April 2018

Case Study of a Collaborative Approach to Evaluation Within a School District Central Office

Oriana Eversole
University of South Florida, everori@hotmail.com

Case Study of a Collaborative Approach to Evaluation Within a School District Central Office

by

Oriana Eversole

A dissertation submitted in partial fullfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in
Measurement and Evaluation
Department of Educational and Psychological Studies
College of Education
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Jose Castillo, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Jennifer Wolgemuth, Ph.D.
William Black, Ph.D.
John Ferron, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
April 4, 2018

Keywords: Collaborative Evaluation, District Leadership, Evaluation Use, Improvement, Organizational Change, School Turnaround

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who believed in me and supported me throughout this journey. To my husband Caleb who selflessly made my dream his dream, and stepped in to provide feedback and to serve as a sounding board. To Elijah, my amazing son who entered our lives last year—you give me even more motivation for improving education for generations to come. For my sister Kimberly who has always been the biggest fan of my work. To my baby brother Jon and brother Chris who ignited my passion for teaching at an early age. To my mother Maria (my first teacher) and my stepfather Roger who went above and beyond to support me throughout this process. To my father Chris who inspired me to write and to be voice for change. And to my grandma Jennie…I did it! Thank you for believing in me. I love you all!!!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many individuals who have made this dissertation possible, and I would like to extend my appreciation to all of them. Thank you to my fellow classmates and colleagues at USF who encouraged me and helped push my thinking along the way. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. William Black and Dr. John Ferron, and especially my co-major professors, Dr. Jose Castillo and Dr. Jennifer Wolgemuth. You all have gone above and beyond. I am also grateful to Dr. Liliana Rodríguez-Campos who trained me as an evaluator and to Dr. Steven Tozer at the University of Illinois at Chicago who served in an advisory role regarding continuous improvement and educational leadership. Thank you to Dr. J. Bradley Cousins at the University of Ottawa for including my work in an upcoming book on the Principles to Guide Collaborative Evaluation. In addition, I want to express my gratitude to the school district that this case study is based in for their continued support of my dissertation work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) provides an in-depth examination of a collaborative approach to evaluation within a school district's central office. This study analyzes the implementation of collaborative approaches to evaluation (CAE) within a school district's central office with an emphasis on evaluation use from the evaluators' perspectives. It also explores the role and evolution of the evaluators throughout the evaluation process. Furthermore, this study adds to educational research on how to support the implementation and use of improvement processes in school district central offices. The analysis focuses on the evaluation activities that my colleagues and I led as internal evaluators for a school district's school improvement initiative from September 2015 to October 2016. The conceptual framework that I used to guide my case study are the Principles to Guide CAE (Shulha, Whitmore, Cousins, Gilbert, & al Hudib, 2016), which were recently developed in response to the need for clarification on collaborative approaches to evaluation. Findings suggest that: (1) the organizational context and the evaluators' skills in using CAE impacted evaluation use, including enhancing the capacity for evaluative thinking for involved stakeholders; (2) the quality of the evaluation process, especially the formation of the findings and recommendations, enhanced the credibility of the evaluation and stakeholders' willingness to implement the recommendations; and (3) evaluator involvement over the long-term is needed to support all aspects of the continuous improvement cycle. Findings regarding the evaluator's role within

CAE include the need for evaluators: (4) to fully understanding their role and positioning themselves as critical friends and facilitators; and (5) to create a safe space for learning and inquiry to occur. The findings from this study have implications for evaluation researchers interested in evaluation use and the implementation of CAE, as well as for educational researchers focused on incorporating evidence-based practices and improvement processes in school district central offices.

CHAPTER 1:

STUDY PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

There are two areas of research that this instrumental case study addresses: (1) collaborative approaches to evaluation (CAE) to enhance evaluation use (utilization), and (2) evaluation use within a school district central office to support improvement. These issues were examined through an instrumental case study of the evaluation process for a school turnaround initiative over the span of two years, with an emphasis on the evaluation activities that occurred from September 2015 to October 2016. The context of this study was the school district's central office, and more specifically, the internal evaluation team that guided the evaluation process—where I served as the lead evaluator. The case study approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth analysis and understanding of the complex nature of collaborative approaches to evaluation within an organizational setting (Stake, 1995).

I begin this chapter by framing the purpose of the study and the research questions. I then summarize the context surrounding the evaluation that occurred—first from the federal and state level and then from the local district level. In addition, I address literature regarding evaluation and the role of collaborative approaches to evaluation within education to support improvement. I also provide an overview of the research approach for this study and definitions of key terms.

Research Purpose and Questions

The primary purpose of this study is to contribute to research on evaluation, particularly to develop a better understanding of CAE within the context of complex organizations such as school districts. This case study examines the collaborative approach to evaluation within the school district's central office. The purpose of this focus is to add to the understanding of evaluation use within school districts as a way to support the use of evaluation findings and to potentially enhance improvement processes, with an emphasis on the school district's internal evaluation team and the stakeholders involved in the evaluation process.

The concept of *evaluation use* (i.e., utilization) is central to this study, and can be defined as "the way in which an evaluation and information from the evaluation impacts the program that is being evaluated" (Alkin & Taut, 2003, p. 1). More specifically, evaluation use is commonly categorized into two main areas: the *use of findings*, which is the organization's use of the recommendations and knowledge for a variety of purposes (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998), and *process use*, which is individual or organizational changes in thinking or behavior as a result of learning that occurs from the evaluation process (Patton, 1997). Evaluation influence is also a concept that is widely accepted in evaluation research, and is defined as "the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means" (Kirkhart, 2000, p. 7). This study addresses evaluation influence more indirectly since this concept often occurs over time and is somewhat elusive—making it more challenging to study.

The Principles to Guide CAE were used as the conceptual framework for this case study (Shulha, Whitmore, Cousins, Gilbert, & al Hudib, 2016). This set of principles was developed to synthesize the commonalities and best practices for various collaborative (i.e., stakeholder

oriented) approaches to evaluation—with a focus on supporting evaluation use. The research questions I address are:

1. From the perspective of the evaluator(s), what does this case demonstrate about the relationship between the implementation of a collaborative approach to evaluation and evaluation use in the following categories (using the principles to guide CAE as a framework):

    a. the school district's use of findings (i.e., conceptual knowledge, implementation of the recommendations from the evaluation process)?

    b. the school district's process use (i.e., organizational learning, evaluation capacity building)?

2. What does this case demonstrate about the evaluators' role and growth within a collaborative approach to evaluation?

Context of the Instrumental Case Study

This study examines the process that was used to evaluate a district school turnaround initiative, which I have given the pseudonym the *Grow for Success* initiative. This effort focuses on five elementary schools in an urban school district in the Southeastern United States. After the implementation of NCLB, schools that did not make adequate yearly progress had sanctions imposed on them for improvement. Annual yearly progress was based on annual testing that was required for grades three through eight (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008). Schools that are "chronically low performing schools" are commonly referred to as *turnaround schools* (Herman et al., 2008, p. 4). The state's department of education identified each of the five schools within the Grow for Success initiative among the state's lowest performing schools, and required the school district to implement school improvement strategies

and interventions. In addition, each of these schools had a high percentage of minority students—with each school at over 80 percent of the student population identified as black or African American and a high percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch.

The school district placed a level of emphasis on the monitoring and evaluation of the Grow for Success initiative, and hired me as a fulltime internal evaluator to solely focus on the evaluation of this initiative. CAE were incorporated into the evaluation plan (Shulha et al., 2016). These approaches included empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005) and collaborative evaluation (O'Sullivan, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012). In collaborative evaluation, the evaluators are in charge of the evaluation but there is a strong partnership with the members of the target program or organization (Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Wandersman, & O'Sullivan, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012) whereas in empowerment evaluation, program stakeholders are involved at multiple levels of the organization in a cyclical evaluative process (Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). The evaluation functioned as primarily formative—which focuses on incremental improvements of an existing program. It also incorporated some developmental evaluation processes and outcomes by helping to develop major shifts in the program via new strategies (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2010; Patton, 1994; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). The school district context is central to the case study and the questions that guide it. The subsequent section examines the literature on evaluation, collaborative approaches to evaluation, and improvement science as they relate to improvement processes within school districts.

Overview of Literature on Evaluation to Support Organizational Improvement

Effective evaluation systems can positively impact organizations in a variety of ways, which has implications for enhancing the work of school districts. According to Patton (1997), program evaluation can serve as a tool for improvement: "Program evaluation is undertaken to inform decisions, clarify options, identify improvements, and provide information about programs and policies within contextual boundaries of time, place, values, and politics" (p. 12). Patton (1997) also emphasizes how evaluation is an essential component for the improvement and sustainability of an organization. In addition, Stein and Coburn (2010) support the notion that the incorporation of school district stakeholders in the research process adds to their use of the information for decision-making and to their capacity for utilizing research for problem-solving and organizational improvement. School districts can benefit from the facilitation of an improvement or inquiry cycle *and* from learning by doing—such as enhancing their own capacity for approaching continuous improvement by engaging in the process (Leithwood, 2010). This proposition supports the use of collaborative approaches to evaluation that involve stakeholders in the evaluation process.

It is important to examine the literature on collaborative approaches to support evaluation use and organizational improvement as well as the ways in which educational research and evaluation emphasize the implementation of improvement processes within school districts. CAE are those approaches that incorporate stakeholders (i.e., those individuals who have vested interest in the program or organization's success) (Shulha et al., 2016). These approaches are also aligned with enhanced evaluation use. Multiple researchers suggest that incorporating stakeholders in the evaluation process leads to greater evaluation use and better support for organizational improvements, including developing evaluative skills and capacity of the

stakeholders involved (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Johnson, Greenseid, Toal, King, Lawrenz, & Volkov, 2009; Patton, 1997; Shulha & Cousins, 1997; Stein & Coburn, 2010). For example, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989), the incorporation of stakeholders can enhance the quality of the evaluation findings and the likelihood that these findings will be used by those involved in the evaluation process. Thus, collaborative approaches to evaluation have the potential to enhance the use of the evaluation findings *and* to build the capacity of stakeholders for evaluative thinking—therefore increasing their ability to continue to incorporate these practices into the organization to support improvement over time.

Collaborative approaches to evaluation support school district continuous improvement processes. Organizations, especially school districts that are charged with addressing complex problems, are attempting to work with researchers and evaluators to improve their programs and practices (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015; Coburn & Turner, 2011; Finnigan & Daly, 2016; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Suppovitz, 2005; Suppovitz, 2006; Smylie, 2010). In fact, there is emerging interest on improvement science approaches such as *continuous improvement* and their applications to school districts (Bryk et al., 2015; Finnigan & Daly, 2016; Smylie, 2010). Continuous improvement approaches focus on measurable, long-term results by developing a strategic focus while capitalizing on a community of expert practitioners—typically through an emphasis on a collaborative approach, a foundation of data-based decision-making, and a cyclical process that supports continued growth and improvement (Smylie, 2010). Program evaluation can play a critical role in helping school districts meet federal and state accountability requirements (Alexander, 2012; Finnigan & Daly, 2015) and enhance their continuous improvement efforts (Nevo, 2009). In response to increased accountability for school districts and the need to use data and information throughout continuous improvement efforts, many

school districts have established accountability and research departments within their central offices—such as the one that I worked in during the time of this case study.

Research Problem

Despite the increased emphasis on improvement processes, there is minimal research that investigates evaluation use within district improvement efforts—especially relative to examining collaborative approaches to evaluation. Furthermore, evaluation researchers have identified a lack of empirical research on evaluation and a need for more rigorous studies on evaluation that go beyond historical reflection (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). The information provided in this section outlines the research gaps that currently exist in both the broader evaluation and education fields in relation to how collaborative evaluation processes are implemented in an applied setting.

Although evaluation use is one of the most researched topics in evaluation, there is a limited number of comprehensive studies that have added to the knowledge base on this topic. One such study was a systematic analysis of the empirical research on evaluation utilization conducted by Cousins and Leithwood (1986). They analyzed 65 empirical studies of evaluation use and examine trends on how an evaluation is used within an organization to support decision-making and improvement. In 1997, Shulha and Cousins conducted an updated analysis of research on evaluation utilization. Themes that emerged from these studies emphasized that evaluation use is closely linked to the way that the evaluation was implemented and the context for decision-making. Ultimately, both studies indicated that "engagement, interaction, and communication between evaluation clients and evaluators are critical to the meaningful use of evaluations" (Johnson et al., 2009, p. 19). Correspondingly, evaluations that engage stakeholders

and participants in a more collaborative manner also tended to have an enhanced use of evaluation (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Johnson et al., 2009; Patton, 1997; Shulha & Cousins, 1997; Stein & Coburn, 2010).

Collaborative and stakeholder oriented approaches to evaluation have continued to gain popularity in recent years. Evaluation scholars have been exploring how to best support evaluators with implementing these collaborative approaches to evaluation—with a special emphasis on those that enhance evaluation use and support programmatic or organizational improvement (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman et al., 2014). With the popularity of collaborative and stakeholder oriented evaluation approaches, evaluation researchers and thought leaders have developed many evaluation models consistent with these approaches. These various models and approaches exist to meet different information needs and often serve different audiences (Shulha et al., 2016). However, the various options can lead to confusion for evaluators when choosing which approach to take for a given evaluation and this can be a barrier to effective evaluation implementation (Shulha et al., 2016).

To address the confusion over the type of collaborative evaluation approach to take, Shulha and her colleagues (2016) developed the Principles to Guide CAE, which are also referred to as the *CAE principles*. These principles were developed empirically using an in-depth validation process. They are intended to support professional practice by better defining and supporting collaborative (i.e., stakeholder oriented) approaches to evaluation. By finding commonalities and evidence-based practices across the various approaches to CAE, an evaluator has more guidance on the evidence-based practices for evaluation utilization without feeling that he or she must be constrained to on specific approach to CAE (e.g., collaborative evaluation, empowerment evaluation). Furthermore, Shulha and her colleagues (2016) suggest that it is the

purpose and the context of the evaluation that should guide the evaluation approach taken. For example, an evaluator should take into consideration the needs and capacity of the stakeholders involved in the evaluation process.

Although the development of the CAE principles is an important first step in synthesizing the major aspects of collaborative approaches, the authors recognize that that more examination of the principles in applied settings is needed to enhance validity. In addition, the authors see these principles as ones that will continue to get refined over time. Accordingly, Cousins, Whitmore, and Shulha (2013) have asked their evaluation colleagues to analyze these CAE principles within multiple contexts, and to share the themes that emerge from these analyses: "Rather, we encourage colleagues—academics, practitioners, commissioners, and stakeholders in evaluation—to take these principles forward and make them 'the subject of continuous analysis and renewal through dialogue and systematic inquiry'" (p. 18). Studies such as this case study are needed to validate and refine the CAE principles that have been proposed, and to contribute to the knowledge base on CAE. This is one reason why I used the CAE principles as the conceptual framework to guide this study; it is highly relevant to my research purpose and the knowledge gained from this study can contribute to the quality of the framework.

In addition, there is a need for higher quality and rigorous studies regarding the implementation of collaborative approaches to evaluation. This need is supported by Cousins and Chouinard (2012), who conducted an analysis of empirical literature on participatory evaluation practices—which greatly overlap with collaborative approaches. In the process of identifying the 121 studies that they included in their analysis, they noticed the need for enhancing the quality of studies in the evaluation field. Specifically, they were concerned that the majority of the evaluation studies were reflective case narratives and did not typically include a methods section

to describe their research approach despite the fact that most were published in peer-reviewed journals. Based on their observations from the empirical literature they developed several methodological considerations for research on evaluation, which included augmentation of the case study narrative through various sources of data and an examination of the evaluation process over time (i.e., over a year).

There is also a gap in the research literature on internal evaluation. There is limited research on the role of the internal evaluator (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001; Volkov, 2011). For example, there is a need to address how the role of the internal evaluator can potentially support organizations with capacity building and approaches to inquiry (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010; Volkov 2011). Specific to the focus of this study, there are even fewer studies that have addressed evaluation use from the internal perspective within a school district central office in a comprehensive manner. The lack of such studies may have to do with the fact that most school districts hire external evaluators for complex and high stakes evaluations (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001) and that these external evaluators may not have the same access to the district central office to allow for an in-depth and systematic analysis of the evaluation process.

Overview of the Instrumental Case Study

I designed this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) to address the need for research on CAE and the guiding principles as well as the application of CAE within the school district from the perspective of an internal evaluator. I also incorporated many of Cousins and Chouinard's (2012) methodological recommendations for a more rigorous approach to the case study. My aim is to help evaluators within complex organizations such as school districts understand collaborative approaches to evaluation to better support evaluation use and approaches to

organizational improvement. This study also addresses the collaborative evaluation approach as a process for improvement within the school district's central office since the primary perspective guiding the study is that of the district's internal evaluators. The role of the evaluators and our growth throughout the evaluation process are central to this study, and this is a key focus of this study as well. This section describes the methods proposed for this case study.

As mentioned previously, the Grow for Success school turnaround initiative was concerned with improving five low performing schools through a variety of interventions. This case study examines the evaluation activities that occurred from September 2015 to October 2016. In addition, an analysis of the context and activities directly before and after these dates are included. As such, historical and contextual data from Year 1 (from May 2014 to August 2015) and a retrospective examination of evaluation use in Year 3 (November 2016 to June 2017) of the target initiative were analyzed. The following breakdown provides an overview of the way in which the data were used for the analysis:

- The historical and contextual data incorporated into this study provided foundational information regarding the target initiative and the beginning of the evaluation process (Year 1) from May 2014 to August 2015.
- The evaluation process data addressed the evaluation activities during Year 2 and the beginning of Year 3 of the initiative from September 2015 to October 2016. I served as the lead evaluator for the target initiative during that time period. The formative evaluation process occurred from September 2015 to February 2016. This was followed by the research and evaluation work to inform modifications of the initiative (for the 2016-2017 school year), which occurred from March 2016 to July 2016. The evaluation process for the modified

initiative (which I will refer to as the *Turnaround Zone*) occurred during Year 3 of the initiative from June 2016 to October 2016.

- I examined data with a focus on the use and influence of the evaluation to provide a retrospective examination of evaluation use for improvement.

For this case study, I saw my role as an evaluator as central to understanding the implementation of collaborative approaches to evaluation. In addition, my role as an internal evaluator allowed for a more in-depth perspective of the district as a central office and the way in which evaluation was used as a tool to support improvement. The *evolution of evaluator identity, role, and positionality* is a theme that Cousins and Chouinard (2012) identified in their analysis of empirical literature on participatory evaluation practices (which is one collaborative approach). This theme was a central tenet of the research approach that I took in this case study. Because I made many of the initial methodological decisions for the evaluation within my role as the lead evaluator, I primarily use the first person *I* when discussing the evaluation process. I use the term *we* when referring to a joint decision by the evaluation team or stakeholders. In addition to my interpretation of the case as the lead evaluator, I also incorporated other viewpoints by using data from document analysis and interviews with the other two evaluators involved in the Grow for Success evaluation. This allowed for data triangulation as a means to enhance the validity of the research process (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995).

I used the CAE principles as anchors for a deductive thematic analysis of the case study data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lichtman, 2013; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I used these principles as a framework because this case study is concerned with examining the collaborative approach to evaluation and the process that our evaluation team implemented within a school district initiative. The principles are: clarify motivation for collaboration; foster meaningful

relationships; develop a shared understanding of the program; promote appropriate participatory processes; monitor and respond to resource availability; monitor evaluation progress and quality; promote evaluative thinking; and follow through to realize use. The principles are listed in a loose temporal order (Shulha et al., 2016). I also conducted an inductive analysis of themes that went beyond those listed in the conceptual framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lichtman, 2013), and examined how these inductive themes connected back to literature from multiple disciplines. This helped me ensure that the themes that emerged were comprehensive, and examine the use of the CAE principles framework in an applied setting—thus, serving to further validate these principles and contribute to their ongoing refinement.

Throughout this study, pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants, schools, and school district. It is important to note that I refer to Grow for Success as an initiative as opposed to a program for two main reasons—to align with the district's terminology as closely as possible and to recognize the malleability of the school turnaround work that was still in development as opposed to a more established and stabilized program. Program evaluation concepts were applied to this initiative within this study, and therefore this study has implications for adding to the knowledge base for program evaluation.

Significance of the Study

This case study has implications for supporting evaluators who are attempting to implement collaborative approaches to evaluation to an applied setting, evaluation researchers interested in collaborative approaches, and those interested in evaluation use. In addition, it has implications for educational researchers focused on incorporating evidence-based practices and improvement processes in school districts. The methods used for this study provide for an in-

depth, rigorous, and high-quality analysis of collaborative approaches to evaluation within the context of the school districts, thus addressing the research concerns raised by Cousins and Chouinard (2012). In addition, it contributes to the ongoing refinement of the Principles to Guide CAE that its developers have called for (Cousins et al., 2013; Shulha et al., 2016), and helps to enhance the validity of these principles for ongoing use in the evaluation field.

Information gained from this study can provide insights into evaluation use for organizational and program improvement by examining how school districts use and respond to the evaluation process, from the perspective of the evaluator. Spillane (2012) contends that the "relations between data and practice have been underconceptualized" (p. 113) and need to be more fully addressed. In addition, Honig (2008) recognizes that having a more solid foundation in how to approach the inquiry process for improvement allows district central offices to enhance their direct influence on school improvement practices. Therefore, by pulling in information from evaluation theory and evaluation use, one may be able to have a better understanding of how data can be used collaboratively to support school district improvement efforts and to build internal capacity for ongoing evaluative thinking.

Definitions of Terms

Collaborative (i.e., stakeholder oriented) approaches to evaluation - "Evaluation practice in contexts where the meaning of evaluation is jointly constructed by evaluators and stakeholders" (Shulha et al., 2016, p. 196).

Continuous improvement - Approaches that are implemented for measurable, long-term results by developing a strategic focus while capitalizing on a community of expert practitioners—

typically through an emphasis on a collaborative approach, a foundation of data-based decision-making, and a cyclical process that supports continued growth and improvement (Smylie, 2010).

Developmental evaluation - An evaluation type that is focused on the role of the evaluator alongside the program managers in the program development process. Within this role, the evaluator provides wisdom and guidance on programmatic evaluation methods on monitoring and feedback systems (Patton, 1994).

Evaluation (i.e., program evaluation) - "Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming" (Patton, 1997, p. 12).

Evaluation capacity building - A way in which evaluation is embedded into the organization's culture to provide the foundation necessary for stakeholders to implement "sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action" (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 443).

Evaluation use (utilization) - "the way in which an evaluation and information from the evaluation impacts the program that is being evaluated." (Alkin & Taut, 2003, p. 1).

Evaluation influence - According to Kirkhart (2000):

> The term influence (the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means) is broader than use, creating a framework with which to examine effects that are multidirectional, incremental, unintentional, and noninstrumental, alongside those that are unidirectional, episodic, intended, and instrumental (which are well represented by the term use). (p. 7)

Formative Evaluation - An evaluation type that is concerned with improvement of an existing program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010).

Inquiry - A cyclical process that incorporates evidence-based practices for improvement (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Organizational Learning - According to Torres, Piontek, and Preskill (1996), organizational learning is:

> A continuous process of organizational growth and improvement that: (a) is integrated with work activities, (b) invokes the alignment of values, attitudes, and perceptions among organizational members, and (c) uses information or feedback about both processes and outcomes to make changes. (p. 2)

Principle - "Foundation for system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning" (Oxford, 2015).

Process use - ''Individual changes in thinking and behavior and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process'' (Patton, 1997, p. 90).

School turnaround - A phrase that typically refers to schools that have been "chronically low performing" on various accountability measures (Herman et al., 2008, p. 4).

Stakeholders - Those individuals who have vested interest in the program or organization's success.

Summative evaluation - A type of evaluation that provides a way to judge the performance of a stable program and address if it worked to reach its intended goals and outcomes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001).

Use of (evaluation) findings - The organization's use of the recommendations and knowledge for a variety of purposes (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter one serves as the overview of the proposal and presents the need for and significance of the study. Chapter two provides a more in-depth overview of the literature surrounding the topics of continuous improvement, evaluation use, collaborative approaches to evaluation, and the role of evaluation in school district central offices. The research methods proposed, rationale for the methodological approach, and the data collection process are further discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter also addresses research validity, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 4 provides a narrative overview of the case study and associated findings. In Chapter 5, I provide a deeper analysis including conclusions and implications for practice as well as further research.

Conclusion

This case study explored the evaluation process with a focus on CAE and the role of the evaluator for a school turnaround initiative. It focused on the way in which CAE was incorporated into the evaluation, how CAE is connected to evaluation use, and the evaluators' position and growth throughout the evaluation process. The Principles to Guide CAE were used as a framework for deductive analysis. Inductive analysis was also used to identify additional themes and to address the role of the evaluator. This study has implications for understanding how collaborative evaluation approaches are applied in context and how this connects to evaluation use. Other implications include developing a better understanding of evaluation and

continuous improvement efforts in school districts as well as insights on how to strengthen these processes.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review addresses two main areas of research: (1) the area of evaluation research, particularly on evaluation use and collaborative approaches to evaluation, and (2) educational research that is concerned with school district's capacity to engage in continuous improvement processes. Collaborative approaches to evaluation (CAE), which have been associated with enhanced evaluation use (i.e., utilization), can serve as a tool for inquiry and continuous improvement within school districts. These evaluation approaches also have implications for capacity building and organizational learning, which can have longer-lasting effects or influence on the school district central office and stakeholders involved in the process. In addition, researchers have recognized the need for school districts to enhance their problem-solving processes and to engage in inquiry processes that are based on empirical evidence (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Bryk et al., 2015; Shulman, 1981; Suppovitz, 2005; Suppovitz, 2006; Smylie, 2010; Finnigan & Daly, 2016). Numerous studies in educational leadership have emphasized the critically important role of evidence-based inquiry processes such as evaluation and continuous improvement approaches (Alexander, 2012; Bryk et al., 2015; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Lingenfelter, 2011; Smylie, 2010), which both incorporate collaborative inquiry and use of evidence to support decision-making for the purpose of improvement.

Ultimately, this case study is concerned with developing a better understanding of collaborative approaches to evaluation and how the implementation of these approaches into a complex organization is connected with evaluation use for improvement—in this case, the school district. This chapter provides an overview of the literature in these areas. In addition, it provides and overview of Principles to Guide CAE (Shulha et al., 2016) which is the conceptual framework used to guide the analysis for this case study.

Relevant Evaluation Research and Guiding Conceptual Framework

It is important to provide a more detailed overview of key evaluation concepts as a foundation for this instrumental case study because the case itself is concerned with the evaluation process within the school district's central office. Within this section, I give the definition of evaluation, discuss the similarities and differences between research and evaluation as forms of inquiry, examine evaluation purposes and types, and introduce commonly accepted categories for evaluation approaches and models. These concepts provide the foundation for understanding the collaborative approaches to evaluation (CAE) and the Principles to Guide CAE (Shulha et al., 2016) that were used as the conceptual framework for this case study. This section also describes the concept of evaluation use (i.e., utilization) for organizational improvement. It helps lay the groundwork for the additional focus of this study—the use of evaluation as a method to support improvement within school districts.

Overview of Key Evaluation Concepts

Evaluation can be viewed as a form of inquiry for improvement for organizations and programs. Patton (1997) provides a helpful definition of program evaluation: "Program

evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming" (p. 12). It is important to distinguish some parallels and differences between research and evaluation, since each concept has distinct purposes. While this study is particularly interested in evaluation, it also has implications for the use of research within organizations as this relates to evaluative processes and practices. One commonality between research and evaluation, as approaches to inquiry, is that they both aim to integrate quality information and practices to support learning, decisions, and practice (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). Although research and evaluation are both grounded in inquiry, some characteristics separate them. Evaluation and research often have different purposes, reach different types of audiences or clients, and report their findings in different ways (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). For example, the organizational context is an important aspect that differentiates evaluation from research. According to Russ-Eft and Preskill (2010), "A distinguishing characteristic of evaluation is that unlike traditional forms of academic research, it is grounded in the everyday realities of organizations" (p. 6). Therefore, evaluations can typically be more specific to the needs of individual organizations and programs.

Purposes and types of evaluation. Within evaluation, there are various purposes and types. Prior to Patton's (1994) introduction of developmental evaluation, program evaluation was placed into one of two main types—summative or formative. Summative evaluation provides a way to judge the performance of a stable program and if it works to reach its intended goals and outcomes. Formative evaluation is concerned with improvement of an existing program and developmental evaluation is focused on the development of the program itself. However, both developmental and formative evaluation emphasize improvement through cycles of inquiry

(Fitzpatrick et al., 2010; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). The evaluation that is the focus of this case study was primarily formative, but also incorporated some aspects of developmental evaluation (which is detailed more in Chapter 4).

The concept of developmental evaluation, which Patton introduced in the 1990s, is a relatively new term to the evaluation field. Here, a more detailed explanation of developmental evaluation is provided because it has a more nuanced definition than formative or summative evaluation, and is a concept that is highly relevant to this case study. Developmental evaluation goes beyond the traditional categories of formative versus summative evaluation. The focus is on change and adaptation of programs. It is focused on the role of the evaluator alongside the program managers in the program development process. Within this role, the evaluator provides wisdom and guidance on programmatic evaluation methods. The evaluator is part of the team and evaluative judgments are made in a collaborative manner as a team. In addition, the evaluation questions and plan may shift over time as the program goes through different stages of development (Patton, 1994).

External and internal evaluation. Another important distinction is whether the evaluator is external (i.e., outside of the organization and program that he or she is evaluating) or internal to the organization that is the focus of the evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001; Volkov, 2011). According to Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001), most program evaluators in the past have been external to the programs and organizations that they have evaluated; these individuals are typically university professors or consultants. There has been a growing interest, however, in using internal evaluators. For this case study, both my colleagues and I served as internal evaluators who were employed by the school district. Using an internal or external evaluator can have an impact on the way the evaluation is used, the perception of the

credibility of the source of information, and the way in which stakeholders at multiple levels of the organization are possibly involved in the process. While external evaluators tend to have more credibility or clout as perceived by the organization being evaluated, internal evaluators have the distinct advantage of a more detailed understanding of the organization itself and access to data and individuals within the organization (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001).

Evaluation categorization. There are a multitude of evaluation approaches and ways to categorize these approaches or models. These can vary from behavioral objectives, consumer-oriented approaches to stakeholder oriented approaches such as participatory, collaborative, and empowerment evaluation (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2010). One commonly accepted categorization of evaluation approaches is the evaluation tree that Alkin (2004) conceptualized. Alkin (2004) provides an examination of how evaluation theories have evolved over time. He suggests that all evaluation was born out of social science methodologies (i.e., social inquiry) as a way to address accountability concerns. He uses the concept of an evaluation tree to represent the central tenets of evaluation theory and how various approaches to evaluation branch out, depending on various factors. He categorizes these approaches according to their focus on use, methods, or values.

Notably, the majority of the evaluation theories and models that align with the use branch of Alkin's evaluation tree are also associated with collaborative (i.e., stakeholder involvement) approaches to evaluation (CAE) to help guide decision-making (Alkin, 2004). There are multiple collaborative approaches to evaluation such as collaborative evaluation, participatory evaluation, and empowerment evaluation (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). These collaborative approaches are central to this case study because they were incorporated in the evaluation process being examined. These are explained in more detail below.

Collaborative Approaches to Evaluation

CAE are also commonly referred to as stakeholder oriented approaches to evaluation (Fetterman et al., 2014). Many collaborative approaches stem from action research, which demonstrates the continued overlap of research and evaluation as forms of inquiry for improvement. There are multiple approaches and models that fall into the category of CAE. This section takes a closer look at the definition of CAE and the evaluation models that were incorporated into this case study's evaluation process.

For CAE, stakeholders at multiple levels work together to employ the inquiry cycle. These evaluation approaches typically incorporate multiple levels of stakeholders—both managers and others—in the evaluation design, implementation, and analysis. The purpose of involving stakeholders to this extent is to enhance the accuracy and utilization of the evaluation and to help build the evaluative skill set of the program staff (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2010). Senge (2006) emphasizes the need to incorporate multiple perspectives in improvement efforts to provide for a deeper level of understanding and impact. By supporting learning and involvement at multiple levels, an organization can strengthen its approaches to improvement and the associated impact on results (Senge, 2006).

Many of the collaborative approaches to evaluation draw from action research. Action research is associated with a cyclical process, whereby there are cycles of planning, action, and analysis of the results from the process. In addition, it typically includes the "local stakeholders as co-researchers" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 3). The original term of *action research* was credited to Kurt Lewin in 1944 (Noffke, 1994). The primary rationale for the model for action research, especially in a more participatory manner, is that various stakeholders contribute to the

process because they provide multiple viewpoints and insights into developing the action research plan. Furthermore, the stakeholders are much more likely to be invested in implementation of the plan due to a fuller understanding of the underlying principles that shaped its formation (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

Prevalent models of CAE include collaborative evaluation, empowerment evaluation, and participatory evaluation. In particular, the evaluation that I conducted as part of this case study incorporated collaborative evaluation and empowerment evaluation approaches. In collaborative evaluation, the evaluators are in charge of the evaluation, but there is a strong partnership with the members of the target program or organization (Fetterman et al. 2014). Within this model, the evaluator develops a team of collaborative members who are key stakeholders from the program and/or organization (O'Sullivan, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012). This team works in partnership with the evaluator to develop the guiding questions for the evaluation, conduct data collection, and develop recommendations.

Another model that falls into the category of stakeholder oriented evaluation is empowerment evaluation. This evaluation model involves program stakeholders at multiple levels of the organization in a cyclical process. The role of the evaluator is a guide or "critical friend" who facilitates the evaluation process using internal staff—as opposed to having the evaluator having the bulk of the control in the process (Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). Empowerment evaluation includes a three-step process of developing a *mission* through identifying the values and focus, *taking stock* by identifying the activities and goals, and planning for the future to develop strategies and to document progress (Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). This evaluation model incorporates tools and structures associated with the getting to outcomes (GTO) model (Chinman, Imm, & Wandersman, 2004)

such as developing logic models and action plans. Its main components are goal setting, planning, evaluating, and improving and sustaining.

Participatory evaluation is a stakeholder oriented approach in which program staff members and evaluators share control of the evaluation through a systematic inquiry process to produce evaluative knowledge (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). It focuses on the evaluation process rather than the goals or intent. Participatory evaluation also heavily relies on non-evaluator stakeholder integration into the evaluation process (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). Evaluation approaches that have high levels of stakeholder involvement such as those that fall into the category of CAE have been associated with enhanced evaluation use (i.e., utilization) (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Johnson et al. 2009; Shulha & Cousins, 1997), which is explored more in the next section.

Evaluation Use

This section explores the topic of evaluation use and how this connects to the current study. The concept of *evaluation use*, which is also commonly referred to as *evaluation utilization*, is central to this study because the purpose of the evaluation process is for the stakeholders to find the results valuable and useful for their organization. In many cases, stakeholders also enhance their own skill set through their involvement in the evaluation process (Patton, 1997). *Evaluation use* is "the way in which an evaluation and information from the evaluation impacts the program that is being evaluated" (Alkin & Taut, 2003, p. 1). This can occur at the individual, group, or organizational level.

The Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2011) are used to assess the quality of program evaluation. The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE)

developed these standards to clarify a common set of expectations for evaluation, and they are grouped into the following categories: utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability. The concept of evaluation use overlaps with the utility standards developed by the JCSEE. These utility standards ultimately help to support evaluation use (but are not synonymous with evaluation use). The utility standards are evaluator credibility, attention to stakeholders, negotiated purposes, explicit values, relevant information, meaningful processes and products, timely and appropriate communicating and reporting, and concern for consequences and influence (Yarbrough et al., 2011). These utility standards are further detailed in Appendix A.

Two overarching categories of *evaluation use* are commonly recognized in evaluation research—*use of findings* that supports decision-making and *process use* that encompasses knowledge gained at the individual, group, or organizational level (i.e., organizational learning) (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Patton, 1998). In addition, the concept of *evaluation influence* has been acknowledged by evaluation scholars (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Herbert, 2014; Kirkhart, 2000). These concepts are further defined in the sections below.

Use of findings. *Use of findings* refers to the organization's use of the recommendations and knowledge for a variety of purposes (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). A widely accepted distinction in the way that evaluation is used by decision-makers is between instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic use (Herbert, 2014; Leviton & Hughes, 1981). *Instrumental use* in its simplest form is when there is direct use of the evaluation findings and recommendations by the decision-makers, and it encompasses the effect that an evaluation may have over time—both directly and indirectly (Herbert, 2014; Weiss, Murphy-Graham, & Birkeland, 2005). *Conceptual use* is when there may not be documentation of the actual use, but the evaluation does have some indirect impact on the common knowledge around a specific topic in the organization and helps

shape the way that organizational members approach decision-making (Herbert, 2014). This is closely tied to the concept of *evaluation influence* (Weiss, 1979). *Symbolic use* (Johnson, 1998; Alkin & Taut, 2003) is described as "a symbolic act without intending to use the findings" (Herbert, 2014, p. 391) or, in other words, as more of an act of compliance as part of an evaluation requirement (Nevo, 2009).

Process use. While the predominant conceptualization of evaluation use has been the direct use of findings, there has been a widespread recognition of how stakeholders who are involved in the evaluation process benefit from this participation (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Greene, 1988; Patton, 1998; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). This is referred to as *process use*. Patton (1998), who is credited with developing the concept, states that process use "refers to using evaluation logic and processes to help people in programs and organizations to learn to think evaluatively" and is "distinct from using the substantive findings in an evaluation report" (p. 226). This type of learning-by-doing is also seen as the "stimulus that causes instrumental or conceptual changes to take place" (Alkin & Taut, 2003, p. 7). Ultimately, process use impacts stakeholders by enhancing their capacity to do and use evaluation "through direct participation and systematic inquiry processes" (Cousins, Hay, & Chouinard, 2015, p. 91).

Process use is complementary to current evaluation concepts such as developmental evaluation, organizational learning, and evaluation capacity building. Organizational learning can be defined as:

> A continuous process of organizational growth and improvement that: (a) is integrated with work activities, (b) invokes the alignment of values, attitudes, and perceptions among organizational members, and (c) uses information or feedback about both processes and outcomes to make changes. (Torres et al., 1996, p. 2)

Argyris and Schön (1974) highlight the role of *learning organizations*, which is also tied to the concept of *organizational learning*, as a means to enhance the collective knowledge within an organization. They address how members at multiple levels of the organization can be incorporated into the process, and how this expands organizational learning.

Evaluation capacity building embeds evaluation into an organization and strives to give organizational stakeholders the skills and organizational foundation to engage in evaluation work. Evaluation capacity building is typically enhanced by engaging stakeholders in evaluation activities (Preskill & Boyle, 2008). The evaluation process can help support organizational learning and enhance employees' capacity for evaluation and inquiry (Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004; Preskill & Torres, 1999a; Preskill & Torres, 1999b; Preskill & Torres, 2000).

Influence. The concept of evaluation influence is one that is complex, and is defined in different ways by evaluation theorists (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Herbert, 2014). Evaluation researchers have acknowledged that there is some level of organizational influence that occurs as part of the evaluation process, and this extends beyond the more widely recognized concepts of *use of findings* or *process use*. For the purposes of this study, I am using Kirkhart's (2000) framework for evaluation influence as a reference:

> The term influence (the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means) is broader than use, creating a framework with which to examine effects that are multidirectional, incremental, unintentional, and noninstrumental, alongside those that are unidirectional, episodic, intended, and instrumental (which are well represented by the term use). (p. 7)

Kirkhart's (2000) integrated theory of influence has three dimensions (source of influence, intention, and timeframe) that are subdivided along various levels or continua. *Source of*

*influenc*e is the identified starting point (i.e., source) for the change, and has two levels—the evaluation process and the results of the evaluation. *Intention* has to do with whether or not the evaluation influence was intentional or unintentional. *Time* addresses if the evaluation influence occurred immediately (i.e., during the evaluation process), at the end of the evaluation cycle, or over a longer period of time (e.g., extended impact).

The notion of evaluation influence as one component of evaluation use provides a way to conceptualize the more intangible and indirect impact of the evaluation. While this helps to build a better understanding of evaluation use, this study does not examine the influence of the evaluation directly—primarily because it is such an intangible concept to study. Instead, this study focuses more on the use of findings and process use as outlined by the conceptual framework of the Principles to Guide CAE (Shulha et al., 2016).

Conceptual Framework: Principles to Guide CAE

It is well documented that evaluations which engage stakeholders and participants in a more collaborative manner are associated with enhanced use of evaluation, including use of findings, process use, and influence (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Johnson et al. 2009; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). The conceptual framework described here, the Principles to Guide CAE (Shulha et al., 2016), was used to organize the analysis of this instrumental case study because the framework provides a structure for what collaborative and stakeholder oriented evaluation processes entail, and it addresses these processes for the ultimate purpose of evaluation use; therefore, aligning to this study's research purpose and questions. This section outlines the purpose of the framework and its development. It also provides a deeper look at the principles within the framework.

Although there are advantages of these various collaborative approaches to evaluation, especially for the purposes of *evaluation use*, the involvement of stakeholders can be complicated, challenging to navigate, and many times lead to lengthy evaluations (Shulha et al., 2016). With multiple collaborative and stakeholder oriented evaluation models to follow (e.g. collaborative evaluation, empowerment evaluation), evaluators often face the challenge of trying to apply a specified model to an organizational context which may be incongruent to one specific collaborative approach (Shulha et al., 2016). Although these various models provide a suggested structure for how to conduct evaluation, which can serve as a beneficial roadmap, most experienced evaluators pull from a variety of models. Thus, there is not a "one size fits all" model for evaluation.

The goal of the Principles to Guide CAE framework is to add to the evaluator's understanding of how to apply collaborative evaluation approaches with organizations, and to add to the working knowledge of evaluation practice: "This set of principles is offered as a mechanism to support the development of professional working knowledge and evaluator expertise in the use of CAE" (Shulha et al., 2016, p. 194). The approach to evaluation and the model that is used depends on the context of the evaluation and the needs of the primary stakeholders. For the sake of alignment, I will refer to the same definition of *principle* that the Shulha and her colleagues used when introducing the Principles to Guide CAE (2016). They adopted the Oxford dictionary (2015) definition: "foundation for system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning." These principles were developed empirically over the course of a four-year multiple method, multi-phase study. It involved sessions for input around the concept of developing principles for CAE at the American Evaluation Association (AEA) conference during the Fall of 2011 and the Fall 2012, an online survey of 320 evaluation practitioners, and a

validation process on the draft set of principles. As mentioned previously, the authors are currently working on an additional layer of validation by asking practitioners to provide feedback on the application of the CAE principles to their work.

These principles are aligned with the ultimate goal of evaluation use, and are intended to support professional practice—therefore being pragmatic in nature as opposed to purely theoretical. In addition, the principles are primarily for use with formative or developmental evaluation, thus having an emphasis on programmatic improvement (Shulha et al., 2016). Table 1 provides an overview of the principles and the contributing factors that are associated with each principle. The eight principles are clarify motivation for collaboration, foster meaningful relationships, develop a shared understanding of the program, promote appropriate participatory processes, monitor and respond to resource availability, monitor evaluation progress and quality, promote evaluative thinking, and follow through to realize use.

Table 1. Principles and contributing factors to guide collaborative approaches to evaluation.

Principles	Contributing Factors
Clarify motivation for collaboration	▪ Evaluation purpose ▪ Evaluator and stakeholder expectations ▪ Information and process needs
Foster meaningful relationships	▪ Respect, trust, and transparency ▪ Structured and sustained interactivity ▪ Cultural competency
Develop a shared understanding of the program	▪ Program logic ▪ Organizational context
Promote appropriate participatory processes	▪ Diversity of stakeholders ▪ Depth of participation ▪ Control of decision-making
Monitor and respond to resource availability	▪ Time ▪ Budget ▪ Personnel
Monitor evaluation progress and quality	▪ Evaluation design ▪ Data collection
Promote evaluative thinking	▪ Inquiry orientation ▪ Focus on learning
Follow through to realize use	▪ Practical outcomes ▪ Transformative outcomes

In addition, the developers have emphasized that the principles themselves have only a "loose temporal order" as opposed to suggesting a step-by-step approach, and they emphasize the importance of the interconnectedness of each principle (Shulha et al., 2016, p. 198). Essentially, while most of the principles will be present in any given collaborative approach to evaluation, one principle does not supersede another. Context is the key to how the principles are practiced, and an evaluator's implementation of his or her approach to evaluation remains flexible enough to respond to a given context. The section entitled *Application of the Principles to Guide CAE to this Study* toward the end of this chapter discusses how this framework will be used to guide this instrumental case study.

Figure 1 below provides a comprehensive overview of the concepts that have been discussed in this section and how evaluation, specifically collaborative (i.e., stakeholder oriented) approaches to evaluation are situated within the evaluation field, with a focus on improvement. The summary of concepts in this figure help to bridge the various concepts presented so far to that of evaluation use—again, with an emphasis on both the use of findings and process use. The additional focus of this case study is how evaluations, specifically those that are approached collaboratively, may have implications for organizational and programmatic improvement within school district central offices.

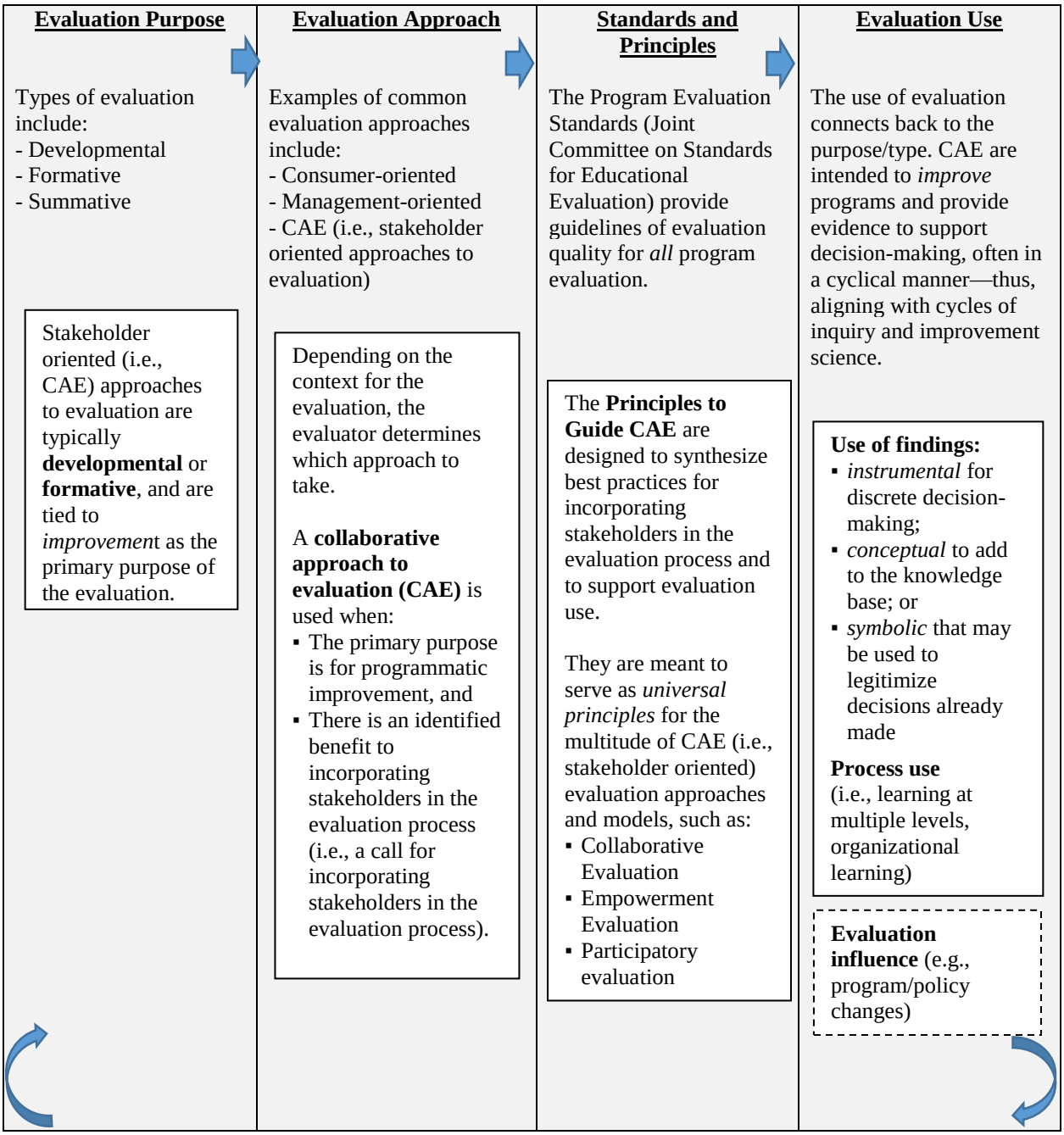

Figure 1. Overview of Collaborative Approaches to Evaluation (CAE) for organizational improvement.

Relevant Educational Research

There is a need for processes that can help school districts in addressing the multiple pressures that they are under, particularly in response to federal and state accountability requirements. There has been a movement within public education toward quantifiable data, accountability, and measurable results due to the increased accountability associated with NCLB legislation (Kaestle & Lodewick, 2007; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This is especially pertinent to school districts who are asked to measure and evaluate their programs in response to variety of reasons—such as compliance and mandates at the federal and state levels, pressure from the greater community, and/or a self-directed interest in programmatic improvement.

School districts, like most other complex organizations, are faced with multiple challenges. Labaree (2011) draws attention to the enormous complexity of schools and the systems surrounding them, referring to the loose coupling, nested contexts, and hard to define constructs around teaching and learning that make generalizations difficult. This reinforces the notion that quantitative data such as test scores cannot fully address the complexities that school districts face. Thus, the way in which many policymakers and educational leaders have focused on quantitative data alone has limitations, especially in such a complex organizational setting (Glazer & Peurach, 2013). In many cases, data are being used in a more punitive way as opposed to using it for inquiry and exploration for problem-solving or continuous improvement (Coburn & Turner, 2011).

Instead, evaluation and research approaches that use empirical evidence from multiple sources for problem-solving have the potential to better support school districts work toward their goals, and can serve as a tool for continuous improvement. Continuous improvement processes incorporate collaborative inquiry, use of evidence to support decision-making, a

cyclical process, and ongoing and incremental change (Smylie, 2010). Evaluation approaches can be viewed as one of many tools for continuous improvement. This section examines how evaluation, and particularly collaborative approaches to evaluation, in school districts can be used to support of improvement processes and outcomes.

Research regarding collaborative evaluation approaches to support evaluation use in school districts, including the use of findings and process use are also examined here. In particular, the concept of process use as a means to promote evaluative thinking—thus potentially leading to evaluation capacity building of involved stakeholders and organizational learning—is highly relevant to the needs of school districts that are facing consistent pressure to improve. Ultimately, there is a demonstrated need for further research on the Principles to Guide CAE (Shulha et. al, 2016) within the context of the school district's central office. This supports the purpose and research questions associated with this case study. An overview of how the conceptual framework of the Principles to Guide CAE (Shulha et. al, 2016) was used for the analysis of this case study is also provided.

Trends in Current Educational Research: Improvement Science and Continuous Improvement Processes

Recently, there has been an increased emphasis on improvement concepts, and particularly improvement science within educational research. Lewis (2016) focuses on the ways in which the lessons from improvement science, such as those from continuous improvement models, have the potential to contribute to educational research and practice. *Improvement science* is an approach that is focused on learning-by-doing within ongoing cycles of improvement (Bryk et al., 2015). Within this study, I use the concept of *improvement science*

synonymously with the concept of *continuous improvement*, and use the following definition of continuous improvement: approaches that are implemented for measurable, long-term results by developing a strategic focus while capitalizing on a community of expert practitioners—typically through an emphasis on a collaborative approach, a foundation of data-based decision-making, and a cyclical process that supports continued growth and improvement (Smylie, 2010).

The theories and tools associated with continuous improvement and improvement science approaches can support understanding and expansion of knowledge-building, motivation systems, and strategies for learning. Continuous improvement models began to take shape in the early 1800s and during the 1900s in response to the need for higher levels of quality and efficiency within the realm of industrialization and manufacturing. Continuous improvement approaches, such as Continuous Quality Improvement and Total Quality Management, warn against decision-making that is primarily based on assumptions; instead they promote a focus on research-based analysis and planning (Smylie, 2010). Preskill and Torres (1999) describe the incorporation of continuous improvement into organizations by stating:

> Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and Total Quality Management (TQM) were developed in response to problems with processes and procedures within organizations. These programs provided a means for employees to analyze underlying causes and tweak processes so that they could work better. (p. 11)

Improvement science emphasizes innovation and adaptation to better address the highly complex nature of educational organizations. This is in contrast to the limitations involved when focusing primarily on policy adoption or implementation, which typically lack the innovation involved in the improvement process (Lewis, 2015; Mitki, Shani, & Meiri, 1997). The field of improvement science has led to increased performance in multiple sectors. Many of those in the business and

healthcare sectors have a history of incorporating improvement science practices to support continuous improvement efforts.

Those in the educational research field also see how those approaches to improvement, which incorporate evidence-based decision-making through cycles of inquiry, can benefit school districts and individual schools. For example, Fullan (2014) suggests that educational leaders need to be more strategic by more widely incorporating data and evidence-based practices—such as those that are used in business and other fields. While there is currently a resurgence in interest of continuous improvement models within school districts, Preskill and Torres warn that some of these models have limitations. Continuous improvement approaches potentially fall short if they are focused on "quick fixes" rather than employing a more in-depth analysis to support long-term change (Preskill & Torres, 1999). Thus, some of these models may not allow for an in-depth understanding of a problem and potential solutions that will lead to lasting change. Evaluations can serve as tools for continuous improvement and provide a more in-depth understanding of programs and organizations, such as school districts, to support a more comprehensive approach for lasting change. This is further addressed in the next two sections.

Evaluation as a Tool for Continuous Improvement in School Districts

Evaluation approaches can have many implications for enhancing the way in which continuous improvement processes are incorporated into an organization. For the purposes of this study, the collaborative evaluation process is examined as a way to support programmatic and organizational improvement—therefore serving as one approach to continuous improvement. The need to focus on evaluation in educational organizations to support improvement is a common theme in both education and evaluation research (Nevo, 2009). Stein and Coburn

(2010) state that there is a recent emphasis in educational research on more direct applications to improve educational practice. This emphasis on more direct applications of research can have a positive impact on schools and school districts facing complex challenges. Spillane (2012) also supports the utilization of inquiry and research to enhance educational practices. Furthermore, Preskill and Russ-Eft (2001) explain how evaluation can help organizations meet their needs in a more strategic manner that is based on using quality information to support decision-making:

> As organizations have been forced to respond to an increasingly competitive environment that is volatile and unpredictable, and as they are likely to continue being pressured to do things better, faster, and cheaper, they are looking at evaluation as a means to help them determine how to best proceed. In the knowledge area, where we find ourselves now, it is critical that organizations learn from their mistakes, that they see themselves as part of a larger system, and that they use quality information for making timely decisions. (p. 61)

Lingenfelter (2011) suggests that educational practitioners use an inquiry or action research process within educational settings that incorporates evaluative and continuous improvement approaches. This must allow for flexibility and an iterative process that incorporates reflection on what is or is not working and adjusting the strategies based on movement (or lack of movement) toward identified goals while also drawing on the "wisdom of experienced practitioners" (p. 48).

In addition, evaluations that strive to understand the context of a program can help to understand the program's unique needs. Rallis and Militello (2009) make a case for school districts to practice ongoing evaluative processes for problem-solving and improvement that is specific to their context:

> Rather than be held accountable solely by external forces, school districts can take charge of accountability through internal mechanisms of ongoing evaluation, defining terms, and

> demonstrating outcomes… Engagement and dialogue with other professionals about real problems of practice in contextualized settings allows educators to make choices and take responsibility for their actions; they become accountable through their actions. (p. 268)

One explanation for how evaluation can work to understand and address organizational improvement is provided by Argyris and Schön (1974). They suggest that there is a difference between a *theory-of-action* which is typically an idealized plan that is based on theoretical research, and a *theory-of-use* which is what actually occurs when the theory of action is applied in the context of organizations. By incorporating strategic approaches to evaluation, practitioners can work to "narrow the gap between theories of action and theories-in-use" (Rallis & Militello, 2009, p. 269). Taking this one step further, collaborative approaches to evaluation have been associated with an increased understanding of the context of the organization (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Johnson et al., 2009; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Therefore, an examination of how this is applied to a school district setting can provide insight into continuous improvement processes and the educational research surrounding this.

Organizational Learning in School Districts

As mentioned previously, process use in evaluation is closely associated with organizational learning, and has implications for the conceptual and instrumental use of findings (Alkin & Taut, 2003). Collaborative approaches to evaluation typically result in both the use of findings to support organizational improvement as well as process use to enhance organizational learning and evaluation capacity building for involved stakeholders. Such collaborative approaches have the potential to support higher levels of evaluative thinking and skills for continuous improvement over time. This section provides more detail on the concept of process

use and organizational learning as it pertains to school districts. These concepts are central to the understanding of the way in which collaborative approaches to evaluation support evaluation use.

There is a recognized need for increasing the knowledge and skills of educational administrators and district leaders, and how these individuals interact with information when engaging in decision-making (Cohen et al., 2007). For example, Spillane (2012) notes that the actual implementation of inquiry and research practices within school districts depends on practitioner knowledge, skills, and motivation. Leithwood (2010) emphasizes the need for school districts to focus on enhancing their capacity for problem-solving—making them better able to incorporate evidence-based practices to address the educational and organizational problems that they face. Thus, school districts need to enhance their own skill set to be more effective in continuous improvement processes (Honig, 2008; Suppovitz, 2006).

Stein and Coburn (2010) also reinforce the way in which district leaders can benefit from incorporating research into their decision-making practices and the impact this can have on their capacity for engaging in more systematic approaches—which can then lead to longer term changes over time:

> Frequent communication across diverse sectors of the district office, opportunities to engage deeply with research ideas outside the decision context, relations of trust, and shared understanding about instruction all promote more substantive engagement with research as part of decision-making… district capacity is crucial—not only the capacity to access, interpret, and bring research to bear on the local problems but the capacity to orchestrate systematic responses as well. (p. 13)

This then raises the question of how school districts can enhance their own capacity to engage in meaningful inquiry processes to support improvement so they can have a greater impact on schools and students. Honig (2008) pulls concepts from organizational and sociocultural learning theories to outline how central offices may be able to serve as learning organizations. She draws from sociocultural learning theory to address the importance of joint work among various levels of stakeholders for capacity building. Honig states, "Sociocultural learning theory elaborates forms of assistance that foster participants' increasingly deep engagement in various activities—or, as some theorists put it, novice-expert relationships that aim to bring novices into fuller participation in a given activity" (2008, p. 634).

Furthermore, Preskill and Boyle (2008) address the way in which evaluative inquiry can enhance evaluation capacity building, which aims to embed evaluation into the organization's culture and to provide the foundation necessary for these stakeholders to be successful. According to Preskill and Boyle (2008), "the ultimate goal of evaluation capacity building is sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action" (p. 443). Teaching and learning strategies for evaluation capacity building include multiple approaches to learning through engaging internal stakeholders in evaluation processes. Again, this connects back to the importance of involving multiple stakeholders through an evaluation approach that is collaborative to support evaluation use (both the use of findings and process use) and organizational improvement.

Application of the Principles to Guide CAE to this Study

I used the CAE principles and concepts that unite them as my guiding conceptual framework for my analysis as opposed to examining the data in relation to one particular approach to evaluation (e.g., collaborative evaluative or empowerment evaluation). For this study, I examined all eight of these principles, with an emphasis on evaluation use, within the context of the evaluation that my colleagues and I conducted. In particular, I examined how the principles were applied to support evaluation use and continuous improvement processes in the school district. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the researchers who developed these principles have asked other evaluators and researchers to examine these principles in context as a means to enhance their validity:

> We make no claims that this set as it stands today is either exhaustive or enduring. It is, however, a product of the collective wisdom of evaluators who both embrace CAE in their practice and took the time and interest to help inform how these practices could be understood. Our hope is that as collaborative approaches are both used and refined, empirical and scholarly work will seek to test the veracity of these principles. In encouraging such work, we recognize that the principles themselves are likely to evolve. (Shulha et al., 2016, p. 196)

In addition, Cousins and Chouinard (2012) conducted an analysis of empirical literature on participatory evaluation practices. There were seven themes that emerged as highly relevant, and many of these themes can also be applied to broader evaluation approaches and stakeholder involvement approaches. In comparing these seven themes to the CAE principles, I found one theme that coincided with all eight principles. This theme—the *evolution of evaluator identity, role, and positionality*—stood out as a central tenet. This is why I am addressing the concept of

evaluator identity, role, and positionality as a major aspect of my research process. Chapter 3 provides more detail about my role as an evaluator, and how this perspective is central to understanding the implementation of collaborative approaches to evaluation within this case study.

Conclusion

The findings and implications of this study can contribute to the knowledge base for research on evaluation and on improvement processes within school districts. This study also has the potential to provide insights for programmatic improvement and organizational learning. According to Scriven (1996):

> Evaluation is not only a discipline on which all others depend, it is one on which all deliberate activity depends. It follows that significant improvements in the core concept and techniques of evaluation, of which we have seen many in recent years, and of which many more could be made within the next few years, have the potential for huge improvement in the quality of life and work, as well as in the level of achievement in all disciplines. (p. 404)

Taken together, this literature overview provides a path for understanding how collaborative approaches to evaluation need to be explored further and how they can support educational leaders with critical decisions for organizational improvement.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODS

Introduction

This case study examines the evaluation planning and process that incorporated collaborative approaches to evaluation (CAE) for a school district initiative. I examined this primarily from the perspective of the evaluators. This study was designed to answer these questions:

1. From the perspective of the evaluator(s), what does this case demonstrate about the relationship between the implementation of a collaborative approach to evaluation and evaluation use in the following categories (using the principles to guide CAE as a framework):

    a. the school district's use of findings (i.e., conceptual knowledge, implementation of the recommendations from the evaluation process)?

    b. the school district's process use (i.e., organizational learning, evaluation capacity building)?

2. What does this case demonstrate about the evaluators' role and growth within a collaborative approach to evaluation?

Research Approach and Rationale

The research was conducted as case study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) of my experience as a lead evaluator who was implementing a collaborative approach to evaluation. For this study, the case was the specific internal evaluation activities surrounding the school district's turnaround initiative of five lower performing elementary schools. This case was largely bounded in time and was based primarily on the perspectives of the evaluators—myself as the lead evaluator and two other colleagues. It focused on the evaluation activities that occurred from September 2015 to October 2016, but an analysis of the context and activities directly before and after these dates was also included. As such, historical and contextual data from Year 1 (from May 2014 to August 2015) and a retrospective examination of evaluation use in Year 3 (November 2016 to June 2017) of the target initiative were also examined.

The purpose of utilizing a case study for this research was to address the complex nature of organizational systems and school districts (Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995; Stake 2005; Yazan, 2013; Yin, 2014). According to Stake (1995), the case study is a qualitative approach to research, which incorporates multiple perspectives around a specific case or situation within a specified timeframe. The case study format allows for an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of evaluation within an organizational setting from which to understand the context and research questions (Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995; Stake 2005; Yin, 2014). The study is an instrumental case study because the case serves as the instrument for understanding a specific phenomenon—which for this study was the use of a collaborative approach to evaluation for improvement (Stake, 1995; Stake, 2015).

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm that guided this study is pragmatism. Ultimately, my goal is for my research findings to contribute to practical applications in addition to conceptual contributions to evaluation and educational research. Particularly, this study incorporated a pragmatic paradigm as influenced by John Dewey:

> What makes this perspective different from other ways of understanding educational research (and research more generally) is first and foremost its underlying transactional framework, which allows for an understanding of knowledge as a function of and for human action, and an understanding of human interaction and communication in thoroughly practical terms. (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 14)

The purpose of this research is to provide insights for practical use and to better inform researchers, evaluators, and school district leaders on evaluative inquiry approaches for continuous improvement. This research purpose is driven by the prevalent goal in education to make positive changes in schools that lead to enhanced student outcomes.

Reflexivity Statement and the Role of the Researcher

Within qualitative research, it is essential that the researcher examine her own background and subjective stance that might influence the study and the associated analysis. Mruck and Breuer (2003) posit that a researcher should engage in reflexivity throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Reflexivity is a process in which the researcher identifies and reflects on her own background, influence, and subjective self (Peshkin, 1988). This helps him or her be more aware of how these factors might influence his or her own research approach and interpretation of the data. Reflexivity is especially important because I relied heavily on my

own personal observations and interpretations of the case throughout my data collection and analysis process. Although there were a variety of other data sources that helped to add validity and triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Leech, 2007, Lichtman, 2013; Maxwell, 2009; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2013), as a qualitative researcher I recognize that the study itself was influenced by my own personal experience and role within the case.

My goal in developing a reflexivity statement is to be as transparent as possible about these potential biases, and to use it to help me reflect on the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes. Also, my role as an internal evaluator who worked within the school district and my positionality within this role was central to this case study. When looking back at what influenced my research approach and interest in the field of evaluation, much of this was developed while studying cultural anthropology as an undergraduate. In addition, my work during my master's program in community development relied heavily upon participatory action research tools and incorporating the participants throughout the research process. My approach to data collection has been influenced by participant observation, whereby the researcher is immersed in the context of the study. This approach is credited to the field of anthropology, specifically Boas and Malinowski (Lichtman, 2013). Participant observation provides the researcher with a more in-depth understanding of the case itself.

The school district that I focused on for this case study was the one that I worked for throughout the time period of the evaluation process. Being an internal employee gave me a unique perspective, but it also has implications for full disclosure and ethical considerations to protect those who work in the district and how I have represented the district as a whole. I focused the study primarily on my role as an evaluator rather than on the school district itself to address this concern and to align my research more closely with the purpose of the study. This

study's focus on the evaluator has two main advantages—it adds to the knowledge base for the evaluation field and it places emphasis on the evaluation work. I refrained from providing details that would disclose the identity of the district to keep its anonymity. I am aware that it was important for me to maintain a positive relationship with the district and with those who work there. Therefore, there is the possibility that the importance of maintaining these relationships has somewhat influenced my analysis and findings. For example, during my analysis, I found myself shying away from portraying the district in a negative way. While I understand the impact that this may have on the study's validity, my goal was to be as candid about the themes that emerged to directly answer the research questions. As such, I paid close attention throughout my analysis and reporting process to represent the data in an accurate and balanced way. In addition, I have a deep commitment to education and to using research to improve programs that impact students. This commitment is a distinctive characteristic and, in my opinion, an advantage that I have when conducting educational research and evaluation. I have worked with K-12 education since graduating from college including as an AmeriCorps member in an urban school district, as a teacher with Teach For America in Texas's Rio Grande Valley, for nonprofit organizations supporting education, and again in the school system as a teacher evaluator. The reason that this history is important to this case study is that my background may have also added a layer of credibility with the stakeholders and had some additional influence on the use of the evaluation results.

Research Design

This study used an instrumental case study approach to analyze the evaluation process that was conducted from September 2015 to October 2016. Although my interpretation as the

lead evaluator was central to the study, I also incorporated other viewpoints through document analysis and interviews with the other two evaluators involved in the Grow for Success evaluation. Data triangulation through these multiple viewpoints worked to enhance the validity of the research process (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995). I used multiple sources of data (reflective journal entries, documents, and interviews) to incorporate additional perspectives. The use of multiple data sources helped me identify themes and determine consensus and divergence among perspectives that were evident. The primary data sources were documents that were developed during the timeframe of the case study, interview transcripts with district research staff members to incorporate their perspectives on the organizational impact of the evaluative inquiry process, and transcripts form reflective journal entries that I kept throughout the evaluation process.

The following list outlines the data that was analyzed for this study, including documents and interviews. The data included:

- transcriptions from reflective journals recorded by the lead evaluator from October 2015 to October 2016;
- interviews with each of the three evaluators directly involved in the evaluation process;
- district documents related to the evaluation;
- and local and national news articles that directly address the target initiative and the schools associated with it (for historical and contextual information).

Research Setting

The context of this study was a large urban school district in a Southeastern state, with a focus on the evaluation and research office's role in evaluating a specific school turnaround initiative. As previously mentioned, pseudonyms were used throughout this study to protect the

anonymity of the school district and study participants. The Evergreen school district began implementation of an intensive initiative during the 2014-2015 school year to dramatically enhance the school climate and academic achievement of five elementary schools. These schools were at risk of state takeover due to their continually low performance on multiple accountability measures, which indicated that students who attend these five schools performed significantly below their peers within the district and the state. The percentage of students at the five schools who scored as proficient (Level 3 and above) on the state's reading assessment in grades 3 through 5 ranged from the 13% to 21% compared to the district rate of 58%. The percentage of students who scored as proficient on the state's math assessment in grades 3 through 5 ranged from the 7% to 15% as compared to the district rate of 53%. These statistics supported the need, as identified by the state, to improve education for these students through an intensive improvement effort. The school district's initiative, called Grow for Success, included multiple components to turn around these underperforming schools (which are further detailed in Chapter 4). The school district prioritized this as one of its major initiatives during the 2014-2015 school year, and engaged in evaluation work via their internal evaluation team within their evaluation and research department. I worked for the school district as a part-time employee from June to August 2015 to support the evaluation work for this initiative. I then was hired in September 2015 to be the lead evaluator and continued in that role until October 2016. It was during this time period, from September 2015-October 2016, when the primary evaluation activities for this study occurred. As part of this evaluation, I participated in weekly monitoring meetings with district leadership to discuss the progress of these schools toward their goals and was also present for most of the decision-making meetings that occurred around this initiative.

Collaborative approaches to evaluation (CAE) were incorporated into the evaluation plan (Shulha et al., 2016). These included empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005) and collaborative evaluation (O'Sullivan, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012). In collaborative evaluation, the evaluators are in charge of the evaluation but there is a strong partnership with the members of the target program or organization (Fetterman et al. 2014; O'Sullivan, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012). In empowerment evaluation, program stakeholders are involved at multiple levels of the organization in a cyclical evaluative process (Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). The evaluation was primarily formative in nature, but also incorporated developmental evaluation components (Patton, 1994; Patton, 2011)—particularly during Year 2 (the 2015-2016 school year). Formative evaluation focuses on improvement of an existing program and developmental evaluation is typically is used during the development stage of a program or when a major program changes occurs (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010; Patton, 1994; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). Although the timeframe and activities of the case study do include a summative evaluation, the primary focus of the study was on the formative evaluation process that occurred.

Participants

This case study and the research questions guiding this study are concerned with the way in which collaborative approaches to evaluation are implemented within a school district central office to support evaluation use for improvement. Correspondingly, the role that the internal evaluators played within the district are the primary viewpoints included in the data collection process. I chose to focus on the perspectives of the evaluators, which includes me as the lead

evaluator and two other colleagues—the district's executive director of evaluation and research and the manager of evaluation. I chose this focus because we were (1) the most familiar with the concepts guiding collaborative evaluation, and (2) members of the school district's central office staff who were highly engaged in organizational learning and capacity building throughout this process. When examining participatory and collaborative approaches to evaluation, Cousins and Chouinard (2012) recognized the evolution of evaluator identity, role, and positionality as a primary theme. They suggested that, "As a relational construct, participatory evaluation can thus be conceptualized as a dialectic process that fundamentally transforms both evaluators and stakeholders, since together they become active participants in the research process" (p. 160). By assuming that participatory and collaborative approaches to evaluation have an impact on evaluators as well as the stakeholders, the analysis of our growth as an evaluation team throughout the process was central to this study and situated us as learners throughout the evaluation process. Our roles in helping to conceptualize the evaluation, supporting the conditions and circumstances for use, acting as critical friends, and working within organizational power and politics all played a part in how the evaluation was designed, carried out, and used.

Data used to capture the evaluators' perspectives included reflective journals that I completed as the lead evaluator and interviews conducted with the three members of the evaluation team. The reflective journals were completed from October 2015 to October 2016 prior to when I took leave from the district in November 2016. In addition to reflective journals, interviews were conducted with my fellow evaluation team members and myself after receiving IRB approval from the school district (note that an IRB application for this study was submitted to the USF IRB review board and they determined that the study did not need IRB approval). For

my interview, I had one of the fellow internal researchers from the school district interview me using the same interview questions and protocol that I used with the other two evaluation team members.

In addition to the evaluation team members, other evaluation participants included the district's superintendent; assistant superintendent; two area superintendents; leadership staff in charge of curriculum, special education, and family and community engagement; and the principals from each of the five school sites. These same people were involved during the 2016-2017 school year. However, four of the five principals were replaced and the initiative expanded to include eight school sites. Therefore, there were three additional principals involved in the evaluation along with one more area superintendent. Since the initiative being evaluated underwent major modifications, a director of school transformation and a team of seven staff members were also added.

Data Sources and Data Collection Process

Multiple data sources were examined as part of this research study. The purpose of including multiple documents was to have an additional source from which to examine themes, multiple perspectives, and the context of the study. Each of these data sources is described in the sections that follow along with a description of how the data was collected. Each of the documents and newspaper articles included in the analysis was available as public documents. In addition, the interviews discussed below took place on June 12, 2016 after the district IRB approval was granted.

Reflective journals. A critical component of the data were the transcriptions from my reflective journals as the lead evaluator that I recorded from October 2015 to October 2016.

Throughout the evaluation process, I conducted 38 voice-recorded observational journal entries to reflect on the evaluation process. These journal entries occurred within days of the activities being discussed, often directly after key evaluation activities or meetings. The reflective journals were recorded using the Recorder Plus application. Each recording, which ranged from approximately 10 to 60 minutes, was transcribed using Dragon Pro Individual. I then listed to each recording to clean up each Microsoft Word file transcription. These transcriptions were organized by date and are kept on a password protected electronic server. A list of the dates and lengths of the recorded and transcribed journal reflections can be found in Appendix B. The purpose of these reflective journal entries was to provide contextual information from the perspective of the evaluator regarding the initiative and the way in which information was used to guide decisions. As part of the reflective process, I used the Program Evaluation Standards developed by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (Yarbrough et al., 2011) as a framework to guide my journaling and to analyze the evaluation practices that were implemented against the standards. This allowed for reflective growth and improvement of the evaluation during the evaluation process itself. I also reflected on how we designed and implemented the evaluation process in comparison to the evaluation models that we incorporated—collaborative evaluation (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012) and empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005).

Interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to collect data from the perspectives of the two additional evaluators who were part of the evaluation process for the Grow for Success initiative, and to compare this to my own perspective and interpretations. According to Stake, each interviewee offers a unique perspective and the interviews cater to each individual (1995),

which is highly important within case study research. I interviewed the members of the evaluation team—the district's executive director of the evaluation and research department and the manager of evaluation. In addition, I had a district researcher interview me with the same set of interview questions. These interviews allowed me to compare the perspectives of all three evaluators who were involved in the process.

After I obtained IRB approval from the school district, I contacted the interviewees and the additional district researcher who interviewed me via email to explain the purpose and process of the interview and to confirm their initial consent for participation (this email is provided in Appendix C). I asked participants to respond to the email within two weeks to confirm his or her agreement to participate, and then scheduled the interviews for approximately three weeks from that date. These interviews were then conducted individually on June 12, 2017 at the district central office—which was a mutually agreed upon location that is convenient for the participants. At the beginning of each interview, I shared details about the study, discussed the informed consent form (in Appendix D), and asked them to sign the consent form. I also explained to each participant that the interview would last approximately one hour and would be recorded and transcribed. For each interview, I used the interview protocol in Appendix E. I explained that the interview was completely anonymous and that all of the data would be kept in a password protected server or locked file cabinet. Once the interview was complete, I asked each participant if they have any additional questions that I could address.

A semi-structured interview approach was used for each interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Lichtman, 2013; Tracy, 2013). Suggested guidelines and advantages to this approach have been outlined by Lichtman (2013). The semi-structured interview is a process in which the researcher develops a series of questions to guide the interview. The process of having

consistent questions that were asked of multiple interviewees helped me see where there was alignment or divergence among individuals regarding key aspects of the research topic. Additionally, a semi-structured interview process allowed the interviewers to address tangential topics that emerged during the interviews. This provided the flexibility within the research process for other themes to emerge that might not otherwise have been brought to light. These interview questions were developed to align with the research questions guiding this study and key concepts associated with these questions, which allowed me to conduct deductive coding and analysis according to these themes. Additional inductive codes were then developed as they emerged and were validated from multiple perspectives. All interviews were audio recorded and analyzed to enhance the accuracy of my analysis which was conducted solely by the principal investigator.

As mentioned above, an interview protocol and questions were developed to guide the interview process (see Appendix D). Table 2 below lists the interview questions and how they address the research questions for this study. In addition, introductory questions regarding their role in the district and the evaluation process were included to provide background information about the interviewees. Also, the final question which is not included in the table below was a general question to elicit any additional comments regarding the evaluation process that they would like to share. The length of each interview can be found in Appendix B.

Table 2. Alignment Between Research Questions and Interview Questions.

Research question 1: From the perspective of the evaluator(s), what does this case demonstrate about the relationship between the implementation of a collaborative approach to evaluation and evaluation use (using the principles to guide CAE as a framework)?
Interview questions that align with research question 1: - What is your understanding of the district's motivation for conducting this evaluation? What makes you say this (i.e., evidence to support this)? - Can you tell me what you remember about how collaborative approaches were used in this evaluation? - In what ways, if any, was the evaluation process successful in using collaborative approaches—such as those that involve the stakeholders of the initiative in the evaluation process? - In your perspective, did this evaluation process result in the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations by decision-makers? If so, can you describe this? - What components of the evaluation design and process helped to support the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations by the decision-makers involved in this initiative? - How do you think the evaluation process for this initiative has added to the district's: a. knowledge of school turnaround? b. use of evaluation to support evidence-based decision-making? c. knowledge of the continuous improvement process? - Ultimately, do you think that the evaluation process has supported improvement for: a. The school district's approach to school turnaround? Why or why not? b. The district's approach to decision-making and problem solving for continuous improvement? Why or why not? - In what ways could the collaboration with stakeholders throughout the evaluation process be strengthened?
Research question 2: What does this case demonstrate about the evaluators' role and growth within a collaborative approach to evaluation?
Interview questions that align with research question 2: - When I say collaborative approaches to evaluation, what does this mean to you? - How has this process added to your own understanding of evaluation approaches to support continuous improvement of programs and initiatives?

Documents directly related to the evaluation process. The evaluation documents used for this case study were carefully selected to add to the understanding of the context of the case and the research questions posed. These documents included the evaluation reports and research papers from the evaluation process. These data are an important part of the case because they

provide a historical perspective around the planning and implementation of the evaluation process for this case study. The documents that were examined included those that relate to the planning of the initiative and the initial logic model; a letter from the assistant superintendent to the school board outlining the milestones of the initiative and a timeline outlining the implementation and evaluation of the initiative; the district evaluation plans and evaluation reports including formative and summative evaluations from the 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017 school years; documents that are directly related to the target initiative including a summary of the district interventions and supports, turnaround recommendations, turnaround best practices, and associated research briefs; and the theory of change with the empirical research review and logic model for the modified target initiative. All of these documents are public and were collected by searching on the school district's website and the board materials. The inclusion criteria for these documents was that they were directly connected to the evaluation work that occurred between September 2015 and June 2017, and that were either public documents or have been approved through the district's IRB process. Any documents that did not meet these criteria was excluded from the analysis and the case study. Furthermore, these documents were used for thematic analysis only and no identifying information was given in this study.

Newspaper articles. Documents help to address the research questions within a case study (Stake, 1995). Local and national news articles that directly addressed the target initiative and the schools associated with it were used to provide a historical understanding of the initiative and its context. Beginning in August 2015, one of the major local newspapers wrote a series of articles spotlighting the schools that were part of this initiative. The articles from the major local newspaper, a smaller local newspaper, and another national source served as important data for

my analysis. These articles documented the context and political climate surrounding the Grow for Success initiative and the school district during the time of the evaluation process.

Newspaper articles related to the Grow for Success initiative were collected by conducting an online search for the name of the initiative and a commonly used title for the initiative that the press had given to the target schools. As a result of this search, I included 30 articles published between August 2015 and June 2017 (26 from the local newspaper, three from the community newspaper, and one from a national newspaper). Newspaper articles were saved according to the source of the article and the date of the publication. The articles were kept on a password protected electronic server. These articles were used for historical and contextual information and were not cited in the current study so as to protect the anonymity of the school district.

Stages of Data Collection and Data Sources for Analysis

This study incorporates a historical look at the initiative and the evaluation process, and extends beyond October 2016 to provide an analysis of evaluation use—both the use of findings and process use (i.e., organizational learning, capacity building). The case study analysis was segmented into five different stages for data collection and analysis, with some overlap of specified timeframes and activities. These stages are represented in Figure 2. In addition, Table 3 provides a list of the data used to analyze each stage of the evaluation process. *Stage 1: Historical and Contextual Data* provides foundational information regarding the target initiative and the beginning of the evaluation process (Year 1) from May 2014 to September 2015. *Stage 2: Initial Evaluation Process* examines the evaluation activities during Year 2 of the initiative from October 2015 to February 2016. It was during this time period that I began serving as the

lead evaluator for the target initiative. The data used in the analysis of this stage included the plan and implementation of the formative evaluation. I also examined the way in which research was integrated into the evaluation process during this time period. *Stage 3: Continuation of the Evaluation Process* was also during Year 2 of the target initiative and focused on activities from March 2016 to July 2016. This included data from the research and evaluation work to inform modifications of the initiative for the 2016-2017 school year. *Stage 4: The Evaluation Process for the Modified Initiative* included data from Year 3 from June 2016 to October 2016. By examining data from this time period, I was able to provide a deeper analysis of the implementation of evaluation recommendations. *Stage 5: Retrospective Examination of Evaluation Use for Improvement* also looked at data from Year 3 of the modified from November 2016 through June 2017. The data from this stage provided a retrospective look at the use and influence of the evaluation. These data also incorporated the perspectives of the additional evaluators who were directly involved in the evaluation activities during this evaluation process.

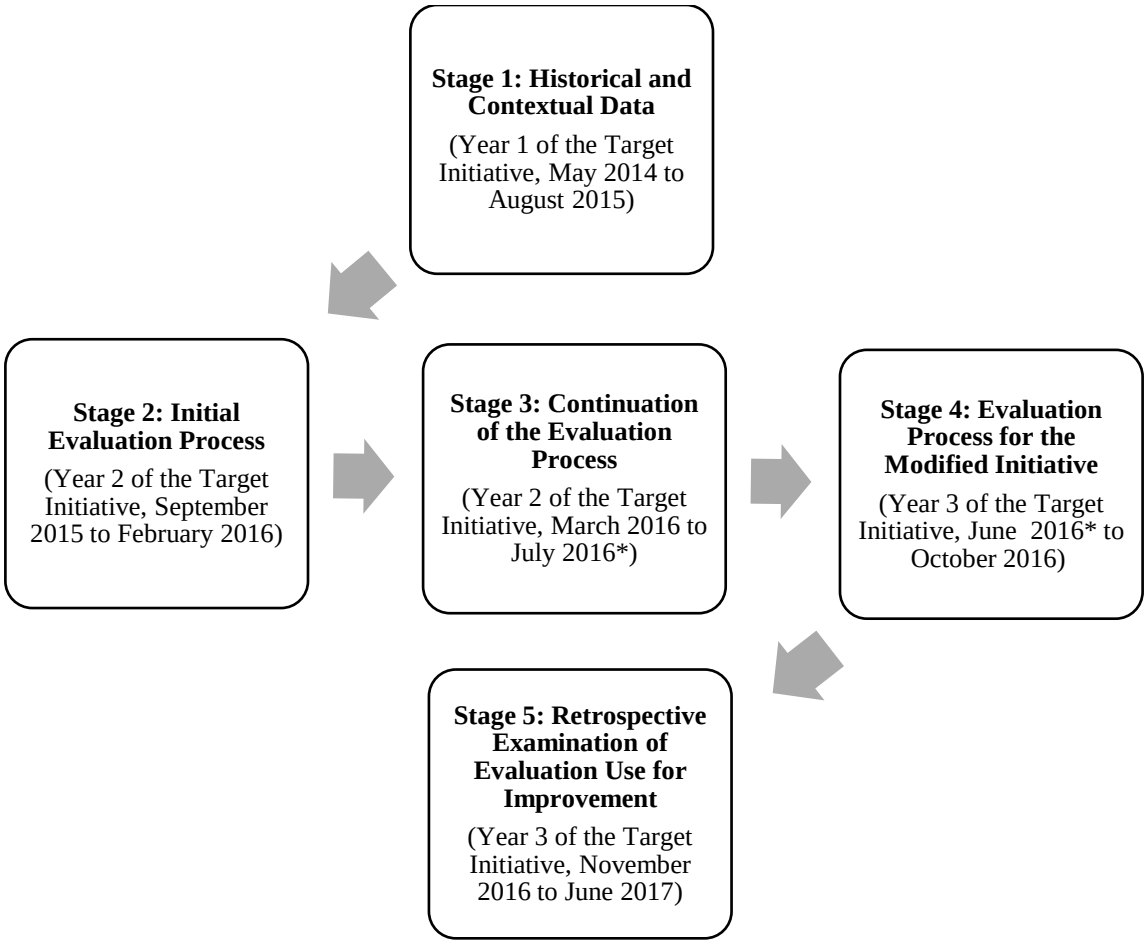

Figure 2. Stages of the Case Study Analysis and Dates.

***** *Although some of the dates do overlap, the focus of the analysis will be different within each of these.*

Table 3. List of the Stages of Data Collection and Data Sources for Analysis.

Stage 1: Historical and Contextual Data
(Year 1 of the Target Initiative, May 2014 to August 2015)

This included…

- the events that led to the development of the initiative and the subsequent evaluation;
- the context in which the target initiative and evaluation are embedded, including perspectives of external stakeholders.
- and the evaluation work that took place during the 2014-2015 school year.

Data for analysis were…

- local and national news articles that directly addressed the target initiative and the schools associated with it;
- district documents related to the planning of the initiative and the initial logic model;
- The district evaluations, including formative and summative evaluations from the 2014-2015 school year;
- A letter from the assistant superintendent to the school board outlining the milestones of the initiative;
- and a timeline outlining the implementation and evaluation of the initiative.

Stage 2: Initial Evaluation Process
(Year 2 of the Target Initiative, September 2015 to February 2016)

This included…

- the formative evaluation work of the initiative during the 2015-2016 school year;
- and the developmental evaluation process that occurred simultaneously to inform changes for the 2016-2017 school year.

Data for analysis were…

- transcriptions from reflective journals recorded by the lead evaluator during this time period;
- evaluation documents including the overview of the evaluation, the evaluation plan, and the formative evaluation;
- and the district documents that are directly related to the target initiative, which includes a summary of the district interventions and supports, turnaround recommendations, turnaround best practices, and associated research briefs.

Stage 3: Continuation of the Evaluation Process
(Year 2 of the Target Initiative, March 2016 to July 2016)

This included…

- the summative evaluation work of the initiative during the 2015-2016 school year;
- and the ongoing developmental evaluation process that occurred simultaneously to inform changes for the 2016-2017 school year.

Data for analysis were…

- transcriptions from reflective journals recorded by the lead evaluator during this time period;
- evaluation documents including the overview of the evaluation, the evaluation plan, associated research briefs, and the summative evaluation;
- the theory of change with empirical research review and logic model for the modified target initiative;
- and local and national news articles that directly addressed the target initiative and the schools associated with it.

Table 3. (Continued)

Stage 4: The Evaluation Process for the Modified Initiative (Year 3 of the Target Initiative, June 2016 to October 2016) *This included…* ▪ evaluation planning and data collection for the 2016-2017 formative evaluation; ▪ and implementation of changes during fall 2016. *Data for analysis were…* o transcriptions from reflective journals recorded by the lead evaluator during this time period; o the evaluation overview document for the 2016-2017 school year; o and local and national news articles that directly addressed the target initiative and the schools associated with it.
Stage 5: Retrospective Examination of Evaluation Use for Improvement (Year 3 of the Target Initiative, November 2016 to June 2017) *This included…* ▪ a reflection on evaluation use through an examination of how the recommendations were implemented; ▪ an analysis of evaluation use for the purpose of program improvement (i.e., Did the implementation of the recommendations result in improvement?); ▪ and an exploration of evaluation process use for organizational learning—specifically from the perspective of the evaluators and researchers directly involved in the evaluation. *Data for analysis were…* o the completed formative evaluation for the modified initiative; o interviews with the three additional evaluators and researchers directly involved in the evaluation process as well as my own responses to the interview questions (which also cover the other stages 1-4); o and local and national news articles that directly addressed the target initiative and the schools associated with it.

Data Analysis

According to Stake (1995), "analysis essentially means taking something apart" (p. 71). Case studies typically rely on both direct interpretation and categorical aggregation for analysis. Direct interpretation typically focuses on an individual instance and tries to make meaning out of that instance through analysis and synthesis. Categorical aggregation is analysis of multiple instances until they can be classified, which results in themes. While most case studies use both of these approaches, the instrumental case study relies more on categorical aggregation in relation to the research question and phenomenon being studied (Stake, 1995; Stake 2005). Stake

provides suggestions for analyzing case studies. These suggestions include reviewing the raw data under multiple interpretations, searching for patterns and correlations within the data, looking for linkages between activities and outcomes, drawing tentative conclusions, and reviewing the data or possibly integrating new data to confirm conclusions—typically, incorporating a process of deliberately seeking disconfirmation of the original findings.

To be consistent with the instrumental case study approach, qualitative data analysis involved thematic coding of all qualitative interview and journal reflection data. Thematic coding is a process of chunking, sifting, and organizing information to develop common themes around a given research topic (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2009). Dedoose online software was used to support the coding process. The coding process used for this study was drawn from the grounded theory approach. While grounded theory as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is typically thought of as an entire research approach, this study used the "Straussian" approach to grounded theory for the coding process only (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Thematic analysis included deductive and inductive coding processes using the constant comparative technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lichtman, 2013; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I used the Principles to Guide CAE and their contributing factors (Shulha et al., 2016) as the conceptual framework to follow for the deductive coding process. In addition, I analyzed the data using inductive coding based on themes that emerged (Lichtman, 2013). The coding process that I used to develop themes included: (1) open coding, in which I labeled each strand or piece of information with a code; (2) axial coding in which I made connections between pieces of information and inductive themes began to emerge; and (3) selective coding in which a hierarchy among the themes emerged and the most "prominent" themes were identified (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I engaged in an iterative coding process in which I consistently reassessed the codes and

information until the point of saturation—the point in the data analysis process when no new codes emerged (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In addition, I used analytic memos as a way to organize my thoughts regarding codes and pieces of information throughout the coding process, particularly during open coding (Saldaña, 2009). I used these memos to serve as a rationale for my analysis during the coding process and to provide a way for me to continue my own reflection on the evaluation process itself. The analysis followed both a sequential and thematic approach that allowed for the development of a linear narrative of the evaluation process over time as well as a thematic analysis of the process in response to the research questions (Wolcott, 2009).

Validity of the Case Study

The combined analysis of lead evaluator journal reflections, interviews, and associated district evaluation documents allowed me to incorporate multiple perspectives. It also served as a way to triangulate the data and have a more comprehensive, robust data collection process (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Gibson & Brown, 2009; Leech, 2007, Lichtman, 2013; Maxwell, 2009; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2013). In addition, the analysis of the relevant newspaper articles provided contextual information for the case. Stake (1995) emphasizes the need for high standards for validity within case study research:

> It is true that we deal with many complex phenomena and issues for which no consensus can be found as to what really exists—yet we have ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding. We need certain triangulation protocols or procedures which researchers and readers alike come to expect, efforts that go beyond

simple repetition of data gathering to deliberative effort to find the validity of data observed. (pp. 108-109)

Qualitative research and the case study approach are not typically associated with the development of explicated generalizations to multiple contexts. However, the specificity of the case allows for what are referred to as *naturalistic generalizations*. The concept of naturalistic generalizations is congruous with the notion that individuals form generalizations based on their own experiences and information with which they engage (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). According to Stake (1995), "Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves" (p. 85). The methods used for this case study add to the validity of the case study and to the quality of the description of the case to the extent that it can serve as a vicarious experience for the reader. This includes the way in which this study incorporates a thorough collection of raw data for analysis, the way in which triangulation has been addressed by utilizing various sources of information, and providing the reader with detailed descriptions of the case.

Although there is some debate on how to define "quality" in qualitative research, there has been support for the need to address how qualitative research can be more useful in influencing social policy and legislation. In other words, the qualitative researcher is often confronted with the question of how their research study and inquiry is "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.290). Tracy (2010) set out to synthesize the universal hallmarks of qualitative research to inform this concept of quality—with the objective being a more wide-spread integration of qualitative work into the empirical knowledge base that is used for decision-making and influence. These markers of quality in qualitative research include (a)

worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. Correspondingly, this case study has been guided by these markers of quality and the adherence to these markers has been woven both directly and indirectly throughout this chapter. Some examples of this include how I addressed *rich rigor* through the carefully constructed data collection process, time in the field, and intensive data analysis process; *credibility* by collecting multiple sources of relevant data to triangulate information and to conduct an analysis that weaves in multiple voices; and *resonance* via a narrative format that allows the reader to make connections through naturalistic generalizations based on the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

There was minimal risk for participants involved in this research study. One potential risk was the possibility of participants experiencing discomfort during the interview process. Prior to participant engagement in the study, I provided both verbal and written communication regarding the nature of the study. Confidentiality agreements and consent forms were signed and collected from all participants. I informed each participant that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Another potential risk is that the identity of the participant may appear within a published paper. In order to minimize this risk, pseudonyms have been used for all participants of the study. In addition, any information that may identify the participant has been disguised in the study. Recordings were saved on a password protected server for security purposes. All recordings and data have been labeled with participants' pseudonyms only and have been stored in a different location than the consent forms. All data has either been placed in

a locked cabinet or stored in a password protected computer. After five years, the recordings will be deleted.

Ethics of the study have also been addressed via the school district's IRB process. This study has also been reviewed by the USF IRB board. These review processes helped ensure that all federal, state, and local policies around the use of human subjects and ethical considerations were met. In addition, a report of the study's findings has also been submitted to the school district.

Study Limitations and Delimitations

A qualitative approach to research is helpful when analyzing complex systems. However, the results from qualitative research studies typically are not generalizable across multiple contexts—which can be viewed as a limitation. This is also addressed in the *validity* section above and in the discussion of *naturalistic generalization*. In addition, the case study approach embraces the notion of subjectivity (Stake, 1995). As such, no "objective" truth was anticipated to emerge from the study. Rather, a deeper understanding of the particular context and evaluation processes was the aim of the study. Due to the fact that the researcher was an employee of the subject of the study, there are factors concerning subjectivity and potential bias that may limit the credibility associated with the study. As mentioned above, I have continually engaged in reflexivity and memo writing throughout the research and analysis process as a way to reflect on and address potential biases.

A delimitation of this study was the focus on the perspective of the evaluators. This study addressed the role of the evaluator in navigating the collaborative approach to evaluation more

directly—which allowed me to add to the knowledge base on CAE and evaluation use, with an emphasis on working in the school district central office.

Conclusion

The benefits of the proposed methods have been discussed throughout this chapter. Some of the key points include the use of triangulation of data and multiple informants to provide various perspectives. In addition, reflexivity has been a key aspect of the research process within this study. This was due to the role of the researcher within the school district. Furthermore, the intensive and interactive coding techniques used allowed for a thorough analysis of the case.

CHAPTER 4:

CASE NARRATIVE AND FINDINGS

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter gives an overview of the case study's context, the evaluators' backgrounds, the evaluation process, and the evaluation's use. It conveys the district initiative our evaluation team was evaluating and our evaluation process by taking on a more descriptive tone. The chapter then presents the findings regarding the relationship between the implementation of a collaborative approach to evaluation (CAE) and evaluation use, using the principles to guide CAE as a framework. The evolution of the evaluators' roles and positionalities are woven throughout these findings, with an additional section toward the end of the chapter to more directly address this. I provide the findings from the multiple data sources including my reflective journals, the interviews with the evaluators, and documents related to the evaluation. Newspaper articles were also used as a source of historical and contextual data for this case. I provide a summary of the data, especially the data from my reflective journals and the interviews, to consolidate the major themes and concepts that emerged from this case. I also include salient quotes from interviews and reflections throughout this chapter. Unless otherwise stated, the direct quotes provided in this chapter are from the interviews with the three members of the evaluation team on June 12, 2017. I have incorporated more direct quotes from Jasmine

and Ron to represent their perspectives and because I have had the opportunity to express my own interpretation of the case via my writing and synthesis.

Case Study Background

A high-quality education for ALL students. This is the ideal that we strive for in public education. However, in too many instances there are overwhelming odds stacked against our students, and our job is to help them overcome these odds. During my time as an educator in multiple settings, I saw firsthand the impact that an outstanding teacher can make. What's more, I saw how the district and school leaders have a direct influence on how the system either supports or detracts from student success. I set out to use the evaluation process to promote evidence-based decisions and improvement, and to do this in a collaborative manner to support evaluation use and organizational knowledge. This is bold position for an evaluator. In my experience, many organizational leaders and stakeholders see evaluation as simply a way to measure, judge, and report on the facts...end of story.

Although I had conducted evaluations in educational settings previously, I had not yet worked within a school district central office on a key initiative. When I was approached to help evaluate a major initiative to drastically improve students' academics and behavior in five of the state's lowest performing elementary schools (and with some of the highest percentages of minority students in the state), I knew that I couldn't say "no." I started as a consultant for the school district during the early summer of 2015 and then started working fulltime to solely focus on the evaluation of that initiative in August 2015. What I did not know when I began the position was how much media and community attention the five schools would receive starting in mid-August 2015. The local nationally-acclaimed newspaper began a highly critical five-part

series around the previous "failure" of the school district to support these schools. The energy around the initiative and its evaluation quickly gained even more momentum. As an internal evaluation team, we felt the pressure to conduct a high-quality evaluation to help the school district examine its approach to supporting these schools and students. This case study is the story of our journey, beginning in August 2015, to conduct a formative evaluation of this initiative using a collaborative approach—primarily from my perspective and that of my fellow evaluators.

District and Program Context

This case study took place in the Evergreen school district, which is a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. Notably, there was a long history of tension between the local community and the school district—particularly regarding black student achievement. This was exacerbated by the school board's 2007 decision to end bussing and to return to *neighborhood schools*. During the timeframe of this evaluation, there were also two longstanding active lawsuits against the district concerning minority achievement. The superintendent had just started in his position during the 2012-2013 school year, and he made supporting minority achievement a priority for the evaluation and research department. During the 2014-2015 school year, the district began implementing the Grow for Success Initiative to enhance the school climate and academic achievement of five low-performing elementary schools. Each of the schools involved in the initiative had over 80% of their student bodies who identified as black, thus making equality and minority achievement central concerns of this initiative. The activities identified were having a paraprofessional in each classroom as a teaching partner, additional staff dedicated to student services, extra supports for families, increased access to after-school

programs, and training for principals and other school-based leadership staff provided by an outside consulting agency (the School Support Project). Additional details regarding the planning for the initiative and the context of the school district are provided in subsequent sections.

The Evaluation Team

The primary evaluation team was made up of three individuals who were internal to the school district's central office. In addition to myself, our team included Jasmine who was the manager of evaluation and Ron who was the executive director of evaluation and research. All three evaluators had experience as educators in urban K-12 public schools, which allowed us to more fully understand the context for the evaluation. Jointly, we had a drive to make a positive impact on these schools and their students through our evaluation work. The team approach and our joint commitment to the work motivated us to make this evaluation process as successful and as useful as possible.

The bulk of my teaching experience was in schools with high levels of poverty and a high percentage of minorities. I have also worked with community development programs, and I value the use of participatory practices and action research as tools for continuous improvement. I would describe myself as a well-rounded overachiever who uses research tools to tackle some our society's toughest challenges. As my major professor during my undergraduate program in anthropology stated in a letter of recommendation, "She is an idealist for sure but with her feet planted firmly on the ground." I think that my desire to take on a challenge was a perfect match for this evaluation work on school improvement and minority achievement—some of the most persistent problems of our time.

Jasmine began her position in the school district in March 2014, and she was there during the inception of Grow for Success. She has a boisterous personality and can fill a room with her smile. She often expressed to me how passionate she is about minority achievement, especially as the only African American on our internal evaluation team and as a parent. Her primary responsibility during the time of this study was evaluating key initiatives within the district. Jasmine described this in her interview: "My role is really to give the district continuous feedback and help to frame or shape continuous improvement in these schools and around these areas. This focus can vary, but during the past few years there has been a huge focus of minority achievement." She also earned her Ph.D. in Educational Measurement and Evaluation from a local university. Jasmine and I worked well together throughout the evaluation process, and we often had lengthy discussions around our work and ways to improve the "system."

Ron had been with the school district in multiple roles for over fifteen years, most recently as a high school principal. He was also a parent of a child in the school system. Ron provided a description of his role and his background when the evaluation work began in August 2015: "I was previously a school-based administrator, and now my role is I oversee the evaluation research department…When this work began, I was new to that role. I brought a certain learning curve to this whole work as well..." He also added, "Because we had such a small staff, I was probably more directly involved in the evaluation development than maybe I might have been if we had a larger evaluation team." When I first met Ron, he displayed a mixture of exuberance to make change happen and nervousness about the new role that he had just taken on. Almost daily, he would walk around the office saying, "It's going to be a great day people!" while clapping his hands excitedly—almost as a coach would do to pump up his team before a big game. Although he had an Ed.D. in educational leadership, he did not have a strong

skill set in quantitative research or evaluation. At the beginning of the evaluation process, Ron's limited knowledge in these areas presented some challenges to moving our evaluation forward. Jasmine and I worked closely with him to build his skill set—in particular, the more facilitative and educative role that collaborative evaluation incorporates. Eventually, as I discuss more at the end of this chapter, he did expand his understanding of evaluation and his appreciation of collaborative approaches.

Overview of the Evaluation Process

The evaluation process presented here covers the dates from September 2015 to October 2016. Here, I provide a glimpse of the initial impetus and motivation for the evaluation and also the planning and design of the evaluation. This includes the evaluation approaches and models that we incorporated and how we incorporated them. I also share how we developed recommendations collaboratively and how we worked to support the use of the evaluation findings.

According to Jasmine and Ron, who had more direct interaction with district leadership such as the superintendent and assistant superintendent, the motivation for the evaluation was twofold: to have a better pulse of what was happening at these five school sites (i.e., how the implementation of the initiative was unfolding) and to be able to see if the interventions that were currently in place were working. Jasmine shared with me, "I think that they really wanted to know will these things work or will it change or affect positive change in these schools." For example, one of the major financial investments of the initiative was the placement of a paraprofessional in each classroom. Jasmine noted that district leaders were particularly interested in knowing if the use of paraprofessionals was an effective model. Jasmine shared,

"We spent four million dollars for paraprofessionals because we have one in each classroom" and district leaders wanted to know..."How did that go?" Ron described how he thought that the district leaders were genuine in their intent to work with the evaluation team. He said that district leaders wanted to see how the interventions were working and to get additional recommendations for improvement:

> Number one, I think the district didn't have the answers. I think it was putting things into place without knowing why it was putting them into place, because I think it felt the pressure to put things into place. So I think it was the system—and obviously the superintendent, but the system too—was asking for some research basis for what it was doing, and I think it was admitting…it was admitting that it didn't have the answers. And it was turning to the evaluation to find some of those answers. I think it was pure in its intent, and that was good.

The scope of the evaluation itself was quite expansive to meet the needs of the district leaders and to help them address inquiries from the press, the community, and the state's department of education. The areas evaluated included academic achievement, student behavior, support for leadership (i.e., principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches), support for instructional staff, and family engagement. We used a mixed-methods approach that included: field work, focus groups and interviews with school-based staff, using a collaboratively developed observational instrument to conduct classroom observations, formal surveys, year-to-year comparisons of student test scores, and other academic growth indicators. Our evaluation plan pulled from well-established evaluation models—collaborative evaluation, empowerment evaluation, and developmental evaluation. In alignment with the collaborative evaluation process, we engaged multiple stakeholders in the evaluation to develop the guiding questions for

the evaluation, conduct data collection, and develop recommendations. The primary stakeholders involved during the 2015-2016 school year included the superintendent, assistant superintendent, two area superintendents, leadership staff in charge of various components of the initiative, and, to a lesser extent, the principals from each of the five school sites. The evaluation team met with stakeholders to identify and develop measurement instruments, inform evaluation process decisions, and help generate the recommendations for the evaluation. Many of these processes implemented that coincide with collaborative evaluation are detailed more in the section on *Findings for Principles to Guide CAE and Evaluation Use*.

Based on the findings of the formative evaluation, there were incremental improvements in academics during the 2015-2016 school year. Quantitative discipline data (e.g., the number of office referrals) as well as qualitative data suggested a more marked improvement in student behavior. More extreme behaviors, however, continued to be identified as a challenge for instructional staff. The evaluation's stakeholders collectively concluded that stronger supports for these schools needed to be put in place to more dramatically improve school climate and student learning. This was especially important considering the pressure from the community and state mandates that could lead to a state takeover of low performing schools (Herman et al., 2008), not to mention the needs of the students at the schools. We used the evaluation findings and the steps in the *taking stock* process from the empowerment evaluation model (which is typically used to identify program goals and future strategies) to collaboratively develop and prioritize recommendations for the formative evaluation. I described the process in one of my reflections:

> Wednesday we have meetings to go over the data and refine the recommendations through a systematic process to help us add to and prioritize the recommendations. If we

> have all of these actions that we think are going to help, we need to examine what specific actions we think will help move the needle (toward the target outcomes) and clarify the specific recommendations for these actions. (January 20, 2016)

In the Spring of 2016, we used the processes and tools from GTO—which encompasses goal setting, planning, evaluating, and improving and sustaining—to help develop action plans for the initiative for the next school year. This action planning process also connects to developmental evaluation, as I discussed in my interview:

> We (the evaluation team) found—even in our own organizational learning from each other and going through the evaluation process—that we have to look beyond just doing evaluation or formative evaluation…We needed to also look at outside models (for school turnaround) and do in-depth research and policy briefs to get a better understanding of best practices to bring back to district stakeholders.

The evaluation team incorporated aspects of developmental evaluation concurrently with the formative evaluation process to propose potential major strategic shifts to the program for the 2016-2017 school year. We created research briefs on critical topics (e.g., teacher recruitment, alternative student discipline strategies) to ensure that program changes would be evidence-based and we worked with an external research partner at the request of the assistant superintendent. This research partner developed customized research papers around key topics and questions posed by the district. We synthesized the recommendations from the formative evaluation report and the additional research to collaboratively develop a more intensive school improvement effort for the subsequent school year. We then developed a chart, which we referred to as a research matrix of recommendations, to show the stakeholders the key recommendations, the sources of evidence to support each of the recommendation, and the anticipated level of effect

for each recommendation on turning around underperforming schools. Although the evaluation findings were presented on an ongoing basis throughout the process, we made a more formal presentation of the formative findings and recommendations in February 2016.

Case Study Findings: Evaluation Use

The evaluation findings indicated that more intensive supports needed to be put in place at the five Grow for Success school sites, and correspondingly many of the recommendations identified in the evaluation were implemented by the school district—connecting to the *use of findings*. Again, the use of findings can be categorized as *instrumental* for discrete decision-making regarding program changes for improvement, *conceptual* to add to stakeholders' knowledge base; or *symbolic* that is used to legitimize decisions that have already been made. The evaluation team also recognized some *process use* in relation to this evaluation, such as organizational learning at multiple levels of the organization around evaluative inquiry and the associated evaluation capacity building.

District's *Use of Findings* and Recommendations

In response to the need for a more intensive and strategic effort, the school district restructured the Grow for Success Initiative starting in the 2016–2017 school year and renamed it the *Turnaround Zone*. Overall, the majority of these changes were in alignment with the evaluation recommendations. Although not all of the recommendations from the evaluation were followed, the district did try to implement most of the ones that were associated with having a greater impact on school turnaround. According to Ron in his interview:

> Certain ones (recommendations) that were followed were the most important ones. For example, the recommendations that we needed more time in the schools and extending the school days—however that looked—and there were lots of ways to do that. Major investment. We know…we pushed for that through the evaluation, and I think that that happened. Even the conversation about whether teachers should be paid more…the notion of setting up a 'turnaround team' and hiring a 'turnaround' leader to do this work, which was a recommendation, and which was followed through with.

Jasmine reflected on the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations, and how the district moved from a less organized school improvement model to a more systematic school turnaround model: "In 15-16 I felt like we could get really immersed in the turnaround model, and quite frankly this is when I believe that we started to get the best movement—when you think about really moving the district from haphazardly having all these unintegrated strategies to integrating (them)." She went on further to say, "I don't think you can want for much more (as an evaluator)."

The district hired a turnaround director in December 2015 and started to work on a comprehensive plan for school turnaround. Those changes appeared to align more with the concept of *instrumental* use. As part of the developmental evaluation model and GTO (a component of empowerment evaluation), the evaluation team facilitated additional developmental work such as creating of a theory of change, logic model, and action plan for the revised initiative. Other major program shifts that aligned with the evaluation's recommendations included more intensive teacher recruitment efforts, teacher bonuses of up to $25,000, and an extended school day. District leadership also replaced four of the five principals at these school sites based on screening for qualities of school turnaround leadership, which was

somewhat connected to our recommendation to reexamine the leadership at the school sites for turnaround leadership qualities. In addition, the new director of school turnaround requested a seven-person turnaround team dedicated to this initiative, which the district also put into place.

Symbolic evaluation use may be difficult to pinpoint since there is no easy way to tap into a leader's position on a particular issue, but it did seem evident from the beginning of this evaluation that leadership was concerned with the amount of money it would take to retain a paraprofessional in each classroom. The evaluation recommended having flexibility in the paraprofessional model at each school site, in which principals were able to decide on the needs for his or her site. The district did end up reducing the number of paraprofessionals at these school sites for the 2016-2017 school year—but because this decision may have already been made by district leadership, the fact that we put it as a recommendation may have been more symbolic than instrumental.

In terms of *conceptual* evaluation use for educative and learning outcomes, the district relied primarily on its evaluation and research department to provide information around school turnaround prior to the arrival of the new director. The following conversation from my interview with Ron demonstrates his perspective on how the evaluation process helped to enhance the district's knowledge of school turnaround:

> Oriana: How do you think the evaluation process for this initiative has added to the district's knowledge of school turnaround?
>
> Ron: I think significantly. I think…*significantly*.
>
> Oriana: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?
>
> Ron: *Very* significantly. I don't think the district knew anything about school turnaround.
>
> Oriana: Right.

> Ron: So, that's the end of your story, I mean. And so you have to ask the question, and let me turn the question on you: How is it that the district learned about school turnaround if it wasn't for that (evaluation) process? And I don't think that they did through any other process. So, I'm going to say to you, the district relied almost exclusively on us for that. And I think the district, to its credit, has learned a lot and made mistakes. It had to have made the mistakes. I think the only other learning that they ever did around turnaround was from the director of turnaround, who came in at the end of this process which—by the way, was a recommendation and hired through our (evaluation) process.

Once the district hired the director of school turnaround in January 2016, who had firsthand knowledge of effective school turnaround practices and had researched turnaround leadership extensively as part of his Ed.D. program in instructional leadership, this was invaluable for the district and for our research team.

It is important to note, however, that in some cases, there were challenges in implementing the recommendations the way that they were originally intended or written and this resulted in evaluation misuse. Ron reflected in this interview on the challenges with evaluation use and implementation of recommendations in a large bureaucracy:

> I think that they (the recommendations) were reviewed, and I think that they were honestly reviewed. Then I think that those recommendations were combined with the realities of political realities that were in place. Right? Fiscal realities. Okay? And related things that have to be made—decisions that have to made by folks at the top of an organization and, again, particularly a bureaucracy. And, so, those things (the recommendations) weren't always followed.

One example of evaluation misuse and implementation challenges I raised in my interview was how the recommendation to increase teacher pay and to enhance recruitment efforts did not get implemented as the evaluators and stakeholders had envisioned. Part of this had to do with the district starting teacher recruitment in the late spring 2016 and part of it had to do with challenges that the assistant superintendent had when he negotiated with the local teacher's union about higher pay at these school sites. In the end, the decision was made to tie the additional pay primarily to the extra hour and half school day. Unfortunately, teachers saw this pay structure as "more pay for more work" rather than the pay being seen more as incentive to draw more highly effective teachers to the target schools. In my interview I stated:

> At the same time, the way that it (the additional teacher pay to support recruitment of effective teachers) was implemented I didn't completely support because even though they did do teacher bonuses it was tied to the longer school day. I am not sure that this made it a complete incentive for teachers because I think that that isolated some teachers who would be effective teachers because they are not willing to put in an extra hour because they're already working long hours. And the recruitment efforts started late in the year.

Despite some of these obstacles, the school district did see additional academic improvement in most of these schools during the 2016-2017 school year and the local newspapers began to write more neutral and even positive articles highlighting the districts school turnaround efforts.

District's Process Use

Each of the evaluators expressed in our interviews that the district central office, including our evaluation and research department, increased its ability to use evidence and

research, and to incorporate evaluative inquiry into their major projects and programs—which demonstrates organizational learning and enhanced evaluative inquiry skills in relation to evaluation *process use*. Two primary examples of the district's enhanced use of these skills are the work around the plan to increase minority achievement with a focus on racial disparities and the way in which the district restructured its planning and monitoring of major strategic projects.

The district and the evaluation and research office staff increased their knowledge about strategies to support minority achievement and school turnaround. They also strengthened their skill set for action planning and monitoring. Subsequently, this provided a foundation for the research team to collaboratively develop an action plan that addresses minority achievement district-wide in Fall 2016, and to more successfully monitor and measure movement toward identified outcomes. Ron expressed to me:

> I think the (*minority achievement)* plan is an example (of the growth of the district). I don't think the (*minority achievement)* plan as it currently exists, which is a fairly robust plan—although not perfect—would not have been possible, or even conceived of, prior to this work…And yes, I do think that some of those things are better because of all of this (Grow for Success) work. I think we're in a much better situation as a district and more pointed and more directed.

Jasmine also brought up the minority achievement plan and how the Grow for Success evaluation process served as a stepping stone to the greater district-wide work:

> Now because we have developed a turnaround plan we have been charged with what this will look like across the district. How do we bridge the achievement gap? And with that plan, it used to literally be five pages and it had nothing that was actionable, measurable, anything SMART (i.e., specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound). They

> fleshed out that plan and now it is an 82-page plan. What I would say about it, though, is that it was really improved, which is a huge win for the community. It is a huge win, I think, for the district also.

Jasmine, the district's director of strategic planning, and I recognized the need to build the district's capacity for meaningful participation in continuous improvement at the upper management level. We tried to tackle this early on in the evaluation process by developing strategic teams around key strategic areas. However, we were not successful in changing the organizational culture. We realized that we could not shift this culture on our own—partly because we were internal employees and partly because we had never done this before. In the spring of 2016, the three of us worked together to bring in a consulting group. The agency that we worked with had a strong skill set in quality improvement and had a history with our district superintendent—thus, it already had established trust. Once this outside group came in, we saw a marked change in the district's way of working to support continuous improvement of major projects. The fact that we had an outside partner also helped expand the evaluation and research department's knowledge around this work. It allowed the school district to engage in strategic planning and continuous improvement in a more meaningful way—albeit still not perfect—but still more aligned and systematic than it had been previously. Jasmine shared with me:

> You asked about how evaluation affected other areas…and I think these were happening simultaneously…but again, I think how we influenced the process…was the creation of the strategic teams, which ultimately evolved into the (restructuring of the district's strategic planning and monitoring process). If you think about through our evaluation work that we were able to say that things are sort of dysfunctional or people are working in silos or there's no clear way that we're communicating across departments about

> certain aspects of the initiative—I think all those resonated in the district…I think that's a huge influence on the system that came out of our evaluation.

Ron also discussed the changes in the district that occurred during the 2016-2017 school year, which included a more systemic way of working around major district projects and having strategic planners from the research and evaluation office more involved in supporting this work:

> We've also changed structures in the district. We've become more project-based, cross-departmental, and moving (strategic) planners into more—not in leadership roles—but they have become more visible in the organization…And the district doesn't even know that. The system doesn't know that it's doing that. The system is just doing that. So, our question is: Why are they doing that when they weren't doing that two years ago or 18 months, okay? So, I would say some of that's been born out of this work, absolutely. I know for a fact it has.

In response, I added, "I know early on in our conversations, I mentioned that we needed to change the structure in the district in order to allow for improvement." Ron nodded in acknowledgement: "That's right. I agree with that 100 percent. And I think we have impacted the change of structures at the district. That's right. Because if you keep the same structures, you know—it's not going to happen just organically. You almost just have to change the structure, and I think to some degree that has occurred."

Evaluation Influence on District's *Use of Findings* and Recommendations

Based on my own reflections throughout this evaluation process, I noticed that there were many factors that influenced the district leadership's decision-making, with evaluation as one piece of the puzzle. The district as a whole shifted its way of thinking about school turnaround

for multiple reasons. For example, there was pressure for change from the state, the community, and the media. These presumably played a major role in the school district's decision to implement the recommendations from the evaluation to demonstrate that it was continuing to improve the initiative. In his interview, Ron expressed, "And I do think…I would give the community credit...you know, we have the media and the community... because being collaborative; I mean if they play their role, they have sharpened our saw—no doubt about it. They have held us accountable for some of that (more strategic) thinking." Still, as Jasmine points out, our evaluation team members all expressed that the evaluation had at least some influence on the major program shifts implemented for the 2016-2017 school year:

> There is a "turnaround" zone when there wasn't one three years ago. There wasn't a zone two years ago. And the fact, I think, that based on our recommendations and our immersion—I feel like in these schools in this work…I think that it was very collaborative in us informing that work and actually seeing your recommendations come to fruition for the improvement of schools.

The evaluation team collectively recognized that much of this influence had to do with the quality of the evaluation, including validating the recommendations with our outside research partner, and the credibility that we believe we had built with the stakeholders.

Findings: Principles to Guide CAE and Evaluation Use

Based on the evaluation, I analyzed each of the eight Principles to Guide CAE and how these were evident in the evaluation, with an emphasis on how these connect to evaluation use. Here, I discuss key points in the evaluation process that connect with each of the eight principles.

Note that I give attention to some principles and contributing factors more than others based on the way in which they emerged within this case study.

Clarify Motivation for Collaboration

The principle of *clarify motivation for collaboration* suggests that the evaluator takes steps to confirm stakeholders' in-depth understanding of CAE and that stakeholders have a justification for its use. Its contributing factors include *evaluation purpose, evaluator and stakeholder expectations,* and *information and process needs*. This study demonstrates that in terms of the *evaluation purpose* and *evaluator and stakeholder expectations*, the primary stakeholders, including the superintendent, were interested in the evaluation process as a tool for improvement. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the stakeholder's purpose for the evaluation did seem to improve the initiative. Ron shared with me, "I would say to you that I think the intent was that we (the stakeholders) trust an observer with a research-based lens to give us feedback because we do not have the answers, and in the absence of this feedback, we are not going to fix these schools." Although these district leaders did show an interest in evidence-based research and improvement, they seemed to be less familiar with a collaborative approach to evaluation as opposed to a more traditional or summative evaluation model. Jasmine and I, however, were highly familiar with the collaborative evaluation approach. We both knew the value of a collaborative approach, especially in terms of evaluation use, which compelled us to incorporate this model for the formative evaluation. We suggested a collaborative approach, with only limited understanding on the part of the stakeholders of what this would entail. I mentioned in my interview, "I think that there was sort of a disconnect in terms of really knowing if they wanted a collaborative approach. Instead, the evaluation team said that this is

what we do and what we know will be most effective." As an evaluation team, we tried to educate the stakeholders about the collaborative process. For example, we presented an overview of the evaluation models proposed with the stakeholders and discussed their preferences.

In retrospect, we realized that stakeholders needed to be made fully aware of the level of participation that a collaborative approach will entail, including the amount of time involved in the process. The context of the school district, including the culture of the district leadership and policy dynamics, also plays a part in the willingness for and level of participation in collaboration. These lessons were expressed by each of the evaluators in our interviews. For example, each of us mentioned the way in which the hierarchical structure of the school district made it difficult to work directly with those who are in power and who make many of the high-level decisions. Ron mentioned the need for evaluators to frontload our explanation of what collaborative evaluation is and what the stakeholder involvement would look like. He said we could have worked better to, "tell them what they were expected to do in the collaboration" and "the degree of ownership they were expected to have in the conversation." We also saw the need to have dedicated personnel who could make the time commitment to the project—which also connects to the principle of *monitor and respond to resource availability*. Thus, we saw that it is important to ensure that stakeholders are more fully on board, and to help develop a common vision for what the evaluation process and outputs will look like. We found that it is essential for evaluators to explain to stakeholders that they will be taking on a facilitative and educative role (i.e., critical friend) throughout the evaluation process because some stakeholders may not be open to this approach.

Foster Meaningful Relationships

The principle of *foster meaningful relationships* is concerned with establishing quality working relationships among evaluators and stakeholders. The contributing factors identified for this principle are *respect, trust, and transparency*; *structured and sustained interactivity*; and *cultural competency*. As an evaluation team, we worked to bring the stakeholders together on a regular basis. While meeting regularly did lead to sustained interactivity, the structure and quality of these activities were somewhat limited. One barrier we faced was the way in which the weekly meetings were structured—in that they were led by the assistant superintendent and not by the evaluators themselves. My reflection early on the process (October 19, 2015) led me to rethink our approach to accessing district leaders and managers. Rather than being guests attending the assistant superintendent's meetings we changed the structure to hold our own meetings. As evaluators, we soon realized that we needed to have a stronger common vision as an evaluation team about what the meetings would ideally look like, and that it would have also have been helpful to more clearly communicate this with the stakeholders at the beginning of the evaluation process. After the evaluation team began holding meetings that were solely focused on the evaluation, we saw a higher level of stakeholder participation and collaborative inquiry.

Although we had some initial concerns about the meeting structure, we found that both meeting types—the ones that were led by the superintendent and the evaluation-focused meetings that our team held—contributed to relationship building between the evaluators and stakeholders. Jasmine, Ron, and I each referenced the importance of being "at the table" throughout the 2015-2016 school year—in which we were able to attend the weekly meetings to provide the latest findings to district leadership *and* organizing our own meetings for stakeholders to have more direct involvement in the evaluation. According to our evaluation

team's reflections and interviews, the *respect, trust, and transparency* that we built during the evaluation process highly influenced the district's use of the evaluation findings and recommendations. In addition to the relationship aspects that helped to build trust—such as internal commitment to the work itself and being internal employees ourselves—the quality of the evaluation work reinforced the credibility of the evaluation team. This instilled stakeholders' trust in our work and increased stakeholder buy-in to the evaluation process and recommendations.

As for the contributing factor of *cultural competency* in this evaluation, the evaluation team was very open to various cultural perspectives. Unfortunately, there were limitations to having more of a *diversity of stakeholders* in the evaluation. District leadership appeared to be reluctant to work with certain groups of stakeholders and limited communication with community members who they perceived as antagonistic. I also saw that the communication between the school district and the community members was limited. I touched on this in my reflection on May 5, 2016 after I attended a meeting with the local community group that was formed to oversee the district's work to support minority achievement:

> The two main individuals who lead (the community group) typically have some type of way of presenting information in the meeting that seems antagonistic. There are about 30 people at the meeting with various people from the district and the community…I don't think that we (the district) have done a good job of communicating (with community stakeholders)…I don't think that it is that they are always attacking the superintendents but that they feel that this particular administration has not been very transparent. It would help us to be more collaborative and have better communication, but I don't think

the district is quite there yet and Jasmine and I have not been invited to the table to help facilitate this process.

Due to the need to build capacity for evaluation within the district central office, the large scope of the evaluation, and the district leaderships' hesitancy to have our evaluation team engage more with various community members the evaluation team primarily focused on the district central office and school leadership level during the 2015-2016 school year.

Develop a Shared Understanding of the Program

The principle of *develop a shared understanding of the program* addresses if the stakeholders have a common understanding of the program activities and intended outcomes. This principle is associated with the contributing factors *program logic* and *organizational context*. The Grow for Success Initiative lacked a director who was solely committed to this program. Instead, the district's assistant superintendent was in charge of its oversight for the majority of the 2015-2016—which was just one of his many responsibilities as the second in command of a large school district.

Also, it was challenging for us as evaluators to identify the program logic around the program activities. The discussion Jasmine and I had during her interview demonstrates the nature of the initial program planning which was not collaborative and was based on limited information. She shared with me that the activities identified for the initiative were primarily based on one focus group with staff at the target schools. Jasmine said in reference to the district leadership's thought process at the time:

> When the journey started in 2014, it was like, 'Oh my god, what is wrong with these schools? Can someone tell us or give us some feedback on what we can do to turn these

> schools around?' They (district leaders) started out with this loose question but no framework around what to do for school turnaround—from a district's perspective.

I attempted to then clarify with her based on what I had been told about the initial development of the initiative in 2014, "And then from what I'm understanding, you basically asked some questions and did somewhat of a developmental evaluation model to understand what was happening in the schools and made recommendations." Jasmine interjected:

> I would say no model at that point—just a loose focus group where we go down and get a loose pulse from the staff, and I think that developed into what they then called the (Grow for Success) initiative. They took the feedback and said here are nine bullets that we are going to do based on that feedback, and that is what the district framed the initiative around based on that one data collection piece, and that was based on one focus group.

The initiative started as a list of activities based on suggestions from a focus group with teachers at the five target schools. As such, many of the program's activities were not based on evidence or research that indicated these activities could have a significant positive impact on student behavior and or academic achievement. While there were some foundational pieces for the program logic, such as having external consultants and paraprofessionals to support teachers, the depth of the planning for this initiative was limited. There was a general consensus around the program logic, but the plan itself was loosely organized. The lack of a strong plan for the initiative was something that the community groups also expressed concern about. The initiative did not have strong program logic so it was difficult for us to develop a strong evaluation model going into the 2015-2016 year. For example, it was challenging for us to identify with our

stakeholders the most essential program components to evaluate, and this led to the evaluation having a large scope.

In terms of the *organizational context*, the hierarchical structure of the district limited the evaluation team's access to the superintendent who was one of the primary people with the power to reinforce the evaluation work. For example, some of the district leaders demonstrated more of an interest in "actions" rather than deliberation which made it challenging to engage in collaborative, evaluative inquiry. I made a note of this in a reflection:

> I do feel more confirmed in my thinking that he (the assistant superintendent) is just not…I don't know if it is that he does not appreciate it or if there is a roadblock to more strategic thinking. I do not know if he thinks that this (collaborative inquiry) is not helpful work, and whether he thinks that deliberation and talking about things to find the best solution is important. When we talked about one school during a meeting we listed four things that we need to work on with that school and then he (the assistant superintendent) said, 'We already listed four. Let's just act now or it is never going to get fixed.'" (October 20, 2015)

Jasmine described the district's tendency to rush into action, even if is not fully thought out, to attempt to alleviate pressing issues. In her interview, she stated:

> When teachers are screaming for help the superintendent feels the pressure to give them help whether it is research-based, evidence-based, or just to relieve stress and pressure…I know it has been a huge challenge. How do we balance research, practitioner, evidence-based…and time? And ultimately it is the children who are very much waiting on the adults to figure it all out.

Ron also described some of the challenges to collaboration with district leadership, which he attributed to the hierarchical structure and "a bureaucracy that's vertically aligned." I noted in my reflections how the district took a more compartmentalized approach as opposed to being more systemic in its approach to major initiatives: "As a district, we still are not putting supports in place systematically. Again, the district is looking more school by school rather than seeing what they (the district) can do to support a more systemic approach" (October 18, 2015). Unfortunately, these organizational challenges seemed to negatively impact our ability to engage stakeholders in more consistent and meaningful collaboration. Ron stated in his interview, "I think the (district) system is ready for turnaround. I think the system is ready for answers because the system wants to be better, but I think that the system wasn't ready for collaboration…I think all of those things inhibited growth—our growth as a system—and ran counter to the intent of the of the evaluation." One way that our evaluation team attempted to overcome the barriers of power dynamics and hierarchy was to work more directly with individuals in managerial positions which I recorded in a reflection:

> The people who have the more direct influence (i.e., those who are at a managerial level within the district central office) can help impact change, and we (as evaluators) can influence this is a positive way. For example, we can see where people are open to making this happen and we can work with them—see what is develops organically. One analogy I thought of for this is that we cannot go through the mountain—for example with roadblocks or gatekeepers within the bureaucracy that we are dealing with. We have to go around the mountain to make this work happen by considering what partnerships we can work on in order to facilitate this work. (October 20, 2015)

I discuss how we worked with individuals at the management level in the next section.

Promote Appropriate Participatory Practices

The principle of *promote appropriate participatory practices* encourages evaluators to consider how they will engage stakeholders in the evaluation process. The associated contributing factors are *diversity of stakeholders*, *depth of participation*, and *control of decision-making*. For this evaluation, there was limited *diversity of stakeholders* involved in the actual evaluation process—especially school-based staff and community members. Many barriers stood in the way of having a more diverse group of stakeholders. For example, the scope of the evaluation was so large that it was difficult to plan and manage for the inclusion of diverse groups of stakeholders. Importantly, the district seemed to shy away from involving the community in the evaluation—perhaps due to the active lawsuits around minority achievement and the media attention on the Grow for Success schools. Also, access to the school-level staff, including principals, was limited because of other demands for their time, and this is strongly connected to the principle *monitor and respond to resource availability*. I touched on this in one of my interview:

> I do think that this was a collaborative evaluation to some extent, but I also see where there were gaps in how it (the evaluation) was actually implemented. It wasn't as collaborative as I would ideally like to have seen it. There were different factors and power dynamics that came to play…We did not really engage with them on a regular basis, which I think is a gap in how collaborative this was…Part of that is time (that stakeholders have available). Part of that is the buy-in from the district to say we want to give you the time with them.

We did, however, obtain various perspectives of diverse groups (e.g., parents, teachers, students) via interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

The *control of the technical decision-making* rested mainly with the evaluation team in combination with individuals and teams in charge of various components of the initiative. The *depth of participation* of the district staff at the managerial level was quite high, especially because the evaluation team was internal and interacted with many of these individuals on a regular basis. I shared this in my interview:

> We were more effective in being collaborative with, for example, the person who is in charge of family engagement, the after-school initiative, and even the person in charge of the positive behavior supports in the schools and MTSS (Multi-tiered Systems of Supports). We did have ongoing discussions with them about what tools to use for data collection, getting them involved in the data collection process, and then reviewing the results with them to form recommendations—so I do think that that was a strength.

This partnership helped the evaluation team ensure our own understanding of the activities associated with the initiative, select the most appropriate instruments to measure the effectiveness of each activity, engage stakeholders in data collection and interpretation, and work collaboratively to validate findings and recommendations.

Monitor and Respond to Resource Availability

Monitor and respond to resource availability addresses the fact that the participation of stakeholders is essential for a successful evaluation and that there is a need to address the extent to which stakeholders are available to engage in the evaluation. The three contributing factors for this principle are *time*, *budget*, and *personnel*, and they often influence one another. Here, I

address these collectively since they were very intertwined for this evaluation. The interconnectedness of each of these factors seems especially true when conducting internal evaluation—whereby we did not have a specified budget or billable hours for the evaluation. Instead, the only dedicated budget item was my salary as the lead evaluator which was added to the district's budget for the 2015-2016 school year to allow for a more in-depth, high-quality evaluation. In her interview, Jasmine recalled the district's decision to hire me as a fulltime evaluator:

> As one individual who overseas evaluation for the district, it is not enough—not to get into the deep understanding we would need for school turnaround…We are going to need to have someone fulltime working on this who can immerse him or herself in the work itself. I think that's one thing that came—we need a team—potentially around this work.

Fortunately, we had the flexibility as an evaluation and research department to reallocate resources and add extra staff support throughout the process—especially when we conducted visits to all classrooms and held separate focus groups with teachers and paraprofessionals in the five target schools. This team approach made a positive impact on the success of the evaluation and how it was received by stakeholders. One major obstacle, however, was the limited time available to meet with school-based staff. Ron also spoke about the time pressures for decision-making, which made it difficult to produce quality data and to meaningfully engage stakeholders in the evaluation process. Based on this evaluation process, we found that evaluators need to minimize any political and time barriers to allow for more meaningful involvement of diverse stakeholders.

Monitor Evaluation Progress and Quality

Monitor evaluation progress and quality prioritizes the maintenance of data quality and the use of professional standards. This principle encompasses the contributing factors of *evaluation design* that includes the initial planning and scope of the evaluation (with an emphasis on a design that allows for adaptation) and *data collection* that ensures data accuracy and reliability. As mentioned previously, the quality of the evaluation helped us as an evaluation team build credibility with our stakeholders—including those who were school and community-based. Although there were some concerns about the consistency and accuracy of the data collected by stakeholders, the fact that we used multiple methods and sources of data to triangulate the findings allowed us to develop a methodologically robust evaluation while also adapting and making modifications as needed throughout the evaluation process. In addition to incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods in the evaluation design, we conducted fieldwork to immerse ourselves in the context of the initiative. Ron spoke about how important these approaches were to the success of the evaluation:

> And it's also made me think—what it's made me realize is *these are hard questions to answer*, and we do need a mixed methodological approach to most of these solutions…We're not making widgets here, so it's hard to just run numbers all the time. We maybe need to do more fieldwork, and we maybe need to do more qualitative work to be able to get the answers to the questions we're asking.

During the evaluation process, we quickly realized that we needed to pull from a variety of research-based sources and to consider the context of the organization for which we were making the recommendations. We looked at outside models for school turnaround, prepared in-depth research and policy briefs, and validated our recommendations by comparing them with

literature reviews conducted by a third-party research group. Each of us separately pointed out in our interviews that the quality of the evaluation process and the documents we shared with our stakeholders helped increase stakeholder buy-in of the evaluation recommendations. Jasmine said, "We did create documents, and I think they were awesome and amazing work around—and not because we did it. I think they were very thorough and research-based and evidence-based." Ron told me, "I want to give kudos to our work here too...One is that the things that we did were research-based. That was critical, which goes back to our *credibility*…I think that they *trusted* that we washed our findings through a research lens." District leaders and the school board also shared with us that they were impressed with the thoroughness of the evaluation process and the research that we conducted to support the recommendations, which adds to the case that quality played an important role in evaluation use.

Promote Evaluative Thinking

The principle of *promote evaluative thinking* suggests that evaluators serve in an educative role to enhance stakeholders' understanding and use of evaluative inquiry. The associated contributing factors are *inquiry orientation* and *focus on learning*. Since these contributing factors are so closely linked, I have analyzed this principle more holistically rather than segmenting out the contributing factors. Just as most evaluators involved in CAE experience, our evaluation team took on a facilitative role (Shulha, et al., 2016) and stepped in to support stakeholders with the decision-making process for the target initiative. For example, starting at the very beginning of the evaluation, the evaluation team developed monthly data snapshots to share with the stakeholders. We facilitated meetings to review the data snapshots, and we used the findings to help inform incremental decisions for improvement along the way.

This allowed the district leaders involved with the initiative to make decisions and change their course of action as needed throughout the year—even before the formative evaluation report was formally released.

In one of my reflections (February 2, 2016), I compared the planning that it takes to effectively facilitate a stakeholder meeting and how challenging this can be:

> In reflecting on myself as an evaluator and helping to facilitate decisions using data, both qualitative and quantitative, and then you think about the best approach—it is almost like we are lesson planning… This needs to be carefully planned and we need to consider how much time it will take for each activity. In addition, we want to make sure that all voices are heard. I'm trying to find the best process that works for me in terms of facilitating these meetings, and I'm still working this out.

Also, as mentioned in the evaluation overview, we met with subgroups that were focused on each aspect of the initiative (e.g., those that focused on after-school programming) to jointly develop recommendations for the formative evaluation. Many of the district staff had limited experience with a more collaborative approach to evaluation which made it challenging for the evaluation team members to establish ourselves as facilitators and critical friends. Fortunately, by the end of the evaluation process, the district leadership and management demonstrated an increased understanding of and appreciation for evaluation and its role in helping to make more informed decisions. Eventually, as Jasmine mentioned in her interview, the evaluation process and the team members became a foundational component for programmatic decision-making. This quote demonstrates how the district showed appreciation for having the evaluative information, which according to Jasmine, was a major shift in the way of work in the district at that time:

> I just remembering being at the heart of it where almost a decision couldn't be made without evaluation. I think probably at the peak of collaborative evaluation at that point—when you're providing real-time data, you're problem-solving around the data, you are getting research-based solutions to it and then those solutions being put into play.

Follow Through to Realize Use

The principle of *follow through to realize use* addresses how the evaluation findings are communicated, used for planning, and acted upon; and how evaluators support the *use of the findings* and *process use*. The contributing factors identified with this principle are *practical outcomes* and *transformative outcomes* from the evaluation. The actual evaluation use and outcomes connected to the evaluation are described in the narrative portion of this chapter. In this current section, I delve deeper into the role the evaluation played in the district's use of the evaluation findings and recommendations, and the learning associated with the evaluation process.

As suggested by the GTO process, which is associated with empowerment evaluation, it is important to think about each layer of the organization when dealing with the complex structure of a school district. Accordingly, our evaluation team developed the recommendations to address multiple levels of the organization and took into consideration the organizational capacity and the feasibility of each recommendation. We vetted these recommendations through our evaluation and research office, district leadership, and the newly hired director of school leadership to align them with best practices for school turnaround. We then met with the superintendent to share the evaluation report and discuss the recommendations, and subsequently presented these to the school board and the individual schools involved in the Grow for Success

Initiative. The district did implement many of the primary recommendations from the evaluation, which I listed in the *District's Use of Findings and Recommendations* section above. We worked closely with the stakeholders to develop a theory of change and a logic model for the modified initiative for the 2016-2017. Some of the district stakeholders included the area superintendents who oversaw the target schools and the newly hired director of school turnaround. Other stakeholders, however, were not as open to taking the time for action planning. In her interview, Jasmine discussed a lesson learned from this experience to enhance evaluation use:

> I know you (Oriana) suggested pulling together a meeting (to develop action plan based on the recommendations)…I am thinking that we even need to make a that a must—turning the recommendations into an action planning or continuous improvement process immediately—who's going to do it and what—because they (the stakeholders) lose sight of the recommendations.

As this case study demonstrates, evaluators engaged in CAE are more likely to support use if they are present to help stakeholders interpret findings and recommendations and, if possible, to aid in the process of action planning to implement recommendations. This involvement can help limit misuse of evaluation findings and recommendations, especially if stakeholders encounter barriers that might prevent successful implementation of recommendations. In some cases, the evaluators may not have the skill set to co-develop action plans with stakeholders or there may be other barriers to their involvement such as a lack of willingness by the stakeholders to involve the evaluators in this process or power dynamics. In that case, the evaluators may want to work with a third party or consulting firm that has experience in action planning. I addressed this in one of my reflections:

> One thought to support the development of a stronger action plan is to have an outside consulting agency help with the formulation of the plan since the school district doesn't seem to have the internal capacity to do this, and I might be limited in my own power or connections make this happen. (February 22, 2016)

Beyond the more concrete use of the evaluation recommendations, this evaluation and planning process laid the groundwork for a more aligned approach to school turnaround and a comprehensive plan to improve minority achievement district-wide—which I also mentioned earlier in this chapter. There has been a shift in the way that the district approaches minority achievement and minority hiring, which could be interpreted as a transformative outcome. Jasmine noted that there has been some transformative change in the district that was connected to this evaluation work, although there were multiple influences for change:

> A lot has happened over the past three years, there really has…that people haven't seen these types of changes in the last 30…I think even when you start to think about our district no longer being colorblind, which is really interesting…So I think even in the fact that we're starting to think in some respects that race matters more. You know, whether it's ugly, good, bad…we have to address these types of issues head-on, especially since this is the first system that all children are going to encounter. I think that's huge…the fact that we have hired five black district staff people in the last six months—it has been intentional.

Evolution of the Evaluation Team

As mentioned in Chapter 3, evaluators are active participants and learners throughout the evaluation process. Evaluations that involve a high level of stakeholder participation are

dialectic—leading to the transformation of the stakeholders *and* the evaluators, including shifts in our identity, role, and positionality. My analysis revealed two themes that address our positionality and growth throughout this case study. The first theme had to do with developing our own understanding as evaluators of the more intensive role that we have within CAE and to expand our stakeholders' understanding of this more hands-on facilitative approach to evaluation. The other theme that emerged was that we as evaluators were open to learning and flexible throughout the process. This case study demonstrated similar characteristics in each of us that allowed us to learn and grow. These included our ability to admit our own limitations, to be open to learning new things, to push each other as team members, and to be reflective throughout the evaluation process.

Recognizing Our Role as Beyond that of a "Traditional" Evaluator

Based on my experience, many people view the traditional evaluator role as an objective or neutral third party who comes in to simply make a judgement and to assess the merit of a program. However, CAE often calls on evaluators to go beyond this more traditional role and to work alongside the stakeholders as a facilitator and critical friend. These concepts of the *objective third party* or *critical friend* seem to be somewhat incongruous. The clash of perspectives of the evaluator's role came into play during this evaluation process, and our entire evaluation team learned to take on a more hands-on approach to stakeholder oriented evaluation. This was an important aspect of the evolution of our role and eventually shifted how we promoted our role with our stakeholders.

Ron, Jasmine, and I also learned that we as evaluators needed to better understand and define what a collaborative approach to evaluation looked like, especially because we all had

different experience levels with that approach. Ron, who was completely new to evaluation, had a more traditional view of what our role should be. He shared in his interview how he moved from thinking as a practitioner who is primarily action-oriented to being more research-oriented and methodical in his decision-making:

> You have to realize that I'm a practitioner, and I am somebody who worked in schools, and I like to fix things quickly. And I'm a "let's go fix it" kind of guy, and I think most school principals are like that. So, first of all, I think it (this evaluation process) helped me to be more reflective about what we're doing and why we're doing it and why that solution…So I think it's made me be, as a school practitioner and now as a district leader, to be somebody who is purposeful and methodical in making decisions. So, I think evaluation has made me just think about stepping back and taking the viewpoint that the things need to be evidence-based.

As a team, we also had worked to develop a joint vision that evaluators need to be involved throughout the continuous improvement cycle to better support evaluation use within CAE. Building a common understanding of our team's approach to evaluation was initially a huge challenge, especially trying to build Ron's capacity and understanding of more participatory evaluation approaches. I mentioned some of the challenges in my reflection on March 26, 2016: "If you don't know what evaluation and research is supposed to look like then you may not be aware of the holes in your knowledge that you may have. In addition, you need to trust your experts around you." Jasmine and I had countless conversations with Ron about the need for the evaluation team to take on a more facilitative role. In fact, each time I would say that we needed to *facilitate* a meeting or a process to support collaboration, Ron would shy away from the use of that term and told Jasmine and me that we should not take the reins as facilitators—that we are

merely there to present the information. However, after the process was complete, Ron also commented on how he had become more open to collaborative approaches. “And I'm all for collaborative, and I'm all for things that aren’t hierarchical. I think that would be my preference as a leader moving forward…And I think if we do that, we would have a better system (in the district).” Ron’s shift in thinking also led to other changes in how he managed the evaluation and research office, including getting involved in district strategic projects.

Jasmine and I had the most experience with CAE. However, we still grappled with how we wanted to implement it in this unique context and how to make the evaluation truly collaborative within such a bureaucratic setting. Jasmine and I were initially coming from a research and evaluation background, but we both grew from the experience in many ways. Through this evaluation process, we gained a much deeper understanding of how to apply CAE. We also sought out professional development opportunities along the way and sharpened our skill set for continuous improvement methods and strategic planning. We learned that evaluators need to make sure that our stakeholders understand the more facilitative role that evaluators play in CAE. In response to this concern, Jasmine and I raised the question: Do evaluators need to "rebrand" themselves to distance themselves from the common preconception that evaluation is only summative? Jasmine brought up this concept of rebranding in her interview: “I know that sometimes during the year we (Jasmine and Oriana) talked about rebranding evaluation so that again the district could learn how to utilize us to maximize their efforts.” I also made a comment in one of my early reflections around this topic:

> One of the things that came out of this is my reflection on perhaps if we changed or rebranded ourselves. For example, my title could be something more along the lines of evaluation and planning or evaluation and strategic development. Then maybe that would

help people see me beyond evaluation role and that I can support dramatic and strategic decisions that help support improvement. (November 8, 2015)

Based on what we learned during the 2015-2016 school year, I made some adjustments to my evaluation approach during the 2016-2017 school year. For example, I set up meetings in the summer of 2016 with Turnaround Zone stakeholders to discuss their needs for program improvement. I made changes to the evaluation proposal to include the continuous improvement cycle. I also worked with stakeholders during the evaluation planning process to gain agreement on the amount of time I would need from the stakeholders throughout the evaluation and their role in data collection and analysis. In addition, as I mentioned previously, Jasmine and Ron applied their strengthened evaluation skill set to *facilitating* the development of a plan to increase minority achievement throughout the district.

Evaluators as Demonstrating Flexibility and as Co-learning

Early on in the evaluation process, the evaluation team recognized that we needed to be flexible. We changed course multiple times to best address the needs of the program, organization, and stakeholders. One of our earlier challenges was to design the evaluation based on the various evaluation models to guide the evaluation process (i.e., empowerment evaluation, development evaluation). We struggled with sticking to one model versus being more flexible in how we approached the evaluation. Ultimately, we found that the core of each of these models is the collaborative inquiry process and we as an evaluation team need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the stakeholders and to make changes to the evaluation along the way to better meet the stakeholder's needs. Jasmine alluded to this in her interview: "I think flexibility from

the evaluator…flexibility and communication from the evaluator are probably the best ways to improve this collaborative process."

Each of the evaluators was tenacious in his or her own right and very passionate about the evaluation purpose, which was to improve this initiative. As Jasmine expressed in her interview, "I think how much you actually believe in the work and the work that you're doing and the fact that it can advocate for children can play into it too, depending on district leaders—all of that synergy works together." In this case, we each were dedicated to the work and brought a unique set of knowledge and skills to this work that ultimately supported the use of the evaluation and improvements to the initiative. As a team, we continuously met—often in long, somewhat intense meetings—to help push each other's thinking and to overcome any obstacles we were facing with the evaluation process. This team approach allowed each of us to be more reflective, and demonstrated our willingness to learn from one another. Jasmine described in her interview how the strong partnership that we had as co-evaluators helped strengthen the evaluation and its use. Ron also mentioned the way in which we learned from each other. He referred to us as "co-learners in the work." At the end of my interview with Ron, I asked him if there was anything additional he wanted to say about the evaluation process. Here is the conversation we had, which demonstrates the attitudes we both had toward the work, the struggle, and the importance of the evaluation:

> Ron: I just think it was beneficial to our school district. People were brought together at a time in our school district's history for a reason, and I think our system will benefit from it for a long time. And I see some fruits of that, even if they're not as big or get us as far as we would have all wanted.

Oriana: Right. And I think too, I think we have to bring it back to that tenacity and teamwork.

Ron: Sure.

Oriana: It's like, really wanting to see the change happen.

Ron: Yeah. We were true believers in the work. A lot of productive struggle. I don't mind that, but that's what was going to have to be. There was just too much at stake.

Concluding Thoughts

Although I did part with the district in April 2017 for personal reasons—to focus on being a new mother and relocating to Wisconsin—I have continued to stay in touch with my colleagues and friends in the Evergreen school district. To this day, we continue to jointly reflect on how the evaluation helped to shape the district's approach to collaborative inquiry and how we each grew from the experience.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This case study is an examination of the collaborative approach to evaluation (CAE) within the school district's central office, and contributes to the fields of evaluation and education by providing insight into the use of CAE within a complex educational setting. As a researcher I am particularly interested in the way in which CAE is tied to evaluation use—primarily because evaluations that include high levels of stakeholder involvement and collaboration are recognized as also having higher level of stakeholder use (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Johnson et al., 2009; Patton, 1997; Shulha & Cousins, 1997; Stein & Coburn, 2010). This chapter provides an overview of the emerging themes around the way in which the evaluation was designed and implemented, and how this ties to potentially greater evaluation use. The conclusions presented here build upon the previous research on how to enhance evaluation use and support programmatic and organizational improvement (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman et al., 2014). The conclusions are broken down into two sections to address each of the research questions. The first question addresses the way in which implementation of a collaborative approach to evaluation supports evaluation use within the school district, and the second question is concerned with what this case demonstrates about the evaluators' role and growth within a collaborative approach to

evaluation. In addition, I provide implications for evaluators and those working with school districts in an evaluative capacity. Lastly, I give suggestions for further research in these areas.

Conclusions: Research Question 1

Based on the findings and thematic analysis for this case study, I synthesized three themes in relation to the Principles to Guide CAE and evaluation use. The themes I identified for the way in which the implementation of CAE in the district supported evaluation use are: (1) the need for organizational readiness in combination with evaluator ability to promote evaluative inquiry and collaboration, (2) having a high-quality evaluation planning and process with an emphasis on the timeliness of findings and recommendations, and (3) incorporating a long-term commitment to the evaluation to support continuous improvement. These themes are detailed in the subsequent sections.

Theme 1: Organizational Readiness *in Combination with* Evaluator Ability to Promote Evaluative Inquiry and Collaboration

Based on my findings, evaluators who engage in CAE work in complex organizations such as school districts will most likely not have the most ideal context for CAE. However, it is important to consider both the context and the ability of the evaluator (or evaluation team) when deciding to engage in CAE work within a school district and when trying to predict the potential use of the evaluation. This represents the central idea for Theme 1. In this case study, as explained by the concept of process use, our evaluation team found that we were able to incrementally increase the organization's capacity for evaluative thinking. One major aspect of

the learning that occurred throughout this evaluation was the way in which the stakeholders had to construct their understanding of what CAE was via firsthand experience.

Shulha and her colleagues (2016), who developed the Principles to Guide CAE, state that the purpose and the context of the evaluation should guide the evaluation approach taken, and that an evaluator should also take the needs and capacity of the stakeholders involved in the evaluation process into consideration when deciding to engage in this work. Specifically, the authors indicate that, "We have taken the stance that applications of CAE are likely to be most powerful when they remain responsive to the purpose and context for the requested evaluation and to the needs and capacities of stakeholders" (p. 195). This concept of examining the context for collaboration is akin to Cousin and Chouinard's (2012) identification of antecedents (i.e., contextual factors and enabling conditions) for implementing participatory evaluation. The antecedents that they identified are evaluator background and role, community context, institutional influences, and program influences. This case demonstrates that the context to support collaborative inquiry may need to be examined *in combination with* the evaluators' abilities to promote collaboration and evaluative inquiry. One component is the context that exists with the primary stakeholders and intended users of the evaluation. This is the preexistent context for collaborative evaluation that Shulha and colleagues encourage evaluators to examine prior to engaging in a collaborative approach. The second component is the way in which the stakeholders involved in the evaluation develop their capacity for reflective practice, such as the collaborative inquiry that is involved in a collaborative approach to evaluation.

In terms of the contextual component that supports evaluative inquiry, the school district within this study both encountered barriers and acted as a barrier to fully implementing CAE—such as having a hierarchical structure and a lack of willingness to include diverse stakeholders.

These are challenges that are present and that continue to be perpetuated in school districts—thus limiting their capacity to engage in evaluative inquiry for improvement (Cohen, Moffitt, and Goldin, 2007; Cousins, 1998; Glazer & Peurach, 2013; Suppovitz, 2006). According to Marsh (2007), "School districts by design are bureaucracies that often embody structures and cultures incompatible with the norms of collaboration and deliberative democracy" (p. 159). In particular, my evaluation team and I observed that district leaders in high pressure situations tended to make decisions quickly based on limited facts rather than being more deliberative in their thinking or delving deeper into additional research. This type of quick fix mentality within school districts is also well-documented in the literature (Hord, 1997; Owens, 1998) as well as the challenges of school districts as complex organizations. School districts are complex organizations that must navigate policies and mandates that are constantly changing, limited resources, political and societal issues, time pressures to make and implement decisions quickly, and multiple layers of management (e.g., school level, district level) (Labaree, 2011; Owens, 1998). In this case, the evaluators were aware that time and community pressure influenced district's decision to put the initial initiative in place quickly during the 2014-2015 school year without developing a more comprehensive, evidence-based plan. Barriers such as these may have dissuaded other evaluators from engaging in CAE within this district altogether. However, both at the beginning and the end of this evaluation process, my colleagues and I concluded that the benefits of taking a collaborative approach outweighed the challenges that we had to overcome. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the district demonstrated growth in its understanding of school turnaround approaches (conceptual use) and in its demonstrated ability to engage in collaborative inquiry (process use).

While we did face challenges, our evaluation team engaged in a CAE process and over time did observe change in the district's organizational learning climate and evaluation capacity.

Based on the findings of this study, the evaluation team's reflections on the organization's growth in evaluative thinking and process use during this evaluation demonstrates how a strong collaborative evaluation can help strengthen an organization's capacity to engage in this type of work in the future. Process use is the way in which individuals and organizations enhance their evaluative thinking skills via meaningful engagement in the evaluation process (Cousins, Hay, & Chouinard, 2015; Patton, 1998) and is associated with the concept of organizational learning (Alkin & Taut, 2003) and evaluation capacity building (Preskill and Boyle, 2008). The evaluation team had to work on building the organizational capacity of the stakeholders bit by bit, and this included growing as an evaluation team. For example, the evaluation process helped develop the skill set of internal staff in the areas of evaluative thinking and approaching decision-making in a more systematic, deliberative way—as demonstrated by the district's use of these skills to develop a more comprehensive minority achievement plan and the restructuring of their approach to strategic planning and continuous improvement. The findings here support the notion that process use can provide an important stepping stone for developing the organization's evaluation capacity. Thus, the way that the evaluator plans and implements the evaluation, such as engaging in CAE, can serve to enhance an individual or a group's capacity for evaluative thinking and organizational learning (Cousins et al., 2004; Preskill & Torres, 1999a; Preskill & Torres, 1999b; Preskill & Torres, 2000; Torres, Preskill, & Piontek, 2005). In addition, as mentioned in the findings, the evaluation team and our strategic planning colleague even brought in an outside agency to shift the organizational culture to support better cross-departmental alignment, a more systematic approach to planning, and a more streamlined oversight and monitoring process for major district projects.

Part of building capacity for evaluative thinking and organizational learning relates to my finding that the stakeholders must actually engage in the process to be fully aware of what a collaborative inquiry approach looks like and what it entails. Preskill and Torres (2000) suggest that evaluative inquiry and organizational learning are grounded in constructivist learning theory - a process in which "individuals and groups learn by interpreting, understanding, and making sense of their own experiences, often within a social context" (p. 28). This case study shows a connection to constructivist learning theory by modeling how the collaborative inquiry process will not get fully conceptualized for some until they have actually gone through the process. Preskill and Torres (1999b) also provide an explanation of how engaging stakeholders in evaluative inquiry leads to organizational learning: "learning takes place through (a) the collective creation of meaning, (b) the action, (c) the developments of new knowledge, (d) and improvement in systematic processes, and (e) the overcoming of tacit assumptions" (Preskill & Torres, 1999b, p. 49). Although it is not an easy task, as this case study reveals, shifts in organizational culture such as expanding the understanding and use of collaborative inquiry did occur. As Ron stated in his interview, although the district wanted to understand school turnaround it was not "ready" for using CAE at the onset of the evaluation process. Each of the evaluators expressed in our interviews that the district central office, including the evaluation and research department, increased its ability to use evidence and research and to incorporate evaluative inquiry into their major projects and programs—which demonstrates organizational learning and enhanced evaluative inquiry skills in relation to evaluation *process use*. Two primary examples of the district's enhanced use of these skills are the work around the plan to increase minority achievement and the way in which the district restructured its planning and monitoring of major strategic projects. An understanding of learning theories can aid evaluators

in facilitating organizational learning. As Schein (1987) states, "Culture is learned, evolves with new experiences, and can be changed if one understands the dynamics of the learning process" (p. 385).

Theme 2: High Quality Evaluation Planning and Process with an Emphasis on Findings and Recommendations

The second theme addresses the connection between evaluation use and having a high-quality evaluation plan and process. This theme is primarily tied to the way in which the evaluation supported the use of findings and recommendations. Within this theme, some major lessons that the evaluation team learned were that we needed to do a better job of preparing the school district on the front end for what the CAE process would entail, what their role would be as stakeholders, and what our role would be as evaluators. This set of actions during the evaluation planning could have enhanced evaluation use even more. However, the strengths of this evaluation, which appeared to support stakeholders' use of the primary findings and recommendations, were the way that the evaluation team followed high standards of quality and how we involved stakeholders throughout the process.

Within this case study, the principle of follow through to realize use was closely tied to the quality of the evaluation process as well as the validity of the evaluation report and its recommendations. In terms of the evaluation quality, we closely adhered to the JCSEE Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2011) with a special emphasis on the utility standards of credibility, attention to stakeholders, negotiated purposes, explicit values, relevant information, meaningful processes and products, timely and appropriate communicating and reporting, and concern for consequences and influence. These standards helped with planning for a high-quality

approach by providing guidelines for successful evaluation practices. Many of the Program Evaluation Standards align with best practices for collaborative evaluation. Our evaluation team incorporated multiple methods and data sources to triangulate the findings. We worked closely with stakeholders and conducted in-depth research to develop and validate the recommendations. Furthermore, we considered the timeliness of when the findings and recommendations were released (which was usually on ongoing process throughout the school year) to ensure that decision makers had access to quality information for the decision-making process.

This case study also exemplifies how evaluation planning and the communication with stakeholders throughout the planning process were both central to the success of the evaluation *and* an area that needed to be strengthened. During the evaluation planning process, we discovered that evaluators need to be very clear about what the process will look like and gain agreement on and a commitment to using CAE early in the initial planning stage. Although the evaluators initially did define the evaluation approaches early in the process, we did not actually explain this thoroughly to our stakeholders for the 2015-2016 school year. Therefore, one theme that emerged is how we prepare the "system" (e.g., the organization, program) for collaboration. One of the main lessons we learned was that the planning that goes into the evaluation and the communication with stakeholders during the onset of the evaluation is central to the success of the evaluation process. We found that preparing the system for evaluation includes ensuring that the stakeholders understand the collaborative evaluation process, the commitment of participants, and the role of the evaluator as more of a facilitator or critical friend throughout the process.

In addition to the importance of preparing the school district, we also found that the structure of the evaluation meetings with stakeholders was vital to the evaluation process and the use of findings. As noted in my findings, the initial structure of the evaluation meetings with

stakeholders was not ideal for implementing CAE in the district. Instead, our role was more of being guest at the assistant superintendent's meetings. Eventually, the structure and quality of the meetings enhanced evaluation use. After the evaluators structured and facilitated the evaluation meetings with stakeholders, this helped to promote evaluative thinking and decision-making. The importance of establishing a team of stakeholders to meet on a regular basis is central to the collaborative evaluation approach (O'Sullivan, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos, 2012; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012). Therefore, although the evaluation team did help to organize and plan the evaluation meetings we also realized the importance of working closely *with* stakeholders to maximize the quality and outcomes from those meetings.

One major component of the evaluation design and quality is the evaluation outputs that have been identified as consequences of participatory evaluation, including the quality of evaluation knowledge produced and timeliness of evaluative knowledge produced (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). Ultimately, as my findings suggest, the quality and validity of our evaluation and its outputs (e.g., the recommendations, the final report) increased the district leadership's and the school board's buy-in of the findings and recommendations. We had a high level of stakeholder involvement when confirming our findings and refining our recommendations—thus helping to ensure a higher level of quality of the findings and recommendations and increase the stakeholders' ownership, understanding, and buy-in (Posavac & Carey, 1997). This stakeholder involvement included using empowerment evaluation approaches to develop recommendations based on the formative evaluation. In addition, after the initial recommendations were developed by stakeholders, the research and evaluation team conducted in-depth research and literature reviews to add an additional layer of validity to our recommendations. We found the research

process to be especially important to support recommendations for major program shifts within a developmental evaluation model.

This study's findings demonstrate how the recommendations need to be high quality, well thought out, and built upon the knowledge of multiple levels of stakeholders—especially when trying to ensure evaluation use for programmatic improvement. According to Patton (1997), "well-written, carefully derived recommendations and conclusions can be the magnet that pools all the other elements of an evaluation together into a meaningful whole" (p. 324). In our case, the quality and validity of the evaluation itself and the recommendations were key to the use of the findings and to building our credibility with stakeholders—which led to increased use of the evaluation findings and recommendations. Credibility is associated with enhancing evaluation use (Patton, 1997; Yarbrough et al., 2011). Patton (1997) provides a further explanation of credibility within the field of evaluation: "Credibility is a complex notion that includes the perceived accuracy, fairness, and believability of the evaluation and the evaluator." (p. 250). Furthermore, within a bureaucratic school district context, it is especially important to develop a relationship with stakeholders that fosters trust and respect, which will ultimately help the evaluator establish credibility (Marsh, 2007).

Theme 3: Evaluator's Long-term Commitment to Support Continuous Improvement

This third theme is concerned with the evaluator's long-term commitment to support continuous improvement. The evaluators in this case found that evaluation use is strengthened when evaluators provide ongoing stakeholder support for the interpretation of findings and recommendations, action planning, and applying the components of the continuous improvement

cycle (plan, do, study, act). This case study also demonstrates how a long-term process (i.e., a process that may take place over multiple years) can enhance the use of the evaluation findings (Patton, 1997; Posavac & Carey, 1997; Torres, Preskill, & Piontek, 2005) and help to prevent evaluation misuse (Patton,1997). One prevalent reason for evaluation misuse that our evaluation team observed was the disconnect between what individuals predict will happen based on theory and what actual happens when new ideas are put into action. As we learned from this evaluation process, evaluators can potentially prevent misuse of findings and recommendations by actively engaging with organizational decision-makers when making the move from theory (e.g., recommendations) to implementation.

As we saw in this case, a longer-term commitment by the evaluator that goes beyond just handing the stakeholders an evaluation report can enhance evaluation use. When we engaged in action planning with stakeholders around key recommendations we saw that stakeholders were better able to interpret and use the evaluation findings and recommendations. My analysis led me to the conclusion that a CAE process that is more cyclical and that attends to each part of the continuous improvement cycle (i.e., plan, do, study, act) can help to enhance implementation of the recommendations and can help prevent misuse or misinterpretations of the evaluation findings and recommendations. Patton (1997) addresses the issue of evaluation misuse, which can be either intentional or unintentional, and the fact that as evaluation use increases evaluation misuse also increases. Evaluation misuse might be due to ill intentions of the users, problems in the evaluation design, or other factors that impact the ability to carry out the findings and recommendations such as political or contextual factors.

In this case study, there was evidence of evaluation misuse when the evaluators were not included in the planning process. The evaluation recommendation about teacher incentives

morphed into simply "more pay for more work." This was due to multiple factors—perhaps misinterpretation by intended users as well as political factors and roadblocks (e.g., negotiations with the local teacher's union). As a result of the district's actions, which differed from the evaluation's intended recommendations, the district had difficulty recruiting more experienced and qualified teachers for the target schools for the 2016-2017 school year. Conversely, when the evaluators were present to help mediate any possible misinterpretations of the findings and recommendations the planning around those recommendations appeared to be more successful. For example, the evaluation team continued to work with school district stakeholders even after the formative evaluation results were shared in early 2016. This allowed us to facilitate action planning around the recommendations and to monitor implementation of the revised Turnaround Zone Initiative for the 2016-2017 school year. In this instance, our evaluation team was involved throughout the entire continuous improvement and planning cycle, which helped facilitate improved use of information collected as part of the evaluative inquiry.

As this case study demonstrates, organizational decision-making is extremely complicated and is influenced by multiple factors (Owens, 1998). The information provided within an evaluation report is limited in its role to impact decision-making in relation to the values of the stakeholders within a given context and politics that impact organizations on an ongoing basis (Mark, 2009). Therefore, it may be difficult to predict how recommendations will play out within a particular organizational setting (Posavac & Carey,1997). Furthermore, even after the recommendations have been made there may be new information and shifts that need to be addressed during the implementation process. This was the case with the above teacher recruitment example and how the negotiations with the teacher's union shifted how the recommendation got implemented by the school district. Argyris and Schön (1974) suggest that

there is a difference between a *theory-of-action* which is typically an idealized plan that is based on theoretical research, and a *theory-of-use* which is what actually occurs when the theory of action is applied in the context of organizations. By incorporating strategic approaches to evaluation over time, practitioners can work to "narrow the gap between theories of action and theories-in-use" within a program or organization (Rallis & Militello, 2009, p. 269). Again, as my analysis suggests, when evaluators are present to support planning, implementation, and monitoring then the likelihood of misinterpretation and misuse by program decision makers decreases.

Conclusions: Research Question 2

The concept of the evolution of the evaluator identity, role, and positionality is concerned with the way in which the evaluator(s) are involved throughout the evaluation process and how their role may shift—for example, as a critical friend, trainer or facilitator (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). In my analysis, I expanded this initial concept to include how we as evaluators grew and learned throughout the evaluation process. Overall, this case study demonstrates the process of growth of the evaluation team to implement CAE and to influence evaluation use within the organization. We as an evaluation team needed to develop our own capacity to be able to extend this knowledge and skill to others in the organization. Two primary themes around this concept emerged: (1) understanding and positioning the role of the evaluator within CAE, and (2) creating a safe space that allows for inquiry and organizational learning. These are explored below.

Theme 4: Understanding and Positioning the Role of the Evaluator within CAE

One major takeaway from this study about the evaluator's positionality within CAE is that most stakeholders were not as familiar with the role of the evaluator within collaborative approaches to evaluation. Instead, they appeared to be more familiar with the traditional role of evaluation as summative—on which a judgment is made about the program at the end by a more distant, highly objective, outside evaluator. Torres, Preskill, and Piontek (2005) clarify how a more participatory approach to evaluation requires a more active role than the more traditional approaches to evaluation:

> Evaluators whose work reflects collaborative, participatory, and learning-oriented approaches often find themselves acting as educators, consultants/facilitators, coaches, and interpreters. Each of these roles moves beyond the traditional notion of evaluators as expert-scientist-researchers and challenges the positivistic assumption that evaluation can provide clear-cut explanations of cause/effect relationships. (p. 309)

This disconnect regarding individual understanding of the evaluator's role was exemplified in this case by the preconceptions by district leadership about what evaluation is and what evaluators do. In addition, our evaluation team found that as internal evaluators within a hierarchical organizational structure it is challenging to position ourselves as the "expert" or "critical friend" and to work within the limitations of that particular organizational structure (e.g, time constraints, willingness of others to engage in the inquiry or deliberation process). I found through my experience and my analysis of this case that evaluators need to better communicate to our stakeholders what our role will be and to confirm that the stakeholders are in agreement about what this role entails. This is especially important because the evaluator role within CAE is different than what was common in the evaluation field in the past (Posavac & Carey, 1997).

One member of our evaluation team (Ron) was completely new to the field of evaluation and to more collaborative approaches to evaluation. Also, although Jasmine and I had experience with CAE in the past, we had not had the opportunity to apply it to this extent within the context of the school district. Therefore, we as an evaluation team needed to evolve in our understanding of CAE before—or in this case, *while*—leading the school district through the CAE process. According to Torres, Preskill, and Piontek (2005), "Engaging in a participatory, consultative role requires comfort with maintaining ongoing, collaborative relationships with stakeholders, the ability to relinquish control, and at the same time help organizations learn through inquiry, reflection, dialogue, and action planning." (p. 305). This case study demonstrates the growth of the evaluation team to implement CAE. For example, Ron shared in his interview how he made a shift in thinking from more of a "quick fix" mentality as a practitioner to more of an orientation toward evaluative inquiry and methodical decision-making. He also developed a stronger skill set for and involvement with district strategic projects. Jasmine and I also made changes to my own thinking and approach to CAE work during the timeframe of this case study. Both of us learned how to better position ourselves as critical friends despite the challenges of a strongly established school district hierarchy—primarily through the quality of work, our persistence, and engaging in professional development opportunities to expand our evaluation and quality improvement skill sets. In addition, I took on a more facilitative role at the end of the 2015-2016 school year to help with action planning for next school year, and I started to integrate more processes to support continuous improvement. This was a major shift in the role of the evaluator within the organization and for this initiative.

Theme 5: Creating a Safe Space that Allows for Inquiry and Organizational Learning

The concept of organizational learning in this case study goes beyond the stakeholders as the sole beneficiaries of this process. It also includes the research and evaluation team because we are internal to the organization, and our growth as evaluators and researchers contributes to the organizational knowledge within the school district. This case study demonstrates that we as evaluators were reflective, open to growth, and have a deep commitment to seeing the evaluation through. All of these attributes contributed to our ability to learn both individually and as a team. As a team, we developed a safe space in which we could respectfully question each other's thinking and push each other to grow and learn. This safe space for learning allowed us to take risks, ask questions, and enhance our learning. For example, in his interview, Ron mentioned that the evaluation team was engaged in "a lot of productive struggle" and that, we were "co-learners in the work." To help support evaluative inquiry that works to support greater organizational learning, individuals need to be open to speaking up and asking difficult questions (Posavac & Carey, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999b). According to Preskill and Torres (1999b), the process of asking questions "develops a spirit of curiosity that serves as a catalyst for learning" (p. 65). Asking questions and taking risks are also fundamental for organizational learning to occur although most individuals avoid taking risks for fear of making a mistake (Preskill & Torres, 1999b).

Through this evaluation process, we as an evaluation team learned that we needed to enhance our skills for collaborative evaluative inquiry on an individual and team level to be able to expand that knowledge base at the organizational level. Preskill and Torres (1999b) suggest that evaluative inquiry can have a significant contribution to individual, team, and organizational

learning and that the team is the building block for organizational learning. The growth of the evaluation team members, particularly Jasmine and Ron, enhanced their capacity to more meaningfully engage in the minority achievement plan and in other strategic planning within the district. Furthermore, as internal evaluators we were there for multiple years and were able to help build organizational knowledge around evaluative inquiry and CAE. Internal evaluators can contribute to the *institutional memory* of a program or organization - "a memory made up of lessons learned, ideas cultivated, and skills developed over time" (Patton, 1997, p. 232).

Implications

This case study has multiple implications for evaluation practitioners, evaluation researchers, and professionals working with school districts to support programmatic improvement. This study's implications around CAE and evaluation provide insights on evaluation use, incorporating evidence-based practices into school districts, and incorporating improvement science concepts into educational organizations. The implications surrounding evaluation implementation in school districts also address how to move toward a more inclusive and meaningful CAE process in this context. In addition, I provide implications to consider for further research.

Implications for Evaluation Research and Practice

In this section I explore how evaluators engaging in CAE work can enhance evaluation use. Evaluators can incorporate evaluative inquiry to develop a program or organization's capacity for engaging in more meaningful evaluation work in the future. Evaluators can also partner with stakeholders to develop a common understanding of and commitment to the joint

work involved in CAE. In addition, they can help support organizational decision-making and action planning around the evaluation findings and recommendations. Correspondingly, evaluators can enhance their skill sets to support school districts with improvement processes.

As this case demonstrates, it may be beneficial for evaluators to begin with a manageable project or program when initially applying CAE within a new context. Then evaluators may want to continue to expand this work to build the organization's evaluative capacity over time. Evaluators engaged in CAE work need to be able to help programs and organizations build their capacity for evaluation (Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999b). Typically, trained internal or external evaluators teach individuals within an organization the knowledge and skills for engaging in evaluative inquiry and help facilitate the implementation of the inquiry process (Preskill & Torres, 1999b). Evaluators who want to expand organizational knowledge of evaluation should also directly address this in their evaluation plan. Patton (1997) states that, "The practical implications of an explicit emphasis on creating a learning culture as part of the process will mean building into the evaluation attention to and training in evaluation logic and skills" (p. 100). The goal is for evaluative inquiry to become embedded in the practices of the organization for the long term (Preskill & Torres, 1999b). As the evaluator helps to engage the stakeholders in evaluation capacity building and evaluative thinking over time the evaluator can also expand the level of collaboration with a more diverse group of stakeholders.

In addition, evaluators engaged in CAE should develop a team of stakeholders to engage in evaluation working sessions throughout the evaluation and continuous improvement cycle. This can help the evaluator connect with multiple stakeholders throughout the evaluation process and support evaluative thinking and collaboration. Again, the format and the expectations around these working sessions need to be discussed and agreed upon at the beginning of the evaluation

planning process. Torres, Preskill, & Piontek (2005) emphasize that, “Working sessions with clients and stakeholders are the hallmark of collaborative, participatory evaluation" (p. 185). The goals of these working sessions can include formally educating the primary stakeholders on collaborative approaches to evaluation, to interpret data and jointly develop recommendations, and to engage in follow-up sessions for action planning. There are multiple evaluation approaches that regularly use working sessions, and they are an integral component of collaborative evaluation and participatory evaluation approaches (Christie & Klein, 2009; Patton, 1997; Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2012; Torres, Preskill, & Piontek, 2005). For example, within collaborative evaluation, Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez (2012) suggest the formation of a collaborative member (CM) team to work with the evaluator throughout the evaluation process. Within Patton’s utilization focused evaluation, he recommends using task forces of client groups to enhance the intended use of the evaluation. These task forces may even continue after the formal evaluation is complete to follow through on recommendations (Patton, 1997). Creating a team that is jointly engaged in this CAE work can serve as a learning community and has been associated with having a positive impact on evaluation process use (Christie & Klein, 2009).

Based on my findings, evaluators engaged in CAE should plan to be involved throughout the entire continuous improvement life cycle—including the process of using recommendations for program planning and monitoring the implementation of the plan. This ongoing involvement can help to support the use of findings and process use while guarding against evaluation misuse (Patton, 1997). Systematic organizational change requires a long-term commitment to a program—often over multiple years (Preskill & Torres, 1999b). Nevo (2009), clarifies the way in which evaluation is an ongoing process: “It is a process of presenting findings, analyzing them,

discussing them with pertinent audiences, comparing them with other findings, collecting additional information, getting more findings, and coping with added complexities" (p. 299). Furthermore, it is essential to gain agreement with stakeholders at the beginning of the evaluation about what will be involved throughout each step in the process and the time it will take to complete each step. Evaluators whose goal is to support evaluation use and program improvement follow-through after the evaluation is complete could help organizations develop action plans around the recommendations. This support is especially important because contextual factors and shifting conditions within complex organizations can affect the way in which a recommendation needs to be implemented or modified (Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999b). Patton (1997) suggests helping "decision-makers make decisions on recommendations, including facilitating a workshop session that includes a clear assignment of responsibility for follow-up action and timelines for implementation" (p. 326). Action planning can potentially involve a wide range of organizational members—some of whom have also been involved in the evaluation process (Preskill & Torres, 1999b).

Implications for Engaging in CAE in Educational Settings

The lessons taken from this case study can also be applied to understanding how school districts can enhance their ability to engage in meaningful inquiry and quality improvement processes such as CAE, which are prevalent concerns for researchers (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Bryk et al., 2015; Shulman, 1981; Suppovitz, 2005; Suppovitz, 2006; Smylie, 2010; Finnigan & Daly, 2016). School districts are highly complex organizations which makes programmatic decision-making particularly challenging (Owens, 1998). This case study demonstrates that program evaluations, especially those that are conducted in a collaborative

manner, can enhance school district's ability to meet the needs of their students (Honig, 2008; Alexander, 2012) and can help build their own organizational capacity for evaluative inquiry over time (Nevo, 2009; Rallis and Militello, 2009). Ultimately, based on this study, I suggest that evaluators and educational researchers who are working with school districts pull from a variety of approaches and knowledge of best practices (e.g., improvement science, CAE, supporting evaluation use) to meet the needs and to build the capacity of their stakeholder groups. In addition, tapping into preexisting processes that school districts use for evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement can help district staff connect with and develop a deeper understanding of the concepts that underlie CAE and internalize these concepts more effectively over time.

Promoting participation of diverse stakeholders. One major barrier that we faced in this evaluation was the district's hesitancy to include a diverse group of stakeholders in the evaluation process. One explanation for this is that school districts are typically top-down and there is a level of control that district administrators may impose when faced with the high stakes nature of school improvement or school turnaround work (Honig, 2006b). This issue of inclusion and diversity of stakeholders is especially important when working with groups that have been traditionally marginalized. Ladson-Billings (2006) states, "As a result of the sociopolitical component of the education debt, families of color have regularly been excluded from the decision-making mechanisms that should ensure that their children receive quality education" (p. 7). Inequity in education persists due in part to larger societal inequities reflected in their institutional structures (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). However, research has shown that it is possible for school districts to disrupt or even displace the underlying structures that perpetuate this inequity (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008).

Even though the district did not initially invite the African American community and families to be involved in evaluating and improving the Grow for Success initiative, the members of the community still appeared to have an influence on the changes that occurred. The power that the community had was manifested more in an adversarial way through negative media attention and mandates from lawsuits. I would prefer to see, however, the two parties—being the district and the African American community—come together in the spirit of problem solving and collaborative approaches to improvement. Individuals who are most directly impacted by the work (i.e., parents of students in the affected schools, community members) need to have a voice in the evaluation process in order for it to better meet their needs (Mertens, 2008). Evaluators working with school districts, especially those who are internal, can promote inclusiveness and cultural competence for improvement and decision-making processes. To achieve this goal, evaluators need to develop their own cultural competence, promote this in school districts, and work toward more inclusive practices. Over time, evaluators may be able to shift the mindset of the district to include more diverse perspectives in evaluation and decision-making processes. Some suggestions that I have developed based on this case study for facilitating joint work with stakeholders are to pay careful attention to inclusiveness in the joint work and who is represented throughout all stages of the process, structure and monitor the process to support deliberative decision-making, set up rules of engagement to support meaningful participation, and pay special attention to the structure of meetings to allow high levels of participation from all those involved. These suggestions are also supported by Marsh (2007). The individuals involved should represent a wide variety of stakeholders: people who have the authority and power to use evaluation findings for decision-making, people who believe that the evaluation is worth doing, and people who have the time commitment to be actively

involved (Patton, 1997). The joint work between researchers and practitioners should be viewed as a collaboration for which both parties have meaningful contributions to the inquiry process and as an opportunity for practitioners to enhance their inquiry skills (Argyris & Schön, 1996).

Repositioning and expanding the role of the evaluator. Another important aspect of successful implementation of CAE that emerged from this study is the need for the evaluator to clarify her role with stakeholders. For example, our evaluation team found that we needed to clearly explain to our stakeholders that we would also being serving as a critical friend, facilitator, and partner throughout the evaluation and action planning process. In addition, Jasmine and I even engaged in discussions about rebranding the evaluator role to also include strategic planning and facilitation as a way to expand the district leaders' understanding of evaluation to go beyond just summative. This explanation helped those involved in the evaluation process develop a more nuanced and expansive understanding of evaluation as a method to support continuous improvement efforts and the role of the evaluator. We also often found ourselves explaining to district leaders and managers that the tools and processes that are part of CAE are transferable to other inquiry processes within the district and even mirror many of the practices that the district is already trying to put in place—such as data based decision-making, problem solving processes, and strategic planning and monitoring of major initiatives. An additional implication of taking on this expanded role is that evaluators need to have the skill set to do this work effectively (Patton, 1997; Torres, Preskill, & Piontek, 2005) or, at the very least, be able to connect stakeholders to individuals who have that skill set (Nevo, 2009). Torres, Preskill, and Piontek (2005) state, "To facilitate individual, group and organizational learning, evaluators need a broader range of skills than in most evaluation and training provides" (p. 305). For example, evaluators who are engaged in CAE may need to further develop their knowledge

of continuous improvement practices, action planning, strategic planning, and approaches to collaboratively developing logic models to better meet the needs of their stakeholders (Inkelas, Christie, & Lemire, 2017). Furthermore, as this study demonstrates, evaluators need to be flexible and adaptive to the changing context of the school district and to the unexpected barriers and politics that could impede the evaluation process. Honig (2006a) and Spillane (1998) suggest that we should assume that variability is normal within school districts. This case study also demonstrates that building the capacity and human capital to engage in evaluation is critical to evaluation use and enhancing program outcomes. As I saw in this evaluation, school district personnel often have multiple roles and competing demands for their time. As such, districts might consider having a qualified staff person or a team of staff dedicated to evaluation, researching evidence-based practices, and addressing how to incorporate these practices within the school district. In addition, depending on the level of expertise of a district's evaluation staff, the internal evaluator could work with outside partners to help build their own capacity in evaluation and CAE. School districts can also bring in outside experts and intermediary groups as needed for evaluation, research, strategic planning, and monitoring because not all school districts have the resources and human capital to implement this effectively. These intermediary organizations should ideally have credibility with the school district (Coburn & Stein, 2010) and have a history of successful implementation of the practices that they are asked to carry out. An additional benefit of working with an outside agency is that it can help address some of the challenges of the power dynamics and hierarchy within the school district that internal evaluators may face.

Cultivating district capacity for improvement. This case study also demonstrates the overlap between evaluation approaches—especially those that are more participatory such as

CAE—and improvement science (Inkelas, Christie, & Lemire, 2017). Some of the ways that improvement science overlaps with more participatory approaches to evaluation include its focus on collaboration, the involvement of stakeholders who are close to the work, the incorporation of multiple sources of data to inform decision-making, and a focus on improvement as the ultimate goal (Inkelas, Christie, & Lemire, 2017; Cousins & Earl, 1992). Improvement science processes can also help practitioners understand how to adaptively integrate and implement new practices into a unique context (Bryk et al., 2010). Incorporating improvement science in school districts may help strengthen evaluative thinking by providing tools and a way of work that coincides the continuous improvement cycle—thus enhancing a district's capacity in this area and shifting its way of work over time (Honig, 2008).

Improvement practices, including CAE and improvement science, are most successful when they are understood, supported, and used at *multiple levels* within the organization—and when they are permeated throughout an organization in a systemic manner (Preskill & Torres, 1999b). This is especially true considering the deep-set organizational practices that have been in place in schools for nearly a century (Owens, 1998) and our attempts to turn some of these practices on their heads. Furthermore, practices such as CAE and improvement science that are meant to enhance the work of schools and school districts need to think beyond incremental change of schools to the larger organizational change within the school district (Smylie, 2016). Correspondingly, our evaluation team found that we needed to change the organizational culture within the district central office to allow for more effective evaluative inquiry and collaboration to take place *across* the system. To make change happen at the program level, we had to address the district's overall approach to developing, monitoring, and improving major strategic initiatives to be more systematic. We brought in external partners who trained high-level staff on

common continuous improvement processes and tools. This helped us create a common understanding for and language around continuous improvement within the school district for major programs.

As this experience demonstrates, evaluators and educational researchers need to look at the school district as the unit or system for improvement and consider how to support systemic change at the level of the school district central office (Finnigan & Daly, 2016). Trainings and working sessions can help develop a common language and understanding of these processes within the district. Evaluators working with school districts may consider developing trainings in evaluation and continuous improvement that district management and leadership can participate in. For example, those individuals in the school district responsible for leading the charge for research, evaluation, and continuous improvement could consider holding regular professional learning community (PLC) sessions in which they share knowledge and tools to support each other's learning and enhance expertise in these areas (Hord, 1997). The format of PLCs is commonly used in school districts, and it can serve as a springboard for team learning and ultimately organizational learning within a school district. In addition, school districts might want to develop seminars, specialized working groups, and other opportunities to engage with educational researchers and evaluators so that their staff can have the opportunity to interpret research findings and develop their skills in this area. These sessions may go beyond the traditional evaluation sessions that one might find in CAE, and can provide an opportunity for interdepartmental discussions around key issues (Coburn & Stein, 2010). Another way to support school districts and expand their use of improvement processes is for them to engage in Networked Improvement Communities (NICs). NICs support joint work across school districts, experts, and others in examining specific problems or identified areas for improvement and

engage them in a joint process to develop solutions. In many ways, the process that is applied is similar to the plan, do, study, act (PDSA) model and the concept of PLCs. A major aspect of the NICs is that practitioners and experts accelerate their learning by sharing their knowledge and enacting in this process collaboratively (Bryk et al., 2015).

Implications for Further Research

This study is just one piece of a larger puzzle on how to support CAE and evaluation use for organizational improvement and how this might be applied to school districts. There are many questions and issues raised here that are beyond the scope of this current study but that warrant attention to advance research in the fields of evaluation use and educational improvement. We need to continue to make a stronger link between evaluation research on use and current educational research on the use of evidence to support educational best practices at the practitioner level.

Overall, there is clearly a need for in-depth and rigorous research on evaluation use because this area of research has mainly relied on self-reports and reflective field studies (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). I make the suggestion, in tandem with Cousins and Chouinard (2012), that more rigorous studies are needed in the area of evaluation use and the implementation of more collaborative approaches to evaluation to develop a better understanding of the best practices and ways to enhance this work. Some methods for achieving this research aim include conducting in-depth interviews with evaluation stakeholders and participants, observations of evaluation meetings and work sessions, and asking evaluation team members and stakeholders to maintain a reflective journal throughout the process to allow for an analysis for changes in evaluative thinking and capacity building over time.

One area for additional research can be on how CAE and evaluation use research connect to improvement science concepts. There is a clear overlap between evaluation and improvement science, but there is limited research or literature on this overlap and how the principles and practices from these approaches can be used in conjunction with one another (Inkelas, Christie, & Lemire, 2017). A recent publication of the American Evaluation Association entitled *Improvement Science and Evaluation: Methods and Uses* (edited by Christie, Lemire, & Inkelas, 2017) attempted to raise the awareness in the evaluation community about the commonalities between evaluation and improvement science—and put forward a call for evaluators and evaluation researchers to examine improvement practices and their application to the field of evaluation. The authors and editors associated with this publication, as well as I, encourage further research into this area. Evaluation researchers can answer this call for more information by continuing to explore lessons and best practices from the improvement science field that could be utilized and/or influence evaluation and its use—especially as it relates to supporting the goal of program improvement. One way to address this may through a metasynthesis to examine the connections and similarities among best practices and lessons learned from the evaluation use literature and the improvement science and quality improvement literature. In addition, evaluators could conduct field studies of evaluations in which improvement science techniques have been incorporated into the evaluation process, or conversely, where evaluation techniques have been infused into preexisting improvement process. Again, such studies should go beyond reflective studies to include rigorous and potentially long-term qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between these approaches within various contexts.

This case study sheds light on the barriers that evaluators face when implementing CAE in school districts—whose hierarchical structure, limited understanding of a collaborative approach to evaluation, and political nature create challenges for collaboration. We as evaluators and educational researchers need to continue to expand our thinking around how to build a culture and capacity for evaluative thinking within school districts, including using CAE as a means to enhance current inquiry-based improvement systems within school districts—such as PLCs, strategic planning, and program monitoring processes. Thus, this pinpoints a need for researchers to more closely examine evaluation and improvement practices within the school district context to gain a better understanding of school district leaders' perceptions of these practices. This includes how they value evaluation and evidence-based decision-making and the use of evaluation findings and recommendations. To address this, I would encourage evaluation and educational researchers to lean on organizational change research. They could use these frameworks to analyze evaluation processes and use within school districts. Those in the evaluation research field may also want to continue to expand on adult learning theory and change theory concepts. This could help evaluation researchers better understand how to shift mindsets to be more open to evaluation and incorporate evidence-based practices. Furthermore, Stein and Coburn (2010) suggest that a careful analysis of the social processes surrounding school district use of data can provide insights into research (and evaluation) use in education:

> Even when district administrators have access to high-quality research on pressing topics, they often fail to use it in substantive ways in the decision-making process…It is critical to pay attention to the social processes that surround the research as a way to leverage research use. (p. 13)

Accordingly, an analysis of the social and contextual processes surrounding data and information use for decision-making within the district's central office can provide insights for researchers and evaluators on how to better support these data and research use processes. Furthermore, evaluation researchers may want to build on the multi-disciplinary model of evaluation capacity building (ECB) developed by Preskill and Boyle (2008) as a framework for understanding how evaluation gets embedded into an organization's culture and how to provide the foundation for supporting ECB: "The ultimate goal of ECB is sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action" (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 444). Although some research has been conducted around the social and contextual processing involved in district's data use and decision-making, the majority of these studies have relied on self-reports (Honig & Coburn, 2008). Research on the decision-making context and processes that occur within a school district central office, especially those that are more rigorous and include multiple data sources, can further our understanding of how to support school districts in this area.

In addition, the role of internal evaluators continues to be a topic that is less developed in the evaluation literature and that needs to continue to be explored further (Preskill & Russ-Eft, 2001; Volkov, 2011). For example, one area for research is how internal evaluators approach collaborative work within a hierarchical organizational structure—especially considering their multiple roles as facilitators, critical friends, and potential partners in planning, implementation, and monitoring processes. Researchers could also examine how evaluators, both internal and external, can educate their stakeholders about more collaborative approaches to evaluation and the varying roles that the evaluator may take on throughout the process. While there is some research on what the evaluator role should look like, especially in more participatory approaches

to evaluation (Cousins & Earl, 1992; Cousins & Chouinard, 2012), there is a lack of research on *how* evaluators can position themselves within complex and hierarchical organizations to support successful evaluations (i.e., those that promote a high level of evaluation use and program improvement). Therefore, I suggest that evaluation researchers consider conducting studies concerning the evaluator role and have the evaluator(s) maintain a reflective journal to record their experiences, role, and positionality throughout the evaluation process to capture the experience as accurately as possible (Ellis, 2004). In addition, these evaluators may want to examine the barriers that they encountered in realizing their role within a given context as well as the ways that they worked to overcome these barriers. Such a research process could provide rich data for understanding how evaluators can reinforce and carry out these roles more efficaciously.

Final Researcher Reflection

My reflections throughout this research process gave me additional insights and lessons learned for evaluation research and practice. In 2016-2017, the turnaround team members and I used the district's new approach to strategic planning to set target objectives, measures, and monitoring through a collaborative process. As part of this process, the turnaround team met regularly with a collaborative committee to examine progress and to discuss next steps. Although this was not CAE in its purest form, it was evident that the principles of CAE have become more engrained in the district's central office. Notably, I learned firsthand that I should not strictly adhere to just one approach to evaluation or quality improvement. Rather, evaluators need to consider the needs of the context in which they are working, the needs of their stakeholder groups, and the evaluation capacity of those involved in the process. Evaluators can then pull from evaluation models, quality improvement techniques, and even context-specific processes

(e.g., PLCs) to develop a plan to support meaningful collaborative inquiry. I realized it was important to find ways to support the district with strategic planning and quality improvement. For example, in 2016, I went through a certification process in Lean Six Sigma (a quality improvement approach). My goal was to develop skills to strengthen programs and to integrate data use from a variety of disciplines—not just the evaluation field.

In addition, I noticed that the district leaders at the top tier (e.g., the superintendent, the assistant superintendent) appeared to serve primarily as figureheads who felt compelled to act in response to the state and federal mandates. On the other hand, the individuals at the management level seemed to be more open to working in a collaborative and deliberative manner. Thus, our evaluation team found it more fruitful to focus on working with managers—particularly those individuals whose values and beliefs made them more open to collaborative inquiry. I found that our evaluation team could continue to expand our work with others in the organization once they saw the benefits of the evaluator and practitioner partnership. This supports the notion, as I discussed in the conclusions section for Theme 1, that organizational learning occurs over time as more and more individuals and groups within the organization grow and change their practices.

School districts, which are continually under pressure to improve, may continue to face challenges engaging stakeholders in meaningful ways—but the more that they are open to engaging in this work the more they can break down barriers with those stakeholders who are meant to be the beneficiaries of this work (e.g., community members, parents, students). In recognition of this need, I continue to explore new ways to support dialogue, purposeful stakeholder engagement, and cultural competency in my evaluation practices.

Conclusion

As a whole, this case study demonstrates how the use of collaboration in evaluation and improvement processes can support school districts in organizational learning. In addition, it shows how evaluators can work to promote a process that is more participatory and supports evaluation use. Because inquiry processes are implemented within a complex context that has multiple forces acting within it and multiple players with varying levels of power—in this case, the school district central office—the evaluator(s) and researchers who implement collaborative inquiry need to be highly adaptable. The role of evaluators is to use their knowledge and skills as a way to integrate their practices within preexisting organizational processes, and at the same time push the boundaries of the district's current way of work to move stakeholders toward more effective approaches to collaborative inquiry and decision-making. These are not easy tasks or positions to take on, yet this is an area where real change and improvement can occur within school districts. Accordingly, I urge fellow evaluation and educational researchers to look beyond the dogma that school districts are incapable of change and investigate how we can continue to strengthen school districts' approaches to collaborative inquiry to improve education for all students.

REFERENCES

Alexander, N. (2012). Policy analysis for educational leaders: a step by step approach. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Alkin, M. C., & Christie, C. A. (2004). An evaluation theory tree, In Alkin, M. C. (Ed) *Evaluation roots: Tracing theorists' views and influences* (pp. 12-65). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Alkin, M. C., & Taut, S. M. (2003). Unbundling evaluation use. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 29, 1–12.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D.A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method and practice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bhuiyan, N., & Baghel, A. (2005). An overview of continuous improvement: From the past to the present. *Management Decision, 43*(5), 761.

Biesta, G. and Burbules, N. (2003). *Pragmatism and educational research*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes 2004: Promoting accountability through methods and tools for planning, implementation, and evaluation*. (No. TRTR101). Santa Monica, CA: RAND. Available at http://www.rand.org/publications/TR/TR101/.

Christie, C. A. (2015). Setting the stage for understanding evaluation use and decision-making. In Christie, C. A., & Vo, A. T. (Eds.) *Evaluation use and decision making in society: A tribute to Marvin Alkin* (pp. 1-10). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Christie, C. A. & Klein, B. M. (2009). Developing a community of practice: Learning and transformation through evaluation, In Ryan, K. E. & Cousins, J. B. (Eds.) *The SAGE international handbook of educational evaluation* (pp. 357-373). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Coburn, C. E. & Stein, M. K. (2010). Key lessons about the relationship between research and practice, In Coburn, C. E., & Stein, M. K. (Eds) *Research and practice in education: Building alliances bridging the divide* (pp. 201-226). Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

Coburn, C. E., & Turner, E. O. (2011). Research on data use: a framework and analysis. *Measurement*, 9(4), 173-206.

Cohen, D. K., Moffitt, S. L., & Goldin, S. (2007). Policy and practice: The dilemma. *American Journal of Education*, 113 (4), 515-548.

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Cousins, J. B. (1998). Intellectual roots of organizational learning, In Leithwood, K. A., & Louis, K. S. (Eds.). *Organizational learning in schools* (pp. 219-235). Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers.

Cousins, J. B., & Chouinard, J. A. (2012). *Participatory evaluation up close: An integration of research-based knowledge.* Greenwich: IAP - Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Cousins, J. B., & Earl, L. M. (1992). The Case for Participatory Evaluation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* (4), 397.

Cousins, J. B., Goh, S. C., Clark, S., & Lee, L. E. (2004). Integrating evaluative inquiry into the organizational culture: A review and synthesis of the knowledge base. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 19*(2), 99-141.

Cousins, J. B., Hay, K., and Chouinard, J. (2015). The third perspective: Uniting accountability and learning within an evaluation framework that takes a moral-political stance. In Christie, C.A., & Vo, A.T. (Eds.) *Evaluation use and decision making in society: A tribute to Marvin Alkin* (pp. 91-111). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Cousins, J. B., & Leithwood, K. A. (1986). Current empirical research on evaluation utilization. *Review of Educational Research,* (3). 331.

Cousins, J. B., & Whitmore, E. (1998). Framing participatory evaluation. In E. Whitmore (Ed.), Understanding and practicing participatory evaluation. *New Directions in Evaluation,* No. 80 (pp. 3–23). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Cousins, J. B., Whitmore, E., & Shulha, L. (2013). Arguments for a common set of principles for collaborative inquiry in evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 34*(1), 7-22.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical education*, *40*(4), 314-321.

Dictionary, O. E. (2015). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. *Web. May*, *14*.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Fetterman, D. M. (2001). *Foundations of Empowerment Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Fetterman, D., Rodríguez-Campos, L., Wandersman, A., & O'Sullivan, R. G. (2014). Collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation: Building a strong conceptual foundation for stakeholder involvement approaches to evaluation (a response to Cousins, Whitmore, and Shulha, 2013). *American Journal of Evaluation*, *35*(1), 144-148.

Fetterman, D. M., & Wandersman, A. (2005). *Empowerment evaluation principles in practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Finnigan, K. S., & Daly, A. J. (2016). Why we need to think systemically in educational policy and reform. In Daly, A. J., & In Finnigan, K. S. (Eds.) *Thinking and acting systemically: Improving school districts under pressure* (pp. 1-8). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

Fitzpatrick, J. L., Sanders, J. R., & Worthen, B. R. (2010). *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: three keys to maximizing impact*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W.R. (2007*). Educational research: An introduction* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Gibson, J. L., Ivancevich, J. M., & Donnelly, J. H. (1985). *Organizations: Behavior, structure, processes* (10th ed). Burr Ridge, IL: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Gibson, W.J., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with Qualitative Data*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Glazer, J. L., & Peurach, D. J. (2013). School improvement networks as a strategy for large-scale education reform: the role of educational environments. *Educational Policy*, 27(4), 676.

Grbich, C. (2013). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Greene, J. G. (1988). Stakeholder participation and utilization in program evaluation. *Evaluation Review, 12*(2), 91-116.

Greenwood, D. J., & Levin, M. (1998). *Introduction to action research: Social research for social change.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2001). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Heck, R. & Hallinger, P. (1999) Conceptual models, methodology, and methods for studying school leadership, In Murphy, J. & Seashore Louis, K. (Eds) *The 2nd Handbook of Research in Educational Administration*. San Francisco, CA: McCutchan.

Herbert, J. L. (2014). Researching evaluation influence: A review of the literature. *Evaluation Review, 38*(5), 388.

Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). Turning around chronically low-performing schools. IES Practice Guide. NCEE 2008-4020. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*.

Honig, M. I. (2006a). *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Honig, M. I. (2006b). Street-level bureaucracy revisited: Frontline district central-office administrators as boundary spanners in education policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, (4), 357.

Honig, M. I. (2008). District central offices as learning organizations: how sociocultural and organizational learning theories elaborate district central office administrators' participation in teaching and learning improvement efforts. *American Journal of Education*, (4). 627.

Honig, M. I., & Coburn, C. (2008). Evidence-based decision making in school district central offices: Toward a policy and research agenda. *Educational Policy*, *22*(4), 578-608.

Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Inkelas, M., Christie, C. A., & Lemire, S. (2017). Value and Opportunity for Improvement Science in Evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, (153), 93.

Johnson, K., Greenseid, L. O., Toal, S. A., King, J. A., Lawrenz, F., & Volkov, B. (2009). Research on evaluation use: A review of the empirical literature from 1986 to 2005. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *30*(3), 377-410.

Johnson, R. B. (1998). Toward a theoretical model of evaluation utilization. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 21, 93–110.

Kaestle, C. F., & Lodewick, A. E. (2007). *To educate a nation: Federal and national strategies of school reform.* Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

King, J. A. (1988). Research on evaluation use and its implications for evaluation research and practice. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 14*, 285-299.

Kinsella, E. A. (2007). Technical rationality in Schon's reflective practice: dichotomous or non-dualistic epistemological position. *Nursing Philosophy*, (2), 102.

Kirkhart, K. E. (2000). Reconceptualizing evaluation use: An integrated theory of influence. *New Directions for Evaluation,* (88), 5-23.

Labaree, D. (2011). The lure of statistics for educational researchers. *Educational Theory*, 61(6), 621-632.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7): 3-12.

Langley, G. J. (2009). *The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2007). An array of qualitative data analysis tools: A call for data analysis triangulation. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *22*(4), 557-584.

Leithwood, K. (2010, June). Turning around underperforming school systems: Guidelines for district leaders. Retrieved from http://o.b5z.net/i/u/10063916/h/Pre-Conference/CASS_Research_Paper_3_Leithwood_Turning_Around_School_Systems.Pdf.

Leithwood, K. A., & Steinbach, R. (1995). *Expert problem solving: Evidence from school and district leaders*. Albany. NY: State University of New York Press.

Levin, B. “Collaborative Research in and with Organizations.” *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1993, 6(4), 331–340.

Leviton, L. C., & Hughes, F. X. (1981). Research on the utilization of evaluation: A review and synthesis. *Evaluation Review*, 5, 525–548.

Lewis, C. (2015). *What is improvement science? Do we need it in education?* Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative Research in Education: A User's Guide* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

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

Lingenfelter, P. (2011). Evidence and impact: How scholarship can improve policy and practice. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 43(3), 44-49.

Mark, M. (2009). Evaluation, method choices, and pathways to consequences: Trying to make sense of how evaluation can contribute to sense making, In Ryan, K. E. & Cousins, J. B. (Eds.) *The SAGE international handbook of educational evaluation* (pp. 55-73). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Marsh, J. A. (2007). *Democratic dilemmas: Joint work, education politics, and community*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Maxwell, J. A. (2009). Designing a Qualitative Study, In Bickman, L. & Rog, D. (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of applied social research methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (Ed.). (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Mertens, D. M. (2008). *Transformative research and evaluation*. New York, NY: Guilford Publications.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Mitki, Y., Shani, A. B., & Meiri, Z. (1997). Organizational learning mechanisms and continuous improvement: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *10*(5), 426-446.

Mruck, K., & Breuer, F. (2003, May). Subjectivity and reflexivity in qualitative research—The FQS issues. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 4, No. 2).

Nevo, D. (2009). Accountability and capacity building: Can they live together?, In Ryan, K. E. & Cousins, J. B. (Eds.) *The SAGE international handbook of educational evaluation* (pp. 291-339). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Noffke, S. (1994). *Practically critical: An invitation to action research in education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Owens, R. G. (1998). *Organizational behavior in education*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

O'Sullivan, R. G. (2012). Collaborative evaluation within a framework of stakeholder oriented evaluation approaches. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, (4), 518.

Patton, M. Q. (1994). Developmental Evaluation. *Evaluation Practice*, 15(3), 311-19.

Patton, M.Q. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (1998). Discovering process use. *Evaluation*, *4*(2), 225-233.

Patton, M.Q. (2011). Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use. New York, NY: Guilford Publications, Inc.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—one's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-21.

Posavac, E. J., & Carey, R. G. (1997). *Program evaluation: Methods and case studies*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Preskill, H., & Boyle, S. (2008). A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 29(4), 443-459.

Preskill, H. S., & Torres, R. T. (1999a). Building capacity for organizational learning through evaluative inquiry. *Evaluation, 5*(1), 42.

Preskill, H. S., & Torres, R. T. (1999b). *Evaluative inquiry for learning in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Preskill, H., & Torres, R. T. (2000). The learning dimension of evaluation use. *New Directions for Evaluation*, (88), 25.

Rallis, S. F., & Militello, M. (2009). Inquiry-minded district leaders: Evaluation as inquiry, inquiry as practice, In Ryan, K. E. & Cousins, J. B. (Eds.) *The SAGE international handbook of educational evaluation* (pp. 253-272). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Rodríguez-Campos, L. (2012). Advances in collaborative evaluation. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, (4), 523.

Rodríguez-Campos, L., & Rincones-Gómez, R. (2012). *Collaborative evaluations: Step-by-step*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books.

Rorrer, A., Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J. (2008). Districts as institutional actors in educational reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, (3). 307.

Russ-Eft, D. & Preskill, H. (2001). *Evaluation in Organizations: A Systematic Approach to Enhancing Learning, Performance, and Change*. New York, NY: Basics Books.

Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to Identify Themes. *Field Methods*, *15*(1), 85.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Schein, E.H. (1987). Defining organizational culture, In Shafritz, J. M., & Ott, J. S. (Eds.) *Classics of organization theory* (pp. 381-395). Chicago, IL: Dorsey Press.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Scriven, M. (1996). The theory behind practical evaluation. *Evaluation*, *2*(4), 393-404.

Senge, P. M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency.

Shulha, L. M., & Cousins, J. B. (1997). *Evaluation use: Theory, research, and practice since 1986.* Sage Publications.

Shulha, L. M., Whitmore, E., Cousins, J. B., Gilbert, N., & al Hudib, H. (2016). Introducing Evidence-Based Principles to Guide Collaborative Approaches to Evaluation: Results of an Empirical Process. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *37*(2), 193-215.

Shulman, L. S. (1981). Disciplines of Inquiry in Education: An Overview. *Educational Researcher*, (6). 5.

Smylie, M. A. (2010). *Continuous school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Smylie, M. A. (2016). Commentary: Three organizational lessons for school district improvement. In Daly, A. J., & Finnigan, K. S. (Eds.) *Thinking and acting systemically: Improving school districts under pressure* (pp. 209-219). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

Spillane, J. P. (1998). State policy and the non-monolithic nature of the local school district: Organizational and professional considerations. *American Educational Research Journal*, (1), 33.

Spillane, J. P. (2012). Data in Practice: Conceptualizing the Data-Based Decision-Making Phenomena. *American Journal of Education*, 118(2), 113-141.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative Case Studies, In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stein, M. K., & Coburn, C. E. (2010). Reframing the problem of research and practice, In Coburn, C. E., & Stein, M. K. (Eds) *Research and practice in education: Building alliances bridging the divide* (pp. 1-13). Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Suppovitz, J. A., & Taylor, B. S. (2005). Systemic education evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 26*(2), 204-230.

Suppovitz, J. A. (2006). *The case for district-based reform: leading, building, and sustaining school improvement.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Torres, R. T., Preskill, H. S., & Piontek, M. E. (2005). *Evaluation strategies for communicating and reporting: Enhancing learning in organizations* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight big-tent criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry,* (10), 837.

Tyack, D. B., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

United States Department of Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform: A report to the nation and the secretary of education.* Washington, D.C.: The Commission: Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O. distributor.

Volkov, B. B. (2011). Beyond being an evaluator: The multiplicity of roles of the internal evaluator. *New Directions for Evaluation,* (132), 25-42.

Weiss, C. H. (1979). The many meanings of research utilization. *Public Administration Review*, 39, 426–431.

Weiss, C. H., Murphy-Graham, E., & Birkeland, S. (2005). An alternative route to policy influence: How evaluations affect D.A.R.E. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 26, 12–30.

Wolcott, H. F. (2009). *Writing up Qualitative Research* (3rd ed). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Yarbrough, D. B., Shulha, L. M., Hopson, R. K., and Caruthers, F. A. (2011). *The program evaluation standards: A guide for evaluators and evaluation users* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation's Program Evaluation Standards for Utility (Yarbrough et al., 2011)

Utility Standards

The utility standards are intended to increase the extent to which program stakeholders find evaluation processes and products valuable in meeting their needs.

U1 Evaluator Credibility Evaluations should be conducted by qualified people who establish and maintain credibility in the evaluation context.

U2 Attention to Stakeholders Evaluations should devote attention to the full range of individuals and groups invested in the program and affected by its evaluation.

U3 Negotiated Purposes Evaluation purposes should be identified and continually negotiated based on the needs of stakeholders.

U4 Explicit Values Evaluations should clarify and specify the individual and cultural values underpinning purposes, processes, and judgments.

U5 Relevant Information Evaluation information should serve the identified and emergent needs of stakeholders.

U6 Meaningful Processes and Products Evaluations should construct activities, descriptions, and judgments in ways that encourage participants to rediscover, reinterpret, or revise their understandings and behaviors.

U7 Timely and Appropriate Communicating and Reporting Evaluations should attend to the continuing information needs of their multiple audiences.

U8 Concern for Consequences and Influence Evaluations should promote responsible and adaptive use while guarding against unintended negative consequences and misuse.

Appendix B: Dates of Recorded and Transcribed Journal Reflections and Interviews

Table A1. Dates of Journals Reflections and Interviews.

Journal Reflections			
Date	#	Length	Stage
10/19/2015	1	14 minutes	Stage 2
10/19/2015	2	21 minutes	Stage 2
10/20/2015	3	26 minutes	Stage 2
10/26/2015	4	36 minutes	Stage 2
10/28/2015	5	36 minutes	Stage 2
10/30/2015	6	41 minutes	Stage 2
11/4/2015	7	32 minutes	Stage 2
11/8/2015	8	33 minutes	Stage 2
11/12/2015	9	47 minutes	Stage 2
11/20/2015	10	44 minutes	Stage 2
11/20/2015	11	26 minutes	Stage 2
12/2/2015	12	36 minutes	Stage 2
12/4/2015	13	36 minutes	Stage 2
12/10/2015	14	59 minutes	Stage 2
1/6/2016	15	14 minutes	Stage 2
1/8/2016	16	34 minutes	Stage 2
1/15/2016	17	37 minutes	Stage 2
1/20/2016	18	19 minutes	Stage 2
1/27/2016	19	18 minutes	Stage 2
2/2/2016	20	38 minutes	Stage 2
2/8/2016	21	12 minutes	Stage 2
2/22/2016	22	8 minutes	Stage 2
2/26/2016	23	20 minutes	Stage 2
3/4/2016	24	44 minutes	Stage 3
3/11/2016	25	27 minutes	Stage 3
4/13/2016	26	25 minutes	Stage 3
4/20/2016	27	26 minutes	Stage 3
4/27/2016	28	41 minutes	Stage 3
5/5/2016	29	50 minutes	Stage 3
5/17/2016	31	21 minutes	Stage 3
5/26/2016	32	23 minutes	Stage 3
6/8/2016	33	19 minutes	Stage 3
6/23/2016	34	42 minutes	Stage 3
8/9/2016	35	42 minutes	Stage 4
9/22/2016	36	44 minutes	Stage 4
10/13/2016	37	56 minutes	Stage 4
11/3/2016	38	25 minutes	Stage 4

Table A1 (Continued)

Interviews		
6/12/2017 Jasmine Interview	1	62 minutes
6/12/2017 Oriana Interview	2	46 minutes
6/12/2017 Ron Interview	3	53 minutes

Appendix C: Interview Participant Notification and Initial Consent

Dear District Evaluator:

I am a doctoral student at the University of South Florida in the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies, conducting a research project under the guidance of Drs. Castillo and Wolgemuth.

I am writing to let you know that a research study is being planned that may be of interest to you. The purpose of the interviews is to address the perceived evaluation use, influence, and lessons learned from the evaluation process that you were involved with for a school district turnaround initiative.

Please be aware that your participation in this or any research study is completely voluntary. There will be no consequences to you whatever if you choose not to participate. If you do choose to participate, the study will involve:

- A one hour interview that will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- All data collected will remain anonymous. All recordings will remain on a password protected server for security purposes.

There is minimal risk for participants involved in this research study. In order to minimize this risk, pseudonyms will be used for all participants of the study. In addition, any information that may identify the participant will be disguised in the study. All data will be either placed in a locked cabinet or stored in a password protected computer.

If you are interested in participating contact me back directly at _____.

Thank you,

Oriana Eversole, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # _____00030334_____

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

An Instrumental Case Study of a Collaborative Approach to Evaluation within a School District Central Office

The person who is in charge of this research study is Oriana Eversole. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Jose Castillo, Ph.D., and Jennifer Wolgemuth, Ph.D.

The research will be conducted at the (school district's) main administrative office

Purpose of the study

This qualitative, instrumental case study provides an examination of a collaborative approach to evaluation for a school turnaround initiative that was implemented within a school district's central office. The main purpose of this study is to help evaluators who work with complex organizations understand collaborative approaches to evaluation, which are approaches that involve multiple individuals from various levels of the organization. Specifically, it looks at the relationship between the collaborative approach to evaluation and the use of evaluation findings and learning to support organizational improvement.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because of your high level of involvement in the evaluation process that is the focus of this case study and your role as a researcher/evaluator within the school district.

Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in at least one hour-long interview, and you may be asked to participate in one additional hour-long follow-up interview—for a maximum of two separate hour-long interviews. The interviews will be held in a semi-private area at your work location to make it as convenient for you as possible. I will work with you to secure an appropriate location.

All interviews will be audio recorded based on your consent. I will be the only person who has access to these recordings. These recordings will be stored on a password protected computer for 5 years after the final report is submitted to the IRB, and then will be destroyed by deleting them from the database.

Your privacy and confidentiality as a participant will be kept in a variety of ways. Pseudonyms will be used to keep your identity confidential. All data will be either placed in a locked cabinet and/or stored on a password protected computer. All recordings and data will be labeled with the pseudonym and will be stored in a different location than the consent forms (which will be kept in a separate locked cabinet) as an extra measure to protect your identity.

The interviews are semi-structured, meaning that they will follow a series of questions that have been identified but additional questions may be asked for clarification purposes. Questions that will be asked include:

Can you tell me about your role within the school district and how this relates to the school turnaround evaluation?

Can you describe what your role was or is in the evaluation process for the school turnaround initiative?

What is your understanding of the district's motivation for conducting this evaluation? What makes you say this (i.e., evidence to support this)?

When I say collaborative approaches to evaluation, what does this mean to you?

Can you tell me what you remember about how collaborative approaches were used in this evaluation?

In what ways, if any, was the evaluation process successful in using collaborative approaches—such as those that involve the stakeholders of the initiative in the evaluation process?

In your perspective, did this evaluation process result in the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations by decision-makers? If so, can you describe this?

What components of the evaluation design and process helped to support the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations by the decision-makers involved in this initiative?

How do you think the evaluation process for this initiative has added to the district's:

Knowledge of school turnaround?

Use of evaluation to support evidence-based decision-making?

Knowledge of the continuous improvement process? How has this process added to your own understanding of evaluation approaches to support continuous improvement of programs and initiatives?

Ultimately, do you think that the evaluation process has supported improvement for:

The school district's approach to school turnaround? Why or why not?

The district's approach to decision making and problem solving for continuous improvement? Why or why not?

In what ways could the collaboration with stakeholders throughout the evaluation process be strengthened?

Do you have anything additional to share that we have not already discussed in regards to the evaluation process or the use of the evaluation by the school district?

Total Number of Participants

Three individuals will take part in this study in addition to myself.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. In addition, your job status will in no way be impacted by their decision to participate. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There are no known conflicts of interest.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

The research team, which consists of myself as the Principal Investigator and my co-major professors, Dr. Jose Castillo and Dr. Jennifer Wolgemuth.

Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.

Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research such as the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).

The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Oriana Eversole at _____.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____ _____

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to

explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____ _____

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Interviews will be scheduled at least two weeks in advance. They will be scheduled for a maximum of one hour and will be located at the school site of the principal in a semi-private setting with limited background noise. I will introduce herself, my role as the researcher and as a student under the guidance of Drs. Castillo and Wolgemuth for my dissertation work and case study.

I will define the research purpose and overview of the study:

"The purpose of the interviews is to address the perceived evaluation use, influence, and lessons learned from the evaluation process. The interview questions connect back to the research questions posed for this study and the research purpose. This case study examines the evaluation planning and process for a school district initiative that incorporates Collaborative Approaches to Evaluation (i.e., stakeholder-involvement approaches).

In particular, I am examining the evaluation activities from September 2015 to October 2016. These activities include the formative, developmental (i.e., research on evidence-based practices to inform the modifications made to the initiative for the 2016-2017 school year), summative evaluation, and the collaborative development of the theory of change and logic model for the initiative in 2016-2017."

I will then explain the confidentiality of the interview, the recording and transcription process, and the length of the interview as outlined in the written consent form. I will ask if there are any additional questions or concerns about the study and his or her role in the study, and address these questions. I will then start the recording and begin with the first question of the semi-structured interview:

1. Can you tell me about your role within the school district and how this relates to the school turnaround evaluation? (Probe for the time period that they were involved and his/her role over the course of the study.)
2. Can you describe what your role was or is in the evaluation process for the school turnaround initiative? (Probe for the time period that they were involved and his/her role over the course of the study.)
3. What is your understanding of the district's motivation for conducting this evaluation? What makes you say this (i.e., evidence to support this)?
4. When I say collaborative approaches to evaluation, what does this mean to you? (Probe: What does this look like?)
5. Can you tell me what you remember about how collaborative approaches were used in this evaluation? (Probe for the various components of the evaluation: formative, developmental/research, summative, and evaluation planning for the modified initiative.)
6. In what ways, if any, was the evaluation process successful in using collaborative approaches—such as those that involve the stakeholders of the initiative in the evaluation process? (Probe for 1-2 specific examples. Probe for the various components of the evaluation: formative, developmental/research, summative, and evaluation planning for the modified initiative.)
7. In your perspective, did this evaluation process result in the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations by decision-makers? If so, can you describe this? (Probe for 1-2 specific examples. Probe for evidence to connect the evaluation process to evaluation use.)

8. What components of the evaluation design and process helped to support the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations by the decision-makers involved in this initiative? (Probe for 1-2 specific examples. Probe for the various components of the evaluation: formative, developmental/research, summative, and evaluation planning for the modified initiative. Probe for collaborative evaluation approaches if none were mentioned.)
9. How do you think the evaluation process for this initiative has added to the district's… (Probe for the various components of the evaluation: formative, developmental/research, summative, and evaluation planning for the modified initiative.)
    a. Knowledge of school turnaround? (Probe for 1-2 specific examples and evidence for this.)
    b. Use of evaluation to support evidence-based decision-making? (Probe for 1-2 specific examples and evidence for this. Probe for how this connects to evaluation capacity building.)
    c. Knowledge of the continuous improvement process? (Probe for 1-2 specific examples and evidence for this. Probe for how this knowledge may transfer to other district initiatives and/or processes.)
10. How has this process added to your own understanding of evaluation approaches to support continuous improvement of programs and initiatives? (Probe to see how their understanding has evolved over the time period of this evaluation. Probe for specific examples. Probe for his/her understanding of collaborative evaluation approaches if this was not mentioned.)
11. Ultimately, do you think that the evaluation process has supported improvement for:

a. The school district's approach to school turnaround? Why or why not?
b. The district's approach to decision-making and problem solving for continuous improvement? Why or why not?

12. In what ways could the collaboration with stakeholders throughout the evaluation process be strengthened?
13. Do you have anything additional to share that we have not already discussed in regards to the evaluation process or the use of the evaluation by the school district?