., 2002). Within their own history involved with the organization, implementing agents have learned and integrated norms as part of their adaptation to the organizational culture. The individual's experiences form ideas and expectations about how to respond within the context of the organization when faced with new policy implementation (Spillane et al., 2002).

Through social interaction organizational members negotiate meaning of terminology and policies together (Hill, 2006). Within each implementer's positional sphere, members of the organization together define terms and form understanding. For example, teachers positioned in close proximity in the same grade level or subject context help make sense of policies with the help of other members in the same group. It is important to note that public education positions are nested within multiple levels of larger settings. That is, teachers are a part of a grade level, which is part of a school within a larger school district housed within a state. Each layer offers various levels that constitute the situational context for implementing agents, and at different levels each group can interpret messages differently (Spillane et al., 2002).

Design of policy, purpose, and manifestations. The intent of the policy and the amount of change the policy is designed to bring forth do not always match how the policy is implemented in practice (Fowler, 2009). Spillane et al. (2002) describe three levels of change involved when policies are intended to be transformative. The first level requires little to no modification to the implementing agent's belief system. Superficial changes within a school might include adjusting the time that lunch periods start during the school day or when a particular concept is taught in the curriculum. The second level includes changes that allow the

implementing agent to build upon their current understanding. These changes allow their foundational beliefs to remain in place while adding additional knowledge to their schemas. The addition of SLOs into the evaluation may constitute such a change if the implementers simply view the growth model as an additional step in the evaluation process. Lastly, the third level is the most challenging type of adjustment because it requires implementers to revise or modify their present understandings. Fully shifting the focus away from teacher performance during the evaluation process to student performance constitutes a third level policy design change. The cognitive framework for policy implementation provides lenses to both analyze the policy designers' potential intent of the policy and the comparable degree of change demonstrated by implementing agents (Spillane et al.).

The analysis of the intentions behind the design of policies often takes place using the formal representations of the policy. Policies are constructed with statements, examples, objectives, goals, and supporting documents (Hill, 2006). As previously discussed, implementing agents must interpret the policy design and put the policy into action: "There is thus a very real tension between communicating abstract principles and being concrete enough to provide adequate constraint on the understanding process" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 416). The practice of providing meaningful learning opportunities, as opposed to simply communicating the policy to implementing agents, can help support the agent's ability to match the result of the policy to the intended design (Spillane et al., 2002). It is also helpful to represent the policy message in multiple forms, such as providing concrete examples or professional development sessions linking current practices to intended practices. Additionally, when third level change is the expected outcome within the policy, it is important to highlight the problems within the current practice that the policy intends to modify before implementation begins. Creating disharmony

between past practice and the need for a solution leads implementing agents to understanding a current change in practice is required to provide the intended solution embedded within the policy (Spillane et al., 2002).

Distributed Cognition

The concept of distributed cognition is closely aligned, and according to some scholars, encompassed within the cognitive framework of policy implementation (Spillane et al., 2002). Distributed cognition theory is the belief that individual cognition is shared across the environment and it includes the use of either people or artifacts for the implementing agent to utilize while sensemaking. Applying the theory, researchers seek to understand how people interact with their environment and use resources, known as artifacts, to help distribute the cognitive thinking process. Researchers utilizing distributed cognition theory emphasize one of the two aspects of how the thinking is distributed: They either emphasize the social component of agents relying on others to make sense (Spillane et al., 2002), or they focus the distribution of agent's cognition towards environmental artifacts (Halverson & Clifford, 2006; Hutchins, 1995).

The distributed cognition framework is more commonly displayed as a framework that analyzes the use of environmental artifacts as a means for forming and applying cognition (Halverson & Clifford, 2006; Hutchins, 1995; Liu, Nersessian, & Stasko, 2008). The theory was developed mainly from the work of Edwin Hutchins (1995), who studied how pilots relied on instruments within the cockpit as a part of the cognitive decision-making process when flying and landing airplanes (Halverson & Clifford, 2006; Hutchins; Liu et al., 2008). The theory has been expanded to include the examination of how members of a team use artifacts to create an outward system of cognition (Liu et al., 2008).

Halverson and Clifford (2006) adapted Hutchins' (1995) work to examine how principals understood and implemented new teacher evaluation policies. Using a case study methodology, the authors studied how a middle school principal utilized a standards-based teacher evaluation framework that was part of a larger district evaluation policy. The research focused on the principals' use of the evaluation framework as an artifact used to enhance cognition and ultimately form judgments regarding teacher performance. Halverson and Clifford noted the importance of artifacts within the study of policy implementation: "The work of policy makers in education can be seen as inscribing intentions into policy artifacts through designed features with the hope that practitioners pick up on these features to shape practice" (p. 584).

The distributed cognition framework, as advanced by Halverson and Clifford (2006), is employed in this study because the framework focuses on the completion of a sophisticated task within a complex environment that relies on the use of artifacts to assist with cognition (Liu et al., 2008). The SLO process places the principal and the teacher at the center of the sensemaking process as they use artifacts involving multiple types of student data to determine a teacher's evaluation rating (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2012a). Artifacts involved in the process may include the following: (a) SLO template for teachers, (b) guiding questions for teachers to write SLO, (c) SLO template for principals, and (d) guiding questions for principals to evaluate the SLO (Slotnik et al., 2014). Halverson and Clifford (2006) noted, "In a distributed cognition analysis, cognitive flexibility is displayed through the actor's discretion about which aspects of the cognitive system to emphasize and which to play down in a given situation" (p. 607). Applying the distributive cognition framework allowed for the observance of the cognitive process involved when implementing agents use SLO artifacts and when they invoked "discretion" by underemphasizing artifacts and aspects of the SLO process (Halverson & Clifford).

The Integration of Distributed Cognition Into the Cognitive Framework

The cognitive framework used for researching the implementation of the SLO process provided analysis of the individual agent's cognitive structure, the situated context in which the policy is implemented, and the representations of the policy in various forms (Spillane et al., 2002). Although policy implementation is not a linear process, Spillane et al. (2002) provide a framework that allowed examination of multiple aspects of the implementation process with the site being studied. Of the main three areas within the cognitive framework, only the section describing how representations of policy are interpreted touched briefly upon the concepts of artifacts influencing the final implemented practice. Integrating the distributive cognition framework into this study allowed for a more robust analysis of how administrators and teachers engage with multiple documents associated with the creation and approval of SLO goals.

With a foundation in sensemaking, the cognitive framework and the distributive cognition theory were the essential tools of analysis used for this study. The three frameworks were merged together offering multiple elements of consideration for the study, as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for SLO policy implementation.

The cognitive framework is represented with core tenets: (a) the individual agent's cognitive structure, (b) the situated context in which the policy is implemented, (c) and the representations of the policy (Spillane et al., 2002). The three elements interact as implementing agents work to make sense of the policy and apply it to practice. These elements, and the subsequent factors that comprise each element, interlink as the implementer applies, refines, or recreates understanding of the policy in action. As the elements influence the cognitive process to various degrees for each implementing agent, the effect of the three elements on the outcome of implementation various by each individual agent's sensemaking. Sensemaking occurs in

response to the introduction of the new policy and the process materializes as implementing agents act to apply the SLO process to the teacher evaluation process.

The distributed cognition framework allows for further understanding of principals' ability to make sense of SLO policy implementation. This aspect of the framework incorporates the distributed cognition associated with the use of SLO artifacts. As the implementers interact with the policy and understanding begins to take shape in the form of action, the implementer engages with the many artifacts involved with the SLO process. Another layer of the sensemaking process takes shape as the implementing agent is engaging with the artifact as an individual with his or her own cognitive structures, in a situated context that is formed uniquely around the individual, and he or she is responding to how the policy is represented in various forms. For the purpose of this study, the interaction of the implementing agent with the SLO artifacts was a point of analysis that provided further insight into principals' sensemaking.

The circular arrangement of the conceptual framework demonstrates the interactions between three forms of analysis applied towards the analysis of SLO policy implementation. In addition, like a circle, the process of sensemaking does not have a beginning and ending point; it is an ongoing process involving interpretation and reaction (Weick et al., 2005.) While the end result of implementing SLO policy involves principals and teachers engaging in the SLO process, the action of these agents using the SLO artifacts to complete the steps involved, does not imply they have fully made sense of the policy. The elements within the cognitive and distributed frameworks are constantly influencing the actions of agents as they participate in the SLO process, use the artifacts, and use retrospection to adjust future practice. The circular arrangement also denotes the possibly cognitive flow involved in the sense making process. Even

when the SLO teacher evaluation system is being implemented, the sense making process is constantly occurring.

Conclusion

Given the PERA requirement that each Illinois school district developed its own plan for incorporating a SGM into teacher evaluation. Every Illinois school district has now designed a teacher evaluation policy for implementation by the school districts' individual agents—central office administration, school administrators, and teachers. This chapter outlined a brief history of the role and methods involved in the teacher evaluation process. Within the chapter various aspects of SGMs were explained along with the empirical research that emphasizes the complexities embedded in a SGM. As noted, the SLO process is the most popular choice of SGM for districts across the state of Illinois (Milanowski et al., 2015). Also explored were the intricacies of the SLO process and a limited number of studies regarding SLO implementation. Sensemaking and policy implementation were then analyzed through established theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Specifically, the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002) and the distributed cognition framework as adapted by Halverson and Clifford (2006) were reviewed. The three frameworks were merged and utilized to gain insight into how implementing agents make sense of the SLO process while incorporating them into the practice of teacher evaluation.

Chapter Three

Methodology

School district leaders, principals, and teachers play a significant role in the implementation of school district policies. Specific to developing a new teacher evaluation process with SLOs, principals are the key organizational actors and implementing agents who make sense of the procedures and guide teachers through the practice. Teacher evaluation processes remain high-stakes for teachers and now include the complexity of incorporating student growth data into the evaluation system. This single-case study sought to determine how school and district administrators make sense of SLO polices and how they integrate the SLO process into the practice of evaluating teachers. Given the rapid assimilation of SLOs into teacher evaluation systems in Illinois (Milanowski et al., 2015) and across the nation (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014), this study is of immediate importance for principals, school district leaders, and to the field of educational leadership. The study was designed to answer the following three research questions:

1. What meanings and understandings do principals construct regarding the SLO process and how the process is implemented?

2. How does the sensemaking of teachers, principals, and central office administrators affect the operationalizing the SLO process?

3. Which dimensions of implementing the SLO process influence the school practices of teachers and principals?

This chapter describes the research methodology and provides the rational for the research design, a description of the research sample, explanation of data collection procedures, methods for data analysis, description of ethical considerations, and exploration of issues with validity and reflexivity.

Rationale for Research Design

When conducting research it is important to select a method that allows the research questions to drive the decision for determining the design of the study (Creswell, 2013). After identifying the question or questions he or she is seeking to answer, a researcher should intentionally select the most advantageous methodology for providing answers (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is effective at allowing the researcher to understanding meaning, context, process, influences, and for developing explanations (Maxwell, 1996). Qualitative research also provides the researcher flexibility and freedom to investigate a topic in-depth (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and it allows for study in a specific setting and/or with a specific phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Given the depth of understanding necessary to answer the research questions and the need to adapt and respond to the insights of the study participants, the qualitative research method best served to meet the objectives of this study.

Multiple methods are available within the realm of qualitative research. Of the five that Creswell (2012) highlighted, case study is best suited to match the intentions of this study and to permit full exploration of the research questions. Case study allows researchers to analyze a process or event involving individuals and to identify participants' perceptions and reasoning within an organizational setting (Creswell, 2013). Seeking to explore the mental constructs of the various implementing agents requires the researcher to utilize a method of study that allows for a thorough exploration of the participants' beliefs. Case study methodology is built upon the philosophical foundation of social constructivism, and through the interaction with the researcher, the participants' views are identifiable (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The case study method offers many benefits for exploring and delineating the beliefs of those involved in the SLO implementation process. Case studies take on various forms and

designs and can include an analysis of a single location or multiple locations (Yin, 2009). For this study I selected a single case study approach by focusing the unit of analysis on a unit school district in which the SLO process had been implemented for a minimum of 3 school years. A multiple case study design had the potential to hinder my ability to analyze the phenomenon in great detail (Merriam, 2009). As a researcher, dividing my attention across multiple cases would not have allowed for the depth of exploration needed to uncover the sense making process of implementing agents.

Case studies can use a mixture of research collection methods and take into account the contextual conditions that affect and form participants' beliefs (Yin, 2009). Within the single school district as the unit of analysis, the perspectives of district-level administrators, principals, and teachers were identified through interviews, Joint Committee observations, artifact conferences, and an examination of SLO artifacts. The credibility of this research was enhanced by exploring multiple perspectives and generating multiple data sources (Yin, 2009).

Interviews allowed me to capture participants' sensemaking regarding the implementation and utilization of the SLO process. Interviews are powerful data collection tools for eliciting views and opinions of participants (Creswell, 2013) and for conducting an intensive case study (Merriam, 2009). Interviews allow the researcher to "reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes" (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 529). Due to principals' situated context within the environment of the school district, members at multiple levels of the organizational hierarchy were interviewed: teachers, principals, and central office administrators.

All interviews were semi-structured. As the researcher, I played an important role, as an instrument of the research (Creswell, 2013). Altheide and Johnson (2011) emphasized the

researcher's interactions between the environment, subjects, sensemaking process, and their need to make reliable judgments. For these reasons, the study utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Open-ended interviews require the researcher's sensitivity in the moment of the interview to make modifications or to ask clarifying questions better understand participants' beliefs (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As the researcher, my interactions surrounding the questions and adaptations made during the semi-structured interviews allowed me to learn the perspectives of the participants (Bogdan & Bilken, 2008). From interviews with principals I was able to gather data on their sensemaking regarding SLOs and the implementation process. Interviews with teachers and central office administrators provided further evidence of sensemaking and also served as a method for triangulation of data.

Because this study sought to explore the participants' views of the SLO process, observations of Joint Committee meetings served as second form of data collection. Observations allow for observers to view routines, interactions, and engagement in dialogue and the decision-making process (Merriam, 2009). Implementing SLOs at the district and school level provides multiple situations for the practices involved in the process to be observed. In this case study I observed two district-level Joint Committee (JC) meetings. The observations permitted me to capture sensemaking in the moment and within the context of principals interacting with teachers and central office administrators.

The documentation involved in completing the SLO process is a valuable artifact and a significant data source for analyzing how participants make sense of the SLO process through completing the necessary documentation. Halverson and Clifford (2006) wrote, "reform-based teacher evaluation artifacts provide a unique opportunity to examine how the hopes of policy design meet the realities of existing practice" (p. 580). With the intent to gather evidence

regarding how various SLO forms were used and what additional management systems principals utilized during the SLO process, two artifact conferences were conducted with two principals. During these conferences, the principals were asked to identify and describe the SLO artifacts they used from the SLO guidebook and to share any artifacts or protocols they had created to assist them with completing the SLO process. Through examination of the multiple artifacts required for competition of the SLO process, I was able to further triangulate the sensemaking data gathered from the other research sources. A review of documentation was completed for each phase of the SLO process, including the planning stage, the mid-point review, and final evaluation phase. In addition, I thoroughly reviewed the district's teacher evaluation SLO guidebook, SLO forms, and electronic documents involved in the process. The collection of artifacts was instrumental in understanding how participants utilized tools in practice and to determine how the participants' relational views of the artifacts affected how they completed the SLO process. Table 1 describes the artifacts reviewed for the study.

Table 1

Artifact table

Artifact	Source	Description	Purpose
SLO Framework Examples	SLO Guidebook	Contains the following five columns with multiple questions to be answered by the teacher in each of the columns: Baseline Data, Population, Learning Objective, Assessment, Student Growth Target.	To provide examples for teachers and administrators. 5 separate examples are given for each of the following teaching positions: ELL, 11th Grade U.S. History, 7th Grade Math, 9th Grade Science, and 3rd Grade Reading

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Artifact	Source	Description	Purpose
Blank SLO Framework	SLO Guidebook and provided by 2 principals	Contains the following five columns with multiple questions to be answered by the teacher in each of the columns: Baseline Data, Population, Learning Objective, Assessment, Student Growth Target.	This is the primary form used by teachers to create an SLO.
Assessment Approval Tool for Type 3 (Teacher-Created) Assessments	SLO Guidebook and 2 completed examples were provided by principals	The form has columns that require the teacher to list the associated standard; describe the standard, identify the intended Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level; and identify the number of questions for each DOK level. The final column is for the evaluator to check and approve if the questions match the intended DOK level.	It serves as a communication tool for teachers to have their Type 3 assessment approved by the evaluator.
Assessment Approval Checklist for Evaluators	SLO Guidebook and 1 example provided by a principal	The form lists the Assessment Guiding Principles and offers check boxes for administrators to evaluate traditional assessments and performance-based assessments. A final approval box and location for teacher and evaluator signature is located at the bottom of the form.	Provides a 14-point checklist for evaluators to use when evaluating Type 3 assessments for approval.

Table 1 (continued)

Artifact	Source	Description	Purpose
Assessment Approval Tool Checklist (For Evaluators) of SPED, ELL, ECE, Alt. Ed Specialty Positions	SLO Guidebook	Similar in structure to the general assessment approval tool with modifications listed for the growth targets.	Provides a 14 point checklist for evaluators to use when evaluating Type 3 assessments for special teaching assignments and allows for necessary modifications based upon the population of students.
SPED, ELL, ECE, Alt. Ed Specialty Areas Hybrid SLO Scoring Form	SLO Guidebook	The form has four columns that describe the requirements for each of the four ratings available for the SLO: Excellent, Proficient, Needs Improvement, Unsatisfactory.	Allows evaluator to approve SLOs written within the hybrid model. The teacher is required to list projected growth for each of the four rating categories before the SLO is approved.
Timeline Checklist	SLO Guidebook; 2 principals provided examples	The form contains four columns: Deadline, Calendar Date, Task, and Check When Completed. The deadline describes deadline for the task and the task column describes each of the 11 tasks required for completion.	Evaluators use the form to list the calendar dates they complete each task and to check to ensure all task are completed.
Meeting and Documentation Checklist- Single SLOs	SLO Guidebook and 3 principals	The document list 10 tasks that are required for SLO completion and it allows the evaluator to write a date when each is completed. Two columns are provided for Teacher Initials and Evaluator Initials	The form is intended to ensure all task are completed and to document the data and participation of the evaluator and teacher.

Table 1 (continued)

Artifact	Source	Description	Purpose
Summative Student Growth and Performance Evaluation Rating Form-Summative Evaluation Meeting	SLO Guidebook and multiple completed examples provided by 3 principals	The form is divided vertically into three sections. The top section list the required "thresholds" students must achieve for the teacher's individual SLOs to rate: excellent, proficient, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory. The middle section allows for the teacher to list their rating for each SLO. The lower section merges the teacher's SLO ratings with the Professional Practice Rating and provides a box to check the teacher's final overall rating.	The form allows for the teacher to summarize their ratings on each of the SLOs and for the evaluator to incorporate the SLO rating with the Professional Practice Rating. The ratings are merged so the evaluator can assign a final overall rating.
SLO Data Tool	Central office administered and multiple examples from 3 principals	The Excel document contains 10 columns for the teacher to complete. The first column is students name and the other 9 columns are completed for each of the students included in the SLO. The 9 additional columns include: Beginning of Year score; Growth Expectations; Midpoint Assessment; Midpoint Growth; On track to meet?; Post-Assessment; Approved Expectation; Total Growth; and Met Target?	This form serves as a means for documenting the assessment growth from the first assessment to the final assessment for each student.

Site Selection, Population, and Participants

In determining the parameters of the sample, it is essential to select participants who have the contextual perspectives necessary to provide meaningful insights (Maxwell, 1996). Purposeful selection allows the researcher to intentionally select participants and a site that best supports answering the research questions (Creswell, 2013). When deciding upon a district to conduct the study within, I intentionally sought out one of the 41 RttT or SIG award-winning school districts that began using the SLO process earlier than other Illinois school districts. The 3-year period for implementation allowed a greater amount of sensemaking among educators to occur, especially considering that sensemaking occurs partially through retrospection (Weick, 2005). Additionally, by conducting the research with a more experienced school district, the SLO process was more fully developed because the district's JC was encouraged to refine the SLO artifacts and make modifications annually (Milanowski et al., 2015). By seeking out an early adopting district, I knew that the central office administrators and principals involved in SLO implementation were unable to use other districts as models for policy implementation. The early adopting districts set the example for other districts throughout the state of Illinois and designed a policy aligned with the state school code.

A review of the ISBE website identified 32 districts in Illinois that were RttT participating districts. In addition, between 2012 and 2014, nine school districts were awarded SIG grants for schools within their systems. Combined together, the RttT and SIG districts equaled 41 school districts that implemented the PERA required student growth portion of teacher evaluations. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was both an RttT and SIG district; however, it was eliminated from the pool of available districts because of the additional approval process required to conduct research in CPS would have delayed the completion of this study. To

increase generalizability, I further narrowed the search from 41 early adopting districts down to the 21 unit school districts. Unit school districts, which span grades K-12, offer multiple perspectives from staff members experienced with a variety of grade levels and content subjects. SLOs are purported as being adaptable to multiple grade levels and content areas (ISBE, 2014a).

The study addressed implementation of only SLOs as the specific SGM of interest. Therefore, through a review of publicly available information on the Illinois School Board of Education website and individual school district websites, I further narrowed the list of 21 down to 10 unit school districts, in which I obtained evidence that the district utilized the SLO process. It is possible that more than 10 of the 21 unit districts were using the SLO process; however, publicly available information did not specify if the other 11 school districts were using the SLO process, so I eliminated these districts as a possible sample for the study.

Via email, I attempted to contact the superintendents of the 10 early adopting SLO school districts. Within the email I explained the nature and purpose of the research, and I requested a brief telephone interview (Appendix E). Initially I received no responses to my email, so I expanded my attempts, emailing the assistant superintendents in the four larger districts. The other six districts did not appear to employ assistant superintendents.

I received two responses of interest in study participation. I also learned that one of the two districts had staff members who were selected to share their insights, experiences, and knowledge of the SLO process at a forum sponsored by a local Regional Office of Education. Based upon this knowledge I conducted the screening interview with Dr. Cosgrove, an assistant superintendent of Jackson School District. I confirmed the district's eligibility for the study by asking questions about the SGM model to confirm the district utilized an SLO model. After confirming eligibility, I requested and received permission to conduct the study within the

district by providing the Dr. Cosgrove with an official request for study participation (Appendix B). Dr. Cosgrove invited me to attend and observe an upcoming JC meeting in May 2017. I also requested and received access to relevant district SLO artifacts, such as the district SLO guidelines and an Excel document used to complete the process.

After the site observation, I later interviewed Dr. Cosgrove and Assistant Superintendent Aaron Kirby together (Appendix G) at the end of May 2017. I relied upon Dr. Cosgrove's and Mr. Kirby's suggestions to help identify principals and central office administrators who were the most experienced with the SLO evaluation process. The assistant superintendents recommended six principals/assistant principals for interviews. I interviewed five of the six and I was unable to contact the sixth individual. During the principal interviews, they recommended an additional four principals/assistant principals, who I subsequently interviewed. This approach is known as a reputational approach (Abu-Laban, 1965). After contacting the suggested list of principals to inquire about interest in study participation via email (Appendix C), I eventually met with and interviewed five principals and four assistant principals (Appendix H) during May-June, 2017. I asked principals to help identify teachers who might be interested in participating in the study and that were experienced with using the SLO process. Eleven teachers were identified and were contacted via email to seek permission for study participation (Appendix D). Six teachers responded and were later interviewed for the study in June and July, 2017 (Appendix I). When working with the assistant superintendent, and later the principals, to help identify study participants, I also relied upon mixed purpose sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select interview participants. I sought out participants that were on the JC and from a broad range of instructional levels and content areas. Eight of the 18 participants were on the

district's JC at the time of the interviews. Table 2 presents information regarding all participants'

positions, years of experience, instructional levels, and JC status.

Table 2

Profile of Participants

Participant	Position	Years in current job	Years in district	Current JC member
		Elementary		
Chuck Rich	Principal	2	10	Yes
Diana Jenkins	Principal	5	5	No
Genie Prichard	Principal	8	8	Yes[a]
Lisa Garfield	Principal	15	3	Yes
Janice Rice	Assistant Principal	3	3	No
Rebecca Wright	Teacher	6	6	No
Meghan Drew	Teacher	8	8	No
		Middle School		
Mary Kimble	Principal	2	7	Yes
Brandy Step	Assistant Principal	2	16	No
Mindy Smith	Language Arts Teacher	5	9	No
Jill Olivian	Teacher: Data Instructional Facilitator (DIF)	4	10	Yes
		High School		
Malaysia Williams	Assistant Principal	2	11	No
Heather Allison	Assistant Principal	2	19	No
Courtney Gable	Special Education Teacher	2	6	No
Tim Simmons	Social Studies Teacher	4	4	No
		Central Office		
Elizabeth Isaacs	District Curriculum Coordinator	3	22	Yes
Aaron Elliott	District Assistant Superintendent	3	15	Yes
Susan Cosgrove	District Assistant Superintendent	3	3	Yes

[a]Served as the Joint Committee chairperson for the district.

In crafting and implementing the SLO policy, the Jackson school district worked with an

educational organization called Consortium for Educational Change (CEC). Attempts were made

via email to contact the primary liaison that worked with the school district. Later, I learned that

she was no longer employed by the CEC organization, and I was unable to contact her to request an interview.

Data Collection Procedures

I conducted a single-site case study of one Illinois public school district that has utilized the SLO process for the previous 3 school years. Data collection was ongoing over the course of 6 months beginning in May 2017. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with nine principals, six teachers, and three district-level leaders. The interviewed principals represented all three instructional levels within the school district, elementary, middle school, and high school. Likewise, the six interviewed teachers represented the elementary, middle, and high school levels and a variety of instructional content areas, including special education and an instructional coach. Data collection also included two artifact conferences that focused on the identification and use of SLO artifacts, and two observations of district JC committee meetings occurred (Appendix J). One JC observation occurred at the end of the 2016–2017 school year, and the other occurred in the fall of the following school year. Additionally, I reviewed over 100 pages of relevant SLO artifacts and analyzed the intended use and manner in which the artifact was actually used (Appendix K). The Data Collection Matrix (Appendix A) denotes how I utilized the various aspects of the three main forms of data collection to target and answer the guiding research questions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the school administrators, teachers, and with one district-level administrator. Two assistant superintendents were interviewed simultaneously and in person as part of a district-level administrator interview. Interviewees participated from all three of the instructional levels taught within the school district participated (elementary, middle, and high school). At the elementary level, four

principals, one assistant principal, and two teachers were interviewed. At the middle level, the

principal, assistant principal, and two teachers were interviewed. At the high school level two

assistant principals and two teachers were interviewed. Initially I planned to interview the

teachers in a focus group interview; however, based on the teachers' personal preferences and

availability the interviews with teachers were conducted individually. Interviews for all

participants were conducted in person or over the telephone based on his or her individual

preference. After an initial analysis of data collected from May 2017 through July 2017, I later

conducted follow-up interviews to clarify participant perspectives in August and September 2017.

These follow-up interviews occurred via telephone with two school administrators and one

teacher in September 2017. In total 21 interviews were conducted during the course of this study.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and the transcriptions were later emailed to the

participants as a form of member checking. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify,

add, or rescind statements. Interviews were conducted from May 2017 through September 2017

and they ranged in time from approximately 30 to 45 minutes long.

Observations were also completed as an additional form of data collection. Research data

collection initially began with an observation of the district's annual, end-of-year JC meeting that

was held in May 2017. The meeting was held in a boardroom at the district's central office and

11 members made up of both teachers and administrators attended the meeting. Dr. Cosgrove

informed the committee about my attendance at the meeting and my research interests. A second

JC observation was conducted during the next school year in October 2017. During both

observations a laptop was used during the meeting to capture conversations involving the

implementation challenges, solutions, and individual and group sense making. The observations

were not audio recorded. I used the Site Observation Tool to capture important notes and for later analysis (Appendix J).

Two artifact conferences were conducted with an elementary principal and a middle school principal. The two administrators who agreed to these conferences had previously participated in individual interviews. During these artifact conferences, field notes were taken to capture a first-hand account of how the administrator incorporated the SLO process into his/her daily school administrative practice. The principals shared and provided examples of how each manages the paperwork involved in the SLO process, and during this artifact conference the middle school principal shared an organization system she created to help keep track of the SLO goals submitted by the 82 staff members evaluated in the school. During the elementary school artifact conference, the principal shared a personal rubric she created for evaluating the rigor of questions in teacher-created assessments. After each observation, I reviewed the field notes and added additional anecdotal notes and further thoughts related to the administrator's interactions with the SLO process and the tools involved.

The third major component of the data collection involved the gathering of artifacts used for understanding and completing the SLO process. A variety of SLO artifacts were collected with the intention of identifying how the task of using the SLO artifacts involved the implementing agent's cognitive system. Some of the interview participants voluntarily provided all the artifacts analyzed in the study. The district's 73-page Jackson School District SLO Guidebook was the first artifact collected for analysis and provided by a district-level administrator. The guidebook provided administrators and teachers detailed explanations of the SLO process with SLO examples, and it outlined the JC's history and goals for the implementation of SLOs. The guidebook included the SLO templates, planning documents, mid-

point review guidelines, and final goal analysis forms. As soon as I obtained the guidebook, I thoroughly read and reviewed it, because it provided specific and important information about the history of SLOs within the district, rationale for the use of the SLO process, and descriptions of the process. Field notes were taken during the review process.

Three principals and one teacher voluntarily provided additional SLO artifacts. After retracting the names of students, teachers provided copies of some of their previous SLO goals and they spoke about their thoughts regarding each particular goal. The teacher's impressions of her goals were recorded in field notes and later analyzed. A blank copy of the assessments used in the construction of the SLO goals was also submitted for research analysis. Additionally, two principals shared both SLO exemplars and less ideal SLO examples, which had been submitted previously by teachers. Names of students and teachers were removed from all artifacts before the SLO samples were accepted.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process involves making sense of the data, using different data analysis techniques and delving into the interpretations (Creswell, 2013). The data analysis process should follow a prescribed method, analyzing each type of data collected (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis was ongoing and completed simultaneously while gathering data and making interpretations (Creswell, 2013). In this manner I analyzed field notes immediately after completing observations, conducting artifact conferences, and receiving artifacts from participants. I also listened to audio-recorded interviews after conducting them. This instant analysis generated preliminary themes that compelled modifications to questions in upcoming interviews and follow-up questions for some participants. I continuously used inductive analysis

for all three forms of data collection as facts, themes, and ideas emerged while collecting data (Creswell, 2013).

The various forms of qualitative interview data available allowed for the incorporation of different data analysis tools and provided another form of triangulation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). While listening to and transcribing the audio-recorded interviews word for word, the formal analysis process began. As I transcribed the interviews, I took notes on significant points and remained open to themes that might emerge through the analysis of this form of data. Once all interviews were transcribed, I uploaded them into the NVIVO Qualitative Data Analysis software program to assist in coding process. Coding "involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant" (Creswell, 2013, p. 198). All relevant field notes on observations and artifact conferences were uploaded into NVIVO.

The multiphase analysis used is best described as a constant comparison analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The initial formal phase of analysis involved grouping relevant phrases and themes into initial codes, which are known as "nodes" within the NVIVO program. Through a lens of analysis using sensemaking, the cognitive framework, and distributive cognition theory, nodes were determined. I read each interview, observation notes, and artifact note once. As I read, I began to identify emerging and related themes, and I used paper and pencil to list possible emerging themes. I then reread the interviews and notes a second time and began to select and code each statement or note as a specific node in the NVIVO system. A sample coding chart of a continuous response from one interviewee is included in Appendix L. Significance was given to data points that were more frequently observed, related to themes from my literature review,

stressed as important by an interview participant, or appeared significant in answering the research questions. Throughout the entire process I attempted to remain unbiased and remain mindful of my personal thoughts and experiences as a principal who works regularly with the SLO process.

After the initial coding of themes, I began to utilize many of the powerful data analysis tools further offered within NVIVO. The word frequency query was executed during part of the analysis phase. This query highlights the frequency of relevant words within participants' responses or within the field notes. After clicking on and conducting a deeper analysis of frequently used words by responses, I was able to create additional codes and link other responses to previously identified codes from my initial coding. I also applied the text search query to search for specific examples of text which I believed may be present in the data and related to initial codes. The text search feature became very useful in the later stages of analysis when I had established initial nodes. I then searched for notes or comments that might include terminology used by the interviewee or from my field notes that might generate more evidence of the emerging theme. In this manner, I frequently found more data to support the theme that I had initially overlooked, and in some cases, I did not find any additional supporting data. The text search feature and this method of analysis allowed me to further question if the emerging theme were significant and common.

As codes began to take on greater meaning and a stronger significance, I activated the compound search query. A compound search allows for deeper exploration of codes by specific groups of participants. Each interview was uploaded individually into the program and specific and relevant attributes of the interviewee were defined during the upload process. As an example,

the identities of teachers, principals, assistant principals, and district-level administrators were all linked to the each participant's interview as a case note in the program.

The incorporation of interviews and field notes from observations and artifact reviews allowed for the simultaneous analysis and triangulation of the three primary data sources. Through application of the distributive cognition lens (Halverson & Clifford, 2006), I also looked for consistencies in the use and intended use of the artifacts as designed. This form of artifact analysis provides me with an external manifestation of the sensemaking process involved in completing a complex task, and it allowed me to establish patterns of behavior significant to the sensemaking process (Halverson & Clifford, 2006).

 Once I had combed through and reviewed all points of data, I began the process of narrowing down the initial themes into primary themes (Merriam, 2009). Similar themes were combined and joined together into a single theme. This occurred with both the creation of a new theme that united and defined minor themes, and also with the merging of smaller themes into a more relevant and broader theme. At times other themes were eliminated or noted as less significant, and therefore, these themes were not included in the summary analysis. The relevance and connection to the guiding research questions were constantly considered as final themes emerged. Analysis of the final themes allowed me to think about the answers to the research questions and develop implications of the study.

Ethical Considerations, Validity, and Reflectivity

Throughout the study I maintained ethical principles and followed guidelines for human subjects. As I conducted the research, I held true to the principles of beneficence: to do no harm and maximize possible benefits to participants. Participation in the study was voluntary and I gave informed consent forms to each of the participants prior to their commitment to the study

(Appendix F). The identity of participants has remained confidential, and I have assigned pseudonyms to all participants, the district name, and school names. Participants maintained the right to withdraw from study participation at any time during the study without the risk of harm or negative consequence. No data were shared that contained identifiable information. When study participants voluntarily provided SLO artifacts that contained identifying teacher or student information, the study participant removed the names of all individuals before I accepted the artifact.

Qualitative validity means researchers apply specific procedures to check their data interpretations for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). Multiple steps supported the accuracy and validity of the study. I checked interview transcripts for obvious mistakes, crosscheck assigned definitions of thematic codes, and used member checking (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Member checking, "which involves showing the findings and/or interpretations to the participants for assessment of accuracy, can increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 575). After completing the transcription of each interview, copies were emailed to each participant for review. When necessary, I sought clarification on interview responses. I also included the use of "rich data" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 95) and thick description (Creswell, 2013) to provide a clearer picture of the participants' responses. By including actual quotes within the text, I have corroborated my interpretation of the interview statements and allowed the reader to better understand the insights of participants.

Triangulation of data was the final strategy applied to ensure validity. Triangulation refers to collecting or analyzing information from a range of sources (Maxwell, 1996), and it can take place with data sources, by method (or instrumentation), by researcher, or by theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this study triangulation involved a comparison of the three sources of

data: interviews, observation notes, and reviewed artifacts. I always sought coherence with emerging themes from the various forms of data (Creswell, 2013).

The process of examining and reflecting upon my own perspective is essential in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Researchers bring their own bias, values, and personal background to the study and these characteristics can affect the research outcome (Creswell, 2013). As an elementary school principal who has worked in two RttT participating school districts that used the SLO process within the district's teacher evaluation plan, I have experience and personal insight into the subjects of study. I attempted to remain neutral and unbiased while collecting and analyzing data. As I analyzed field notes and interview transcripts I was aware of my own personal experiences and sensemaking of the SLO process. I intentionally worked to separate my own sensemaking of the SLO implementation process with that of the study participants. I did not want to project my personal thoughts into the body of research data. This deliberate reflexivity helped the development of themes within the research that were autonomous to the Jackson School District as the unit of study.

As a practicing Illinois principal with experience implementing SLOs, my personal position is directly connected to my philosophy of teacher evaluation. In general, I believe the teacher evaluation process is an opportunity for the principal and teacher to learn more about the teacher's instructional practice and to promote professional growth. The majority of time I approach the teacher evaluation process with a coach's mentality, and I encourage the teacher to use professional reflection as a means to continue to enhance at the craft of teaching. At times, however, the teacher evaluation process must also be employed as a mechanism to mandate professional improvement. Should a teacher's practice fail to improve to an acceptable standard, the teacher evaluation process is one of the only means a principal has for reaching negative

employment decisions regarding the teacher. The SLO process is a tool that now fits within the teacher evaluation process and this general philosophy.

I believe SLOs should and can be used to promote teacher reflection, guide instruction, and increase collaboration within schools. In practice it is difficult to achieve this desired result with every teacher throughout the entire evaluation process every school year. The variety of goals submitted by teachers, my own lack of knowledge of certain instructional areas and lack of knowledge of individual students has made it difficult at times to know if I have approved adequate SLO goals. At other moments discussions about SLOs have effectively encouraged teachers to aim and reach higher student achievement levels and to promote collaboration among the faculty. I know that SLOs can be very meaningful and help facilitate improvement within the school.

It is also important to note that on a few occasions I have had significant concerns with a teacher's practice, and the teacher and I arrived at the point that his/her evaluation rating might have resulted in an improvement plan or termination. During these situations, the teacher's SLO scores significantly affected the overall outcome of the teacher's final evaluation rating. I have experienced recording and documenting concerns about a teacher's professional practice through the Danielson model, and his/her SLO results were high enough to pull the teacher into an overall satisfactory rating. This was extremely frustrating for me as a principal and evaluator. In contrast, I also have experience when a teachers SLO rating was low, matched the professional practice rating, and the evaluation process ultimately resulted in a change in status for the teacher. From these experiences I have come to the additional conclusion that SLOs are not always reliable or accurate at determining a struggling teacher's effect upon students' growth, and principals and teachers should put forth great effort to design authentic SLO goals.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology for the single-case study that examined the implementation of the SLO process in the early implementing Jackson School District. Interviews, site observations, and artifact analysis were applied to generate rich and thick description within the study site. The study is grounded in sense making theory (Weick, 1995), and it incorporates a cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002) and distributive cognition theory (Halverson & Clifford, 2006) as a lens of analysis. Study data was reviewed and analyzed using the NVIVO Qualitative Data Analysis software program. Initial and emerging themes were further narrowed down and refined to generate the study's findings.

Chapter Four

Findings

Using case study methodology, the purpose of this study was to explore the sensemaking of principals within the Jackson School District (pseudonym) as they implemented and utilized the SLO process in their schools. The following questions guided the study:

1. What meanings and understandings do principals construct regarding the SLO process and how the process is implemented?

2. How does the sensemaking of teachers, principals, and central office administrators affect the operationalizing the SLO process?

3. Which dimensions of implementing the SLO process influence the school practices of teachers and principals?

This chapter presents in-depth descriptions of the case and key themes that developed through the analysis of 21 interviews with 18 participants, two Joint Committee observations, two artifact conferences, and the review of over 100 pages of SLO artifacts. Triangulation of the data was achieved through the analysis and comparison of common themes across the data sources.

The chapter begins with a detailed look at the context of the single site case study, the Jackson School District. The exploration of the district includes an analysis of various aspects of the district's demographics, including information about students, district administrators, school principals, and teachers. A summary of the work completed by the district's JC and the district's approach for implementation for the SLO process is also provided. Emergent themes are presented in relation to central questions of the study. Analysis of the data occurred through the application of the conceptual framework described in Chapter Two. Within this framework multiple aspects of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005), the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), and distributive cognition (Halverson & Clifford,

2006) were integrated into the examination of data. Through the use of the NVivo qualitative data analysis program, 15 themes were generated.

The Jackson School District

Located in the downstate area of Illinois, the city of Jackson is the county seat of Harrison County. According to the 2010 census report, the city had just over 33,000 inhabitants. Over the past 15 years the city's population has declined by over 3,000 residents. Fifty-eight percent of residents are White, 32% are African American, and 7% are Hispanic. The median household income in the city was approximately $30,000 and the median family income was slightly under $40,000. The city includes a major shopping center, a community college, and one college. Great efforts have been made in the last 5 years to redevelop many business properties within the city. Jackson School District is the city's single public school district, and there are also three private schools within the community that serve PK-12 students.

The Jackson School District is considered a large unit school district, serving over 6,000 students in grades K-12. The district has one high school serving grades 9-12, one middle school serving grades 6-8, six elementary schools, one upper elementary school, one preschool, and one academy school. Five of the six elementary schools serve grades K-4, and the magnet elementary school, Pine Grove Elementary, serves grades 1-6. The district's academy school offers an alternative education program serving middle school and high school students. Table 2 contains a summary of the schools, grade levels, and the number of evaluating administrators. Most elementary schools have a single administrator, and secondary schools have more than one school administrator.

Table 3

Profile of Schools

School pseudonym	Grades served	Evaluating school administrators
Elbert Elementary	K-4	1 Principal
Garret Elementary	K-4	1 Principal
Meadows Elementary	K-4	1 Principal 2 Assistant Principals
Lane Elementary	K-4	1 principal
Harper Elementary	K-4	1 Principal
Pine Grove Magnet	1-6	1 Principal
Wayside Upper Elementary	5-6	1 Principal 2 Assistant Principals
Franklin Middle School	7-8	1 Principal 1 Assistant Principal
Jackson High School	9-12	1 Principal 4 Assistant Principals
Hubert Academy	7-12	1 Principal 1 Assistant Principal
Preschool	Pre-K	1 Coordinator

According to the 2015–2016 school district report card, enrollments include over 70% students of low-income families. The 33% student mobility rate is higher than the state average (12%). In the 2015–16 school year the district spent less than the average school district on instructional spending per student. The district spent approximately $6,300 compared to the Illinois state average of $7,712. Per student operational expenses were less than the average district: $11,250 compared to the $12,821 state average. In 2015–2016 the district's $66 million annual budget was primarily funded through 50% federal, 33% local, and 17% state revenue. In comparison, the average revenue sources of Illinois school districts during the same school year were 67% local, 25% state, and 8% federal.

The district is majority minority, with 60% students of color. The district serves a population of students comprised of the following ethnicities: White, 41%; Black, 41%; Hispanic, 9%; two or more races, 8%; and Asian, 1%. According to the Illinois School Report Card, the ethnic diversity of students has remained relatively stable throughout the past 5 school years. From 2015–2016, 16% of Jackson students received Special Education services, which was slightly higher than the state average of 14%. The school district serves fewer English Learners than the average state district; only 3% of Jackson's students are English Learners compared to the 11% state average.

The school improvement grant. During the 2013–2014 school year, the Jackson High School applied for and earned a $6 million School Improvement Grant (SIG) awarded by the state of Illinois with federal funds. The grant funds were distributed during the following school year, 2014–2015, and the grant lasted through the 2016–2017 school year. As a condition for receiving the grant, the school was required to adopt an intervention model approved by the U.S. Department of Education. The school adopted the "transformative model" and agreed to work with a one of 16 state-sponsored organizations, to be identified as a Lead Partner. Shortly thereafter the district selected the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC) as its partner organization; the CEC offered guidance, technical assistance, and leadership within the school and throughout the school district. During the 2014–2015 school year, an employee, Jessica Fredrick, was hired by both the school district and CEC to serve as a liaison between the two organizations. Other CEC employees also assisted the district with school improvement activities.

The SIG award required the high school to become an early adopter of teacher evaluations with an incorporated student growth model prior to the PERA-mandated September 2016 deadline. In response to this requirement, the Jackson School District began piloting SLOs

within their teacher evaluation model for the entire school district during the 2014–2015. Central office administrators believed it was best to pilot the SLO process district-wide and not just at the high school, as required by the SIG. At that time, central office administrators viewed the mandated early adoption of a student growth model as an opportunity for all district educators to learn together. Administrators knew the PERA law would eventually require all teachers to participate in the student growth component, and they believed it beneficial for all teachers to begin the process together.

Central office administration. Multiple administrators who are involved in instruction and evaluation work in the Jackson central office. Dr. Kim Jones, the superintendent, leads the district. She joined the school district in the 2015–2016 school year, which is a year after the district was awarded the SIG and the SLO process had been designed. Two assistant superintendents provide oversight to instructional services: Dr. Susan Cosgrove, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools, and Aaron Elliott, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools. Mr. Elliott was listed as an original member of the district's JC; however, he stated he was not a part of the first few JC discussions. Both Dr. Cosgrove and Mr. Elliott were currently members of the JC. Dr. Cosgrove was hired the same summer as Dr. Jones and she was not part of the original JC that designed the district's SLO process. Elizabeth Isaacs, who served as the district's curriculum coordinator, was involved in the teacher evaluation process and was a long-standing member of the district's JC. She was interviewed for this study. Although other directors of various services, such as Human Resources and Buildings and Grounds, work within the central office, those positions were not included in this study because they were not actively involved in the teacher evaluation process.

The school principals. A total of 20 administrators served as principals or assistant principals in the 10 schools. There were principals in each of the 10 buildings, and 10 assistant principals were divided among two elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school (Table 3). Eleven of the district's 20 school administrators were interviewed. See Table 2 in Chapter Three for details regarding participants' positions, years of experience, and JC status.

The district's teaching staff. The district employs around 370 teachers and the teacher retention is rate is 81%. According to the school district report card from 2015–2016, the majority of teachers White (94%), female (75%), and their highest degree earned is a bachelor's degree (54%). Four percent of teachers are African American. The student to teacher ratio is 18:1 at the elementary level and 22:1 at the high school level. The teacher attendance rate, at 80%, is slightly higher than the state average (75.%).

The position of Data Instructional Facilitator (DIF) is a unique teaching position within the Jackson School District. A DIF serves as an instructional leader and coach within each of the school buildings. There are 11 full-time DIFs for each of the 10 school buildings. Each school has one DIF with the exception of the high school that has two. The DIF's role is ever-expanding and often includes assisting the school and teachers in unique ways. Some DIFs serve as unofficial leaders and assistants for teachers with the SLO process. Although DIFs are not supposed to write teachers' SLO goals, they sometimes help with crafting, formatting, and aligning the goals to appropriate assessments for the SLO process. In addition, the DIFs frequently lead professional development activities for teachers throughout the school year.

Organization, development, and implementation the SLO process. Shortly after receiving the SIG grant the school district formed a 16-member JC, including eight administrators and eight teachers. Cindy Fredrick, the CEC-district liaison, also assisted the JC

as an ex officio advisor. Many original JC members reported Ms. Fredrick and CEC assistants helped lead the initial JC meetings during the first year.

Interestingly, of all JC members interviewed for this study, none could explain how or when the committee determined the SLO process was right for the district. Two members mentioned that Ms. Fredrick suggested the SLO processes during the first meeting and no other growth models were ever considered. It was apparent that Ms. Fredrick's involvement heavily influenced the district's adoption of an SLO model. As the JC appeared to have relied substantially upon CEC expertise and guidance, the original JC members described the CEC as "vital," "helpful," and "important" in the development stage. All JC members spoke favorably about the CECs involvement in the process.

As an early adopting district of SLO policies, the JC members did not have any other districts to consult for models of SLO policy or implementation. The JC met throughout the 2013–2014 school year, reaching agreement on many details of the SLO process. Discussions centered on having a process that met the needs of all teachers—from elementary through high school. They also considered how to design the process to incorporate the multiple and various subjects and grade levels taught within the school district. They discussed in detail the role and importance of the assessment types used in the SLO process. Through this discussion they determined the importance of helping teachers understand the concept of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) within each question asked on an SLO assessment. Methods of collecting the SLO data, sharing data between teacher and evaluator, and determining a final teacher evaluation rating were also identified.

The importance of the JC and the critical role this committee played in the development of the SLO process was not lost on the individual members. For example, the curriculum coordinator, Mrs. Isaacs observed:

> The process was difficult, but it was really meaningful in the fact that we had some incredible discussions! You could really take the temperature of where we were with instruction as well. We were working collaboratively to tackle something that wasn't going to be easy for anybody, and figuring out a way to follow the law, but also make it a meaningful process, and everybody was really good about differentiating between elementary needing to look different from middle school, which needed to look different from high school, and then the specialty groups, too.

Toward the end of the 2013–2014 school year, the JC, with the help of the CEC, completed writing the 73-page Jackson School District Student Learning Objective (SLO) Guidebook. The CEC claimed copyrights for the guidebook and allowed the school district to share paper and electronic copies only with licensed staff within the school district. The JC then set out to design a system of implementation that trained all teachers and school administrators. They decided to make the 2014–2015 school year a pilot year for all staff members to complete the SLO process without outcomes affecting summative evaluation ratings. All interview participants spoke positively about having a "no stakes" pilot year for teachers.

The 2014–2015 pilot year began with the JC holding a district-wide meeting for all licensed teachers and administrators. The meeting was held on the teachers' first contractual day, a few days before the school year began. Trainers from the CEC led the meeting with minor assistance from the JC committee members. The JC intentionally brought administrators and teachers together to hear a consistent message regarding the introduction of the new SLO process and the rationale for the change as a result of the PERA law. The information provided was condensed, providing only a superficial introduction to the SLO process.

To provide more comprehensive information applicable to the various grade levels and disciplinary areas taught across the district, the JC determined additional training sessions were necessary in each school building. The CEC and JC members then selected and trained one to two educators—a select group of principals and teacher leaders—who would then train staff within school buildings throughout the district. By design, each school had one or two SLO leaders on the staff. To maintain their role as non-evaluative instructional coaches, DIFs initially were not included as SLO trainers. Once the SLO trainers completed their trainings, they were assigned to the high school, middle school, or two elementary schools. Principals who were not JC members received their training at their school sites alongside their own teachers. Only one discipline-specific group, special education teachers, received an individualized training on the SLO process from a CEC trainer and the special education director. All other staff received whole-group, school-based training. During the pilot year, staff members were given a paper copy of the district SLO guidebook and an electronic copy of an Excel file, termed the SLO Data Tool. Subsequent copies of the SLO guidebook were distributed in electronic format only. Teachers use the SLO Data Tool to write and submit their SLO goal.

On a case-by-case basis, many principals scheduled frequent additional after-school and full-day professional development sessions focused on various aspects of the SLO process that he/she believed staff members needed. At the elementary level students were dismissed early every other Wednesday, and some principals used this additional professional development time to focus on the SLO process. Genie Prichard, an elementary principal and JC committee chairperson, described how sessions were dedicated to SLO implementation: "Wednesdays we had different stations for teachers to go to, and I always made sure that I had one on SLOs. In some cases they needed help with their framework, or choosing their assessment, or setting

reasonable goals." Three other school administrators also emphasized the multiple meetings that occurred throughout the school year to support teachers on the SLO process.

The district's assistance from the CEC. As previously noted, the Center for Educational Change (CEC) partnered with the school district because of the $6 million SIG grant. According to study participants the CEC played a significant role in the development of the district's SLO guidelines and providing supports during the pilot. As an early adopting district, Jackson administrators had no examples of SLO policies they could obtain from other districts; therefore, JC members relied heavily upon the guidance of CEC members. The CEC's facilitation, however, was also integrated into many other district initiatives—some related to the SLO process and some that were not. Developing stronger assessments that incorporated a higher DOK was one of the primary initiatives the CEC worked to advance across the school district. It is unclear if the focus on DOK within assessments was generated by the request of a district-level administrator or if the CEC independently took the lead. Multiple interview participants highlighted the monumental efforts, in the form of meetings and professional development sessions, which were dedicated to teachers writing assessment questions with an awareness of the DOK required within each question. Tim Simmons, a high school teacher, described how the CEC was "really into Depth of Knowledge" and repeatedly emphasized the significance of structuring questions which were at all four levels. Janice Rice, an elementary school assistant principal defined the DOK as, "level one is basically recall. Level two is applying. Level three is even deeper concepts where you are adding it to real world problems, and depth four is where you are creating things."

The SIG directly stated the school district would improve and further develop a Professional Learning Community (PLC) model at the high school, and the CEC emphasized this

goal during the partnership. Teachers of similar and specific content types were provided with a

personal planning time and also a daily PLC content area planning time. High school

administrators and teachers stated the first year of implementation focused primarily on writing

common assessments that were also associated with the SLO process. At the high school a CEC

member often attended PLC meetings to help facilitate and guide initial group conversations. As

a result, many of the developed assessments are currently used during the PLC process.

   The Jackson School District SLO process. In this section I provide an outline of

aspects of the SLO process within the Jackson School District that are relevant to the research

questions and subsequent findings. The JC created the SLO guidebook that describes in great

detail the SLO process, and the guidebook offers many exemplars for SLO goals. The Jackson

School District process is built upon a standard three-step procedure that establishes the

foundation of the SLO process. At the beginning of the evaluation cycle teachers set SLO goals

and an evaluating administrator approves the goals. In the second step the teachers have an

opportunity to revise their goal midway through the evaluation period. During the final step at

the end of the evaluation period, teachers review students' progress and growth with the

evaluating administrator and the SLO is assigned an evaluative rating. All teachers in the district

are required to set two SLO goals during the evaluation period. For non-tenured teachers and

tenured teachers with a "needs improvement" or "unsatisfactory" rating, the evaluation period

spans August to February. For tenured teachers with an "excellent" or "proficient" rating the

evaluation period spans 2 school years, with one goal being set between Augusts through May

for each year. Modifications are allowed for teachers who only teach semester-long courses.

   Teachers in Jackson School District must adhere to the Illinois PERA law regarding the

types of assessments that are acceptable for the SLO. Type 1 assessments measure a certain

group of students in the same manner with the same potential assessment items, are scored by a non-district entity, and are widely administered beyond Illinois. Type 2 assessments are utilized and adopted by the school district and administered by all teachers within the district in a grade level or subject area. A Type 3 assessment is developed by the teacher, approved by the evaluator, is rigorous, and aligns with the instructional subject being taught in the classroom. Any teacher who teaches both English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Mathematics must use at least one Type I or II assessment for one of the SLO goals. If a teacher teaches both ELA and Math, he/she must write a separate goal for ELA and Math as the two required SLO goals. If the teacher does not teach ELA or Math, then two Type 3 assessments may be used. In 2015-16 the district created an Assessment Sub-Committee to begin reviewing and approving Type 2 assessments allowable for SLO use across subjects and grade levels in the district.

Timelines significantly affect and shape the SLO process within the Jackson School District. Teachers must select the assessments intended for SLO use one week prior to administration and the evaluating administrator must receive copies of Type I and Type 2 assessments 3 weeks after the start of the semester. The school district Assessment Sub-Committee has already approved Type 1 and Type 2 assessments. Also, in the case of Type 3 assessments, the assessment, along with the "assessment approval tool," should be submitted to the evaluating administer 1 week prior to administration. The administrator must then review and approve the Type 3 assessment or work with the teacher to make adjustments to the assessment. All assessments must be given to the students by the end of the fourth week of the semester, and the SLO goal must be submitted to the evaluator by the sixth week of school. Then evaluators must notify teachers regarding approval or initial revisions within 10 contractual days after the SLO is submitted, and all SLOs need to be approved by the end of the first quarter.

Teachers have the opportunity to revise their SLO goals midway through the evaluation cycle. Specifically revisions are allowed to the initial set growth targets and to the student population included within the original SLO goal. Revisions are optional for all teachers. Teachers who decide to revise their SLO goals must submit the revisions by the tenth contractual day before the second quarter ends. In turn, evaluators are required to notify teachers of his/her decision regarding the approval of the revisions by the end of the second quarter, and the revision process must be completed by the Thanksgiving holiday break.

Depending on the teacher's tenure status, and if he/she is teaching a yearlong course or semester course, the timeline varies for the scoring portion. The scoring portion of the SLO process is the final phase. In general, however, assessments are administered by 2 weeks prior to the end of the semester or school year. Non-tenured teachers and tenured teachers with "needs improvement" or "unsatisfactory" ratings must submit student data and scores 10 contractual days after the start of the second semester and a summative evaluation meeting must be held between the administrator and teacher by February 28. Tenured teachers must submit data 2 weeks prior to the end of the school year. Likewise the teacher and principal must hold the final summative evaluation meeting must by the end of the school year. Table 4 displays the process and timelines used for non-tenured teachers and tenured teachers with a previous needs improvement or unsatisfactory rating.

Table 4

Example SLO process and general timeline requirements

Step 1: Approval	Step 2: Revision phase	Step 3: Evaluation rating
• One week prior to administration, teachers must choose an assessment to use that matches the content and focus of their overall goal.	• Teachers can submit revisions to their goals 10 days before the 2nd quarter ends.	• For courses that last the entire year, students must take the final assessment 2 weeks before the Winter Break. • For course that are a semester long course, students must test during final exam week.
• Before the 1st day of the 5th week of school, teachers must assess students.	• Evaluators are required to give feedback to teachers who submit revisions by the end of the 2nd quarter.	• Teachers are required to submit their final data by the 10th day of the 2nd semester or within 10 days of assessment administration
• During the 6th week of school, teachers are required to submit their SLO to their evaluating administrator.	• SLOs can no longer be change after the Thanksgiving break.	• By February 28th, the evaluator must meet with the teacher to assign a evaluation rating to the SLO goal and the teacher.
• The evaluator is required to respond to the teachers within 10 school days with approval or revisions.		
• By the end of the 1st quarter all SLOs must be approved.		

Clear guidelines are established for determining which students are included in the "student population" and "counted" for evaluative purposes. The teacher identifies the student population based upon certain criteria outlined in the SLO guidebook. One SLO goal must target the total student population of one course, class, or subject, and one SLO may, but is not required to, target a student subgroup, with evaluator approval. As an example, an elementary teacher

could have an ELA goal with the entire classroom population, and a math goal that targets a specific group of students. In addition, only students that are present 85% of the instructional time are counted toward the SLO.

According to the district guidebook, when setting growth targets, the target "should be ambitious yet feasible," "be sufficiently rigorous," and "teachers should uphold high achievement." To help determine if a goal should be approved, evaluators are directed to use the Growth Target Approval Tool that is included in the SLO Guidebook. This tool included a rubric with three defined ratings: Excellent, Proficient, and Not Proficient. It further stipulated that collaboration among teachers was required when setting goals that use Type 2 and Type 3 assessments. When setting growth targets teachers may use, but are not required to use, a prescription known as the Austin Formula. The Austin Formula comes from the Austin (TX) Independent Public School District, where educators were pioneered teacher evaluations with a student growth component. The Austin Formula states that students must make progress from his/her starting score of half the amount toward 100%. The formula is (100-x)/2 where "x" is the pre-test score. For example if a student scores 40% on the pre-test, to progress to 100% he/she would need to improve by 60%. Half of 60% is 30%. The student's growth target would be the initial score of 40% plus the "halfway to 100%" score of 30% in this scenario. The student's final growth target is 70% (the original 40% plus 30% growth).

The SLO Guidebook also authorizes much greater flexibility for teachers that instruct students in specialty areas: Special education, English Language instructors, early childhood, alternative education, Data Instructional Facilitators, instructional coaches and coordinators, and deans. Teachers in these specialty areas may score SLOs using an alternative, hybrid method and must opt-in for the hybrid scoring method each school year. The hybrid method provides these

teachers with much needed latitude to construct SLO goals. For example, these teachers may combine multiple grade levels, classes, courses, or periods to generate a student population for the goal. They may individualize growth targets for each student or exclude a student if the student's skills are not aligned to the rest of the students' levels. If the student population served by the teacher falls below 12 students, the teacher has the option to use only the professional practice rating of his/her teacher evaluation for the final teacher rating. This clause effectively eliminates an SLO requirement for any teacher with a caseload fewer than 12 students.

In Jackson School District deans are considered teachers and not administrators. The SLO guidebook recommends the SLOs for deans focus on reducing discipline referrals. It is recommended that deans target students with 15 or more discipline referrals, and they may target student behaviors, student affect, or social emotional skills. Although it does state that deans may use an alternative method for scoring the SLO, such as negative growth by decreasing the problematic behaviors of targeted students, it does not stipulate how such targets should be measured.

The SLO Guidebook indicates collaboration among teachers is an important part of the SLO process. Collaboration and common objective setting is mandated for teachers at the high school and middle school. At the elementary level, teachers are required to collaborate when setting goals for a Type 2 or Type 3 assessment. There is not such an emphasis placed on collaboration between teachers and the evaluating administrators. In fact, administrators are not required to meet in person with teachers at the beginning of the school year to review the SLO goal, and the administrator can sign-off on the SLO goal without formally meeting with the teacher.

The re-testing policy is a unique feature to the Jackson School District SLO process that also is explored further in the findings. Teachers are allowed to give a second end of the SLO cycle evaluation assessment to students if the students do not perform as highly as expected. The assessment must be a mirrored assessment, which has similar types of questions on the same content, and it must be taken within four weeks of the original final assessment. "Re-testing should be used to foster a culture of re-teaching and reassessing and develop a culture focused on student learning (rather than attainment)" (SLO Guidebook, p. 22). The SLO Guidebook further requires that additional instruction be provided between the two assessments.

The emphasis on DOK is another rarity found in the Jackson SLO process that is not accentuated in the empirical research and that is relevant to the findings. The SLO guidebook dedicates two pages in the appendix for an "Assessment Rigor Analysis- Depth of Knowledge (DOK)" rubric. The DOK rubric describes the four levels of rigor: Recall, Skill/Concept, Strategic Thinking and Extended Thinking. A DOK rubric also gives the evaluator a box for each of the four levels where he/she can list test questions that fall within the defined DOK levels. Evaluators should use the tool to identify the DOK for each of the questions in the assessment, and at least one test question should align with the level of rigor intended from the content standard used in the SLO goal.

Although the SLO process is clearly explained in the SLO Guidebook, the findings demonstrate principals' sensemaking and the actual practice of using SLOs is more complex. The following sections identify fourteen significant findings from the three guiding research questions. The findings were derived by applying an analysis of the conceptual framework to the three main data sources in the study: interviews, artifacts, and site observations.

Research Question One: Principals' Sensemaking Throughout the Pilot Phase

Research Question One stated: *What meanings and understandings do principals construct regarding the SLO process and how the process is implemented?* Findings from this question were incorporated into seven themes: the perceived intent of the SLO policy; varied training, implementation, and principals' sensemaking; the essential nature of the SLO guidebook; principals individualize the SLO approval process; perceived views of accuracy and reliability of SLOs; utilization of the universal growth model; and the SLO process oriented toward teacher success. These themes are addressed in this section.

Many aspects of the sensemaking phenomena were evident as I analyzed the data and began to address the first research question. Specifically, principals' sensemaking was on-going, produced through the sensible cues they experienced throughout various moments of policy creation and implementation, and based upon their own individual mental constructs. Through retrospection and reflection, principals shared their own personal sensemaking with me during the conducted interviews. The majority of these findings were generated from analyzing the interview data, and I then used artifact analysis and observational data to verify many aspects of their sensemaking. For this research question I present findings regarding principals' constructed meanings and understanding of SLOs and the implementation process in a sequential manner beginning with the perceived intention of the policy and onto the inception of the district policy. As principals began to implement the process their understanding of the process developed further. It is important to note that as the researcher I constructed the sequence and order in which the findings are presented, although principals' sensemaking did not always follow such a logical and sequential progression. The following seven themes were extracted from the various

forms of data and describe the meanings and understandings that principals assigned to the SLO

process and the subsequent implementation of the process.

      The perceived intent of the SLO policy. Nearly all interviewed administrators believed

the intent of the PERA legislation, which mandated adoption of the SLO process in the Jackson

district, was a method for ensuring educator accountability and/or prescribing a method for

improving a perceived flaw with instruction. Near the top of the organizational hierarchy,

Assistant Superintendents Elliott and Cosgrove explained their perceptions of the intended

purpose of the PERA legislation as part of a "larger education accountability movement" that

had swept through federal and state reform initiatives over many years. Dr. Cosgrove said, "I

believe it was a legislative push for teachers to justify what they do all day, because

of plummeting test scores and a standardized assessment movement . . . I truly feel like it was

born out of accountability." Mr. Elliott believed that the legislators' goals were "probably

accountability" and resulted in more "prescriptive teaching." The majority of interviewed

principals shared the assistant superintendents' viewpoints regarding the intentionality of PERA

and the subsequently developed SLO policy. It is unclear if this belief uniformly developed at the

same time as the assistant superintendents formed their opinions, or if the assistant

superintendents' opinions influenced the shared belief of the principals.

      In independent interviews, principals identified the intentional use of student data, in the

form of assessment results, as a method for being held accountable for student growth. Student

data were referenced as a "solid" measure, more than a "gut-feeling," and providing

uncontestable evidence of student learning. Principals said the data is being used to "prove" that

students are learning and to demonstrate "improvement" of student skills in deficit areas.

Principal Lisa Garfield stated, "It's the age of accountability. They [legislatures] were probably

thinking that nationally and globally we need to be higher." Middle school principal, Ms. Kimble

stated, "I think that they are trying to hold us accountable. . . . We should be held accountable for

good teaching and best practices and making sure that students are getting the best." Elementary

principal, Mr. Rich, said, "I think it has been a lot more accountability for the teachers."

Two principals expressed a belief that the legislation requiring the SLO process had a

deeper-seated purpose of improving instruction and meeting students' academic needs. High

school assistant principal, Ms. Williams, described the purpose as providing continuing

professional development for teachers and a method for invoking teacher reflection. She said,

"we are trying to improve student learning, and the best way to do that is to reflect on our data."

Similarly, Mrs. Prichard stated, "The whole point of the SLOs is for teachers to continuously

assess their students and look at their data to adjust their instruction and to look at groups and

where they can provide additional supports."

In comparison to principals' sensemaking, it is interesting to note all six teachers

interviewed shared the belief that the SLO process is being completed for the purpose of teacher

accountability. Middle school teacher, Jill Olivian, stated:

> For the profession there is a lot of negative talk about teachers and what public schools
> are doing, and at least from a public eye, whether or not we agree with it, it is a
> justification of what we are doing.

The beliefs of the majority of principals regarding the intentionality of the SLO policy

aligns with that of all interviewed teachers.

Varied training, implementation, and principals' sensemaking. Principals' levels of

understanding and sensemaking varied significantly throughout the initial rollout and training

period. Understandably, because they were involved throughout the development of the district's

evaluation process, principals who were members of the JC developed a deeper understanding of

the SLO process and the related polies than principals who were not JC members. Through

extensive meetings and ongoing discourse during the development and initial introduction of the

SLO process, principals on the JC were more deeply engaged with designing and enacting the

process. Principals on the JC had more time to construct understanding, to consider how the pilot

process would roll out within their buildings, and to retrospectively reflect on the effectiveness

of the process because of their ongoing participation.

Middle school principal, Mary Kimble shared, "I was fortunate enough to sit on the Joint

Committee and be able to see how the steps came together. And so it was easier for me to say,

hey teachers, this is exactly what you need to do." Elementary principal, Chuck Rich commented

that as a JC member he attended "a lot of meetings" during the development phase and attributed

much of his understanding of the SLO process to the conversations as a JC member. While

referencing the advanced understanding the JC members had in comparison to non-members, Ms.

Kimble stated, "If you didn't sit on the Joint Committee and go through the process, then you

didn't get it."

The levels of understanding and knowledge of the process were deepest elementary

principal, Mrs. Prichard, who has served as the SLO chairperson since the beginning of the SLO

adoption process. Her answers frequently captured and reflected themes in the SLO guidebook

more so than any other principal. Referencing the process of teachers applying the SLO process,

she said:

> SLO's are not just another thing! It is meaningful data that you should be using in your
> classroom. It should tie into your grade-level goal, your school goal, your district goal.
> They should all relate. Teachers should not just see it as another thing to do.

In comparison, the SLO Guidebook stated that SLOs should "provide meaningful feedback to

foster both professional learning and student growth that is aligned to school and district needs

and professional growth goals." Mrs. Prichard reported that even though not all her staff

subscribe to this vision, it remains her continual goal. Through interviews, it was clear that Mrs.

Prichard understood the steps and SLOs forms using for the SLOs at a much deeper level than

most interviewees. It is also noteworthy that training sessions for staff appeared to focus mostly

on training staff how to complete the process and not upon the deeper purpose of using SLOs to

enhance instruction and increase collaboration.

When asked about the purpose of the SLO policy Curriculum Coordinator, Mrs. Isaacs,

who also served on the JC since inception, stated the purpose was to help teachers match their

instruction to the learning needs of students. She referenced the district's SLO Guidebook in her

response, which reads: "Using SLOs allows the teacher to monitor student progress through the

year and adapt teaching methods accordingly. . . . SLOs provide teachers a map, leading the

teacher down the appropriate path for individual student success." The fact that she referenced

the actual intentions from the SLO Guidebook further bolsters the finding that JC members held

beliefs most closely aligned to the SLO Guidebook and district policy.

The central office administration did not provide any professional development sessions

that were specific to the building-level administration, so that they could collaboratively learn

about the SLO process and reach a system-wide, shared understanding of their administrative

roles and responsibilities as they led these changes within their buildings. Instead, principals who

did not serve on the JC were introduced to the SLO process by the select group of district trainers

comprised of district teachers were trained by members of the CEC and the JC. One or two

expert teachers were assigned to each school and they trained all teachers and principals in the

school. Consequently, principals begin to engage in their sensemaking alongside the majority of

the teachers. Elementary Principal, Diana Jenkins, appreciated being trained at the same time as

her teachers: "I thought was fabulous, because then we had a teacher-leader there who was also part of that training." Principal Jenkins reported that she and her teachers relied on her assigned teacher-leader. She said, "Our teacher-leader had meetings after school in the beginning, you know, to say, 'If you want to get together, I'm available in my room from 2:30 to 3:00 if you want to talk about your SLOs.'"

Because trainings were offered at the school sites and delivered by multiple individuals, the content of trainings, specific focus, and explanations of the SLO process varied across the training sessions. Middle School principal Kimble and high school assistant principal, Heather Allison, acknowledged that this approach led to variations in the ways in principals were able to make sense of the process, which potentially affected their ability to implement the system with fidelity. Ms. Kimble expressed this concern:

> Everybody should have been in the same spot hearing the same information at the same time . . . depending on who you had as a rep depended on what information that you received. As a trainer, if you didn't identify this step as an important one, then people just put down anything and then would skip it.

Mrs. Allison agreed that this approach was problematic, saying there was "miscommunication, in my opinion. Lots of different people saying one thing and then hearing another thing. I just feel like it needed a better system." In addition, as the implementation process unfolded, central office administrators did not provide specific professional development dedicated to the roles of principals as evaluators within this new system. Fidelity checks were not scheduled to ensure that principals were consistently applying the process and, as noted, separate trainings were not offered to principals so that they could learn the process together. Special education teachers were the only group of staff members to receive specialized professional development, which was provided by member of the central office administration and a CEC liaison. Principals were not included in this specialized training. Additionally, as members of an early adopting school

district, Jackson principals were unable to consult principal colleagues from other districts for guidance or support.

Other principals who were members of the JC acknowledged they were unsure about aspects of the SLO process. The district relied heavily on the CEC to provide the training of the district trainers, as they prepared to introduce the process to their district colleagues. The training model was perceived by several educators as ineffective because principals did not have consistency with learning and applying the process. High school assistant principal, Malaysia Williams, reported that the training was insufficient for both principals and teachers:

> I think the mapping out was great, but I think that teachers and administrators needed more support with this process . . . I feel I need more support and I have tons of questions when SLOs start rolling in; I don't feel like I have enough training.

Elementary assistant principal, Ms. Rice observed, "You know, it's just there's a lot of tools to it." She reported that the two teacher leaders who provided training in her school were "supposed to be the gurus" in her school. The district expectation was that both she and her teachers were to direct their questions to the teacher leaders, rather than for the principal to be seen as having sufficient expertise to lead this process within their own buildings.

During interviews, most members of the JC frequently referred to the SLO Guidebook in support of their responses. As an example, these members more regularly cited the names of forms within the SLO Guidebook, instead of simply stating, "There is a form." JC members appeared to know the steps involved in the process better than non-JC members. Ms. Rice, who was not a member of the JC, once referenced the Austin Formula by saying, "I can't remember what it is called, but basically," and she went on to describe the Austin formula. In contrast, Elementary Principal Jenkins, who was not on the JC, used broader terms, such as: "those tools,

those instruments." Thus, JC members displayed a more in-depth understanding of the overall process, including the forms.

Joint Committee members and principals Garfield and Kimble were the only two interview participants who created their own artifacts to assist them with managing the paperwork and timelines for completing SLOs. These principals' creation and extension of an additional SLO artifact may signify they have thought more in-depth about SLO implementation because to support teachers' cognition required to complete the SLO process they determined a need for an additional artifact. Mrs. Garfield used an additional tool to analyze test questions submitted by teachers, and Ms. Kimble created a special system for filing and organizing the teachers' SLOs.

The essential nature of the SLO Guidebook. All school principals were in agreement that the SLO guidebook is a robust and lengthy document, which provides in-depth descriptions and examples for using the SLO process. The SLO Guidebook is the foremost important artifact that assisted principals in sensemaking and for providing support of their own cognition while learning and implementing the process. The guidebook serves both an artifact of resources and a means for communicating changes to the SLO process. As the JC makes annual modifications to the policy, an updated guidebook is electronically sent to all teachers and principals. It is the tool used to link the initial work of the JC and the CEC to the actual practice of using SLOs.

Most principals appear to harbor a dichotomous belief regarding the application and usefulness of the SLO guidebook. Simply stated, they believe it is useful, but also perceive it as so lengthy and detailed that it is difficult to use at times. The Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Kirby, summarized the principals' frustrations when he said that is extremely comprehensive "but not the most user-friendly."

Principals appreciated the guidebook as a resource when needing clarity about the process, and they described it as "valuable," "important," "helpful," and "purposeful." Many principals explained how the first year of implementation they read each page of the SLO Guidebook so they could understand how to construct a SLO, and more recently they only reference it on an as-needed basis. When asked to give advice to school principals who may begin implementing SLOs, Mrs. Prichard said, "Make sure you know your guidebook and what your Joint Committee has established. That's huge!" She claimed that every possible form needed for the process is included in the appendices and that they are explained in the text. Five principals expressed the belief that the more completely that teachers know the guidebook, the less complications occur when completing the SLO process with those teachers. During interviews all principals reported that they regularly referenced the hard copy of their SLO Guidebook or they accessed it electronically on their computers.

Principals emphasized the necessity of timelines as an essential artifact in the SLO Guidebook. They referenced the timeline as "important," "critical," and "helpful" for completing the SLO process. During artifact conferences conducted at the beginning of the school year, two principals shared examples of weekly bulletins they had sent to teachers containing reminders about SLO deadlines. Elementary principal, Mr. Rich stated that if teachers followed the timeline correctly but happened to make errors in the associated SLO paperwork, he would have time for them to correct it before goals are "locked." Principals at all three levels, elementary, middle, and high school, explained the "burden" and "challenge" faced when teachers miss a deadline outlined in the SLO timeline and the entire process slows down. High school assistant principal, Mrs. Allison spoke of the "window of opportunity to fix their SLO" when they submit the SLO on time. Her counterpart as a high school assistant principal, Ms. Williams, shared, "when they

don't do their part on time and then they get upset when we don't do our part on time, it is just very confusing." Mr. Rich stated, "the timelines are clearly laid out in the guidebook for all teachers to access."

The SLO checklist is another important artifact used throughout the process and detailed within the SLO Guidebook. Use of the SLO checklist was noted during two artifact conferences, and it was referenced in interviews by all of the elementary principals and one middle school teacher. The high school assistant principals did not freely reference the document; however, when questioned about it they stated they too used it. The official form is titled "Meeting and Documentation Checklist" and the principal and teachers are required to write their initials as they finalize each step in the SLO process. Mrs. Jenkins summarized her thoughts on the SLO checklist with strong emotion when she stated, "It's really helpful. This is a lifesaver, I would die without this!"

Individualized sensemaking affects how principals make SLO approval decisions. Despite the timeline and checklists within the SLO Guidebook, principals each individually mentioned specific and technical considerations they use when evaluating an SLO goal for approval. Yet, the central office administrators did not place an emphasis on the nuances involved with approving the SLO process. Assistant Superintendent Cosgrove spoke of principals using SLOs to have "authentic conversations" with teachers about instruction and making SLOs "as applicable to the daily workings of the classroom as possible." She mentioned the importance of principals working with teachers on a "case-by-cases" basis to help them improve instruction rather than completing the process out of "compliance" and not just getting the "procedure right."

Principal sensemaking regarding the SLO approval stage is nuanced, with many principals emphasizing various distinctions. This phenomenon may have occurred because of the varied trainings principals received on the SLO process and the fact that principals did not have a district-sponsored training dedicated solely to their portion of the SLO approval process. Instead, principals stressed various aspects of the process. As described in the examples in this section, the school organizational level (elementary, middle, and high school) partially influenced principal sensemaking. The district SLO guidebook recommends, but does not require, teachers to use the Austin formula to "uphold high achievement." Two elementary principals referenced the Austin formula. When deciding if a goal is sufficiently rigorous, Principal Rice uses the Austin formula to "helps determine" if she should approve a goal, and "it helps you to truly get a baseline to where your students are." Principal Rich stated, "I like to use the Austin formula. It seems to work pretty well." In contrast, Principal Prichard said teachers "often times skip over that part," and she does not require them to use this formula.

At the high school level, principals appear to rely more heavily on DOK standards to help with determining whether they should approve an SLO goal. Ms. Williams described using the DOK guidelines to determine if a goal is "rigorous enough." One of her counterparts at the high school, Mrs. Allison, referenced the DOK requirement and said, "we dove into this whole document. . . . It's helpful because they have sample questions and items." In all content areas the assistant principals have asked teachers to pay attention to the DOK Level for questions on the assessments. For example, Mrs. Allison said teachers have "got to have more Level 4 questions . . . and vary the levels and make the questions a little more challenging. It's how they word it, the questions."

Two elementary principals, Mr. Rich and Mrs. Prichard, mentioned their reliance on the Rate of Improvement (ROI) that is built into most Type 1 assessments. At times they have both used the ROI to help determine if teachers had set realistic goals. Mr. Rich stated that teachers and principals have used many of the current Type 1 assessments for many years, so they have learned from experience the amount of growth to expect from the students with these types of assessments. He stated, "it's kind of cut and dry" when approving Type 1 assessments. Mrs. Prichard said when approving goals she will question, "if they are using a Type 1, did they use the rate of improvement?"

Principals at all three instructional levels referenced various technical aspects of the SLO process that necessitated a need for the teacher to revise his/her SLO before the principal could approve the goals. As an example, high school assistant principal, Mrs. Allison described how SLO goals are rarely approved the first time:

> There's usually at least something that I have to check back with them on, or they didn't fill this in correctly. And it that may not be as high or as low a percent with the first initial form. There are different forms that require more, so a lot of times they'll have not filled out something fully on the form.

Her response indicates that the approval process relies heavily on ensuring the technical aspects of the SLO process are satisfied.

Many principals tend to have their own preferences for specific formatting requirements that they emphasize to teachers. Elementary principal, Mr. Rich acknowledged some formatting issues are simply due his personal preferences:

> I'm big on using points and percentages, so a lot times I tell teachers I need you to make a revision. But it was more for my personal sanity. Points and percentages versus scale scores and things like that. So, it's just about formatting and making things look good appearance wise so it's easy to interpret.

The SLO guidebook does not stipulate if teachers should use percentages or raw point scores to display student scores. The review of collected SLOs confirmed that a variety of formats are used to define students' levels.

One year after moving into the middle school assistant principal and principal positions, Brandy Step and Ms. Kimble decided to retrain their staff on the SLO process because they disliked how the teachers formatted and completed the SLO approval process. It is important to note that Mr. Rich had been the principal at the middle school before moving to an elementary school in the district. Ms. Kimble said,

> They (teachers) didn't understand the language of the SLO, any part of that. They were giving us stuff that made no sense whatsoever, so then we had to go back to step one and train. Then we had to go back and re-train because they thought they knew what—they thought they knew, and didn't. . . . We had to go back and do it a second time because nothing got approved. Now they are trained appropriately.

The differing approaches applied by Ms. Kimble and Mr. Rich demonstrates the formal authority that principals invoke during the approval stage of the SLO process. This finding also confirms that the central office administration has not developed and implemented a consistent approach throughout the district, choosing instead to permit each principal to determine her/his own approval process.

Perceived views of accuracy and reliability of SLOs. Almost all interviewed principals expressed mild to strong beliefs that SLOs are not always accurate or reliable predictors of teachers' quality as an instructor. Most principals indicated that it is not difficult for teachers to "game the system" and generate a goal that is easy to achieve while requiring little change in instructional efforts. Elementary principal, Mr. Rich summarized a common belief when he took issue with the accuracy and reliability of the SLO process. He stated:

> It just comes to where you set that bar when you look at the student growth. I have good teachers that kind of set the line high in what their expectations are, and they might work

more at an excellent level. You know, I have some other teachers who, struggle with some of the day-to-day things I think are important in running a classroom, you look at that student growth piece, and their students showed a lot of growth. So, I think one of two things, it's either looking at it and saying are those SLO targets set a little low or is the assessment they chose to use not maybe the best assessment?

Two principals criticized the accuracy of SLOs because they are based upon only two assessments and the reliability of the assessments are not always proven. Mrs. Garfield said, "It's only two assessments. It's not a whole lot of information." Middle school principal, Ms. Kimble also pointed out that student growth is more complicated than what is often assessed. She said:

Growth to me happens in different ways. I have a lot of kids who were really good in math and science and social studies, but their emotional growth was at zero, right? But by the time they'd left and we had had social workers working with them, their emotional state had changed. So did that kid grow? Of course he did. He was going to learn anyway. He was a natural learner, but his emotional was at the bottom. So, what are we really measuring?

Only one alternative viewpoint was offered from a principal, who suggested that SLOs may accurately and reliably align with teachers' professional practice ratings. High school assistant principal, Ms. Williams explained that one teacher's performance was low as evidenced by the observation components and the SLO component of the evaluation. Ms. Williams explained, "It wasn't like she was stellar in professional practices, and bombed the SLO. It was a combination of poor performance."

Interestingly, most of the administrators in central office shared similar views regarding a lack of accuracy and reliability. Both assistant superintendents acknowledged that the SLO process lacks reliability and accuracy at rating quality teaching. They shared a story of an overachieving first year teacher who set a highly challenging SLO goal and failed to meet her goal despite strong work habits and quality instruction. As they continued to share more, it became apparent they believed that setting rigorous goals was more of an exception than a norm. Some teachers embrace the SLO practice as a challenge to encourage their own professional

performance and ultimately student academic development; however, most teachers keep it

"simple" and set easily attainable goals. Mr. Elliott stated:

> if you look at the quantifiable data, it would show that 95% of the people are meeting their SLO goals. I think that alludes to the fact that people simplify, I guess so that it doesn't have an overall negative affect on their evaluation.

Although the belief regarding the lack of reliability and accuracy of SLOs was shared among

principals and the assistant superintendents who supervise them, it appears that principals

formulated their own beliefs based upon their own personal experiences. No data suggests that

the assistant superintendents' beliefs influenced the sensemaking of principals or that the central

office administrators actively engaged with the principals to help them think through this process.

Utilization of the universal growth model. With SLOs touted as being adaptable to

measure student growth within multiple subjects and grade levels, principals were questioned

regarding how the SLO process applies to all teachers. Unanimously, principals stated that there

is at least one group of teachers or one subject being taught to whom principals find it more

challenging to administer the SLO process. In many cases the principals stated teachers who use

a performance-based assessment are the most challenging to approve because they require

students to complete a specific task and are not a traditional paper-and-pencil exam. According

to principals across all grade levels, the SLO goals of music, physical education, and special

education teachers are the most challenging to approve for this reason. Ms. Kimble stated:

> I will say out of all of them, PE is the worst to try to do SLOs in middle school, because kids don't care about crossing the line in a race. You know, because PE SLOs are all performance based. You could do a test, but how rigorous can you be about baseball questions?

Her response indicates that students' motivation is often a key factor to achieving success when

utilizing a performance-based assessment. An SLO that was voluntary provided for review was a

physical education SLO focusing on students improving their ability to stretch based upon the

President's Challenge Fitness Sit and Reach test. The teacher's growth targets ranged from students improving their ability to stretch further by reaching an additional one to four centimeters. Elementary principal, Mrs. Garfield explained that she struggles to know when to approve SLOs for her music and Spanish teachers because they are performance based and she is not as familiar with the instructional content. She said, "Any time it is performance based, I don't know if it is rigorous enough. If it is instructional with math and reading, I know it."

Application of SLOs with special education teachers. Special education teachers are given freedom to individualize SLO goals to match the various needs of their students and the content areas within the students Individualized Education Program. Three principals reported the flexibility afforded to special education teachers can make it more challenging for the administrator to approve the goal. Mr. Rich said:

> I think even sometimes looking at that special education population, where there's a little more freedom, and you're looking at teachers in special education setting individual goals. Like you're relying a lot on teachers just being professional in setting their goals. I mean, because they know their kids. I'm in those classrooms a lot, but I think sometimes that's a tough area, because the goals they're setting or the growth they're setting is much different than what you would see in say a general education setting.

Ms. Rice, an elementary assistant principal, had similar thoughts:

> A lot of times for some of those teachers [special education], they will have their goals in their IEPs, so they will connect to that. So if it is a type one assessment you have to think about how rigorous you can make it? That's what makes it tough for approving SLO goals for those types of students.

> Special education teacher, Rebecca Wright, felt that the different standard set for special education teachers does not necessarily make it easier to obtain a proficient rating. She explained:

> I think part of the time it is easier for me with SLOs, as a special education teacher, because we were kind of told we are not going to hold you to the same, not standard necessarily, but I have more leeway because I am a special educator teacher. . . . On the flip side of that, because I have such small numbers of students sometimes it then distorts some of the progress that is made. For example, on a given year I may only have

personally taught 6 to 8 kids so low numbers like that data can be skewed when some of them don't perform so well.

The unique features used to apply the SLO process to special education teachers allows for the process to work, but also distorts the reliability and consistency of every teacher being held to the same standard. Principals also find it challenging when approving special education teachers' goals because of the uniqueness of each goal.

Application of SLOs with unique teaching assignments. The SLO process does not appear to fit well for the job requirements of all certified teachers. In both observed district JC meetings, the committee discussed the challenge of applying the SLO process to deans, DIFs, coordinators, and alternative education teachers. Even though they have no classrooms and do not directly instruct students, all deans in the school district are considered teachers; therefore, they are required to complete an SLO. The middle school and high school principals said this is a challenge that they ultimately "work through" every school year. In the final JC observation in Fall 2017, the committee agreed for the remainder of the school year to work to revise the SLO Guidebook to better support principals and deans through the SLO process. They hoped that beginning in the 2018-19 school year the teachers in positions that do not work directly with students in academic areas, such as deans, could be exempt from the SLO process.

Principals have cited limitations to the SLO process for teachers of gifted and talented students because the use a Type 1 assessment does not fit well for these teachers. Mrs. Isaacs described it as a "ceiling effect" for the students because they "were topping-out of Star 360" and that the students were expected to "go, faster deeper, and farther than others." It is difficult for the teachers to set student growth goals when the students' achievement was already so high. Dr. Cosgrove added, "How do you show growth if the kid is topping out a 99%? You have to give the teachers the freedom to use something else. The flexibility to use an assessment that will

allow students to show growth." Principals reported that gifted and talented teachers have to rely more heavily on Type 2 or Type 3 assessments for their students and the SLO process.

The SLO process is oriented toward teacher success. Many principals stated the JC designed the SLOs process in a manner that allows all teachers to be successful. and that SLOs are "teacher-friendly." The rationale for such belief was twofold. First, teachers are given an opportunity to adjust their SLO goals at the midpoint in the evaluation cycle. If a teacher actively monitors his or her students' progress and notices the students are not achieving at a projected rate, then halfway through the evaluation cycle, the teacher can call a meeting to adjust the final growth goal to a lower level. Secondly, if teachers are still displeased with the student results at the end of the assessment period, the teacher is allowed to administer a second, modified assessment that allows the students another opportunity to improve the scores. High school assistant principal, Mrs. Allison stated it best when she said, "I mean, to me, if you don't excel in it, then you didn't take the time to do so!"

Principal and JC chairperson, Mrs. Prichard emphasized the system is set up to allow teachers to meet their goals because in doing so it promotes the high-quality instructional practice of using assessments to guide instruction. Mrs. Prichard said:

> The mid-year review is looking at your assessments, looking at your data, and seeing how your students are doing and looking at your growth targets and seeing if the students are on track to meet their goals. You know, if not, what other resources do I need to put in place?

Mr. Kirby's stance was similar to Mrs. Prichard's in regard to the process being set up to encourage teachers to monitor instruction and reteach when necessary; however, he was more cynical. He said, "they (teachers) will look at their SLO and they will monitor it themselves, but I think it is easier to adjust the SLO than it is to adjust your teaching. There is your true answer."

That is not to say that all teachers adjust their goals. In fact, the majority of principals reported that very few teachers request a midpoint evaluation meeting to adjust goals. At the same time, all principals reported most of their faculty members have achieved at least a proficient rating on their SLO goals. Mr. Rich said, "Almost all teachers achieve their goals." Only three principals mentioned instances in which a teacher did not achieve his/her SLO goal, and in two of these situations the teacher had set a very high and possibly unobtainable goal. The high rates of success further support the finding that the process is designed for teachers to achieve favorable results.

Research Question Two: The Sensemaking of Key Implementers Affects Operationalization of the SLO Process

Research Question Two stated: *How does the sensemaking of principals, central office administrators, and teachers affect the operationalization of the SLO process?* Sensemaking is a process of actively constructing meaning by redrafting ideas through the interaction between the individual and the element providing the uncertainty (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). Even though this question is reported after the first question, one should not assume that individuals' sensemaking sequentially occurred in the manner in which SLOs were operationalized as reported in this section. Sensemaking often occurs through retrospection (Weick, 1995). Analysis of data related to this research question resulted in four significant findings: overcoming principals' and teachers' hesitations through establishment of SLO practices, principals favor observational data over SLO data, operationalizing the approval process, and the perfunctory approach to the SLO process.

As principals and teachers began to apply the SLO process, their sensemaking continued to develop and evolve. Likewise, the manner in which SLOs were operationalized and used as a

practice also evolved, with certain aspects being emphasized by implementing agents and other aspects receiving less attention than originally conceived. The four themes discovered in this section demonstrate how all implementing agents became comfortable with the SLO process over time, yet principals reported preferring the classroom observation component over SLOs data when evaluating teachers. Principals have individually adapted their teacher evaluation practices to assimilate SLOs into the process, and with principals selectively and individually emphasizing preferred components of the SLO approval process. In conjunction with feeling more comfortable with the process and adapting it to fit their own approaches, many principals now believe that the SLO process is merely a task that is required to be completed with each teacher. Data from central office administration and principals supports these findings and provides further triangulation of these outcomes.

Overcoming principals' and teachers' hesitations through establishment of SLO practices. Teachers, school administrators, and central office administrators commonly believed the practice of using SLOs has become much easier over time. During the initial pilot year, central office administrators, principals, and teachers reported that teachers and principals felt anxiety about the process because teachers initially thought their evaluation scores would be lower. The time required to complete the process was another cited concern. Words that captured participants' feelings reflecting upon the first year of implementation include: "panic," "uncertainty," "afraid of the unknown," "stressful," "confusing," and "hesitant." During an initial meeting of the JC, middle school principal. Ms. Kimble felt so overwhelmed with the idea of overseeing the administration of the SLO process that she actually had a panic attack and was ordered by the superintendent to go to the doctor for a health evaluation. Fortunately, she survived to tell the story and has since gone on to utilize the SLO process successfully at the

middle school. Three other principals reported "pushback" and resistance from teachers during the initial implementation phase of the SLO process.

Although principals approached the first year of implementation, the pilot year, with differing levels of understanding based on their JC membership or the lack thereof, a tremendous amount of individual and organizational sensemaking occurred throughout the school year. JC members approached the SLO process with a more developed understanding of the process, while most principals and teachers learned and began to make sense of the process together as the year unfolded. Assistant principal Williams referenced the fact that she was trained alongside her teachers:

> You know if they needed help with their framework or choosing their assessment, I went through it with them, and that helped me tremendously, too, in knowing what the teachers were experiencing and going through and what they were thinking. That helped a lot.

Teachers and principals also reported challenges as they worked to understand the SLO process, match and write assessments to fit the process, and assign DOK levels to evaluation questions. High school assistant principal, Ms. Williams explained that the science and social studies teachers focused on creating their own assessments for the SLOs that aligned with the newly adopted standards for those subjects:

> I think that was challenging and difficult because a lot of that was creating their own questions and some of them weren't rigorous enough. They were going back and forth and they had to pull ELA standards into it, so then that was really hard for them, but I think, we are going into year 4 with our district and, you know, teachers just expect it. It's par for course now.

Mr. Rich reported applying the SLO process is now easier as an administrator. He stated,

> That first year was just, I think, a nightmare for us. As an administrator you're trying to figure this out and make that part of everything you do. And it was one more thing we were doing. You know, this year I just feel like the process was so smooth. . . . Everybody kind of knows what they are using for assessments and how to utilize that. . . . You can anticipate I think a little better now what students are capable of, you know, and

some realistic goals. . . . Now I think it's just kind of, you know, the norm, it's part of the process.

All principals, with the exception of the middle school principals, reported helping fewer teachers through the process in comparison to previous school years. The middle school principal stated:

> Now that we're 3 years in, it can still be overwhelming because teachers still don't understand the process. There are parts, like is it rigorous enough for them to judge as my assessment, and getting common assessments to the point where this is what we're using. That hasn't happened. You know, and so that makes it even more difficult, because we don't have the common assessments in place where everybody's agreeing. And the hard part is that you have to have all of the teachers in agreement in order for the common assessment to even be approved.

It is important to note the middle school principal and assistant principal were completing their first year as middle school administrators, and they had also expressed some frustrations that the staff was not more united in understanding the SLO process prior to their arrival at the school. The middle school also did not have the professional development offered by the CEC that the high school teachers had been provided.

All respondents stated that looking back upon implementation, they were glad the first year was a pilot year that did not affect teachers' evaluation ratings. Principal and JC chair, Mrs. Prichard stated:

> I think it was great we did a pilot year, and in that pilot we were able to explore the SLOs and the guidebook and in the pilot we were able to see what worked very well, and what we needed to adjust and change. So, I think the pilot year had a huge impact on implementing our SLOs, and it made teachers feel not as stressed because they did get to pilot it.

The remaining principals expressed similar views that the pilot year was beneficial for learning the process and adjusting their evaluation practices accordingly.

Teachers also shared positive statements about the pilot year. Middle school teacher Mindy Smith stated, "I appreciated having a no-stakes pilot year. It was nice learning how to do

it without fear of a lower evaluation score." High school teacher Courtney Gable explained the SLO process was not fully positive for her the first year because it was new to her, and "it was nice that it didn't count against our evaluation." Though "overwhelmed" initially, Wendy Johnson described the pilot year as a "much needed learning year to kind of get a handle on what was expected."

Principals favor observational data over SLO data. The majority of principals stated the preferred using the observational data generated from applying the Danielson framework and analyzing teachers' professional practices, compared to the student growth data generated by the SLO process. They described observation data as "better," "more informative," and "authentic." Elementary principal, Mrs. Garfield, said the SLO process told her less about her teachers' instructional abilities than the professional practice portion of the evaluation piece. She said, "If you have a high professional practice rating as a teacher, you're going to make your SLO goal." She did not, however, indicate that a high SLO rating automatically correlated to a high professional practice rating. Mrs. Garfield continued, "I like to focus more on professional practice," explained that she used data from the teachers' professional practice ratings to determine teachers' professional development needs.

Elementary principal, Mrs. Jenkins reported that she knows which teachers are high quality and typically make extra efforts for the students: "I don't need the SLO to tell me who is outstanding. I work with them every day and I know who my all-star teachers are." Elementary principal, Mr. Rich reported that through the use of classroom observations he can identify teachers' strengths and weakness. When asked about the reliability of the SLOs in relation to the professional practice portion of the evaluation rating, he stated:

I don't know that it's 100% accurate. I think sometimes, you know, as an administrator in and out of the classroom and observing teachers, I can identify who my stronger teachers are, who my weaker teachers are. And it's not always reflective in the results of that SLO.

Teachers provided their insights into why principals may not find the SLO portion of the evaluation as informative as the professional practice observations. Elementary teacher, Meghan Drew, spoke about "playing it safe" when constructing her SLO goal. She stated that she did not want to overextend herself by setting student growth goals that were not easily achievable. She reminded me that it was her evaluation score on the line, and while she thought she might be able to push the students a little more to achieve at a higher level, she felt more comfortable having an easily attainable SLO goal. Generating a SLO goal that can easily be mastered may hinder principals' ability to discern teacher's instructional abilities.

High school teacher, Mr. Simmons, shared that teachers often construct their SLOs using the same assessment and in the same manner each year. He also stated that at the high school level, teachers in the same departments work together to create similar SLOs. SLOs that are identical from year-to-year and even from teacher to teacher within the same subjects can quickly reduce the individualization of a single teacher's SLO. The resulting evaluation data derived from the within SLO can be less informative. Mr. Simmons reported there are "four other US History, and we all use the same common assessments, and we create everything together and then we individually fill out the same paperwork." Middle school assistant principal Mrs. Step said, "If we approved one that came through for several math teachers and it was okay, [we would say] you're all approved." Mr. Simmons reported that each year he administers the same assessments and updates the students' data before submitting his SLO, a statement that high school assistant principal, Ms. Williams, confirmed. She said, "I have had people turn in the exact same SLO they did the previous year . . . and they didn't change anything about it."

Operationalizing the approval process. In relation to how principals navigate the SLO approval process three distinct subthemes arose from the analysis of interview and SLO artifact data. Firstly, when approving SLO goals some principals work with one another during the approval process. Within this finding a difference is noted among the principals at the three organizational levels: elementary, middle, and high school. In addition, principals either proactively set a meeting with the teacher at the beginning of the SLO process to discuss the goal or they meet with the teacher if there is a question or concern. Lastly, principals prefer to seek understanding from teachers if they have questions about the rigor of a goal and principals rarely encourage teachers to set a higher student growth rate.

Approving goals individually or as a team. Because most elementary principals do not have assistant principals, they are more isolated from one other than are the middle school and high school principals. As a result, elementary principals typically do not consult with other administrators when approving SLO goals. In contrast, during the first 2 years of implementation the four high school assistant principals reviewed goals and approved goals as a team. Both assistant principals who were interviewed stated this practice was helpful and allowed for more consistency within the school; however, it was also not sustainable because it was too time-consuming to require each assistant principal to participate in the approval process of every SLO within the school. Ultimately the assistant principals decided to evenly divide teachers' SLO goals among themselves, and if challenging or unique situations were to arise with approving goals, they then seek second opinions from one another. Assistant principal, Ms. Williams said, "it was nice to work as a team on it, because you had more eyes on it . . . and then we were like, wow, this is taking time!"

At the middle school both the principal and the assistant principal find the collaborative practice of approving goals to be extremely helpful. Middle school principal, Ms. Kimble stated:

> We're probably different from other administrative teams; we do things together. When we do SLOs, especially at the first part of the year, we'll sit at that table, she sits on one side, I sit on the other, and we just throw them in the middle. And we just start working through them. So, if we have questions we just bounce it back and forth. And then it makes it a whole lot easier . . . if you have a question, you still have somebody to bounce it off of.

Assistant Principal, Mrs. Step thought this practice is so helpful that it was worth recommending to the elementary principals:

> She could be doing an SLO, and I could be doing a special ed. one, right? But because we're there together I can talk through it, and then it makes sense. Or she could talk through it and it makes sense. So, I think that that's probably a good idea, and we should probably bring that up at a principals' meeting.

Only one elementary principal mentioned consulting with a colleague when she faced a challenge with approving goals. When principal Garfield had questions about approving a questionable SLO, rather than reach out to a fellow principal, she corresponded with Mrs. Isaacs, the Curriculum Coordinator, because she believed Mrs. Isaacs had more time to assist her. She also valued Mrs. Isaacs' combined knowledge of the SLO process and curriculum.

Approving goals electronically or in person. Although principals and teachers are not required to meet formally during the approval phase, elementary and middle school principals tend to meet with the teachers to discuss the goals more frequently than the high school assistant principals. The high school principals preferred to correspond via email with their teachers to ask clarifying questions and to work through the approval process. After reviewing the goals submitted through email, the principals respond, requesting revisions or stating that the teacher can come into the office to "sign-off on" the SLO goals. Mrs. Allison mentioned, "sometimes we just can fix it, and say to them, hey, this is what we did," and then she emails them.

Elementary principals often prefer to meet in person with teachers to discuss the SLO goals and to have them make revisions. Principals appear to fall into the category of being either proactive or reactive-responsive in regard to a goal-setting meeting. Proactive principals embedded the SLO discussions into the regular initial teacher evaluation meeting held individually with each teacher being evaluated. The principal and teacher meet to discuss and plan for possible professional growth and SLO goals. As a proactive principal, Mrs. Prichard stated, "I like to have the meeting because I have to meet with them anyway if they are being evaluated, so I tie that into our conversation." She poses several questions to the teacher to help her understand the teacher's rationale for creating the goals. Mr. Rich is also a proactive principal who embeds SLO conversations into regular grade-level meetings with teachers. He explained:

> I just make it a part of my pre-evaluation conferences. I'll talk to everybody. We'll have that as part of our conversation. You know, we'll look at, say second grade, for example. I knew they collaborated, but a lot of them want to set the same goals. And even though they're using the same assessment, for me it will come down to, they're using that same assessment, but when it comes to breaking it down, you know, Teacher A and Teacher B are going to have different types of students in their classroom.

> Reactive-responsive principals wait until the goal is set or a need arises for them to

discuss the goal with the teacher. Mrs. Jenkins explained how reactive-responsive principals approach approving goals and meeting with teachers.

> You can just approve it and then go from there, yes, it is true. I think I meet with the teachers when they have questions, versus, you know, me saying, "What do you think of this, or this is how I feel." Really it goes both ways. It's not just me asking to meet. It's also the teachers wanting to sit down and kind of go over it together, looking at the assessment tool itself. You know, kind of wanting to be on the same page with the type of questioning in it, how many questions, those kinds of things.

Other examples of reactive-responsive principals included asking to meet with teachers to address minor points that needed clarity. One elementary principal described how teachers

sometimes do not use the correct form or they use it incorrectly. At those times she will pull teachers into a brief meeting to ask them to reconstruct the goal correctly. At the high school level both assistant principals referenced having to "send back" goals and have teachers rewrite goals.

The pursuit of clarification and intentions. The majority of principals prefer to have conversation with teachers if and when they have questions about a SLO goal. Principals either call for a face-to-face meeting with the teacher or send an email to seek clarity. When the principals were asked if they pressured teachers for highly rigorous SLO goals and if they required teachers to rewrite goals that may be too easily attainable, nearly all principals said they have a conversation with those teachers to seek understanding and clarify their intentions. The principals did not indicate they press teachers to create a more demanding growth target when rigor appears to be lacking. Elementary principal, Mrs. Jenkins, observed:

> If I have questions about the SLO, about the rigor, then I ask in like an accepting or discussion way, not a questioning way . . . I mean, really we want it to be set up for rigor, but really the teachers make their own goals, and if they have reasons why, how do I argue with that? I can't argue with that!

Middle school assistant principal, Mrs. Step, admitted that there were times, due to excessive demands of the job, when she has not asked teachers to change SLO goals to increase rigor. She said, "Sometimes it just depends on how hard you want to beat your head against the wall. Is it a fight worth fighting? How much energy am I going to give this now?"

Elementary principal and JC chairperson, Mrs. Prichard prefers to have teachers explain their rationale if she is unable to determine it from the SLO framework. She noted sometimes teachers skip certain parts of the required SLO framework. She emphasized the importance of having the conversation with them over ensuring they used an appropriate formula for estimating student growth gains:

At that point, I usually have a conversation with them about why they set their growth targets, just to get an idea of how and why they did it. That helps to kind of find out how the teacher came up with their goals and what they are going to do with it.

Two principals stated that they have experienced situations when teachers set the bar too high, and the principals did not feel the goals were obtainable by the students. In instances in which they felt their teachers were potentially subjecting themselves to a lower evaluation rating, both principals stated they have counseled teachers to reduce the amount of desired student growth set within the goal. Mr. Rich noted that it is often the new teachers who set unrealistic goals:

I want the teachers to be fair, because a lot of time I feel that some of our young teachers they want to come in and say, well, 100% of my students are going to do this. I say, that's great if we accomplish that, but realistically, you know, what can we accomplish from a pre-assessment, post-assessment. So, a lot of times it's just I don't want to set teachers up to fail, but at the same time I don't want to set goals that are just easily attainable either. So it's just kind of that brainstorm session together to kind of figure out some middle ground.

The principals appeared to place more value in their discussion with teachers about the goals than they did with ensuring adequate high levels of rigor were present in each SLO goal. This finding is partially attributable to the fact that many principals stated the SLO process includes assurances of rigor through the use of the DOK, Austin Formula, or the SLO Framework. When asked about how she decides to approve an SLO goal, Mrs. Prichard said, "it really helps that we have the framework. . . . The framework helps guide them to set their SLO objective." This conclusion was also confirmed when reviewing the SLO artifacts submitted voluntarily by principals.

The perfunctory approach to the SLO process. Although principals and teachers expressed their beliefs that accountability was the intended purpose for the incorporation of a student growth model within the teacher evaluation process, in practice, most teachers and many

administrators reported that some staff members were simply "going through the motions." Only two principals provided examples documenting how some staff went above and beyond to set and reach rigorous goals for student learning. Most believed other teachers were much less concerned about challenging themselves with SLO process. Seven of nine principals reported that some teachers have submitted identical SLO goals from one year to the next. In many cases this approach is understandable because the type of assessment selected for the SLO may fit the SLO process better than other assessments, and teachers may not feel comfortable deviating from it. Even with some similarity in SLO goals expected from school year to school year, the level of differentiation and uniqueness to a new class of students that should be included within the goals was not noticeable by many principals. Principal Garfield stated one limitation of SLOs is they only require two assessments, which are simply a "snapshot" of students' learning achievements. She said, "teachers are doing it out of compliance. Some will use it for their planning and instruction and stuff. But again, it's only two assessments . . . sometimes I feel like the SLOs are just a hoop we have to go through."

Principals are not the only educators who believe teachers find the practice to be perfunctory. Interviewed teachers frequently explained the nuanced steps they went through to complete their SLO, and they appeared to take pride in completing the process well. When they spoke of their perceptions of other teachers' feelings about the process, however, they were not so positive. Four out of five teachers reported that other teachers are "gaming the system," "jumping through hoops," "not buying into SLOs," or "think it's a joke." School administrators appeared aware of the teachers' beliefs, and three principals even expressed similar sentiments regarding teachers' participation. Assistant Superintendent Elliott also acknowledged this

practice: "Right now, I think it is almost an exercise that it is something we have to do, and we have to get beyond that."

Two teachers and two principals suggested they do not believe the student growth component will remain as a state requirement for much longer. They believed the law and district policy will change again and they will no longer be required to participate in the SLO process. Teacher, Mrs. Olivian stated:

> There are a lot of teachers that think the pendulum is going to swing and this is going to go away. It is a process that I am simply following through it. . . . [Others believe] these will go away eventually and I am just doing what I have to do to get through.

The other three interviewees who expressed a similar view spoke of a "rumor" that student growth evaluations would no longer be required in the next year or two. One principal shared that she had heard they were being "legislated out."

For some staff members the process remains superficial. In practice it does not appear that implementing agents in the form of principals and teachers have fully achieved two of the more meaningful goals written in the district's SLO Guidebook. The goals are listed as:

> Provides meaningful feedback to foster both professional learning and student growth that is aligned to school and district needs and professional growth goals. Consistent, purposeful, and reflective processes that foster collaboration and continuous improvement to provide focus to the district.

Most principals did not mention using data from SLO goals to drive professional development decisions within their schools or aligning the goals of teachers with grade-level goals or their school's continuous improvement goals. The only principal to consider such actions was elementary principal and JC chairperson, Mrs. Prichard. She said, "that is one thing I need to get stronger with my staff here. It's really looking at it (SLOs) and tying it in more affectively."

All interviewed principals believe teachers in Jackson have found simple ways to incorporate the SLO process into a variety of previously established school practices, which

could possibly lead principals and teachers to not fully recognize the potential benefits of the SLO process. As an example of assimilation into current practices, elementary teachers tended to favor the use of Type 1 assessments when writing SLO goals. Mrs. Prichard explained teachers favor Type 1 assessments because they were already familiar with many Type 1 assessments, they were already required, easy to grade, and can be applied to the SLO process with minimal effort. She said, "They don't have to create anything, they don't have to grade anything, they don't have to score anything. It is data that is easily accessible to them." The SLO practice of using assessments to measure student growth aligned well with the elementary teachers' practice of administering the required STAR 360 assessment three times a school year.

At the high school level, STAR 360 is not available and many teachers already used Type 2 assessments more frequently than Type 1 assessments. Within content areas teachers had already begun to develop common Type 2 assessments. High school teacher, Mr. Simmons stated:

> We had common assessments in place, but in order to meet the requirements for completing the SLO we had to do a couple of hours of tweaking and adding different standards and adding depth of knowledge questions to meet the requirements.

As stated previously, Mr. Simmons has then used the same assessment every year for his SLO.

Evidence suggests that principals' and teachers' beliefs of the SLO process have evolved over time, to a point in which they now view the process as perfunctory. Much time, energy, thought, and emotion went into the creation of Jackson's SLO policy and the subsequent implementation of the SLO process. Over time, however, many principals and teachers have begun to view it as a requirement that has to be completed as an obligatory part of the evaluation process rather than for any other purpose.

Contributing factors that have led to this belief include many of the previously stated themes within this section of the findings. The contributing themes include the reduction in anxiety and worry that implementing agents felt previously compared to the comfortability they experience with the SLO process. The fact that principals prefer observational data to SLO data and that they question the accuracy and reliability of SLO data have also reduced the value they place on the SLO process. Given that most teachers achieve success with their SLOs in Jackson and that principals individualize the approval process by deviating from the extensively outlined protocol further leads principals and teachers to view the process as perfunctory.

Research Question Three: SLOs Influence School Practices

Research Question Three stated: *Which dimensions of implementing the SLO process influence the school practices of teachers and principals?* This question examined school practices that were created or influenced by the implementation and operationalization of the SLO process. Having now implemented the SLO process for 4 years has allowed for the influential effects on school practices to develop and become institutionalized within Jackson School District. The SLO process has indeed affected the knowledge levels of implementing agents and their daily routines. I approached this question by considering outcomes produced as a result of SLO implementation, and I noted three findings. These practices influenced by the SLO process included improved assessment writing with higher order thinking questions, an increased amount of collaboration while developing and enhancing the SLO process, and an increase in time spent on the teacher evaluation process.

Improving assessment writing with higher order questions. The SLO process advanced principals', and some of the teachers', knowledge of assessment writing. It also provided a platform for introducing the DOK concept. Teachers reported that prior to SLO

implementation they were not "assessment writers" or "experts in testing." Although some still proclaimed they are not assessment specialists, all participants agreed SLOs have required teachers to think more about assessments and to improve their proficiency with writing assessments. Middle school DIF teacher, Ms. Johnson, said, "They had to create the tests, and a lot of teachers aren't trained in writing assessments. So, they were writing basic recall tests without Depth of Knowledge." She explained how the district was just beginning to focus on improving assessment writing at the same time discussions were beginning regarding the SLO process.

Elementary principal, Mrs. Garfield, highlighted how the SLO process helped her teachers gain an understanding of DOK questions. She said, "I feel like our teachers have a good feel on leveled questions, and we are constantly working on getting better questions, because it's a shift. I do think the SLO process has been good in that way." Elementary teacher, Mrs. Drew, does not work within Mrs. Garfield's school. She said, "I consider the difficulty level [DOK] of questions in other assessments, too, especially science and social studies tests." She stated she does not use the DOK as regimentally in the other tests she writes and administers compared to the specific requirements in the SLO process. She now considers the difficulty level of questions as a factor when writing tests, and she loosely applies the DOK concept to these assessments.

Mrs. Isaacs, the district Curriculum Coordinator, said she believes the high school teachers understood and used assessments that related more directly to the instructional standards they teach, as compared to elementary school teachers who still need more training in writing authentic assessments. She stated elementary teachers are still challenged by writing common assessments, "but we are getting better and those are getting better and better. I think that may be more of an elementary issue than a high school issue." Responding to a question about the

benefit of implementing SLOs, elementary Principal Jenkins said, "I think it helped us write assessments."

High school and middle school administrators believed teachers have an increased understanding of DOK questions and teachers are better able to write more complex questions into common assessments. The high school assistant principals highlighted the extensive efforts by the CEC to train teachers on writing high-quality assessments for SLOs. At the middle school level, Ms. Kimble indicated she often has conversations with teachers regarding why the teacher believes a question is at a specific DOK level. When asked specifically about positive effects on school practices that are derived from the SLO process, assistant high school principal Mrs. Step stated:

> I want to say that it has made individuals look at the different levels of rigor for their questions, right? Because you have to have so many questions at the different levels. So. maybe I think some of our people had been using Level 1 questions for their tests, and that's all they were using. I think it also has made them think about the different levels of questioning. Now, in all content areas, they're saying, "I should have more of a Level 4 question for, you know, varying the levels and making the questions a little more challenging." . . . I believe it has made people think more about how they ask questions and what the questions look like and that they are different levels.

Many principals made statements confirming SLOs have influenced teachers' understanding and use of assessment data. Elementary principal, Mr. Rich, pointed out that through setting specific assessment goals for their students, teachers are more likely to consider students' current achievement levels. He said, "I think it's forcing teachers to look a little more at their own class roster and making some teaching decisions, versus what do we expect for grade level groups." Middle school principal, Ms. Kimble also observed an increase in teachers utilizing SLO assessment data and conversing among content level teams.:

> I would say that it [SLOs] actually causes teachers to take a look at kids and it does actually ask them to look at the data. Which I think that if there wasn't an SLO process, that they'd leave that up to the principal to look at the data and look at their kids and look how they're growing.

She continued, explaining that teachers have more common assessment data to use during collaborative discussions.

Mrs. Prichard offered an alternative perspective, stating that teachers do not use the assessment data regularly enough to modify their instruction. She stated, "Even though we progress monitor, my teachers don't look at their data like they should. So, Type 1 really isn't informative for them. It can be, but they don't use it that way." She further added that one of her next goals, as well as a district goal, is to help elementary teachers continue to develop Type 2 assessments.

Developing the SLO process increased collaboration time. At the high school level the SIG provided the funding to provide teachers a new collaboration period with their colleagues who teach the same subjects. This change occurred simultaneously to the development of the SLO process and creation of common Type 2 assessments. Common assessment development and analyzing the resulting student data became the focal point of the common collaboration period discussions. Many high school teachers and principals emphasized the benefit of common collaboration in conjunction with the SLO work. High school teacher, Mrs. Wright said:

> There have been more conversations on how I have taught lessons and this is how it went in my classroom: How could I better my lesson versus someone else? There has been more of a conversation of how the assessments and lessons have been going in the classroom and how maybe one teacher has done better on that area than other teachers, and we talk about how we can help each other out. There have been those kinds of conversations.

Similarly, Assistant Superintendent Cosgrove stated, "I think the SLO process is what we are using to have the conversations about when they see problems with student growth." High School assistant principal, Ms. Williams mentioned that teachers have common collaboration time and believes they focus on conversations related to other assessments, not just the ones used for the SLO. She said, "in essence, depending on what content you teach, an SLO is a common

assessment, but I don't think they focus on that SLO as much as they do the other formative and summative assessments." She stated that unfortunately administrators are not observing or participating during many of these collaboration times because of other obligations and time demands. However, she did state that the SLO process has increased collaborative conversations among instructional teams.

Three elementary principals agreed that SLOs have increased collaboration within their buildings. In most cases they were referencing collaboration between teachers in the same grade level because of the use of common assessments. Mr. Rich, however, also mentioned that the SLO process has allowed him to have more conversations with teachers about student growth and for him to inquire about student progress while attending collaboration meetings:

> At the elementary level for sure there's a struggle for PLC [collaboration] time. So, this [SLOs] kind of forces teachers to, you know, collaborate together. You know, a lot of my grade-level staff are using the same assessment, so it forces them to meet, look at their students, kind of go over what kind of growth should we anticipate, review their data. It definitely has improved collaboration. I would say the rewarding part is just it's a resource to create some really positive conservations, not only between administrator and teacher, but you know, when I meet with grade levels it's kind of—it's talking points, so getting teachers to look at their data.

At the elementary level, Mr. Rich expressed the strongest positive opinion toward the role of the SLO process played in increasing collaboration time. Elementary principal, Mrs. Garfield mentioned the Response to Intervention (RtI) process initially improved collaborative conversations and the SLO process simply fits into what her teachers were already doing during RtI-based collaborations. She said, "It's still a focus on assessments and how students are performing."

Evidence exists from the voluntarily submitted and analyzed SLOs that collaboration occurred while the teachers were developing assessments and setting SLO goals. In regard to a reference to the reading assessment used for the SLO, one teacher wrote, "It is the assessment

that has been created by the design team for the intervention to measure student growth." A

mathematics teacher wrote, "I will use the Common Type 3, eighth grade pre-algebra assessment

created by the eighth grade team. This assessment has been created, piloted, revised, and used to

ensure it is aligned and accurate." A third teacher wrote, "The assessment is aligned with state

standards and has been discussed by Mr. Henderson and me." Mr. Henderson taught the same

subject as the teacher who submitted this SLO. All of the analyzed SLOs using Type 2 or Type 3

assessments referenced collaboration among content teams, but the SLOs that involved Type 1

assessments did not reference collaborations with colleagues.

Assistant Superintendent Kirby stated the SLO process aligns with the overall vision for

instruction that he has shared with principals, but the SLO process is only one among many

district initiatives that will help improve instructional practices. He stated the SLO process is not

his sole focus:

> I'm asking the classroom principals and teachers, "How does that data change what you are doing tomorrow with the group of students you currently teach," and to me, that is an SLO. I'm working on the classroom instruction, the daily assessment, the weekly assessment, the unit assessment, the grade level assessment, and I think that translates into an SLO. So, I think that those two are going to mesh and meet each other, but I am working on the other end of it. This is my backdoor approach into an authentic SLO. I am manipulative in the way that I am trying to get what is happing in the classroom right by using authentic data, which will translate into strong SLOs.

High school teacher, Ms. Johnson, gave evidence that this belief at the top of the organizational

hierarchy is also reaching into the teacher level. When asked, "What do you think your

administrators would say the purpose of the SLO process is?" she stated:

> I would say that they want us to use it. I would say they have used it as a piece of the larger process. It is part of our evaluation, it is part of the PLC [collaboration], it is part of teaching in general, so they have kind of made it a back and forth. There are those times when it is like, "You have to get this done, let's get this in, we have to use this!" And then the other part, where we sit down for these more informal meetings. My evaluator has said, "have you looked at the SLO from one semester to the next, and what did you do differently here?"

SLOs provide another avenue for teachers and principals to engage in conversations about student growth and instruction.

Committing time to the SLO process. Building-level administrators unanimously agreed the SLO process has increased the amount of time they spend working on each teacher's evaluation. They were also in agreement that much of the additional time for the SLO process occurs at the beginning of the evaluation period when they are approving SLO goals. During the initial pilot year of implementation, a significant amount of time was also dedicated to professional development and teacher training throughout the entire year. Assessment writing, procedures for completing the SLO process, and how to establish appropriate goals were topics of professional development sessions the first year of implementation. Now that the teachers and principals are more familiar with the SLO process, it is taking less time than it did the first and second years, but still more time is required for the evaluation process than before the introduction of SLOs.

Principals agreed that the SLO process requires more time and effort early in the evaluation cycle so they can review goals and, when necessary, meet with teachers to adjust SLO goals. Principals described it as "very time consuming" and taking "a lot of time." Estimates of the amount of time ranged from 20 minutes more per teacher to a total of 6 hours more at the beginning of the evaluation cycle. Once the goals are approved in the initial period, principals' views differed regarding the remaining time requirements spent on completing the SLO process. High school assistant principal, Ms. Williams, described the time commitment:

> I think in the beginning when teachers are submitting SLOs, that part when you are going through and reading them, and going through to make sure they are right, that part is time consuming, but the rest after that is fairly easy and smooth. The initial goal like at the beginning of the year when we start getting those individual assessments turned in for evaluator approval that does take time, because they all come in at once.

During a site observation principal Kimble shared her large filing crate that contained all her SLO goals, which were organized by teacher, for her more than 80 teachers. She stated the organization factor was time consuming.

Although teachers have the option to meet with the evaluator at the midpoint of the SLO cycle to review and update their target goals, most teachers do not exercise this option. Elementary and middle school principals appeared to meet with teachers more frequently at this stage than did high school principals. Principals who did meet with teachers at the midpoint of the evaluation process, unsurprisingly, reported additional time commitments for these meetings.

Upon reviewing artifacts used throughout the SLO process, it is apparent the SLO process takes time to complete additional paperwork and for the teacher and for the principal to review the paperwork. Of the six SLOs that were voluntarily provided by the interviewees, two included only two pages of accompanying paperwork, consisting of the "SLO Framework—Teacher Form." The other four SLOs were 6-13 pages in length, and three included a copy of the actual assessments given to the students. An assessment approval tool was required to be completed by the administrator, because these were Type 3 assessments. Interviewees noted the time required for completing the additional paperwork. Mr. Simmons described the burden of SLOs as including "a lot of paperwork time." Principals described it as "unnecessary paperwork," "more time involved," and "very time consuming."

The issue of the extensive time investment for the evaluation process was discussed in-depth during the second JC observation. During this meeting the administrators stated the district requires six observations each school year for non-tenured teachers. Coupled with the SLO process, the administrators stated it was overwhelming to conduct three observations each semester for a total of six throughout the school year. One principal stated, "I'm literally getting

done with one, and going right onto the next." The JC discussed ways to reduce the workload for both principals and teachers. Regarding reducing the evaluation requirements, the teachers' union president stated, "you will have no objection from the JEA" [Jackson Education Association]. As the meeting was concluding, the JC reaffirmed their authority to be able to make changes to the SLO process and the evaluation process. Central office administrators intended to consult with the school district lawyer, and the committee planned a future meeting to continue to consider ways to reduce the workload for administrators and teachers. They did not speak to specifics and it is unclear how such changes may affect the SLO process, if at all.

Summary

This chapter presented findings that were derived from this case study of the SLO process at Jackson School District. The data were used to answer research questions regarding the sensemaking of principals while implementing the SLO process, how the sensemaking affected the operationalization of the process, and the overall effect on school practices. The theoretical framework, which provided the lens of analysis, was derived from sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005), the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002) and distributive cognition (Halverson & Clifford, 2006). Findings noted principals' beliefs about the SLO policy, how they apply SLOs to practice, and their overall depth of understanding. Yet, the central office leaders were not intentional in providing professional development that was specifically targeted to principals, to assist them with gain clarity on the SLO process and to provide administrative consistency with implementation. Furthermore, principals reported overcoming challenges with implementation, preferring observational data compared to SLO data and relying on conversations with teachers when questioning rigor of goals. The principals perceived that the process had become yet another requirement for them to complete, further

adding to the increasing complexity of their administrative roles. Teachers and principals have found SLOs improve assessment-writing skills, increase collaboration time, and require a significant amount of time for completion.

Chapter Five

Summary, Discussion, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the research study, including an overview of the problem statement, the research methodology, and the major findings. The discussion section captures insights into the findings through the application of the theoretical framework and the literature review. Implications and recommendations are made for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars.

Summary of the Research Purpose and Methodology

This study was conducted to examine the sensemaking of principals involved with the implementation of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) within Illinois' revised teacher evaluation system. With the intention of contributing to the body of research on policy implementation, specifically related to the SLO process, data were collected using a single-site case study approach. In an effort to gather the in-depth perspectives from principals, the study was conducted within one Illinois school district that had implemented the SLO process for multiple school years. Principals typically play an essential role as policy implementers within the school system; therefore, this study examined multiple principals' perspectives on sensemaking throughout implementation and incorporation of SLO policies into school practices.

The conceptual framework utilized for the study integrated three theoretical frameworks: the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), and distributive cognition theory (Halverson & Clifford, 2006). This framework takes into consideration the implementer's sensemaking abilities and analyzes cognitive influences that affect her/his decision making when executing portions of the policy (Spillane et al., 2002). Aspects of Weick's sensemaking framework (1995) offer further insights regarding how

individuals draft and redraft sensemaking while socially interacting within the organizational context (Weick et al., 2005). The distributed cognition framework allows for analysis of environmental artifacts as a means for forming and applying cognition (Halverson & Clifford, 2006; Hutchins, 1995). Through the merger of these three theoretical frameworks, a conceptual framework was employed to address the following research questions:

1. What meanings and understandings do principals construct regarding the SLO process and how the process is implemented?

2. How does the sensemaking of teachers, principals, and central office administrators affect the operationalizing the SLO process?

3. Which dimensions of implementing the SLO process influence the school practices of teachers and principals?

The Jackson School District, a large urban district in Illinois, served as the site for the case study. Due to the requirements embedded within a School Improvement Grant, the school district adopted and began implementing the SLO student growth model before the vast majority of Illinois public school districts. Data for the study were collected during the conclusion of the third year and beginning of the fourth year of SLO implementation. Data collection methods included interviews with principals, assistant principals, teachers, and central office administrators. Data also were gathered during artifact conferences with principals, observations of JC meetings, and through the collection and the review of SLO artifacts.

Findings

A brief summary of the findings is described in this section and presented in response to each of the three guiding research questions. The findings uncovered the sensemaking of principals as they were engaged with implementing the SLO process and incorporating it into practice. The findings also explored how principals' sensemaking affected the implementation process, and how SLOs subsequently affected various school practices. Findings primarily were

derived from interview data, and observational data and artifact analysis data allowed for triangulation and the creation of the final findings.

Research Question One: What Meanings and Understandings Do Principals Construct Regarding the SLO Process and How the Process is Implemented?

Seven themes were noted while analyzing data on principals' sensemaking: training, implementation, and principal sensemaking; the perceived intent of the SLO policy; the essential nature of the SLO guidebook; principals' individualizing the SLO approval process; perceived views of accuracy and reliability of SLOs; utilization of the universal growth model; and the SLO process oriented toward teacher success

Principals began to make sense of SLO polices as either members of the JC or through the district-provided train-the-trainer approach that involved teacher leaders in each building simultaneously training teachers and principals. Principals on the JC reported more in-depth sensemaking for the SLO process and their thoughts aligned closely to the descriptions of the process and intended purpose outlined within the SLO guidebook. JC members described the various SLO artifacts and the timeline within the SLO Guidebook in greater detail. Other principals who were not on the JC stated they believed the teacher leaders who served as trainers throughout the district undertrained them, and some continued to have questions about the process. Separate trainings for principals to focus on inter-rater reliability and to establish consistency in application of the process did not occur.

Evidence from the interviews suggested principals believed the SLO process was forged out of a larger movement for accountability. When asked about the rationale for participating in the SLO process, most interviewees reported an opinion that identified the legislative mandate and the onus of responsibility for student growth being placed upon educators. Only two

administrators suggested a different viewpoint, stating the intent and rationale for the SLO process lies with the focus on enhancing instruction through increasing professional development and the use of student data to drive instruction. Although accountability was an initially perceived policy message, the practice of applying SLOs for the primary purpose of accountability was not detected.

When completing the SLO process, principals reported relying upon the district SLO Guidebook as a key artifact for navigating the various requirements of the policy. Principals cited challenges with the robustness of the guidebook; however, they also voiced the importance of using the guidebook throughout implementation. Most principals reported during the pilot year they read the guidebook and actively used it to cognitively assist them through each step in the SLO process. After familiarizing themselves with the process, the principals used the guidebook only occasionally, when needed. Most principals viewed the SLO guidebook as the essential artifact for understanding and implementing the SLO process.

When approving goals, principals relied on the technical aspects of the approval process, citing individual and personal preferences they emphasized to their teachers regarding how the process should be completed. Upon analysis of different SLOs that principals accepted and approved from various teachers, it was clear many variations were acceptable. As mentioned, the SLO process is designed to universally meet the student growth evaluation requirements for all different teachers from all grade levels and content areas. In this manner the process has flexibility and is adaptable. Principals also appeared to emphasize their individual preferences when approving goals. An example was evidenced when interviewed principals reported their opinions regarding if student data were submitted in percentage form or raw number form.

As an evaluation tool for determining a teacher's instructional abilities, principals believed the SLO process lacked accuracy and reliability; teachers and central office administration also shared this viewpoint. Three years into implementation, assistant superintendent Kirby estimated that 95% of teachers annually meet their SLO goals. This belief was supported by principal interview data. Additionally, principals reported teachers commonly submit the same SLO format, including the assessments and similar goals, each school year. This may lead principals to dismiss SLOs as a valid accountability tool because SLO goals appeared similar from year to year.

The SLO process was designed to meet the universal need for assessing student growth among all types of teachers employed within the school district. Principals, however, found it challenging to evaluate goals written by teachers in certain disciplines, particularly those written by special education teachers, DIFs, deans, language, and music teachers. When the instructional area was outside of a principal's knowledge base, or when a goal was a performance-based goal, principals found it challenging to determine if they should approve the goal. Special education teachers were allowed the greatest flexibility designing and setting SLO goals that specially matched individual students' needs, and principals stated it is more difficult to determine the amount of expected growth for students who have special needs.

Principals consistently stated the SLO process in Jackson was designed for teachers to achieve success in the student growth portion of their evaluation rating. To support this viewpoint, many principals highlighted the option for teachers to modify their student achievement goals before the SLO process is completed. Teachers were permitted to reduce their student growth targets during a conference midway through the school year. Furthermore, principals pointed out if a teacher was not satisfied with the levels of student growth toward the

end of the evaluation cycle, the teacher could reteach and reassess students with a similar assessment. Because modifications for reaching the student growth goals could be made, principals believed the process was oriented to promoting teachers' successes.

Research Question Two: How Does the Sensemaking of Teachers, Principals, and Central Office Administrators Affect the Operationalizing the SLO process?

Data from interviews, artifact conferences, JC observations, and a review of relevant artifacts produced four themes: overcoming principals' and teachers' hesitations through establishment of SLO practices, principals favored observational data over SLO data, operationalizing the approval process, and the perfunctory approach to the SLO process.

During the onset of the SLO policies and the development within the district, many teachers and principals reported fear and hesitation about the process, which was made apparent by the belief that the SLO process was created to hold educators accountable for student growth. Teachers feared lower summative evaluation ratings, and principals worried about the amount of time involved in completing the SLO process. Over the course of the 3-year implementation period and through experiencing the practice of SLOs, the initial angst and worry diminished. Having a pilot year in which participants did not receive an evaluation score helped ease some of the initial trepidations. Most principals and teachers stated they now need less support throughout the process than they did during the initial phase.

Although principals applied the SLO process to the teachers' summative evaluation ratings, most conveyed a preference for using the observational component of the evaluation process for formulating a judgment on teachers' instructional abilities. This common opinion may have partially manifested from the viewpoint participants held regarding the lack of reliability and accuracy of the SLO process. Based upon their experiences with formal

observations, informal observations, and daily interactions with teachers, most principals agreed the observational component was more informative and allowed them to better recognize quality teaching. The observational component in Jackson requires the use of the Danielson rubric (Danielson, 2013). The rubric involves principals gathering evidence from 22 different components of a teacher's professional practice, and it provides principals more evidence by requiring them to extract more cues from the classroom environment than the SLOs. Similarly, many interviewees pointed out the SLO process required using data from only two student assessments, which they perceived as a deficiency.

The operationalization of the approval process varied among principals across schools and grade levels. Elementary principals tend to approve goals on their own, and middle school and high school principals often approved goals in administrative team sessions or as partners. Principals generally fell into two categories: proactive or reactive-responsive. Proactive principals met with teachers to discuss and go over SLO goals at the beginning of the school year, and reactive-responsive principals waited to meet with teachers until the need arose, if ever. Rather than relying solely upon the SLO artifacts, when principals had questions they corresponded electronically or in person with teachers to learn more about their thought processes regarding the SLO goals.

Principals, teachers, and central office staff appeared to approach the SLO process as a perfunctory practice. Principals and teachers described completing the practice in a mundane manner with a focus on meeting the required timelines for each step in the process. The SLO process has become a part of their routine evaluation requirements. They participate in the process; however, the deeper meanings and purposes of the SLO process outlined in the district's SLO Guidebook have not fully reached fruition. Outside of the evaluation routine, the SLO

process did not appear to affect principals' decision making regarding staff professional development or school continuous improvement planning. In some instances the teachers and principals reported the SLO process has become superficial.

Research Question Three: Which Dimensions of Implementing the SLO Process Influence the School Practices of Teachers and Principals?

Despite not achieving some of the goals as intended by the SLO Guidebook, implementing the SLOs has influenced aspects of daily school practices for principals and teachers. Interviewees believed teachers were thinking more about the use of assessments to guide instruction and teachers have become more skilled at writing assessments that include higher order questions. Collaboration has also increased as a result of the SLO process, and the time required to complete the evaluation process also has increased.

Implementing the SLO process has enhanced principals' and teachers' knowledge and understanding about using and writing assessments. The DOK concept, which is required as a part of Type 2 and Type 3 assessments, was introduced largely due to the requirements embedded in the district SLO policy. When writing an agreed-upon Type 2 course assessment, teachers readily applied the DOK concept during the pilot year and the second year of implementation. By increasing the use of assessment data and through the application of the DOK concept, the understanding and knowledge has increased for all implementing agents. Interview data from all three central office administrators and the DIF teacher demonstrates progress has been made with understanding, writing, and using assessments, but there was also room for growth in this area. It appeared the SLO process served as a catalyst for initially advancing the use and understanding of assessments.

Related to teachers' knowledge of assessments, the amount of time collaborating in grade levels, content areas, and among teachers and principals increased as a result of implementing the SLO process. Especially in the early phases of implementation, teachers met more frequently to discuss student assessment results and goals. Some principals reported the SLO process provided a platform for having discussions with teachers regarding student achievement. Collaboration time increased the most at the middle school and high school levels because those teachers now have a built-in collaboration period into their daily schedules.

It was evident that the requirements of completing the SLO process have increased the amount of time principals and teachers devote to the evaluation process. The completion of SLOs requires more time for reflection, time, and paperwork. This finding was noteworthy based upon the high number of interviewees who referenced the increased amount of time spent completing the evaluation process and corresponding paperwork. Members of the JC also reported concerns during JC meeting observations; the JC members then charged themselves with seeking ways to reduce the amount of time required for completing the evaluation process in the future.

Discussion

This study investigated principals' sensemaking while implementing and operationalizing the SLO process in schools across one early adopting school district and analyzed aspects of the SLO process that affected school practices. With consideration given to principals' situated context of implementing a policy ultimately overseen by central office administrators and with required participation of teachers, interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and central office administrators. In an effort to identify principals' sensemaking throughout the implementation phase and when applying the SLO policies into practice, I developed a

conceptual framework derived from the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), and distributive cognition theory (Halverson & Clifford, 2006). With the incorporation of the empirical literature regarding SLOs and policy implementation theory, this framework highlights the individual principal's sensemaking within the context of the larger organization, the perceived policy intentions, and the meaningful artifacts developed for SLO application. All three tenants of the cognitive framework informed the development of these findings: the role and representations of the policy, the implementers' situational context, and the individual cognition and affective state of implementers (Spillane et al., 2002). Sensemaking is naturally embedded into the cognitive framework for implementation and distributive cognition theory, and it is explored through these utilities. Through the application of the framework used to analyze and examine the results of this study, this section explores findings derived from the research questions.

Policy design. Spillane et al. (2002) stated, "Although policies cannot construct understanding for implementing agents, the message and design of policies influence implementing agents' sense-making efforts" (p. 414). At the beginning stages of policy crafting the CEC helped set the course for Jackson JC to adopt an SLO policy as a method for addressing the student growth teacher evaluation requirement. Other student growth models were not considered as options and the option to use a shared attribution model within the SLO process was also not considered. A shared attribution model used within the SLO process allows the district, school, or the grade levels to set a common goal for all teachers (Gagnon et al., 2017). While the participatory manner in which principals and teachers individually set goals during the SLO process is proclaimed as an advantage (Gill et al., 2014; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014), the Jackson principals were left to make sense of the complexities of SLO practices. The principals

struggled while making sense of the robust 72-page SLO guidebook, individually applying the process with each teacher, and carrying out the process with teachers that serve in unique teaching roles. Both the design of the policy and the manner in which principals received training with their teachers, necessitated that principal sensemaking occurred individually and in isolation from other principals. The isolation felt by principals was further compounded by the fact that Jackson was an early adopting district and principals within the district were among some of the first in the state of Illinois to implement SLO polices. It is possible that the adoption of a different type of student growth model or the incorporation of a common goal within Jackson's SLO model might have reduced the depth of sensemaking principals experienced.

While one of the JC's guiding principles was to "foster collaboration and continuous improvement to provide focus to the district," there were few examples of the SLO policy being designed as a means for improving collaboration. The primary design of the Jackson SLO policy is to measure student growth for all teachers, and the SLO Guidebook is almost entirely dedicated to describing the process. Only half a page in the entire 72-page SLO guidebook highlighted how the collaborative process is embedded into Jackson's SLO process. Despite the promise that SLOs can improve collaboration between teachers and administration and promote reflective thinking that generates professional growth (ISBE, 2014a), the design of the Jackson policy appears to give little attention to this added benefit of using the SLO process.

Role and representations of SLO polices. The perceived role of the SLO policy and how the policy is represented significantly affected implementation and sensemaking (Spillane et al., 2002). Almost unanimously, participants at all hierarchical levels of the Jackson School District believed a desire for teacher and educator accountability prompted the legislative mandate that required the adoption of the district's SLO policy. Considering central office

administrators held this view, it is plausible their beliefs and positions at the top the district

organizational hierarchy affected and helped frame the accountability belief for the principals.

Empirical research has previously highlighted the belief of accountability as a rationale for more

general teacher evaluation policy reforms (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Hallgren et al., 2014;

McGuinn, 2012; Murphy, Hallinger, & Heck, 2013; Ovando & Ramirez, 2007). Interview data

and artifact analysis suggested the common and preexisting belief in accountability as the

purpose for teacher evaluations, stemmed from principals' schemas prior to the introduction of

the district's SLO policy adoption. A person's prior knowledge affects how new information is

understood and applied when individuals encounter new information, because they use their

current knowledge base to make sense of the new information (Spillane et al., 2002).

The perceived legislative intent for accountability did not appear to transfer to the actions

of central office administrators, JC members, or those responsible for training staff within the

school district. In practice principals did not appear to enact SLO policies with the sole intent of

ensuring that teachers were accountable for student learning gains. Principals were observed

holding teachers accountable to the SLO process itself, in the form of adhering to timelines, and

ensuring teachers completed all required forms for the process. The cognitive framework offers

insight as to why principals and central office administrators may have avoided emphasizing

student growth accountability during SLO implementation. The framework explains values,

emotions, and motivation interplay with cognitive reasoning when adopting new policies, and

implementers tend to gravitate to behaviors that have led to positive outcomes or allow them to

avoid negative experiences (Spillane et al., 2002).

The universal application of SLOs to all types of teachers is one policy representation

found in the research that loosely transferred to the application of the policy within Jackson.

Student Learning Objectives are proclaimed by many to be an adaptable and universal system for assessing student growth across all categories of teacher assignments (Gill et al., 2013; Gill et al., 2014; ISBE, 2014a; Lachlan-Haché et. al., 2012b). In general, principals were able to apply the SLO process to all teachers; however, they were challenged when applying the process to a few position types, such as deans, DIFs, and special education teachers. The Jackson SLO policy designed broadly enough to be applicable to most teaching positions. Using Hill's (2006) suggestion of analyzing the representational forms of the policy in the SLO Guidebook, I noticed statements, examples, objectives, goals, and other supporting documents that made it simple for principals to apply the SLO process to the majority of their faculty members. However, principals find it more difficult to apply the process to those on the boundaries of the definition of teacher, such as deans and DIFs. Spillane et al. (2002) would categorize the application of the policy with these teachers as a more difficult "second level of change" because it must "be incorporated into existing schemas and frameworks rather than undermining them" (p. 415). Principals are more familiar with using assessment data and understanding student growth schemas when applied to those teachers who directly instruct students or who teach content areas with which they are most familiar. It is very challenging for principals to make sense of how to hold those teachers who do not directly instruct students accountable to a standard measurement of student growth.

Principals' situated context. Principals are uniquely positioned to significantly affect the implementation of policies within schools (Hope, 2002; Koyama, 2014; Spillane et al., 2006; Spillane et al., 2011). In the case of SLO implementation within Jackson, principals were largely removed from leadership roles during the early phases of training and implementation throughout the school district—despite the fact that they would be responsible for assisting

teachers with the development of SLOs and ultimately approving them for each faculty member. Teachers within the school district who were selected to serve as trainers provided the initial training for the majority of principals and teachers. The JC and CEC sanctioned the group of trainers and their role as key implementers, and thus, nullified the principals' primary role as important implementing actors. Principals' situational context and relation to the JC affected their sensemaking more so than their formal positions as administrators; the few principals who served on the JC displayed a greater amount of sensemaking regarding SLO polices than those who did not serve on the JC. All Jackson principals were uniquely situated as early adopters of SLO polices.

Implementation research supports the finding that those closest to the original development of the policy understand and apply the process closer to the original intent. Those principals and teachers on the JC formed a "discourse community" (Hill, 2006, p. 65), which interprets and applies meaning to policies, and in turn, rephrases the policy with new or refined language specific to their working environment. In addition, those positioned within close proximity to each other, in comparison to the other members of larger organization, tend to assist each other while making sense of the policy (Spillane et al., 2002). Sensemaking is, after all, "ongoing" and "social" (Weick, 1995). In Jackson, I observed principals nested within multiple implementation groups. Principals fell into categories defined by their JC status, grade levels, and ability to operate in close proximity to other principal colleagues. These various groups provide a situational context for principals and create discourse communities that uniquely make sense of new policies together (Spillane et al., 2002).

To aid in the successful implementation of a new teacher evaluation process, Derrington and Campbell (2015) found that principals have a need for ongoing and open communication

with the overseeing district office administrators who are knowledgeable of the new practices being implemented. Furthermore, it is critical for implementers to receive structured professional development opportunities that allow them to jointly construct meaning, assign interpretations to the policies and the associated practice, and reach consensus on the overall district aims and process (Spillane et al., 2002). In Jackson, principals received little to no formal guidance or professional development from central office administrators. This lack of training may partially be due to transitions that took place with a retiring and then newly hired superintendent and assistant superintendents after the initial pilot year, it nonetheless resulted in administrative sensemaking varying significantly from principal to principal. The training that principals received along with their teachers was focused entirely on the steps and methods involved in completing the SLO process, and the trainings did not address ways to use the SLO process to improve collaboration, enhance instruction, and unify the teaching staff around common goals. A "discourse community" comprised solely of principals and central office administrators was never formally created or naturally established, which resulted in uneven levels of sensemaking, understanding, and implementation. The practice of providing meaningful learning opportunities, as opposed to simply communicating the policy to implementing agents, can help support the agent's ability to match the result of the policy to the intended design (Spillane et al., 2002).

Principals' cognition, sensemaking and understanding of the SLO practice.
Although principals did not receive uniform training as a whole group, this fact alone does not explain the differences in how principals independently made sense of the SLO policies. It is not uncommon for implementing agents to interpret reforms in different manners (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). In some cases this variation is due to a different level or manner of exposure

to the policy or the complexity of the resulting actions involved with applying the policy (Spillane et al., 2002).

Implementing and completing the SLO process is complex and involves multiple aspects of cognition. Consistent with prior research, I discovered principals often questioned the SLO approval process (Gill et al., 2013; Lachlan-Haché, 2015; Slotnik et al., 2014). It was also apparent principals individualized the approval process within their schools and tended to focus on more superficial aspects of the process, such as ensuring timelines were met, or expressing a preference for how teachers represented student growth values in percentage or whole number form, rather than to address the goal of assisting teachers with demonstrating student learning gains. Given this limited training and understanding of SLOs, it was not surprising that principals, as a group, did not lead building-wide faculty conversations to help their faculties collectively reach shared understandings of the purpose and process. Implementation research has confirmed that enactment of complex polices that require a substantial amount of change in professional practices are more difficult to successfully implement than are those policies requiring only superficial changes (Spillane et al. 2002). I concluded it was much easier for principals and teachers, as implementing agents, to simply go through the steps of the SLO process than it was for them to personally and consistently assign a deeper meaning to their efforts. Although positive outcomes on a professional practice were observed in the forms of increased collaboration in schools and a greater development of understanding for the use of assessments, most principals believed these changes were merely circumstantial and not directly attributable to their leadership through the SLO implementation process.

Principals stated a preference to using the observational component (e.g., formal and informal observations) within Illinois' required teacher evaluation system, rather than SLO data,

when evaluating the quality of teachers' professional performance. The applied conceptual framework and implementation research provide an explanation for this mindset. During the act of sensemaking and when new policies are being implemented, people attempt to situate new information within their current cognitive schemas (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). In an effort to make sense of the policy, the implementing agent relies on what is already familiar and focuses more deeply on what is already known (Spillane et al., 2002). Historically, the classroom observation component has been an integral and time-consuming part of principals' teacher evaluation practices (Horng et al., 2010; Tracy, 1995). Principals in Jackson prefer the more comfortable and familiar observation component of the evaluation process, believing it to be a more valid measurement of teacher performance.

As they worked to make sense of the overall SLO process, principals continued to question the reliability and accuracy of the SLO goals submitted by teachers. Sensemaking occurs in a sensible environment, is based on cues from the environment, and is conducted in retrospection (Weick, 1995). Multiple interview participants noted they have only two sensible cues—from the results of the two required assessments administered during the SLO process—to base their judgment on the student growth component of teachers' summative evaluation. Principals noted the limited number of assessments naturally restricted the reliability and accuracy of the SLO process. Using retrospection, principals and teachers also reported that the individual SLO goals that were submitted and approved were often similar from one year to the next. For the past 3 years, principals have experienced multiple teachers who have successfully obtaining mastery over set SLO goals that have not varied significantly. Previous research has linked similar perceptions regarding the accuracy and reliability of the SLO processes to the experiences of other principals and teachers (Donaldson et al., 2014; Slotnik et al., 2014).

Principals' affective states. Prior to the initial development and subsequent implementation of SLOs, principals reported strong reservations about the new student growth portion of teacher evaluations. Hope (2002) stated educators are resistant to change when they "(a) do not understand the implications of a policy, (b) have not received sufficient information regarding its purpose, and (c) do not know how it is to be implemented" (p. 41). Researchers have noted teacher evaluations elicit high emotions including fear (Conley & Glasman, 2008) and the important role of implementing agents' affective state during the implementation process (Spillane et al., 2002). Consistent with previous research on education reforms, the anticipated change to using an SLO model was met with uncertainty from principals and teachers in Jackson.

The act of sensemaking often occurs when confusion arises (Weick, 1995) and it can begin with chaos (Weick et al., 2005). Principals now feel more comfortable with using the SLO process and the majority of principals, and teachers stated they currently need less administrative support throughout the process than they experienced during the initial phase of implementation. Previous research has found perceptions and understanding of the SLO process increased for implementers in the second year of implementation (Slotnik et. al., 2014), and teachers' success rates at attaining SLO goals increased over time (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012). Four years into implementation, Jackson principals and teachers have developed their own cognitive structure as they have continued to make sense of the SLO process. With time and experience using the SLO process, principals are now more comfortable with the routine tasks involved and some even describe SLO completion as a perfunctory aspect of evaluations. Here I must note caution: "One may perceive an implementation to be as intended by policymakers because the core surface features are represented, even if deeper and more abstract principles are not reflected" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 400). Research on teacher evaluation processes states principals, as formal

evaluators, personally determine whether to view teacher evaluation as a necessary part of a bureaucratic process or choose to embrace it as an opportunity for professional learning and organizational improvement (Davis et al., 2002).

Principals did not report engaging in the difficult and uncomfortable task of encouraging teachers to increase their student growth goals. On the rare occasion that a principal questioned the rigorousness of teachers' SLO goals, he/she held a discussion with the teacher and engaged them with a mental state of inquiry, rather than in a judgmental state. Implementing agents' values, emotions, affective state, and motivation interplay with their cognitive reasoning during implementation. Emotions influence memory, reasoning, and responses, and implementing agents often gravitate to behaviors that have led to positive outcomes while avoiding negative experiences (Spillane et al., 2002). Principals preferred to avoid the risk involved with challenging teachers on the rigorousness of SLO goals that they perceived to be of low quality, and they also avoided the uncomfortable experience of applying the SLO policy too stringently for the purpose of educator accountability. Thus, possibly as a conflict-avoidance approach, most principals focused on the technical compliance aspect of the SLO policies—ensuring that SLO goals were developed, approved, and monitored according to district guidelines—rather than using the SLOs as mechanisms to assist their faculty members with carefully analyzing student performance and effecting learning gains throughout their buildings. Research supports the claim that it is not uncommon for supervisors to avoid difficult conversations (Abrams, 2009) and for administrative to succumb to perceived pressures to ensure that teacher summative evaluation ratings remain proficient or higher (Sartain et al., 2010). In Jackson, and in other districts that have implemented student growth teacher evaluation models, teachers' evaluation ratings remain

consistently high (Lenoff et al., 2017). Thus, it is unclear whether the policy intent of the student growth component (e.g., teacher accountability) is being met in practice.

Sensemaking while distributing cognition. As theorized by Halverson and Clifford (2006), the distributed cognition theory explores the manner in which individual and organizational sensemaking is assisted and shared through the use of applicable artifacts. In the case of SLO implementation in Jackson, principals have access to and use the district SLO guidebook to assist them through the process. As administrative actors within the larger organization, principals relied on the guidebook to provide the appropriate evaluation instrument forms, timelines, and general outline for the process. The SLO guidebook is the sole source of collective information for all evaluation participants to reference for guidance and support, and in this manner it is useful in assisting principals with cognition and sensemaking. Especially at the elementary level, the SLO guidebook fills a void for principals, who tend to approve goals and make sense of the SLO process in isolation. In the absence of professional development from the central office administration, and therefore relying on principal colleagues and socially interacting with other principals to make sense of SLOs, principals reported using the guidebook as their primary source for knowledge and guidance.

While completing the SLO process with teachers, principals tended to use their personal administrative discretion when determining how and when to utilize the multiple forms within the guidebook. While there was not a district expectation for principals to engage teachers in setting a common SLO goal aligned to the school improvement plan, doing so would certainly reduce the amount of attention and time given to setting goals using all the required forms with each individual teacher. Some principals required teachers to complete certain forms, while others did not require these same forms for submission. Principals also reported the guidebook

was cumbersome and difficult to navigate. The finding that the collectively established and district adopted evaluation guidebook is complicated and specific artifacts are used selectively by principals is consistent in previous teacher evaluation research (Halverson & Clifford, 2006).

By following the guidelines in the SLO guidebook and completing the accompanying forms that are purportedly required for SLO completion, principals helped standardize and provided consistency to the evaluation practice. Halverson and Clifford (2006) stated:

> The importance of teacher evaluation discretion changes based on the intention built into the policy artifacts. Policies that aim for standardized practice seek to restrict the range of discretion, whereas policies designed to enhance the range of tools available to local practitioners depend on discretion. (p. 607)

Given the high stakes involved with evaluation outcomes and the possibility of teachers' employment being affected by the results, it is arguably important that student growth processes are completed in a uniform manner. In practice, however, principals deviated from this process. Looking at this phenomenon through the distributive cognition lens, it is possible principals applied discretion and ignored some of the required components and documents because the needs of each individual teacher required them to cognitively adapt. Evidence existed that this occurred with unique teaching roles as deans, DIFs, and coaches. Principals, however, also used discretion in not requiring the completion of some artifacts with teachers in general classroom appointments, and not just with the teachers in unique roles. I believe this was due to the lack of adequate district-level training for the principals and the inherent complexity required for task completion with the associated artifacts. Lacking formal district-wide professional development, commonly shared district or school goals, and an opportunity to form a shared level of understanding across all members of the administrative team, principals were left on their own, as they individually made sense of the SLO process and attempted to implement it according to their personal interpretations of fidelity.

In practice when principals questioned a SLO goal or could not make sense of a teacher's proposal goal, they preferred to converse with the teacher and make meaning in person together. In such situations the principals did not rely upon the designed artifact tools, such as the SLO guidebook, the Austin Formula, and the SLO Framework Teacher Form. In this fashion, the SLO artifacts have limitations and do not supersede the social, enactive, and ongoing nature of sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

Application of the Research Study Framework

The conceptual framework I developed for this study is immense and collective. Consequently, it offers multiple options for descriptions and avenues for exploring sensemaking and numerous characteristics of SLO policy implementation. Within the conceptual framework the following aspects and sub-categories were available for analysis and interpretations of the results: (a) grounded in identity construction, (b) retrospective, (c) enactive of sensible environments, (d) social, (e) ongoing, (f) focused on and extracted by cues, (g) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy, (h) consisting of individual beliefs, (i) situational understanding, (j) representational messages within the policy, and (k) shared understanding through the use of others or artifacts.

Although the comprehensive nature of the framework allowed me to approach my data analysis through multiple aspects of the phenomena of sensemaking and policy implementation, its complexity also made it difficult to reach the subsequent depth of analysis. For example, the integration of the distributed cognition theory provided a needed method for analyzing how principals used SLO artifacts, yet the artifact collection was only one of three approaches I used for collecting data. The integration of distributed cognition theory into the framework offered less benefit for the analysis of interviews and observations. In contrast, should the intent of the study been focused solely on how principals use SLO evaluation artifacts, the distributed

cognition theory was sufficiently elaborate to have provided the sole framework for analysis. Likewise, sensemaking and the cognitive framework for implementation are sufficiently detailed theories to explore SLO research independently of the other. In this study, due to the expansiveness of the conceptual framework, it was difficult to know which aspects to apply during development of the findings and the later analysis.

The study was designed to capture the sensemaking of principals who were believed to be at the center of the initial phase of SLO implementation. In Jackson, only principals on the JC held significant roles during the design and the initial implementation stages. Fortunately, many were interviewed who served and who did not serve on the JC. Thus, I was able to explore their sensemaking derived from their experiences regardless of their relationship with the JC, and I also was able to compare the experiences of principals who had differing levels of involvement with the development of the district's SLO process. Within the conceptual framework, the retrospective nature of sensemaking allowed members to reflect upon their initial experience and it gave the interviewees a broader array of insights regarding SLO sensemaking and implementation.

Implications

Student Learning Objectives remain popular as a preferred method for meeting the requirements of student growth measures within teacher evaluations. This single-case study of a school district at the forefront of implementation with SLO policies within the state of Illinois was designed to advance the understanding for researchers, policymakers, and policy implementers. The study contributes to a growing body of empirical research regarding SLOs and policy implementation in school districts. Principals' sensemaking served as the unit of analysis, and the derived findings offer many implications for principals and central office

administrators who are beginning the process of implementing SLOs. Additionally, the findings generate implications for policymakers. In this section I present implications for policy and for practice.

Implications for policy. Designing the SLO policy to meet the needs of varied teacher position types is very challenging. An expert from a consulting agency can provide needed guidance to district committee members and help streamline the sensemaking for all district committee members, as well as for administrators and educators as the process is developed and implementation. This support can lead to greater efficiency when crafting the policy and help ensure legal requirements of the policy are meet. During the SGM selection process using a consulting agency, however, can also lead to JC members focusing too narrowly on one type of student growth model or on specific protocol requirements within an SLO model. It is likely the agency could guide the district into using a student growth model that is most familiar to agency employees. Before selecting a type of student growth model to use, committee members should consider all options. The state department of education also can be more proactive in providing trainings for consultation agencies statewide, to better promote consistency across the state's school districts. Otherwise the selected SGM models and devolved polices may focus primarily upon the preferences of an individual consulting agency.

Many nuances can exist when designing a SLO policy that serves as the universal student growth model for every type of teacher within a school district. The basic process applies to general education teachers, and teachers in unique teaching roles may require specific guidelines for their position. When writing the rules of the SLO policy and creating a guide for principals and teachers, committee members should remain mindful of the need to craft a comprehensive, yet manageable text. Finding this balance is difficult but essential. The written policy needs to be

both user-friendly and contain all relevant information; otherwise, implementing agents will remain uncertain for a longer period, sensemaking will be prolonged, and adequate implementation will be delayed. With a complicated process, such as the SLO process, implementing agents will reference the written policy as a guide for practice. Referencing the written representations of the policy, such as the SLO guidebook, will occur more frequently in the beginning stages of implementation and will continue as questions and uncertainty arise while participating in the SLO process.

Implementing an SLO process that allows each teacher to set individual goals that are negotiated with the principal during the approval process takes time, energy, and expertise. If the policy is designed to focus heavily on the superficial aspects of the process, such as required timelines, then principals may engage superficially in the process and exert efforts to ensure timelines are met, as opposed to focusing on instructional improvement. Similarly if the policy is designed to heavily rely upon multiple forms and protocols for completing the process, principals may lack understanding of the various forms and modify the use of forms, as he/she deems appropriate. Designing a more simplified and uniformed approach for setting SLO goals may allow principals to focus their attention on increasing collaborating with teachers and among the teachers.

Implications for practice. The implications for those who implement SLO policies and incorporate the process into instructional practices are numerous. The findings suggest a strong preconceived belief held by principals, central office administrators, and teachers that student growth measures are intended for the main purpose of teacher accountability. Yet, it appeared that, in practice, principals and teachers were focused more on simple compliance and did not fully acknowledge this responsibility for accountability for student learning. Regardless of the

intent of the state policymakers, or the accuracy of this belief held by principals, central office administrators, and teachers, it is important to note that the initial responses to the SLO policy message—or any educational reform—are likely to be resistance, fear, or hesitation. During policy implementation, sensemaking is constantly evolving; therefore, at the design stages, those charged with the development of structures and procedures would be wise to consider teachers' perceived beliefs and their own personal intentions for the policy. Regardless of the committee's intentions, it is important these intentions are clearly articulated in a manner that allows implementing agents to make sense of the policy and eventually implement the policy as they have designed it. By identifying the committee's intentions for the policy and articulating those intentions within the policy, implementers are more likely to apply the process in a manner that aligns with the original policy intentions.

Due to the far-reaching nature of the SLO policy that needs to meet the requirements for measuring student growth for teachers of every grade level and subject, it can be complicated for principals to help create and approve SLO goals for some grade levels or subject area teachers. The less familiar a principal is with the grade level or subject being taught, the more challenging it is for him/her to oversee and approve the SLO goals. In addition, if the district SLO policy is not explicit for how the policy applies to the various teaching positions that are unique teaching roles, principals will struggle to make sense of how to apply the policy into practice. In contrast, another option is to allow the student growth goal to apply to all teachers within a school or grade level. In this manner the goal becomes universal, rather than the student growth model. Professional collaboration would then take place regarding the instructional practices being utilized throughout the school to achieve the goal and data from common assessments could help drive discussions about teaching and learning practices.

Effective implementation of SLO policies across the entire school district takes time. It is helpful for all implementing agents to participate in a pilot year of implementation that does not affect teachers' evaluation ratings. As was noted in this case study, a no-stakes, pilot year allows all implementing agents the necessary time and experience to begin making sense of the policy without the hindrance of worrying about evaluation ratings and getting the practice right on the first attempt. When leaders of the policy initiative stress the importance of learning without fear of a poor summative evaluation rating, the sensemaking process can occur more naturally and professional learning is not encumbered.

The actual process of completing the steps involved in the SLO process and the associated teacher evaluation process will take more time for teachers and principals. Additional time must be allocated for this process to occur during the first year or two of implementation. Then, as implementing agents become more familiar with the process, they will become more efficient at completing the involved steps. Even after multiple school years of using the SLO policy, implementing agents may remain uncertain about the accuracy and reliability of the SLOs that are written and approved.

Principals will tend to prefer having conversations with teachers, relying heavily on SLO guidance documents and artifacts, to determine if adequate rigor is being applied to the teachers' individual SLO goals. It is much easier for implementing agents to understand and apply the steps of the SLO process, than it is for them to make sense of evaluating the complexities of accuracy, reliability, and rigor. In the absence of district-level leaders who guide the administrators' collective understanding, principals make sense of the process individually and the SLO process will be inconsistently implemented. Discourse communities should be developed so principals can navigate these challenges and continuously problem-solve together.

Principals need numerous, ongoing professional development opportunities to discuss and practice applying the SLO process. They should discuss the SLO process as an administrative team that is united in a common vision that is established in tandem with central office administrators.

An opportunity exists for principals to promote the greater benefit of improving teaching and learning practices than merely to apply SLO polices to the teacher evaluation process as a perfunctory practice or for the sake of accountability. Application of the SLO policy can generate teachers' professional growth centered upon the use of assessments and the use of data to drive their instructional decisions. Implementing agents have demonstrated that using the SLO process requires them to learn more about the various types of student assessments available and the purpose for using such assessments. Additionally, the knowledge and understanding of both the quality and complexity of assessments being used also increases for implementing agents. Implementing the SLO process also offers principals and teachers an opportunity to increase professional collaboration. As goals are set, monitored, and evaluated collaborative discussions can occur among teachers and with principals.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Several recommendations for implementing agents and policymakers were derived from the findings in this case study. Although the findings are not exclusively applicable to this study, policymakers and implementing agents should use discretion when applying recommendations to other settings and policies.

1. Members of the district-level policy formation committee should carefully consider and construct SLO policies. Joint Committee members should begin policy formation by focusing upon the long-term intentions of the SLO policy. If committee members do not

identify a greater intention for SLO polices and determine a long-term vision for the manner in which SLO polies will enhance instructional practices, then the practice of completing SLOs will remain obligatory and implementing agents will superficially complete the task involved in the SLO process. Joint Committee members should not become stuck, worrying whether the SLO policy meets the legislative requirement for student growth-oriented teacher evaluations. Instead, they should develop consensus regarding the message they intend to send implementing agents about the deeper purpose of SLOs. SLO policy design should explicitly highlight the belief that the SLO process can increase collaboration among teachers and principals. Once this policy message has been established, the JC should turn their attention to guiding policy documents, such as the SLO guidebook. The guiding documents, such as a district SLO Guidebook, should express these intentions in a manner that is easily understood and applicable by all implementing agents.

2. A plan for implementation should focus on the immediate and long-term needs of implementing agents. Initially a pilot year is recommended when the process is introduced to all implementing agents. In Jackson the no-stakes pilot year allowed principals and teachers to experience the SLO process without the fear of negative evaluation outcomes and helped all educators understand and internalize the process. In addition, this pilot provided an opportunity for district leaders to make revisions and adjustments, as they identified any problematic elements of their process. It naturally takes time and experience for all implementing agents to learn the nuances and requirements of completing the SLO process. The plan for implementation should include methods for supporting principals, teachers, schools, and instructional levels. The committee should ensure an appropriate number of trainers are assigned to each school, and they should develop a plan for maintaining SLO experts in each of the school buildings.

3. As those in charge of approving SLOs, principals need to receive unified and ongoing professional development. Principals should receive training together as a group and they need to form a discourse community, through which they can make sense of the process together. Specifically, all principals should receive both collective and individualized training regarding the intention of the policy, how to present the intended "policy message" to staff, and how to specifically incorporate SLOs into the practice of evaluating teachers. These trainings should be ongoing, provide a consistent means of support for principals, and offer principals the opportunity to develop consistency through inter-rater reliability activities. Additionally, special considerations should be given to training principals and teachers in regard to those teachers in unique teaching roles, such as deans and instructional coaches. Within their discourse community, the principals should explore options for uniting teachers within their schools to develop common goals that align to school improvement plans. District initiated continual professional development and support sessions should be planned throughout the first year of implementation and into future school years.

4. Principals should embrace the SLO process as a means for improving teaching and learning practices. Implementing the SLO process is an opportunity for professional learning for all educators. An opportunity exists for principals to promote the greater benefit of improving instructional practices through the expanded development of common assessments and the promotion of collaborative conversations. Teachers should understand how their analysis of student growth, and continuing use of effective student assessments, should be an essential feature of their professional practice. Principals and their faculty members should place the ongoing analysis of student learning data as a regular part of their practices, to ensure that they promote improved student learning in their schools. Principals should actively lead this charge

through leadership for learning and by engaging the faculty in dialogue and collaborative work groups designed to analyze student SLO data. As learning leaders principals should use the SLO process to continuously develop systems for effectively using data to make informed decisions about teaching and learning practices. In this manner, increased professional collaboration can develop as a positive outcome of implementing the SLO process. Since SLOs require the need to build or modify the assessments, principals should structure regular time for teachers to collaborate by grade level or subject area. Principals should align professional development activities to increase understanding of how to generate and utilize student assessments while fostering the use of assessments during teacher collaborations.

5. The Joint Committee should meet throughout each school year to make necessary adjustments to the SLO policy and practice. Committee members should ensure a mechanism exists for promoting continued discussion as a committee and with key implementing agents across the school district. The committee should routinely meet throughout the school year to discuss implementation challenges and make necessary adaptions to the policy and practice. It is imperative procedures are in place for committee members to receive concerns and challenges from implementing agents—including administrators and teachers. As the administrators who are responsible and accountable for guiding this process within their schools, principals can and should play a critical role in monitoring implementation challenges in their own school buildings, and they will also need to monitor and facilitate the sensemaking of their own staff throughout the implementation process. The committee should establish a practice for communicating and explaining changes that are made to the policy or process with all principals and teachers across the school district. When changes are made, a clear method for expressing these changes is

necessary so all implementing agents in the school district know how to adjust practices accordingly and that the implementing agents hear a consistent policy message.

6. State policymakers should fund training for school districts to help enhance the use of the SLO process to improve instruction. In this case study the Jackson School District used funding tied to the SIG to work with an outside consulting agency to help make sense of the Illinois PERA law and design an SLO policy. Interviewees who were members of the JC highlighted the benefit of the outside assistance, especially considering that as an early adopter, the district was on a tight timeline to create and implement the policy. As an early implementing district, no state trainings were offered prior to the adoption of the SLO process in Jackson. Policymakers should only require districts implement policies after appropriate training and guiding documents are offered throughout the state. State policymakers should make available training and development services, as well as on-going professional development options for school administrators. These trainings will help districts get beyond the legislative requirements of student growth evaluations and onto more meaningful conversations about improved instructional practices.

Recommendations for Additional Research

Further research is necessary to fully explore principals' sensemaking as it relates to the implementation of student growth components in teacher evaluation process. The following recommendations are presented for future research.

1. Researchers should conduct a comparative case study involving multiple school districts that have designed different approaches to student growth. The incorporation of student growth into teacher evaluations is now required in Illinois public school districts, as well as many states across the United States. A comparative case study would allow analysis of

similarities, differences, and patterns in the beliefs of principals from different school districts that have adopted varying methods to assess teachers' effectiveness in promoting student growth. An empirical research study that includes multiple school districts could expand upon the findings in this study and offer additional insights into principals' sensemaking of student growth processes that have been implemented in their districts.

2. Principals' sensemaking of the student growth process should continue to be investigated over a longer period of time. To capture the sensemaking phenomena in greater detail and to observe further evolution of the phenomena, researchers could conduct longitudinal research, from the beginning phase of the student growth introduction and through an extended period. This study took place over six months and occurred during the transition period from the third to fourth year of implementation. A researcher embedded in the implementation process from the inception of the policy, through its development, implementation, and refinement, would have an opportunity to observe the evolution of sensemaking as it occurs throughout this process. This study relied on retrospection as a key perspective from interviewees. Although the methodology used in this study generated useful data, some of the data was based upon participants' memories of events and previous emotional states. Interviews and observations conducted over a greater period might generate in-the-moment findings that were not observed from a shorter snapshot of time.

3. Quantitative research is needed to further examine the correlation between teacher evaluation ratings involving the student growth component and student learning. This study highlighted principals' uncertainty of the validity, reliability, accuracy, and necessary level of rigor within the SLO process. Although some quantitative studies compare student growth ratings to more complex multivariate student growth models (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012;

Hu, 2015), few, if any studies exist that compare teacher effectiveness as determined by high stakes assessments to teachers' student growth scores. Researchers should conduct a quantitative analysis of teachers' student growth performance ratings and measures of student learning.

Conclusion

The incorporation and implementation of student growth measures into the teacher evaluation process has materialized as a significant component for principals across the nation. Forty-three states now require student achievement measures as part of the teacher evaluation process (Doherty & Jacob, 2015). The Student Learning Objectives (SLO) process is a popular method used for determining student growth across the nation (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014) and within the state of Illinois (Milanowski et al., 2016). Principals can serve as key implementing agents who are charged with making sense of the SLO process while simultaneously applying the process and incorporating it into school practices.

This single case study presented a description of how implementing agents in one early-adopting Illinois school district developed personal and organizational sensemaking while effectuating SLO polices. The conceptual framework utilized within the study was adapted and formed using three theoretical frameworks: the cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), and the distributive cognition theory (Halverson & Clifford, 2006). The merged frameworks were used to analyze sets of data from interviews, observations, and artifact reviews collected from three groups of implementing agents: teachers, and central office administrators.

Findings were ample and wide-ranging. Although the majority of implementing agents believed accountability was the primary intention of state-mandated teacher evaluation models that include student growth, in practice, principals emphasized the importance of adhering to the

SLO process described within the district guidebook, and most did not emphasize the important role SLOs can serve in enhancing professional practices and promoting student learning gains. Ensuring rigor within the SLO was a secondary concern that principals preferred to address through conversation and collaboration with teachers. Despite the utilization of many common SLO artifacts, at times, principals' personal interpretations and preferences affected how they operationalized the SLO process. When completing the SLO process, many principals and teachers appeared to simply "go through the motions," and work to ensure district procedures, forms, and timelines were met, rather than to use this process to examine student learning and improve teaching and learning practices. Principals tended to prefer observational data compared to SLO scores for discerning teachers' effectiveness, strengths, and areas for instructional improvement. Principals and teachers who were JC members, and therefore were involved in the initial development of the SLO process, appeared to share an understanding of the SLO process that is more closely aligned to the district SLO guidebook. Over the past 3 years, completing the SLO process appeared to have become easier and less stressful for all involved; however, it added significant time to the evaluation process. Teachers and principals discovered through utilizing the SLO process, time collaborating increased and implementing agents had a greater understanding of the appropriate use of student assessments.

When implementing the SLO process, school principals have an opportunity to positively affect school practices. Through discussion and collaboration, principals should make sense of the SLO process alongside of their faculty members. Together principals and teachers will collaboratively find ways to interweave the SLO process into their current practices. To prevent the SLO process from becoming mundane and irrelevant, principals should actively work to find ways to enhance instructional practices through the application of the SLO process. The SLO

process can and should increase meaningful collaboration times between teachers and principals. Principals can also align professional development activities to increase understanding of how to generate and utilize student assessments.

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Appendix A

Data Collection Matrix

Data collection sources	How I accessed the data	Research question
Comprehensive interviews Observations meetings; Artifact conferences, SLO artifact collection	Semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers, central office administrators; observation of JC meetings; artifact conferences	What meanings and understandings do principals construct regarding the SLO process and how the process is implemented?
Comprehensive interviews Observations meetings; Artifact conferences, SLO artifact collection	Semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers, central office administrators; observation of JC meetings; artifact conferences	How does the sensemaking of teachers, principals, and central office administrators affect the operationalizing the SLO process?
Comprehensive interviews Observations meetings; Artifact conferences, SLO artifact collection	Semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers, central office administrators; observation of JC meetings; artifact conferences	Which dimensions of implementing the SLO process influence the school practices of teachers and principals?

Appendix B

Email Soliciting Study Participation

Dear [Insert Name of Superintendent],

I am principal at Yankee Ridge Elementary School in Urbana, Illinois and am completing my Doctor of Education degree in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am conducting my dissertation research on the Illinois teacher evaluation process; my advisor, Dr. Donald Hackmann, is directing my study. I am contacting you because your school district matches criteria necessary to participate in a case study that seeks to investigate the implementation of a Student Learning Objective (SLO) process within the practice of teacher evaluations.

School districts throughout the state of Illinois were screened through an examination of progress toward implementing the required student growth portion of the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) law. Based on your district's [Insert either: Race to the Top or School Improvement Grant] award designation, it appears that for the last few school years your school district has a well-established measure for determining student growth that has been incorporated into your teacher evaluation process.

I am contacting you to determine if your district utilizes a Student Learning Objective-type measure of student growth within the teacher evaluation process, and, if so, to determine whether you would be interested in permitting me to conduct research within the school district. If your school district is selected for inclusion in the study, you and/or members of your school community will participate in interviews and site observations of up to five district or school-level meetings regarding the Student Learning Objective process. The amount of time necessary for any staff member agreeing to an interview is estimated at 45 to 60 minutes per interview. In addition, you will be asked to share unused artifacts related to the SLO process. Such artifacts may include copies of the SLO template, a list of assessments authorized by the school district, goal setting forms, mid-point review forms, and final rating forms. All forms will be blank and will not contain any personal identifiable information.

To determine your district's eligibility for study participation I need to confirm that your district utilizes a Student Learning Objective-type growth measure as part of the teacher evaluation process. For the purpose of the study a Student Learning Objective-type process is defined as formal process where the teacher meets with his/her evaluator at the beginning of the evaluation cycle to set a student learning growth goal based upon results of a specific assessment. During the evaluation cycle, the teacher instructs students in order to facilitate the targeted growth, and later in the process, the teacher administers a final assessment in which student growth is measured and determined. At the end of the process, the teacher and evaluator meet again to assess a growth rating for the purpose of the teacher evaluation process.

If your school district utilizes a Student Learning Objective-type growth measure within the teacher evaluation process, and you are interested in participation in this study, please respond via email (bcander2@illinois.edu) or phone (217-552-0240). If you express a willingness to participate, an informed consent form will be delivered to you by email and we will set up a time for a brief 10 minute screening interview to be conducted over the phone. The screening

interview is designed to ensure the district's SLO practices match the criteria necessary for participation in this study. If you have questions or comments regarding this study, please contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Donald Hackmann (dghack@illinois.edu).

Regards,

Brian C. Anderson
Department of Education Policy Organization and Leadership
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Appendix C

**Email Invitation for Principal Participation in Interviews
and Site Observations**

Dear SCHOOL PRINCIPAL,

I am principal at Yankee Ridge Elementary School in Urbana, Illinois and am completing my Doctor of Education degree in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am conducting my dissertation research on the Illinois teacher evaluation process; my advisor, Dr. Donald Hackmann is directing my study. I am interested in talking with you and with teachers in your school, and I am hoping that you would be willing to give me permission to speak with your teachers. During the conversation, I will explain to the teachers that this is a voluntary opportunity and they will be given the right to opt out of participating. In addition to speaking with your teachers, I am interested in speaking with you regarding the role of the school administration in implementing and completing the Student Learning Objective process. Below I have included an overview of the study as well as information related to what teachers who agree to participate would be required to do.

Purpose of study: To determine what meanings and understandings principals construct regarding implementation of the SLO process into teacher evaluations. Specially I aim to identify the following: barriers and constraints that are encountered while implementing the SLO teacher evaluation practices, the dimensions within the SLO process that have the greatest influence on teacher evaluations, and how SLO process has affected the practices of principals and teachers beyond the role of evaluation.

Administrator requirements for the study if you decide to join:

• 1 to 2 formal interviews related the implementation and use of the SLO   process
• Voluntary opportunity to provide the researcher with any artifacts used throughout the SLO process
• Possible commitment to a site observation to observe the use of SLO artifacts
• The time commitment is approximated 45 to 60 minutes per interview

In addition, a research will conduct site observations of any staff meetings related to the discussion of the SLO process and/or meetings between the principal and a teacher working through the SLO process. A total of three to five site observations may occur. These observations will serve two purposes: first to determine how the principal and teacher interact with the artifacts required to complete the SLO process; and to explore how the SLO process affects the overall practice of evaluating teachers.

Please feel free to contact Brian Anderson at bcander2@illinois.edu or 217-552-0240 if you have any questions or concerns. If you have questions or comments regarding this study, please contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Donald Hackmann (dghack@illinois.edu). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian C. Anderson
Department of Education Policy Organization and Leadership
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Appendix D

Email Invitation for Teacher Participation in Interviews
and Site Observations

Dear TEACHER,

I am principal at Yankee Ridge Elementary School in Urbana, Illinois and am completing my Doctor of Education degree in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am conducting my dissertation research on the Illinois teacher evaluation process; my advisor, Dr. Donald Hackmann is directing my study. I am contacting you. I am interested in speaking with you to discuss the details of our study. During the discussion, I will explain that this is a voluntary opportunity and you will be given the right to opt out of participating. Below I have included an overview of the study as well as information related to what teachers who agree to participate would be required to do.

Purpose of study: To determine what meanings and understandings principals construct regarding implementation of the SLO process into teacher evaluations. Specially I aim to identify the following: barriers and constraints that are encountered while implementing the SLO teacher evaluation practices, the dimensions within the SLO process that have the greatest influence on teacher evaluations, and how SLO process has affected the practices of principals and teachers beyond the role of evaluation.

Teacher requirements for the study if they decide to join:

- 1 to 2 formal group interviews related to using the SLO process
- Voluntary opportunity to provide the researcher with any artifacts used throughout the SLO process
- The time commitment is approximated 45 to 60 minutes per group interview

Please feel free to contact Brian Anderson (bcander2@illinois.edu or 217-552-0240) if you have any questions or concerns. If you have questions or comments regarding this study, please contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Donald Hackmann (dghack@illinois.edu). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian C. Anderson
Department of Education Policy Organization and Leadership
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Appendix E

Superintendent or Central Office Screening Interview via Phone

Introduction and Purpose

Today, I am calling because you have agreed to participate in a case study that seeks to investigate implementation of an Student Learning Objective-type process within the teacher evaluation process.

Public records, including public school district websites and the Illinois Board of Education website, were used to identify potential Illinois public school districts that have incorporated a required Student Growth Model (SGM) into the teacher evaluation process since the 2014-2015 school year. These records were used to narrow the list of potential school districts down to those utilizing a Student Learning Objective-type process for the school district's Student Growth Model. Your district was selected because the SGM appears to closely match a set of criteria deemed important for this study.

As indicated on the informed consent form, I will be taking detailed notes of this interview and all personally identifiable information will be removed and replaced by pseudonyms. Should you wish to stop the interview at any time, you may do so.

Questions

1. Describe the Student Growth Model used within your school district to incorporate student growth into the teacher evaluation process?
2. Based on the following description of an Student Learning Objective-type model, do you believe your district utilizes an SLO-type model or something similar? An SLO-type model is defined as a formal process where the teacher meets with his/her evaluator at the beginning of the evaluation cycle to set a student learning growth goal based upon results of a specific assessment. During the evaluation cycle, the teacher instructs students in order to facilitate the targeted growth, and later in the process, the teacher administers a final assessment in which student growth is measured and determined. At the end of the process, the teacher and evaluator meet again to assess a growth rating for the purpose of the teacher evaluation process.
3. How long has your school district utilized the current model for incorporating student growth into the teacher evaluation process?
4. Is there anything else you would like for me to consider when determining your districts' eligibility for the study?

This concludes the screening interview. Should you and your district be selected for participation in the study, I will notify you by phone as soon as possible.

Appendix F

Informed Consent: Principal, Teacher and District Administrator

You are invited to participate in a study involving principals' understandings and sense-making regarding implementation of the Student Learning Objective (SLO) process within the system of evaluating teachers. The purposes of the study is to identify the following: barriers and constraints that are encountered while implementing the SLO teacher evaluation practices, the dimensions within the SLO process that have the greatest influence on teacher evaluations, and how SLO process has affected the practices of principals and teachers beyond the role of evaluation. This study is affiliated with the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Mr. Brian Anderson, doctoral candidate, and Dr. Don Hackmann, Professor, will conduct the study.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your relationship in any way with your school district or your relationship with the University of Illinois. You may elect to terminate this activity if at any time you begin to feel uncomfortable about the experience. Should you consent, you will participate in one to two interviews, which should each last no longer than one hour. Interview questions will focus on how teachers and principals implement and use the SLO process, the successes and challenges of using the SLO process, and about the effects of the SLO process within the teacher evaluation process. You may also be asked to be observed during a meeting involving the use of the SLO process and/or a staff meeting involving the discussion of the SLO process. Interviews and observations will be audiotaped for the purposes of data analysis and will be transcribed, with all identifying information removed to protect confidentiality of the participants. You also may choose to voluntarily provide documents or other artifacts to assist the researchers in understanding the school district's implementation of the SLO process. You will receive a copy of the transcript by email attachment to double-check the information, and you may be contacted by telephone or email for clarification of your interview responses.

Your interview responses will be kept confidential and secure, and the results of the interviews will only be reported in the aggregate. If you are participating in a focus group interview, this format does not provide complete confidentiality because participants will hear their colleagues' responses. Although the researchers cannot guarantee that the subjects discussed in this focus group will not be shared outside the group, we will take careful precautions to monitor and control the group discussion so that responses remain focused on the interview questions. Publication may include the use of quotations from your interview in educational presentations, on websites, and in professional publications, but pseudonyms will be used for all quotations so your responses cannot be attributed to you. There is no direct benefit to agreeing to participate in this study for participants, but participation in the study involves minimal risk. Through identifying positive features and challenges of implementing the SLO process, it is intended that the school district and participants will benefit through improvements in the SLO process, both for the district involved and for other school districts that may be considering implementing a SLO process.

In general, we will not tell anyone any information about you. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. However, laws and university rules might require us to disclose information about you. For example, if required by laws or

University Policy, study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you may be seen or copied by the following people or groups: a) The university committee and office that reviews and approves research studies, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Office for Protection of Research Subjects; and b) University and state auditors, and Departments of the university responsible for oversight of research.

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the University of Illinois Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 217-333-2670 or e-mail OPRS at irb@illinois.edu. If you have questions or comments regarding this study, please contact Don Hackmann (dghack@illinois.edu).

_____

I have read and understand this project and indicate my willingness to voluntarily take part in this research study. I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records.

I agree to be interviewed for this study and to have my interview audiotaped for the purpose of transcription.

Yes   /   No   (circle one)

Printed Name: _____ Email: _____

Signature: _____Date_____

Appendix G

Superintendent or Central Office Administrator Individual Interview

1. Please share your understanding of the main purposes of incorporating SLOs into the teacher evaluation process in your district?
2. What were the intended goals for utilizing the SLO process as an evaluation growth model?
3. Please describe the steps and timelines your district took to adopt the SLO process? Describe the implementation process from the district office through the principals and ultimately to the teachers.
4. What supports did or do principals have to ensure consistency with using the SLO process and for determining the quality of a SLO goal?
5. What factors should principals consider before approving a teacher's SLO goal?
6. How do principals determine if a goal is rigorous, valid, and utilizing reliable data?
7. What forms or paperwork are used to guide the SLO process for teachers and principals?
8. What challenges did your district experience when implementing the SLO process, and how do you address them?
9. What effects have SLOs had on the practice of evaluating teachers? Please note both positive effects and concerns.
10. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weakness of using the SLO process? What did your district do to address these strengths and weaknesses?
11. In what ways has the SLO process affected other school practices outside of teacher evaluations?
12. In your opinion, how can the SLO process be used to influence and positively affect the practices of teachers?
13. What changes do you believe should be made to your district's SLO process?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share or add, that I haven't asked you?

Appendix H

Individual Principal Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a principal? How long in this district?
2. Please share your understanding of the main purposes of incorporating SLOs into the teacher evaluation process in your district?
3. What were the intended goals for utilizing the SLO process as an evaluation growth model?
4. Please describe the steps and timelines your district took to adopt the SLO process? Describe the implementation process from the district office through the principals and ultimately to the teachers.
5. What supports did or do principals have to ensure consistency with using the SLO process and for determining the quality of a SLO goal?
6. What factors do you consider before approving a teacher's SLO goal?
7. How do you determine if a goal is rigorous, valid, and utilizing reliable data?
8. What forms or paperwork are used to guide the SLO process for you and your teachers?
9. What challenges did you experience when implementing the SLO process, and how did you address them?
10. What effects have SLOs had on the practice of evaluating teachers? Please note both positive effects and concerns.
11. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weakness of using the SLO process? What did your district do to address these strengths and weaknesses?
12. In what ways has the SLO process affected other school practices outside of teacher evaluations?
13. In your opinion, how can the SLO process be used to influence and positively affect the practices of teachers?
14. What changes do you believe should be made to your district's SLO process?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to share or add, that I haven't asked you?

Appendix I

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a principal? How long in this district?
2. What were the intended goals for utilizing the SLO process as an evaluation growth model?
3. Please describe how you learned about the SLO process and how you learned to use the process?
4. What factors do you believe principals take into account before approving an SLO goal?
5. How do you believe principals determine if an SLO goal is rigorous, valid, and utilizing reliable data?
6. What forms or paperwork are used to guide the SLO process for you and the principal?
7. What effects have SLOs had on the practice of evaluating teachers? Please note both positive effects and concerns.
8. What has been challenging about learning to use the SLO process and how were the challenges resolved?
9. In what ways has the SLO process affected other school practices outside of teacher evaluations?
10. In your opinion, how can the SLO process be used to influence and positively affect the practices of teachers?
11. What changes do you believe should be made to your district's SLO process?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to share or that I haven't asked you?

Appendix J

Site Observation Tool

Date: _____

Location: _____

Participants: _____

Name or Type of SLO Artifact in use or discussed (if applicable): _____

Time	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Appendix K

Artifact Analysis Tool

Date: _____

Location of artifact in use: _____

Participants: _____

Name/descriptor of artifact	Formally defined purpose of artifact	Implementing agents' explanation of the purpose of artifact	Observation of how the artifact is used in practice

Appendix L

Sample Developed Thematic Coding

Associated research question	Thematic category	Key terms and phrases	Interview quote
RQ3	Increased collaboration	Create, positive, conversations, teachers, administrators, talking points, data	I would say the rewarding part is just it's a resource to create some really positive conservations, not only between administrator and teacher, but you know, when I meet with grade levels it's kind of— it's talking points, so getting teachers to look at their data.
RQ3	Data driven instruction	Utilize data, more aware, progress monitoring, drives instruction, improves	It's something we've always stressed, but I think now it's that accountability factor, so teachers are more likely to utilize that data and be more aware of their data and not just, hey, I'm testing, and I'm progress monitoring my students. I'm putting them into these groups. And they're just kind of not accountable. So I think it improves and drives our instruction.
RQ3	Time consuming	Frustrating, recordkeeping, keeping accountable, make sure, timelines	I think the frustrating part of it would just be, even though it's gotten easier, is the recordkeeping of it all is just making sure -- it's a little easier if you have a smaller staff. I know when I was at the middle school, just keeping everybody accountable. Who's, you know, non-tenured, and I need two SLOs. And I have a large staff now. These staff members only need to turn in one SLO. You know, just keeping track so you make sure you've got everybody accounted for and they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. Because even though it's their responsibility, you know, to turn that stuff in, to keep up with those timelines. You know, I guess as administrator you still need to kind of be on top of that for sure.