GOOD, JUSTIN CHAD. A Single Case Study of Teacher and Administrator Experience in a Turnaround Elementary School. (Under the direction of Lance D. Fusarelli.)

Responding to a gap in existing research regarding teacher and administrator experience in school turnaround settings, an exploratory single-case study was conducted with the purpose of examining how reforms associated with the Endeavor turnaround theory of action impacted teacher and administrator experience at one particular school. Previous research indicated that successful school turnarounds are driven by an engaging vision, a clear plan of action, administrators taking on significant instructional leadership responsibilities, and a strong sense of teacher efficacy. Findings from this study indicated that while a clear vision for success was established, factors such as the lack of a clearly articulated plan from the district and unanticipated organizational factors created challenging experiences for teachers and administrators at the selected school. Although academic performance did not improve dramatically over the course of the turnaround effort, teachers and administrators saw value in their experiences and attributed tremendous professional growth from challenges in which the staff demonstrated perseverance. This study supports findings from previous research regarding the need for a clear plan to guide turnaround efforts and district support for schools in the midst of turnaround implementation. Additionally, they study highlights the need for additional research to determine how efficacious mindsets are created and how turnaround efforts can be implemented in order to produce positive staff experiences and increased academic success.
A Single-Case Study Exploring Teacher and Administrator Experience in a Turnaround Elementary School

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family and friends who have provided support and encouragement as I journeyed down this road. I also dedicate this work to those who were willing to share their story with me as we work together to promote excellent educational opportunities for our students.
BIOGRAPHY

Justin Chad Good’s experiences as a student and school leader profoundly shaped his interest in this work. As a first-generation college student who grew up in an impoverished community in rural North Carolina, Justin was inspired to enter teaching in order to provide opportunities to others who came from similar settings. Justin earned a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, *Summa Cum Laude* from North Carolina State University in 2005. He served as a Teach For America corps member in the Eastern North Carolina region from 2005-2007. Afterwards, Justin continued teaching in a high needs urban school. Recognizing the power of a school leader to lead an entire organization that can significantly impact students’ futures, Justin was inspired to pursue educational leadership opportunities. He earned his Master of School Administration from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in May 2011, and he continued doctoral studies at North Carolina State University, earning his doctorate in Educational Administration and Supervision in May 2015. His accomplishments as a school leader include developing systems of support for struggling students in order to close achievement gaps and leading successful change efforts at a turnaround school in the largest school district in North Carolina. His research interests include school turnaround, multi-tiered systems of student support, and strategies to create positive and inclusive school climates.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the teachers and administrators of Broadview Elementary for being gracious and willing to share their stories with me. A special thanks also goes out to Dr. Lance Fusarelli for his continued support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies. I would also like to thank the mentors, leaders, and colleagues with whom I have had the great pleasure of working with during my educational career for your inspiration and support.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Since the early 1980s, a great deal of attention has been focused on improving the quality of public education in the United States. The National Commission on Excellence in Education’s *A Nation At Risk* (1983) report stated that education in the United States suffered from a “rising tide of mediocrity” which threatened the economic security of the United States and the nation’s corresponding role as a global leader. Although this report increased public attention on educational issues by linking them to economic well being, few changes occurred in education at the national level throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Education was predominantly viewed as an enterprise under the control of the states with some states taking steps to increase standards and accountability for educational outcomes throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Frustrated with a lack of what it considered substantial educational reform, the Hoover Institution released the *A Nation Still at Risk* report in 1998. Within this framework, leaders at the Hoover Institution renewed the call for reform, citing continued evidence of a lack of competitiveness on the global stage as evidenced by a drop in United States math scores on international assessments (Bennett et al., 1998). Furthermore, the authors of *A Nation Still at Risk* argued that the socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps in education endangered equality of opportunity for disadvantaged students. Reforms embraced in *A Nation Still at Risk* included national standards and assessments to measure their attainment, increased accountability of students and teachers, increased school choice options, pay for
performance, and opening the doors of the teaching profession to non-traditionally prepared candidates (Bennett et al., 1998).

With a renewed impetus for reform, the federal government enacted the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) in 2001, further advancing the idea that educational outcomes should be measured utilizing high-stakes tests. The results of such tests would then be used to evaluate the effectiveness of schools—schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress could face sanctions if they did not improve their results. Although the provisions of NCLB have not been reauthorized as of the date of this study, the federal government endorsed the competitive grant program, *Race to the Top* (RttT) as part of the federal economic stimulus program in 2009. Under RttT, funds could be made available to states that created plans to reform their educational systems against four different pillars: high-quality teachers and leaders, higher standards and improved assessments, turning around the lowest-achieving schools, and creating better systems to foster data-driven decision making (McGuinn, 2012). Coupled together, NCLB and RttT represent a significant expansion of federal involvement in education as compared to previous decades.

North Carolina secured a $400 million grant in the second round of RttT competition. The state’s plan mirrored the major pillars of the federal RttT guidelines, with state leaders placing the highest priority on the elements of the plan that increased the effectiveness of teachers and leaders. A portion of the state’s RttT funds were allotted to efforts to turn around persistently low performing schools and school districts. In this effort, the state reserved funding for district and school transformation coaches and called upon targeted
schools and districts to create plans to extend learning time, engage the broader community (including universities and local businesses), develop STEM networks and partnerships, and utilize data to drive instruction. However, Broward County was not a targeted district, nor were any of its schools selected for the state initiated improvement efforts. Local education agencies had considerable leeway in how they chose to spend RttT funds, so long as the funds supported any of the major pillars of the plan (North Carolina Fiscal Research Division, 2010).

As local education agencies developed district plans aligned to the state’s RttT plan, the Broward County School District allotted most of its share of funding to a turnaround program called “Endeavor”. The Endeavor program received over $9 million of the district’s $10 million allotment of RttT funds. The table below provides a breakdown of how Endeavor funds were to be allotted.

Table 1

*Funding Allocations for the Broward County Endeavor Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Element</th>
<th>Three-Year Funding Allotment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment bonuses and performance-based compensation</td>
<td>$2,602,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional staff allotment per grade level</td>
<td>$3,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>$420,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology for Interactive Classrooms</td>
<td>$1,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies and Materials</td>
<td>$450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>$305,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and Implementation Studies</td>
<td>$90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Program Allotment</strong></td>
<td><strong>$9,167,500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the Endeavor program had been in development prior to RttT, funding helped provide the resources necessary for the program’s implementation. Under the Endeavor model, funds would be used to “turnaround” the district’s lowest performing elementary schools according to state standardized test results. As part of the turnaround, the following reforms would be implemented over the course of three school years at the selected schools: reductions in class sizes, infusions of technology, and the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and leaders. At all Endeavor schools, instructional staff had to reapply for their positions for 2011-2012, the first year of the turnaround. At three of the four schools, new principals and assistant principals were selected. If an existing staff member at an Endeavor school wished to remain at the school, they had to be rehired by the new leadership utilizing a district created selection process. In an effort to further enhance the recruitment and retention of “high-quality” staff members, signing and performance bonuses constituted a substantial portion of the plan’s budget (Townsend, 2013).

Prior to this study, the researcher worked as an instructional coach at one of the Endeavor turnaround schools (but not the selected research site). In this role, the researcher was uniquely positioned to work with staff members to improve instructional practice. In the course of this work, the researcher was able to build rapport with staff members who shared the realities of their experiences with the school’s turnaround effort. It was from this experience that the researcher developed an initial interest in the topic. As time continued, the researcher looked further into issues of teacher empowerment, school reform, school culture, and organizational change. As more knowledge was gained on these topics and the
researcher entered into an administrative role at a different site, the researcher’s interest in the original phenomenon increased.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers and administrators at one unique school experienced reforms associated with the “Endeavor” turnaround program and its corresponding theory of action. An argument could have been made to limit the focus of the study specifically to teachers. While focusing solely on teachers would have likely produced the rich, thick descriptions critical to the case, understanding the experiences of teachers in isolation is problematic. Given that teachers interact frequently with administrators, understanding the perspectives of administrators helps us understand the totality of the teacher experience. Previous research indicates that the experiences of both groups are often overlooked as the majority of existing turnaround research focuses on issues such as the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies or the policy specifics of particular turnaround initiatives (Bascia & Rottman, 2011; Day & Smethem, 2009; Kaniuka, 2012; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). An argument could have also been made to include parents, students, and other community stakeholders in the research. While doing so could have provided additional perspectives to further understand the turnaround effort as a whole, descriptions from these groups would have unlikely produced additional insight in regards to how teachers and administrators experienced the turnaround efforts, which is a gap in the existing research that this study sought to address.
It is unlikely that the study will lead to generalizations or theories that can be used to understand change processes on a larger level. Rather, this study explicitly explored the experiences of teachers and administrators at one particular site in order to identify directions for future study and implications for professional practice. Understanding the experiences of teachers and administrators participating in turnaround efforts also helped the researcher develop a comprehensive understanding of leadership behaviors that lead to positive teacher experiences and support the success and sustainability of turnaround efforts.

As indicated earlier, the district invested nearly $10 million in the Endeavor program. Although some successes were noted, including improvements in cultural conditions at the school and improved student behavior, concerns remained. Achievement at the Endeavor schools continues to be low in relation to other schools in the district and the schools continue to experience high staff turnover and challenges with teacher recruitment. As the three-year program ended, questions remained regarding the sustainability of particular reform elements that were instituted, including the allotment of additional teachers and the continued use of additional technology.

Digging deeper into the context surrounding one particular Endeavor school allowed the researcher to explore how teacher and administrator experience is impacted by these particular concerns. To that end, a single-case study was conducted, guided by the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** What is the established theory of action behind the “Endeavor” turnaround reforms?
Research Question 2: What factors set the selected school apart from other “Endeavor” schools?

Research Question 3: How do the unique factors at the selected site impact teacher and administrator experience of the “Endeavor” turnaround effort?

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study, various terms will be utilized which pertain specifically to the K-12 public school setting and the issue of school turnaround. Descriptions of important key terms are included below.

**Race to the Top (RttT):** a competitive federal grant program that was enacted in 2009 to promote reforms in the following areas: higher standards and improved assessments, improved data systems, high-quality teachers and leaders, and turning around the lowest-performing schools. The state where the study occurred received approximately $400 million in funding through this initiative.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** legislation that was enacted as a part of the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The goal of NCLB was to close preexisting achievement gaps across different student subgroups by 2014. Progress in these areas would be monitored through high-stakes tests that measured a schools progress towards meeting these goals in a measurement known as “adequate yearly progress”.

**“Endeavor” Program:** the district’s plan to turn around the lowest achieving elementary schools in the district, as measured by performance on state standardized assessments. Under the program, staff members were required to reapply for positions. The program sought to achieve the following: reduction in class sizes, infusion of technology, and the ability to recruit and retain high-quality teachers and leaders through the use of signing and performance bonuses.

**Administrators:** the group of individuals in this study that includes the principal and assistant principal at the selected school.

**Teachers:** the group of individuals in this study that includes core classroom teachers, elective teachers, intervention and special education teachers, and instructional coaches.
School turnaround: a comprehensive reform effort focused on changing structures, systems, expectations, performance, and school culture throughout a designated school or district. In this case, turnaround efforts were initiated to improve student performance. Specific initiatives included in the turnaround include increased staff allotments, increased technology investments, signing bonuses and performance-based compensation, and re-staffing.

Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWC): a survey conducted across the state on a bi-yearly basis which measures teachers’ perceptions of working conditions such as school climate, support from leadership, and professional collaboration.

Significance of the Study

With different waves of educational reform emerging over the past three decades, a body of research has emerged that explores particular reforms such as increased standards and accountability, school choice models, re-staffing, professional learning communities, instructional best practices and interventions, leadership support, and changes to the credentialing and qualifications of teachers. The literature review in the next chapter will explore some of these issues in further detail as they relate to turnaround efforts. A large portion of the existing reform research is causal in nature as researchers and policymakers seek to examine the relationships between reforms and student achievement (Bascia & Rottman, 2011; Gayles, 2004; Olsen & Sexton, 2009).

Additionally, there is a body of literature that explores organizational change in schools and the conditions that sustain its success. Researchers have voiced concerns over the existing research on organizational change in education, highlighting that paradigms from the business sector have been used to frame and analyze problems associated with organizational change in schools (Duke et al., 2006; Murphy, 2008). Additionally, within the body of existing literature, there has been a lack of coverage related to the voices of teachers and
administrators—the individuals responsible for the day-to-day operation and execution of the school’s learning mission. Existing studies call attention to this underdeveloped element of the reform literature and encourage researchers to seek to understand experiences that are vital to the implementation of school turnaround reforms (Holme & Rangel, 2012; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). This study begins to address this gap by focusing on the experiences of teachers and administrators at one particular turnaround school in an urban setting. The study concludes by identifying particular avenues for future research on school turnaround and it highlights particular professional practices that should be considered when implementing turnaround efforts.

Initial evaluation reports from the school district indicated positive gains in student achievement and organizational culture at all Endeavor schools. A few of the organizational improvements are noted in Table Two.

Table 2

Comparisons of Selected TWC Survey Items Related to Teacher Experience at Broadview Elementary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>2012 Percent Agree</th>
<th>2010 Percent Agree</th>
<th>+/- Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making at this school.</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>+48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff have a shared vision.</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>+43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school leadership consistently supports teachers.</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>+46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect at this school.</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>+56.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

| Overall, the school is a good place to work and learn. | 91.0 | 50.8 | +40.2 |

In Table Two, all of the selected survey items showed a large increase in the percent of teachers agreeing with each of the selected statements. However, descriptive statistics such as those listed in the table only provide a limited understanding of the changes that occurred at the research site prior to and after the first year of the turnaround effort. Furthermore, one must analyze these figures with caution, as the same respondents were not surveyed due to significant staff turnover that occurred as a result of the hiring process for the Endeavor program. In order to increase our understanding of the particular behaviors associated with the change in the survey figures, it is necessary to explore the experiences of individuals such as teachers and administrators at a more intensive level using qualitative approaches to research design.

Overview of Methodological Approach

Given the study’s focus on understanding teacher and administrator experiences, qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to collect the necessary information needed to understand the phenomenon. The study will be organized utilizing a single case study approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Within the study, different groups of individuals (teachers, administrators, and instructional support staff) were interviewed in order to develop a fuller understanding of how the turnaround reforms were experienced. Given that
only a single research site was studied (one elementary school in an urban district in the southeastern United States), the case is bounded to the sole instance of exploring experiences associated with turnaround reforms at one particular turnaround school in one district at one point in time.

In-person, semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection (Seidman, 2006). Eight teachers (including instructional coaches) were interviewed, along with the two Broadview administrators. Although the case could have been made to interview additional informants, the case sought to develop “information richness” (Patton, 2002). In addition to in-person interviews, document analysis was also utilized. In an effort to triangulate information throughout the study and insure trustworthiness, additional data sources were utilized in addition to member checking. The researcher also used a research log to record insights and monitor for bias through the processes of data collection and analysis. A more detailed account of the research methodology will be presented in Chapter Three.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study

This chapter presented an overview of a study to explore how teachers and administrators experienced changes that resulted from turnaround reforms in an elementary school in an urban school district. These changes were the product of reforms associated with the state’s successful RttT application and the district’s aligned Endeavor turnaround plan. The study utilized case-study research methodology to understand teachers and
administrators experiences that resulted from these changes. In-person interviews and document analysis constituted the primary methods of data collection.

Such studies are necessary to understand how key agents of change, such as teachers, understand and respond to the changes associated with school turnaround efforts. When teachers respond positively to change, it is implied that student achievement is positively affected. While the links between teachers’ experiences and student achievement are beyond the scope of this study, it is anticipated that valuable information will be revealed to aid school stakeholders and increase their understanding of how to effectively manage complex change and produce positive, sustainable results.

Following this chapter, a review of the literature as it pertains to school turnaround is presented. This literature was used to guide the formation of the research questions. Upon conclusion of the school turnaround literature review, the qualitative methodology of the study will be detailed. The findings of the study were generated and are listed as key themes in Chapter Four. Finally, the study will conclude with a discussion of the implications of the data collected and directions for future research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to explore how teachers and administrators experienced reforms associated with the Endeavor turnaround theory of action at one particular elementary school in an urban setting. The turnaround reforms began in response to the state receiving federal RttT grants. A key pillar of the RttT proposal included implementation of efforts to improve the performance of the lowest-performing schools across the state. This review of the literature explores key elements surrounding school turnarounds and how these elements impact teacher experiences, a relatively underexplored area of existing turnaround research. An overview of the logic surrounding this review is presented in the Figure 1.
What is a Turnaround School?

Although a single, consistent definition of a turnaround school has not emerged across the literature, turnaround schools are commonly characterized by similar conditions and characteristics. Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) state that turnaround schools are generally a smaller subset of schools that are given short timelines to produce measurable success against clear targets. Leithwood et al. (2010) go further to explain that schools in these circumstances often face sanctions if performance is not improved in some measurable way, usually improved student achievement as measured through standardized test scores (p. 5). Similarly, Herman, Dawson, Dee, Green, Maynard, and Redding (2008) define
turnaround schools as those facing a pattern where more than twenty percent of students fail to reach federal or state established targets for performance over two or more consecutive years.

Murphy (2008) and Leithwood et al. (2010) have developed models to describe the progression of turnaround reforms in schools. Both models are characterized by an initial stage of poor performance, accompanied by discord or low morale across the school. Murphy (2008) and Leithwood et al. (2010) contend that external intervention is often a necessary condition to move to further stages of improvement, which is frequently characterized by a changes in leadership, organizational and cultural shifts, and changes in attitudes towards a focus on efficacy, high expectations for staff and student performance, and an increased focus and willingness to be held accountable for performance. Final stages of both models are similar in that initial actions to improve performance are sustained and refined as the school moves towards improved, stabilized performance.

In examining the conditions that lead to schools being in a turnaround situation, Leithwood et al. (2010) argue that five factors often lead to school decline: (a) challenges associated with educating diverse and impoverished student populations, (b) magnification of these effects in schools where high concentrations of poverty and diversity are present, (c) lack of capacity to sustain improvements, (d) organizational failures conditioned on multiple variables, and (e) weak leadership. Day and Smethem (2009) also argue that turnaround schools are characterized by particular conditions, most notably, that reform is often perceived by governments and public bodies as being a necessary component to improving
achievement and increasing competitiveness. Given that the reforms are often structural in nature, Day and Smethem (2009) argue that reforms “do not always pay attention to teachers’ identities—arguably central to motivation, efficacy, commitment, job satisfaction, and effectiveness” (p. 143).

As schools and districts begin turnaround efforts, there are different models to choose from. Schools and districts frequently opt for transformation models, which call for leadership replacement, limited teacher replacement, and other strategies to improve teaching and learning within the school. Other alternatives include chartering, closing schools, or classic turnaround models, which are characterized by retention of no more than 50% of the existing instructional staff. Whether a district opts for a transformational model or turnaround model, both are similar in that they call upon leaders to pay careful attention to “leading indicators” early in the process to gauge success. Both models also underscore the fact that change is complex, and that schools must pursue efforts across multiple fronts in order to produce sustainable improvements. Although turnaround and transformational models call upon schools to pursue multiple improvement strategies, turnaround leaders should be strategic, focusing on a few strategies at once, celebrating successes when they are achieved, and then attention should be channeled to subsequent priorities (Dee, 2012; Public Impact, 2007).

Evidence on Turnaround Implementation and Success

Prior to stimulus funded RttT turnaround efforts, some schools across the nation had already undertaken improvement efforts as a part of the School Improvement Grants that
were available through NCLB. Out of NCLB, schools were encouraged to utilize comprehensive school reform strategies that focused on the use of research-based and prescribed improvement strategies, such as scripted instructional programs. Research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education noted that schools utilizing these approaches did not demonstrate gains that were significantly different than schools utilizing other improvement approaches, nor were racial achievement gaps narrowed in a significant way in the majority of these schools (Dee, 2012).

Some early studies indicated that stimulus funded RttT reforms have produced statistically significant improvements in student achievement at some schools in California. However, researchers caution that the additional information is needed, and that the results may be the result of the “compiler” effect, as reforms contained within RttT reform plans do not depart significantly from research-based improvement efforts already underway in many districts (Dee, 2012). An early implementation study from Georgia also highlighted a similar trend and cautioned that additional research would be needed as reforms progressed in order to identify ways in which they may or may not depart from previously attempted reform measures (Shearer & Rauschenberg, 2013).

The report highlighting early implementation of RttT reforms in Georgia illustrated that within schools undergoing turnaround efforts, teachers often felt that their efforts were under-valued and that they doubted the sustainability of such reform efforts. The report called for increased district communication and support, the provision of ample time for planning turnaround efforts, the development a pipeline of turnaround teachers and leaders to
fill critical vacancies in turnaround schools in hard-to-staff areas, and increased operating flexibility for school leaders (Shearer & Rauschenberg, 2013). Similar needs have been echoed in previous research examining the implementation of turnaround reforms, including the need to carefully monitor leading indicators that can inform leaders of whether or not turnaround reforms are working at early stages of implementation (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011).

Similar to Broward County’s Endeavor program, Philadelphia initiated the Renaissance turnaround program in the 2010-2011 school year. An evaluation report found that the schools within the cohort did significantly improve student achievement in particular subject areas, but on the whole, the schools within the cohort continued to demonstrate achievement that was well below that of other schools within the district. One particular reform effort embraced within the Renaissance plan was that some schools were chartered, whereas others remained under district control. Researchers found that while academic improvement occurred at both, there was no significant difference in achievement between the charter and traditional district schools (Gold, Norton, Good, & Levin, 2012).

Renaissance school leaders credited their successes to operational flexibility, data-based decision making, and a sense of professional trust that was afforded to teachers that demonstrated improved student achievement. However, as the effort progressed, turnaround leaders noted that challenges emerged which inhibited the continued success and sustainability of the program, which included district budget cuts, staffing restraints, turnover
in district-level leadership, and a sense that schools lacked a plan and were “inventing as you go” (Gold et al., 2012).

In North Carolina, turnaround efforts were implemented in the state’s lowest performing schools and districts between 2006 and 2010. A key component of the turnaround efforts included ensuring that all of the targeted schools had leaders that could instill climates of high expectations, make decisions grounded heavily in data, and create a sense of instructional excellence at the schools. Other improvement efforts included the deployment of leadership and teacher coaches from the state to support instruction in the schools, professional development, and the establishment of partnerships with universities and other entities to establish innovative instructional programs. Results from the study indicated that academic improvement was noted in the high schools and such gains increased over time, but the improvements were not statistically different from the comparison schools (Thompson, Brown, Townsend, Henry, & Fortner, 2011).

Although similar reforms were introduced to low-performing middle and elementary schools in North Carolina, the state was unable to sustain funding for the reforms. Consequently, programs ended before improvements could be measured over time. As the state embarked on implementing reforms contained with the RttT plan, researchers maintained that continued improvement was possible, given that schools were provided an ample opportunity (at least 3 years) to implement reforms, effective leadership was in place at the targeted schools, coordinated efforts to improve instruction were in place, and districts fostered supportive relationships with the schools (Thompson et al., 2011).
The Context Surrounding Turnaround Schools

Each School is Unique

Although turnaround schools can be categorized into a subgroup of schools facing similar challenges and experiencing particular reform initiatives, each school retains its unique qualities. Therefore, it has been consistently stressed that turnaround approaches need to be differentiated to fit the unique needs of the school. Marks and Nance (2007) stress this, citing Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins’ (1994) argument that “ultimately, to develop schools organizationally, effective leadership requires local actors to influence decisions based on particular sets of needs and circumstances” (p. 6). This line of reasoning is also advanced by Harris, Chapman, Muijs, Russ, and Stoll (2006) and Duke (2006), as they argue that variables such as student populations, the socio-economic status of communities, and schools’ internal factors affect the organization and student achievement in a variety of different ways. Leithwood et al. (2010) contend that while successful school turnarounds are characterized by a particular set of similar core actions, “how these practices are enacted depends very much on the context in which leaders find themselves” (p. 177). Going further, Reynolds, Harris A., Clark, Harris, B., and James (2006) argue that differentiating improvement approaches promotes distributed leadership and capacity building as turnaround schools respond to challenges such as a staff turnover, sustaining improvements, and scaling up efforts (p. 436).

In examining the unique contexts surrounding each school, Reynolds et al. (2006) critique the limitations with “off the shelf” improvement programs, as such programs do little
to consider the unique challenges facing each school (p. 429). Rather, Reynolds et al. (2006) believe that schools wishing to experience success in a turnaround should focus on outcomes, instruction, collaboration, capacity building, establishing and following a clear vision, and providing ongoing staff development and support (p. 429). On a similar note, Day and Smethem (2009) argue that turnaround schools are often engaged in work that increases focus and efficiency as opposed to prior organizational cultures where professional discretion was stressed over research-based practice or fidelity to reform efforts (p. 145).

**The Role of States and Districts in Turnaround Schools**

A common element in school turnarounds is the expanded influence of governing bodies outside of the school itself, namely, states and local school districts. Giles and Hargreaves (2006) argued that the “specific, modernistic pressure of externally mandated, standardized reform” (p. 144) limits the impact of micro-level school structures and processes in order to create conditions to facilitate improvements. In such circumstances, Bascia and Rottman (2011), citing Knapp (1997) and McDonnell and Elmore (1998) argue that governments seek reforms that produce quick, visible results, and are “less willing to allocate resources to factors where the payoff is less direct, less certain, and less controllable” (p. 793).

The role of state governments in public K-12 education has increased substantially in recent years as a result of federal accountability measures tied to funding and sanctions such as those found in *NCLB* and *RttT*. Consequently, turnaround school leaders contend that the level of state influence on their actions exceeds that of districts, site councils, or parent
organizations (Marks & Nance, 2007, p. 5). Marks and Nance argue that “states’ strategic use of curriculum and performance standards…pulls in the same direction and serves to reinforce the principal’s role as instructional leader” (pp. 26-27), as states establish policy directions, but leave much of the specifics regarding implementation to districts and individual schools.

Therefore, individual school districts often serve as a conduit for state policy mandates. Leithwood et al. (2010) found this to be helpful for schools when the state provided a clear, consistent focus and allowed districts and schools to tailor the approach to their particular circumstances (pp. 185-186). Scribner and Bradley-Levine (2010) also found that districts can successfully promote reform when clear expectations and communication is provided to individual schools. Particular district actions to promote reform efforts includes districts signaling that improved achievement is a priority and resources, policies, and procedures are aligned to such priorities (Leithwood et al., 2010). Marks and Nance (2007) also contend that district influence can have positive effects in a school turnaround, particularly when districts are focused on improving instruction over monitoring and principal/teacher supervisory responsibilities (p. 23).

**Organizational Elements of Turnaround Schools**

**The Progression of School Turnaround Reforms**

Leithwood et al. (2010) established a model to explain the progression that schools go through as they implement turnaround reforms. The stages can be summarized as follows:
1. Stopping organizational decline and setting conditions for early improvements through building a vision for success and establishing systems and processes to improve student outcomes.

2. Ensure survival and celebrate early improvements through distributed leadership, mastery learning experiences, risk-taking and innovation, and collaborative structures such as PLCs.

3. Attain acceptable performance and strive for continued success, using changed beliefs and improved capacity to address future challenges.

Leithwood et al. (2010) stress that the stages above are not always linear, and that as context changes or conditions improve or worsen, that schools may fall back into earlier stages, thus reflecting a more cyclical view of school improvement.

In leading change of organizational processes, Leithwood et al. (2010) contend that leaders can utilize two theories in turning the school around—Theory E and Theory O (p. 217-218). Theory E, or the economic theory, focuses on control of the organization and compliance. Theory O, or the organizational theory, focuses on capability and capacity building. Theory E and Theory O are explained in greater detail in Figure Two.
In advocating one approach over the other, Leithwood et al. (2010) argue that “sustainable improvement is possible in schools that purposefully create the internal infrastructure to manage any external or internal challenges likely to come their way” (p. 218). Such an argument supports the use of Theory O approaches to create meaningful and sustainable change in schools.

Consistent with prior research, Gayles (2004) argues that the turnaround process should be context-driven, being careful to avoid pre-packaged reforms which may not completely align to curriculum standards or the specific needs of students in individual
schools or classrooms (p. 174-175). Failure to pay attention to context while implementing standardized reforms can result in “great variation…in classrooms despite the sweeping uniformity that is a common characteristic of reform efforts” (Gayles, 2004, p 166). Other authors have advanced the idea that since individual schools undergoing turnaround efforts are situated within larger school districts, districts should consider individual school contexts, be flexible in their approach, offer support, and allow turnaround school leaders the flexibility to act in accordance with the needs of the school (Kowal & Ayscue, 2005). Likewise, Herman et al. (2008) argued that “there is no specific set of actions that applies equally well to every turnaround situation…[schools] applied actions and practices tailored to the school and local community” (p. 7).

Olsen and Sexton (2009) contend that throughout turnaround processes, schools should “go slowly…implement multiple reforms in integrated or sequenced ways…. [Consider ] school context as an active variable” (p. 39). Similarly, schools should be strategic in choosing which variables to change at particular times. Herman et al. (2008) recommend that schools start with particular conditions which can be changed quickly, such as student discipline or data-based instructional practices. Schools should then celebrate success, and move to other, more substantive goals. As schools move through a sequence of conditions to change, Kowal and Ayscue (2005) argue that planning for school turnaround generally takes one year, and that substantial progress is best evident three to five years out from initial implementation. Finally, Leithwood et al. (2010) conclude that “for a school to go through turnaround and reach a stage of suitable recovery requires fundamental changes
to its internal processes and organizational culture. These changes are unlikely to be linear. There are always ebbs and flows, setbacks and successes” (p. 216).

**Structures to Foster Collaboration**

Collaboration has been established as a critical element of any successful school turnaround. In a multi-case study of successful turnaround schools, Leithwood et al. (2010) found that “teachers began to assume much more ownership for their own capacity development, looked to their colleagues much more as sources of insight, and valued their access to…professional development resources” (p. 114). Not only should collaboration occur among teachers who teach the same subject or grade, but it should also occur vertically in order to allow teachers to develop an understanding of how learning is articulated throughout different layers of the school (Harris et al., 2006). In discussing the benefits of collaboration, Gigante and Firestone (2008) argue that “teacher leaders who worked with colleagues to design activities…fostered a common understanding of instruction, which is beneficial to any reform effort” (p. 314).

An important component of collaborative structures are professional learning communities, or PLCs. As schools build collaborative processes, it becomes important for leaders to provide PLCs with the resources, support, and knowledge needed to significantly impact student learning. Within PLCs, the use of data-based decision making to monitor student progress “gave rise to increased vigilance at both district and school levels about the progress of individual students on achievement measures” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 160). The importance of PLCs has been a widely promoted school improvement strategy discussed
by multiple authors (Duke, 2006; Harris et al., 2006; Marks & Nance, 2007; and Reynolds et al., 2006).

**Structures to Promote Improved Instructional Practice**

As schools undergo turnaround processes to improve student achievement, a focus on improved instruction is a given (Duke, 2006). Increasing instructional capacity through strategies such as mastery learning experiences, Kaniuka (2012) argues, is a nonnegotiable element of school reform (p. 344). In further discussing effective professional development opportunities, Gigante and Firestone (2008) argue that when teacher-leaders engage in developmental tasks, such as supporting colleagues with their instruction, a greater understanding of effective instruction across the organization is fostered.

Research on professional development has indicated that the most meaningful and impactful professional development for teachers occurs in an ongoing manner in the context of their everyday instructional duties. This ongoing, job-embedded professional development has commonly taken the form of instructional coaching. In studies of successful turnaround schools, Leithwood et al. (2010) found that coaching was a capacity building process that increased teacher’s beliefs regarding their own effectiveness as instructors (p. 114). In exploring the role of an instructional coach in facilitating successful school reform, Schulman et al. (2008) found that coaches were most effective when they articulated their efforts with administrators in order to focus on areas jointly identified as instructional needs across the school (p. 417). Going further, Schulman et al. (2008) argue that administrative support and legitimacy is important for coaches, otherwise, “coaches may have little impact
on altering teacher behavior that supports quality instruction to promote greater student achievement” (p. 422).

**The Role of Distributed Leadership**

With the complexities facing the school in the midst of a turnaround, school leaders must think critically about where their efforts and energy should be focused. Furthermore, as priorities compete for placement on the leader’s agenda, it becomes impossible for the turnaround leader to “be all things to all people”. Distributing leadership throughout different layers of the school is a technique that has been widely discussed as a key element to successful school turnarounds throughout the literature (Duke, 2006; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Herman et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010; Marks & Nance, 2007).

In discussing the potential of distributed leadership to promote school improvement, Giles and Hargreaves (2006) contend that distributed leadership facilitates problem solving processes by keeping decision making close to the individuals (teachers) most responsible for the implementation of decisions (p. 141). Another important element to fostering successful distributed leadership is partnership with teachers and other school stakeholders. Marks and Nance (2007) argue that partnership with teachers was a critical element of successful distributed leadership, as “..teachers’ active involvement in decision making reflects teamwork and reduces the perceived burden of state-imposed reforms” (p. 26). Given that “the school is a restless organization, actively seeking new ideas, opportunities, and challenges…” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 129), distributed leadership becomes an important element that facilitates the necessary innovation and collective problem solving that is
needed to respond to the changing organizational conditions which accompany school
turnaround. Structures such as PLCs, job-embedded instructional coaching, and data-based
decision making and problem solving allow distributed leadership to flourish throughout the
turnaround school (Duke, 2006; Gigante & Firestone, 2008; Schulman et al., 2008).

**Cultural Conditions in Turnaround Schools**

Multiple authors have stressed the importance of cultural conditions in securing the
success of school turnarounds (Harris et al., 2006; Kowal & Ayscue, 2005; Leithwood et al.,
2010; Marks & Nance, 2007; Penuel et al., 2010; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Leithwood
et al. (2010) argue that “…these features [cultural conditions] do not arise accidentally. They
must be instilled and nurtured, deliberately and painstakingly, by those leading the
organization” (p. 219). Within turnaround school culture, particular elements have emerged
as key, including:

1. The development of a clear, coherent vision focused on improving student
   achievement.

2. An organizational culture focused on the norms of partnership, collaboration, high-
   expectations, and continuous improvement.

3. A strong sense of efficacy that drives the actions of turnaround school leaders and
   staff.

These elements will be explored in greater detail in the sections that follow.
A Vision Focused on Improved Student Achievement

Akin to taking a trip, it is difficult to know if you have arrived at your desired location without knowledge of what the final destination looks like. A clear, coherent vision facilitates school improvement much in the same way—it gives leaders and staff members a clear picture of what the ultimate goal for the organization is. In the case of a turnaround school, improving student performance is the primary goal, so the established vision must take this into account. Harris et al. (2006) argue that a vision focusing on the improvement of teaching and learning led stakeholders within the school to analyze their instructional practices and revise practices if needed to align to the vision of improving learning (pp. 416-418). Leithwood et al. (2010) and Harris et al. (2006) argue that shared visions strengthen staff motivation, commitment, and facilitated problem solving across the school. Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) explain that the vision “…represents a critical pathway for developing teacher commitment and professional accountability…without agreement on the means for raising student achievement teachers see instructional guidance as administrative directives rather than opportunities for professional development” (p. 768).

In establishing a vision focused on improving student achievement, teachers view school leaders as the most influential players in this process (Leithwood et al., 2010). Consequently, it is the role of the turnaround school leader to establish processes and conditions that allow for the vision to be shared across the organization. Penuel et al., 2010 focused on the importance of having all school stakeholders united in the pursuit of the same vision, as this allows for the coordination of improvement activities across the school (p. 89).
In the case of a school that experienced unsuccessful turnaround reforms, fragmentation “…prevented the emergence of a shared vision for improving the school” (Penuel et al., 2010, p. 89).

**Cultural Norms in a Turnaround School**

Duke (2006) argues that “no single person can provide all the leadership needed to sustain a record of high achievement” (p. 28). This point emphasizes the importance of the turnaround leader establishing a school culture with norms of partnership and collaboration amongst different school stakeholders. Cultural norms of collaboration and partnership may emerge as a result of the turnaround leader’s increased focus on structures to promote such collaboration, as Penuel et al. (2010) argue, “…formal structures to support teacher collaboration can emerge naturally from individual interests of faculty members and form a normative culture that supports collegial interaction about instruction, which in turn can produce consistent forms of practice” (p. 87). Others (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010) contend that in order for collaboration and partnership to develop across the turnaround school “teachers must willingly open their classroom doors and work with, teach, and learn from others” (p. 64). Marks and Nance (2007) argue that collaboration and partnership generally do not emerge naturally--turnaround leaders must “invite and develop new forms of collaborative leadership among teachers with their peers” (p. 28). The significance of the turnaround leader in establishing a cultural norm of collaboration is also further supported by Kowal and Aycue (2005), Herman et al. (2008), and Leithwood et al. (2010). Specifically, Kowal and Aycue (2005) argue that turnaround leaders “…engage teachers, parents, and the
surrounding community in a way that encourages them to become part of the changes in the school, rather than critical observers who watch from the sidelines” (p. 15). This level of engagement, as argued by Day and Smethem (2009) builds capacity, motivation, and commitment, and “…may be more powerful levers to enhance quality than compliance” (p. 154).

In examining multiple cases of successful turnaround schools, Leithwood et al. (2010) write that high expectations for staff and student performance is a widely visible component in successful turnaround schools (p. 104). Herman et al. (2008) argue that successful turnaround schools “had a shared common purpose and a belief that all students can learn. Thus, building a committed staff was essential, with everyone of the same mindset” (p. 27). Although leaders take a key role in the establishment of and accountability for high expectations, Leithwood et al. (2010) contend that internal accountability amongst teachers is also an important part of maintaining high expectations for performance (p. 220). Coupled with the establishment of high expectations is clear communication around the expectations for staff performance and student achievement. Reynolds et al. (2006) support this, as it was argued that teachers generally see the benefit of establishing high expectations for student success, but often are unsure of how to “get there”.

The high expectations for staff and student performance discussed above often aids in the establishment of a cultural norm of continuous improvement in turnaround schools (Harris et al., 2006, pp. 416-418). As the organization strives to higher levels of performance in reaching ambitious goals, continuous improvement is a necessary condition which prompts
reflection on current actions, allowing for the adjustment of teacher and leader behaviors to aid the school in continued movement towards established goals. In discussing the value of continuous improvement, Waldron and McLeskey (2010) argue that such approaches encourage problem solving as staff members learn from one another and share expertise (p. 59). Distributed leadership is another condition that supports continuous improvement, as “[leaders] may invite and develop new forms of collaborative leadership among teachers with their peers” (p. 28). Distributed leadership provides enhanced opportunities for teachers across the school to constantly review their own practice and evaluate the impact on student learning” (Harris et al., 2006, p 418). This constant review of practice and adjustment of approaches to improve results may take the form of PLCs or other job-embedded professional development opportunities such as instructional coaching or mentoring (Gigante & Firestone, 2008; Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010).

The Role of Efficacy in Turnaround School Culture

Leithwood et al. (2010) write that “high performing [turnaround] schools believe fundamentally in their ability to outperform their own targets or aspirations. This belief comes from a shared or collective sense of powerful self-efficacy that the school leader orchestrates and nurtures” (p. 242). At the root of a strong sense of teacher efficacy is the idea that teacher empowerment “gives teachers and other professionals ownership of the school improvement activities…” (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 60). Efficacy is not a stand-alone concept—it often emerges in coordination with other improvement efforts, such as the development of mastery learning experiences (Kanuika, 2012), the establishment of a
vision of success coupled with clearly communicated high expectations (Leithwood et al., 2010), or the distribution of expertise and leadership across the turnaround school through opportunities such as instructional coaching (Gigante & Firestone, 2008). The establishment of cultural norms of partnership and collaboration leads to the development of “an efficacious partnership between principals and teachers...with principals retaining influence while they share decision-making with teachers” (Marks & Nance, 2007, p. 24). As all of these different factors come together to establish a pervasive sense of efficacy in a successful turnaround school. Leithwood et al. (2010) argue that “efficacy leads to such persistence; it fosters an attitude of being able to figure out what to do when one’s existing capabilities are not up to the job...” (p. 59).

The Role of the Turnaround Leader

Multiple authors (Day & Smethem, 2009; Duke, 2006; Herman et al., 2008; Holme & Rangel, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy 2008; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010) have attributed considerable influence to the turnaround school leader in securing organizational successes. Throughout these studies, a profile of a turnaround leader has emerged. Key characteristics of this profile are explained in greater detail below.

Symbolic Functions

In addition to the various instructional functions that a turnaround leader fulfills, they often serve symbolic functions as well. In many school turnaround settings, leadership replacement has occurred prior to the implementation of turnaround strategies. Murphy (2008) has argued that the act of replacing school leaders can serve as a symbolic move by
itself, as this signals a change in direction to the rest of the organization. Other authors 
(Herman et al., 2008; Leithwood et al. 2010; Murphy, 2008) argued that turnaround leaders 
function in a symbolic role as they model the behavior they desire from others in the school. 
Leithwood et al. (2010), Herman et al. (2008), and Waldron and McLeskey (2010) argue that 
turnaround leaders exhibit qualities such as hope, optimism, energy, confidence, risk-taking, 
leading by example, demonstrating trust, and supporting staff members. Murphy (2008) 
contends that in order to model such behaviors, turnaround leaders are often “hands-on” 
within the school, demonstrating a willingness to engage in the same processes and behaviors 
that they have established as expectations for the entire staff. Other authors (Day & 
Smethem, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010) contend that turnaround leaders seek to empower 
their staff and provide “moral purpose”, understanding that the work of turning around a 
school is “predominately emotional work…effective leaders know that people are not their 
best asset; they are their only asset; so the need to nurture, develop, and strengthen 
relationships is as the very core of what good leaders do” (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Establishing a Vision

The establishment of a vision of success centered on high student expectations has 
also emerged as an important action of the successful turnaround leader. Herman et al. (2008) 
argued that turnaround leaders place a consistent focus on improvements to instruction as an 
esential piece of improving student achievement. Kowal and Ayscue (2005) argue that for 
the turnaround leader, change is not optional and the pursuit of improved results is relentless 
(p. 20-21). In examining multiple successful schools that had substantially turned around and
sustained improvements, Leithwood et al. (2010) found that teachers perceived principals to the most important players in the establishment of the school’s direction. The establishment and communication of high expectations for staff and student performance was a highly visible component in the successful turnaround schools studied (Leithwood et al., 2010). In another study of multiple successful turnaround schools, Duke (2006) found that the belief that all students could learn at high levels, coupled with a shared responsibility among staff that learning for all was attainable, was a critical element of the schools’ successes.

**Leading Instruction**

The importance of the turnaround leader in leading instruction and securing organizational conditions necessary for improved instruction has also been well documented. Leithwood et al. (2010) and Gigante and Firestone (2008) have argued that developing people is a critical function of a successful turnaround leader. In doing so, turnaround leaders promote opportunities such as instructional coaching and job-embedded professional development through collaborative structures, such as PLCs. The notion that the turnaround leader is a facilitator, coach, mentor, and guide is a departure from the turnaround literature from the business sector, which focuses on the autocratic roles of the turnaround leader (Leithwood et al., 2010). Waldron and McLeskey (2010) argue that the focus on developing capacity through collaboration and high-quality professional development empowers staff to take calculated risks to improve instructional practice (p. 65). In turn, such processes “build cognitive and intellectual capital, and structures of professional accountability…[which] in turn generated teacher loyalty and stability” (Holme & Rangel, 2012, p. 279). Other
researchers, such as Kaniuka (2012), argue that educational leaders should create environments in which “teachers experience instructional success…teachers provided with such mastery experiences can develop a new sense of what is possible, not only in terms of student performance, but also what can be considered as viable school reform options” (p. 343).

**Strategic and Responsive**

The need for the turnaround leader to be strategic and responsive to the changing dynamics within a turnaround school has emerged as another important characteristic. As there are often competing priorities within a turnaround school and multiple issues that require attention, the turnaround leader should concentrate on changes that have the greatest potential to provide immediate impact (Kowal & Ayscue, 2008). As multiple priorities emerge and the potential for increased interference from the outside increases, effective turnaround leaders buffer staff from disruptions such as district directives that do not align to the specific vision of the turnaround, student discipline, and outside visitors (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 163).

Leithwood et al. (2010) argue that while there is a common set of “best-practices” among turnaround leaders, “how these practices are enacted depends very much on the context in which leaders find themselves” (p. 177). Effective turnaround leaders are keenly aware of what their school needs and when. Leithwood et al. (2010) explains further that “the particular amalgam of leadership strategies and approaches that successful leaders select are those that best met the particular needs of the school at the time” (p. 235). Apart from
determining which strategies and approaches are necessary for a particular point in time, Reynolds et al. (2006) contend that effective turnaround leaders must also decide upon the “loose” and “tight” elements of the reforms, meaning that there are particular elements which leaders could let teachers and other staff members make their own, yet there are also other elements which are considered “non-negotiables” (p. 430). As the school develops and changes during the turnaround, leaders must also take note and adjust their leadership behaviors accordingly, as different phases of the turnaround often require different leadership behaviors (Kowal & Ayscue, 2005).

Effective turnaround leaders are also continuously monitoring the school, searching for ways to constantly move the school forward. In this role, the turnaround leader “constantly monitors the status of the internal conditions in the school that influence student learning and improve the status of those conditions that are most in need of improvement and most likely to improve student learning” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 236). In such a capacity, the turnaround leader may also examine the capacities of staff and leverage those capacities towards improving the school through opportunities for distributed leadership (Duke, 2006; Gigante & Firestone, 2008; Herman et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). To encourage distributed leadership, collective problem solving, and accountability for results, turnaround leaders “ask the right questions rather than provide the right answers; and they focus on flexibility rather than insist on conformity” (Leithwood et al., 2010, 228).
Apart from relying upon the informal observations of the turnaround leader regarding what is occurring throughout the school, turnaround leaders are also savvy in their data-based decision making abilities, using multiple sources of student achievement data to determine the priorities of the school (Duke, 2006). This attention to detail is coupled with the ability of turnaround leaders to be responsive, as they “continually scan the horizon but also have a firm grip on how their organization is performing”, quickly intervening if there are sudden signs of downturn (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 232).

**Teacher Experiences in Turnaround Schools**

**A Valuable Perspective Often Overlooked**

Although the research base surrounding school turnaround is rich in regards to particular interventions and organizational conditions that characterize turnaround schools, the information surrounding teacher experience is sparse in comparison. School reform researchers have continued to encourage the exploration of this central issue, as teachers are “closest” to specific reform actions and will ultimately be the individuals responsible for delivering classroom results that school turnaround models seek to produce (Bascia & Rottman, 2001; Craig, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2010; Reynolds et al. 2006). As schools are invariably human organizations, the knowledge, experiences, and mindsets of those involved in enacting reforms has some bearing on their success (Craig, 2012). Bascia and Rottman (2001) explain further that “there is a reciprocal relationship between the conditions that influence the quality of teaching and conditions that influence students’ opportunities to learn” (p. 795). Given this link, the effects of school turnaround strategies and processes
upon teachers cannot be ignored if we are to fully understand other factors such as the success of particular reform efforts over others or gain insight into how to make school turnaround more sustainable.

**Factors Associated with Negative Experiences**

Studies examining unsuccessful school turnaround initiatives have provided insight into conditions that limit the success of turnaround reforms. These conditions are explained in greater detail below.

Underlying notions of teaching as an “art” is the idea that teachers uniquely contribute to student learning, much as an artist uniquely applies their own techniques to produce artistic masterpieces. From the perspective of teachers, then, they should have a protected level of professional autonomy which only comes under question when students are not being well served, which in reality, is open to interpretation depending upon how student success is measured (Olsen & Sexton, 2009, p. 33). As teacher autonomy is reduced, teachers begin to feel “micromanaged”, which can ultimately result in disenchantment and disillusionment (Craig, 2012, p. 11; Day & Smethem, 2009, p. 148; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006, p. 152). Craig (2012) argues that throughout the life cycle of turnaround reforms, “teacher autonomy and agency expanded and contracted, depending on how those in charge interpreted their administrative and consultive roles” (p. 21-22). Similarly, Gayles (2004) argues “the opinions and perspectives of teachers exist outside the realm of any meaningful dialogue with the ‘power brokers’ of curricular implementation…teachers speak from a ‘recontextualized field’ which is clearly ‘delimited’” (p. 176).
As teacher autonomy decreases in negative school turnaround contexts, teachers also share that they feel as if their individual contributions are considered less meaningful to the organization (Heckman & Monterra, 2009, p. 1337; Olsen & Sexton, 2009, p.15). As teachers’ level of investment decreases due to a lack of feeling valued as professionals, “half-hearted” implementation of reform strategies may be the product (Day & Smethem, 2009; Heckman & Monterra, 2009, p. 1337). Heckman and Monterra (2009) argue that reform best comes from within, as teachers and other school stakeholders indigenously invent improvement strategies suited to the context of the school. As turnaround schools receive more public attention and scrutiny, “teachers…felt that the reforms and derogatory tone in which politicians and some of the media described teachers and their work affected motivation and morale” (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006, p. 149).

With an increased focus on the standardization of teaching and learning that often accompanies school turnarounds come teacher sentiments that conformity is a valued school norm and expected behavior among professionals. Such conformity, Olsen and Sexton (2009) argue, is a product of the constricted and hierarchical communication and organizational structures that sometimes accompany school turnarounds (p. 27). Continuing this argument, Olsen and Sexton (2009) contend that reforms “…centralize and restrict the flow of information by constricting control…emphasizing routinized and simplified educational/assessment practices…[and] apply strong pressure for school personnel to conform…” (p. 14).
In cases of unsuccessful school turnarounds, increases in conformity coupled with the loss of teacher autonomy produced feelings of stress, anxiety, and tension among teachers and staff members. Gayles (2004) argued that the failure of one district to consider teacher input and school context when adopting a standardized reform approach produced contradictions and frustrations for teachers (p. 177). As the pressure to produce results increases and teacher legitimacy is questioned, “various subgroups feel threatened in complex, often competing ways…[which translates] into a series of maladaptive effects and responses that influence the school’s reform approach and organizational climate”, including instilling divides between veteran and beginning teachers and between teachers and administrators (Olsen & Sexton, 2009, p. 38). In another case, Schulman, Sullivan, and Glanz (2008) argue that “imposed” reforms in New York City created a group of “second-class” schools as the district exempted higher-performing schools from participation in district-wide reform measures. The framework utilized by Leithwood et al. (2010) also highlights the feelings of denial, discomfort, and anxiety that often accompany the early stages of school turnaround. However, Leithwood et al. (2010) argue that as turnaround processes proceed and organizational improvement is demonstrated, negative feelings fade and are replaced by experiences characterized by feelings of excitement, focus, and commitment. The conditions that lead to positive school turnaround experiences are explored in greater detail below.

**Factors Associated with Positive Experiences**

Although a majority of the cases examined identify negative factors associated with teachers’ experiences in school turnarounds, many of these studies also provide insight into
the conditions necessary to create positive turnaround experiences for teachers. Gitlin and Margonis (1995) argued that teacher resistance and negative outcomes are important variables to examine. As researchers do examine negative experiences, a better understanding emerges of the conditions necessary for successful turnaround experiences (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). Information from negative cases is coupled with descriptions of teachers’ experiences from positive cases to identify conditions that foster positive turnaround experiences for teachers.

Leithwood et al. (2010) have argued that in successful turnaround schools “teachers and other staff are expected to lead innovation and actively try new ideas”, as it keeps the teacher experience energizing and invigorating (p. 220). Others have highlighted the need for turnaround schools to be flexible in solving problems around teaching and learning. In a negative case, Olsen and Sexton (2009) contend that “absent from the collected data was any attention on the part of administration to encourage teachers to think differently about teaching and learning or about school improvement” (p. 30). Heckman and Montera (2009) also argue that turnaround schools should foster processes that support “indigenous invention”, or the idea that solutions to known problems are found within the organization and produced through collaboration and invention across current contexts in the school.

The role of trust, partnership, and understanding in producing positive experiences has been discussed in several cases exploring school turnaround. In one study, Reynolds et al. (2006) found that dialogue was an important element to incorporate into the support structures that accompany turnaround strategies (p. 434). Heckman and Montera (2009) also
contend that trust and partnership are important elements of efforts towards organizational improvement through indigenous invention. The importance of distributing leadership across the school also emerges as a condition necessary to foster partnership and understanding (Gigante & Firestone, 2008; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). Gigante and Firestone (2008) argue that as leadership is distributed to individuals such as instructional coaches and lead teachers, “they [coaches and teacher leaders] want to know that administrators understand the teacher leader role and find it important” to the improvement of the school (p. 323). Gayles (2004) also argues that teachers should be part of decision making in turnaround processes, as teachers are professionals with a well-developed understanding of the problem, given their close nature to classroom instruction and student learning (p. 177).

Efficacy, or the mindset that one has control over and the ability to change a situation for the better, has also emerged as a factor in producing successful turnaround experiences (Leithwood et al., 2010). Bascia and Rottman (2001) argue that teachers’ notions of efficacy are affected by organizational conditions and that “it is in fact difficult to disentangle factors that influence teaching from those that influence learning, and the degree of satisfaction teachers experience appears to arise from the extent to which they believe they can successfully meet students’ needs” (p. 798). Kaniuka (2012) also contends that what teachers believe is a product of their experience, and that in order to change performance, the culture of the school should be focused on changing individual and collective beliefs (p. 342). Gayles (2004) has also highlighted the role of efficacy and its’ impact on teaching behaviors
and school performance, as “that which they [teachers] believe is efficacious filters through and finds its way into their instruction” (p. 177).

**Chapter Summary**

Attention to the topic of school turnaround has been well documented in the literature as a result of the increased focus on accountability policies. Much research exists that examines topics such as specific reform strategies or cultural and organizational conditions that foster improved school performance. From this literature, some common themes have emerged, such as the establishment of the role of the leader in ensuring the success of turnaround reforms, the importance of building organizational capacity, or creating a vision of success coupled with high expectations for staff and student performance.

However, it cannot be ignored that schools remain human institutions that are uniquely shaped by the individuals that work and learn within them. The existing literature on school turnaround sparsely addresses the topic of teachers’ experiences in turnaround efforts. As teachers are situated within the larger school and their experiences are shaped by organizational conditions, culture, context, and leadership behaviors, further research would also need to consider these factors in developing an understanding of teachers’ experiences in school turnaround reforms.

This chapter has reviewed relevant recent literature surrounding the topic of school turnarounds. Information gained from this review was used in conceptualizing the research problem. Further, information gained as a result of this review framed the process of data analysis and the development of the case’s emergent themes. The following chapter outlines
the research methodology utilized and justifies the use of the case study approach as an appropriate choice to explore this issue.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore how teachers and administrators at one school experienced turnaround reforms that were affiliated with the Endeavor theory of action. Although the district implemented the Endeavor program at multiple sites, the selected school presents unique characteristics that set it apart from others in the cohort. These characteristics will be discussed further in Chapter 4 with comparative profiles across major characteristics of the Endeavor schools. Further study is warranted to identify how these unique factors impacted teacher and administrator experience at the selected site. Within this chapter, information regarding the study design, research questions, site selection, sampling criteria, data collection and analysis methods, and issues concerning trustworthiness and limitations will be discussed.

Research Design

Scholars have argued that the qualitative research paradigm is particularly helpful to researchers as they seek an in-depth understanding of human behavior and perceptions (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). While attitudes and perceptions could be explored through quantitative approaches (such as a survey), this methodology would produce aggregated descriptive statistics signaling the intensity of experiences and feelings. The use of the qualitative approach allowed the research design to remain emergent. Patton (2002) argues, “qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry” (p. 255).
Quantitative approaches limit the ability for themes of the participants’ experiences to emerge from the data.

Given the exploratory purpose of the study and the focus on informants’ experiences, it was necessary to utilize methods that allowed the researcher to get closer to the thoughts and feelings of the informants. Doing so helped the researcher identify the reasons why people felt as they did. This also helped the researcher understand how the theory of action and unique conditions at the selected Endeavor school affected teacher and administrator experience. As such, an exploratory case study approach was used. Yin (2003) argues that this approach allows researchers to explore contexts in which the phenomenon being explored cannot be linked to an exclusive set of outcomes. The exploratory case study approach allows for the emergence of multiple themes that are not bounded by strict propositions or theories to be evaluated.

The study was bounded in that only one school at one point in time was examined in depth within the context of the Endeavor reform effort. Stake (1995) supports binding cases by time and activity in order to focus the case on the issue being explored. Additionally, Creswell (2003) also supports such boundaries in case studies so that the researcher may go deeper into the phenomenon being studied. Within the selected school, teachers and administrators were interviewed, as each group was likely to have experienced the turnaround elements in a way that is unique to the particular responsibilities or level of involvement associated with their roles.
Although this study sought to examine administrator and teacher experience at one Endeavor turnaround school with unique characteristics, it was necessary to explore the context surrounding the reforms at this school before moving into an exploration of experience. Therefore, a three-phase model was utilized to develop a fuller understanding of the context surrounding the reform effort, as was argued in the previous chapter that context can profoundly affect experience. In stage one, documents and interview data were reviewed in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the theory of action surrounding the Endeavor turnaround model. This was an appropriate area to further explore in that the implementation of this theory of action would likely lead to changes in the organizational structures and culture. In stage two, documents (such as publicly available testing and performance data) were reviewed to develop a profile of the Endeavor schools in order to identify key characteristics that set the selected school apart from others in the cohort. In the third and final stage, interviews were conducted and subsequently analyzed in order to explore how the theory of action and unique characteristics of the selected school impacted teacher and administrator experience.

The approach described above follows the reasoning of the “single case study with embedded units” design, as different respondents are providing their perspectives on a common experience (Baxter & Jack 2008; Yin, 2003). The “single case study with embedded units” approach supports the exploratory purpose of the study in that data can be analyzed at multiple levels, including the individual, the group, and across groups and individuals as complexities are explored across a singular context (Yin, 2003). Therefore, each embedded
unit (at either the individual or group level) allows for the emergence of different experiences within the bounds of the case.

A critique of the single case research design is that it lacks the rigor necessary to identify experimental effects (Horner & Kratochwill, 2012). Given that the purpose of this study is to further explore the experiences of teachers and administrators as the Endeavor turnaround reforms are implemented at one unique school, this concern is mitigated for this study. Furthermore, single case studies have also been critiqued in that they frequently focus on a description of an intervention’s effects on an individual or group of individuals (Matson, Turygin, Beighley, & Matson, 2011). To address this concern, the proposed study examined the experiences of both teachers and administrators within a single context (one school with unique factors as it implements reforms associated with the Endeavor program) utilizing the embedded units approach described above. Multiple individuals within each group will be interviewed in an effort to build further strength around emergent themes. With the focus of leadership continuity and support described in the previous chapter, the selected school is an appropriate choice for a single case study in that the leadership consistency experienced throughout the turnaround effort was unique to only this school out of the entire cohort of Endeavor schools.

An argument could be made that other qualitative approaches would be appropriate for this research problem. In particular, phenomenology could be used since the exploration of participants’ experiences is a central element of the study. However, given that the overall goal of phenomenology is to develop an essence of the experience, the study would be
limited in using this method (Creswell, 2007). Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that when case studies develop in-depth understandings of particular contexts, they can have significant value in advancing human learning. According to Flyvbjerg (2006), cases are not meant to be “all things to all people”—rather the case is unique in that it allows the reader to live vicariously with particular case elements resonating with the reader’s own experiences or learning needs. Creswell (2007) and Stake (1995) also speak to the ability of cases to create the vicarious experiences Flyvbjerg (2006) describes.

**Research Questions**

Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) have argued that research questions are important in case studies as they help to structure the case and determine data collection methods. Furthermore, other researchers have argued that while research questions should provide structure, they should also be open enough to allow unexpected avenues of inquiry to emerge (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 1998). Yin (1994) argues that “how” and “why” questions are well suited to case study research in that such questions will allow researchers to develop in-depth understandings of particular events or experiences that make up cases. Given that the purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators at one unique Endeavor school, the following research questions were developed. The following research questions allowed the researcher to explore the context surrounding the theory of action and the effects of its implementation on teacher and administrator experience.
Research Question 1: What is the established theory of action behind the Endeavor turnaround reforms?

Research Question 2: What factors set the selected school apart from other Endeavor schools?

Research Question 3: How do the unique factors at the selected site impact teacher and administrator experience of the Endeavor turnaround effort?

Methods to collect data to explore these questions will be detailed in the subsequent section.

Site Selection and Sampling Criteria

In the district where the study occurred, there are dozens of elementary schools located in geographically and economically diverse areas. However, only a select few were chosen to implement the district’s reform efforts based on their past performance on state standardized tests. A unique condition that sets the selected school apart from the other Endeavor schools is that leadership at the site remained consistent throughout the course of the implementation of the Endeavor reforms. As discussed in the previous chapter, leadership is a critical element to turnaround success and positive teacher experiences. As such, interviews were used to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators, with a focus on the impacts of leadership behaviors on turnaround experiences. Given that this unique condition sets the selected school apart from other Endeavor schools, the selection of the site is consistent with sampling a politically important case. Patton (2002) describes this as “trying to increase the usefulness and relevance of information where resources [or conditions] permit the study of only a limited number of cases” (p. 241).
In selecting study participants, purposive sampling strategies were used (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Patton, 2002). The researcher selected informants that were likely to provide information needed to address the third research question. Elements of criterion sampling were also used (Creswell, 2007). In order to gain a better understanding of experiences with the reform efforts, it was necessary to speak with informants who had time to “live” the reforms. Selecting an informant who had spent only a few months at the school would unlikely produce the rich descriptions that the study sought to produce. Therefore, selected participants needed to have met the criteria of having at least a school year’s worth of experience with the turnaround reforms.

Within the site, multiple groups of individuals with different roles and experiences exist, which supports the use of stratified purposive sampling (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) argues that stratified purposive sampling allows researchers to “capture major variations rather than to identify a common core…each strata constitutes a fairly homogenous sample” (p. 240). Since the study sought to examine the experiences of these individuals in depth, a limited number of informants were selected in an attempt to produce “information richness” (Patton, 2002, p. 144). Eight to teachers and two administrators were selected to participate in the study. Table 3 further details the sampling methods used in the study.
Table 3

*Sampling Profile for Broadview Elementary School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Individuals Included</th>
<th>Number Sampled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Support, non-classroom teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Coaches, Intervention Teachers, Special Education Teachers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialists (i.e. Art, PE, Music…)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

Study data was collected using two primary methods—interviews and document analysis. Merriam (1998) states that three methods (interviews, document analysis, and observation) are predominant in the field of qualitative research, but rarely are they used equally throughout a study. Generally, it is necessary for researchers to rely on one particular method more heavily as it produces data necessary to address the research questions. To that end, document analysis produced the data necessary to address the second research question. In-depth interviewing was used to produce the data necessary to address the third research question, and both approaches informed the results surrounding the first research question. Each method is explained in greater detail in the sections to follow.
In-depth Interviewing

Given that the third research question focuses on understanding the experiences of teachers and administrators involved in turnaround efforts, interviews were a suitable means to obtain this type of information (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Seidman, 2006; Stake, 1995). Seidman (2006) argues that since language has meaning communicated through words, interviews allow researchers to gain access to a level of understanding of participant experience that is not readily observable through analyzing the outward behavior of participants (p. 19).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Seidman, 2006) were conducted with each participant within the respective informant groups. An interview guide (Appendix A) was used to direct the course of the interview. Yin (2011) argues that interview guides are useful in the research process as they allow researchers to devote “more attention to those actions and verbatim words that appear to be related to…research questions” (p. 159). At times, participants provided information that was not directly related to an interview question. However, the response was still be recorded as this information may have been potentially useful in providing context around the study’s emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 2006; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011).

Each participant was interviewed once for approximately one hour. Interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. Interview participants were notified that audio-recordings and transcripts of interviews were securely stored on a password-protected external hard-drive and would be destroyed once data analysis was
completed. Additionally, participants were provided a copy of interview transcripts. This information was shared with respondents prior to the interview during the informed consent process. Participants were allowed to select the setting and interviews were scheduled at times that were mutually agreed upon by the researcher and the informant. Choice regarding location and time of the interview was provided to informants in an effort to alleviate concerns regarding the positional power of the researcher (Seidman, 2006).

During the course of the interview, open-ended questions were used. If interview participants produced responses that the interviewer deemed as needing elaboration, the researcher utilized follow-up questions such as “Tell me more…”, “I’d like to hear more about that…”, or “Recreate that experience for me…”. Such questions allowed the researcher the ability to explore the experiences of the interview participant, avoiding the sense that the interviewer was “probing”. Overall, the goal during the interviews was to create a balanced, respectful relationship between the interviewer and the respondent (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, if informants indicated that they are uncomfortable responding to a question or providing additional information, this limit was respected. Interview participants were not compensated monetarily, as this violates the school district’s guidelines for conducting research. However, it was anticipated that informants would gain non-material benefits through the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, potentially identifying areas to further their own professional growth.
**Document Review**

An additional source of data included the collection and analysis of documents. Documents were examined in order to further understand the Endeavor turnaround theory of action and develop a comparative profile of the Endeavor schools. The construction of the data profiles was a necessary component in identifying factors that set Broadview apart from the other Endeavor schools and justified its selection as a single case to study. Such documents included the school’s improvement plan, available meeting minutes posted on the school’s website, data from the state-directed “Teacher Working Conditions Survey”, student achievement data from Broadview’s state-created “School Report Card”, and evaluation and implementation reports from the district.

**Data Analysis**

Inductive analysis techniques were used to analyze data obtained through the study. Seidman (2006) argues that with many qualitative approaches, “the researcher cannot address the material with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory developed in another context to which he or she wishes to match the data” (p. 117). While inductive analysis techniques allowed significant themes to emerge, Seidman (2006) argues that researchers will approach their work having already had significant experiences and knowledge that will affect their interpretation of data. As such, the researcher must be aware of personal paradigms and potential biases that may affect analysis efforts.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the act of data analysis as a process that occurs throughout the course of a study. As data collection activities proceed, data reduction occurs
as the researcher refines collection techniques and begins to identify initial themes. Such a process was used in this study as data collection and analysis activities occurred simultaneously in an effort to reduce data and develop strength around emerging themes. Although Seidman (2006) argues that analysis should occur later as a separate process in an effort to avoid preliminary conclusions, Miles and Huberman (1994) and Yin (2011) argue that analysis activities should occur much earlier in an effort to further refine, strengthen, and focus data collection activities. Analysis techniques for interview data and documents are discussed below.

**Analysis of Interview Data**

As interviews were conducted, data memos were created in an effort to record the researcher’s initial impressions and identify potential significant areas of the interview that needed additional attention as analysis proceeded (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that data memos “serve a clustering function; they pull together incidents that appear to have commonalities…” (p. 74). Since transcription of interview data occurred after the interview and at times, several days passed between an interview and the transcription of the interview’s content, these memos helped prevent the researcher from losing track of initial impressions. Additionally, since initial impressions of the researcher were recorded, data memos helped the researcher remain aware of areas where the researcher’s bias potentially interfered with analysis activities.

Once interview content was transcribed verbatim, each interview transcript was read once to gather an initial impression from the interview. Interview transcripts were then read a
second time, line-by-line, to identify important terms or phrases used by respondents. This process of “in vivo” coding allows researchers to immerse themselves in the words of their informants and describe experiences or themes from the perspective of the informant (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 2006). It has also been argued that such an approach allows researchers to prioritize the voice of the participant over the analytical conclusions of the researcher (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). In discussing in vivo coding, Seidman (2006) further argues:

The reason an interviewer spends so much time talking to participants is to find out what their experience is and the meaning they make of it…and make connections among the experiences of people who share the same structure. (p. 128)

The use of in vivo coding as an analysis technique for interview material aided in the development of categories and themes that were close to the actual experiences of participants (King, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 2006). Although in vivo coding is generally associated with other methodological approaches such as grounded theory, it was used in this study to aid the researcher in developing categories that were used in later stages of inferential coding. As such, special attention was given to particular codes that occurred more frequently within or across individuals’ responses (King, 2009). This aided the researcher generating emergent themes throughout the course of data analysis.

After in vivo coding, transcripts were reviewed again and coded inferentially. Initial coding provided the researcher a level of familiarity that helped with the emergence of inferential codes (Richards, 2009). In the inferential coding process, coding occurred with
chunks of data as key themes or ideas emerged. As thematic codes emerged, patterns were sought, particularly as data from an increasing amount of individuals was analyzed (LeCompte, 2000). Citing Glaser and Strauss, Russell (2010) argues that the use of “the constant comparative method involves searching for similarities and differences by making systematic comparisons across units of data” (p. 58). This method was used as the researcher analyzed interview data within and across the different respondent groups. As analysis continued, codes were refined or “qualified” in order to more accurately label the significance of a particular concept or event. In this process, the researcher is “generalizing and specifying: getting more explanatory power, while better defining the parameters within which that explanation will hold” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 71). Coding at this level continued until saturation occurred and no further themes were identified (Russell, 2010).

**Analysis of Documents**

Documents were analyzed with techniques appropriate to address the particular research questions. In regards to the first research question focusing on the theory of action of the Endeavor program, coding of selected documents was characterized by the inferential process of analyzing the content and identifying themes that emerged based on the researcher’s knowledge of the topic and prior immersion in other sources of data (Frankel & Wallen, 2003; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Russell, 2010). Documents analyzed in this manner included the School Improvement Plan, the district’s initial evaluation reports, and minutes from meetings that occurred at the Broadview.
To address the second research question (which seeks to identify the unique characteristics that set the research site apart from other Endeavor schools), documents were analyzed in order to identify performance metrics and school demographic data across the Endeavor cohort. The researcher reviewed documents including the N.C. School Report Card, the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, and district reports in order to identify these particular data points. During this stage of analysis, relatively little text was analyzed. As such, in-vivo and inferential coding was not used in this stage of analysis.

**Limitations of the Study**

Although actions of trustworthiness were built into the study, limitations are present. A general critique of qualitative research is that it has limited generalizability to other contexts. However, as identified earlier, the purpose of this study was not to create generalizations that could be applied to all school sites undergoing turnaround reforms. Rather, this study sought to explore the experiences of different groups of individuals in the school environment as they participate in turnaround efforts at one point in time. Flyvgberg (2006) argues that what case studies lack in generalizability, they make up for in their ability to develop a deeper understanding of one particular context, which can have significant importance in human learning. Seidman (2006) also remarks that qualitative research methods, such as interviewing, “go to such depth…that surface considerations of representativeness and generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of an individual’s experience” (p. 51).
Another limitation with this study is that it was hard for me as a researcher to completely ignore my role as an administrator as it affects my understanding of teachers, their experiences, and organizational change in schools. This understanding has been further enhanced by my own experience of being a turnaround leader in a different school within the district where the study occurred. For this reason, the research was conducted at a site at which I had no supervisory responsibilities. Additionally, I kept a research journal while the study was conducted. In this journal, I reflected and monitored my impressions as I collected data, created memos, and transcribed interview data. Member checking processes embedded in the study also assisted in limiting my own biases from interfering with my understanding of the data. Particular attention was given to the initial impressions and themes that ran contradictory to the researcher’s own experiences in an effort to limit bias. Despite these attempts, I must be upfront that the knowledge that I gained through this process helped me grow as a school leader.

The study also has inherent structural limitations. Although a few schools were selected to participate in the Endeavor turnaround, only one site was selected for study. Extending the research to other Endeavor schools could have potentially produced additional data that could have refuted or magnified emergent themes. However, given that the purpose of the study was to focus on exploring the experiences of particular stakeholder groups, limiting the study to one site is justifiable at this point. Furthermore, only teachers, administrators, and instructional support staff who have experienced the reforms for at least one school year were included in the sample. Expanding the sample to teachers new to the
school could have produced additional insights into the cultural norms of the school. Finally, the study is limited structurally in the number of informants from each stakeholder group. Expanding the number of informants within each stakeholder group could also have produced additional insights. However, since the study sought to produce “rich, thick” descriptions of experiences, limiting the number of respondents kept the data production and analysis tasks manageable within the parameters of the study and the researcher’s resources and abilities.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has detailed the qualitative research methodology that was utilized in a study to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators in a school where unique conditions existed and significant turnaround efforts were implemented. A three-phase case study design was utilized to develop more comprehensive understanding of the theory of action of the turnaround reform, identify the unique characteristics that set the selected school apart from others in the reform effort, and to explore more deeply the experiences of teachers and administrators involved in the reform effort. As individual experience was a critical element examined through the study, interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding from the perspective of those involved. Document analysis was also utilized to develop a greater understanding of the theory of action for the turnaround and to develop a profile of the schools that illustrated unique different performance metrics and demographic data points. Inferential analysis techniques, including thematic coding, helped the researcher identify themes that ran across different data sources and cases. It is anticipated that the study
meets benchmarks associated with trustworthiness in qualitative research through the use of multiple data sources, prolonged study, and a replicable research design. While limitations are present (most notably in the inability of the study to produce broader generalizations about school reform), the study is anticipated to produce a rich, thick account of the experiences of teachers and administrators within one school as they experience a school turnaround. It is desired that the understandings gained will help the researcher to identify directions for future research and produce a more detailed understanding of school turnaround processes. The following chapter will present the data produced throughout each stage of the case study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore how teachers and administrators at one selected site experienced reforms associated with the Endeavor turnaround program in the Broward County School District. Three research questions guided the case study in order to further explore teacher and administrator experience at the selected Endeavor turnaround school. The researcher collected data over the course of seven months through in-person interviews with selected educators and a review of secondary sources.

Interview data was transcribed and analyzed through the assignment of in-vivo codes study informants used to describe their experiences. Interview transcripts were then reviewed further and inferential codes were assigned to significant pieces of information found within the transcripts. Secondary data sources were analyzed and significant information was assigned an inferential code. Analysis activities occurred in tandem with data collection over the course of the research, and previously analyzed data was reviewed frequently as new insights emerged.

Ten individuals representing several different school roles and responsibilities participated in interviews. Interviews were conducted using an interview guide with questions focused on participant experience. Table Four further describes the characteristics of educators who participated in the study.
Table 4

Selected Teachers and Administrators at Broadview Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Tenure in the Endeavor Program</th>
<th>Other Organizational Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Instructional Coach</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Mentor Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanche</td>
<td>Intervention Teacher</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Mentor Teacher, Department Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Mentor Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
<td>Lead Teacher/Instructional Coach</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>School Improvement Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>Elective Teacher</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Beginning Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Beginning Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsten</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Grade Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charmaine</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freda</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>3 years, 1 month*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Three years represents the entire tenure of the Endeavor program. Freda, the principal, began her duties prior to the start of the first school year, but left Broadview before the program concluded.

Broadview is a four-track year-round elementary school located on the southeastern side of the district’s major urban area. Broadview opened as a new school in July 2007. It shares its campus with a community center, and its construction is unique for the district in that is a two-story build with a U-shaped design, whereas most elementary schools in the district are single story complexes encompassing one or two main buildings.

Visitors enter the school through a main door where they must buzz the office to enter the building. When one enters, they are greeted by a clean, bright environment and an open,
long corridor. Banners emphasizing different character traits hang from the ceiling every hundred or so feet until one reaches the end of the main hallway. A display case located immediately to the left of the entrance, showcases artifacts representing accomplishments of the school, such as newspaper clippings, student photographs, and student projects and artwork. The media center and cafeteria are located along this main corridor, and core classrooms are located off on the sides of the “U” shape.

Since its opening, the student population of Broadview has been majority-minority. The school has also been designated a Title 1 school due to a high proportion of students attending the school who receive free and reduced lunch since opening. In the second year of the Endeavor turnaround, Broadview was designated by the district’s student assignment department as an “overflow” school for Biscayne Elementary, nearby high-poverty, majority-minority traditional calendar elementary school. Once this measure was put in place, any new students that were to enroll at Biscayne as their base school were then required to enroll at Broadview. Many Broadview staff members expressed that this posed significant challenges since the calendar types did not match and Broadview’s students were generally three to nine weeks ahead of traditional calendar elementary schools with the district’s instructional pacing. Consequently, many Broadview staff members expressed that the students who were assigned to Broadview as “overflow” often had significant gaps in their learning and required additional remediation.

Throughout this chapter, findings will be presented which encompass areas such as teacher experience, including but not limited to the number of years of experience. As such,
it will be helpful to understand how the staffing demographics of Broadview changed throughout the course of the Endeavor program and how they related to other schools in the Broward County School District. Table Five presents a summary of this information below.

Table 5

*Staffing Characteristics of Broadview Elementary Compared to Broward County Averages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staffing Characteristic</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of classroom teachers</td>
<td>65 (48)</td>
<td>55 (49)</td>
<td>63 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of teachers with advanced degrees (Masters or higher)</td>
<td>25% (34%)</td>
<td>29% (35%)</td>
<td>22% (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of National Board Certified Teachers</td>
<td>7 (9)</td>
<td>5 (8)</td>
<td>6 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 0-3 years</td>
<td>46% (17%)</td>
<td>42% (18%)</td>
<td>22% (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 4-10 years</td>
<td>26% (36%)</td>
<td>22% (34%)</td>
<td>40% (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 10+ years</td>
<td>28% (47%)</td>
<td>36% (48%)</td>
<td>38% (45%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter will present findings related to the following three research questions that guided the case:

- **Research Question 1**: What is the established theory of action behind the Endeavor turnaround reforms?
- **Research Question 2**: What factors set the selected school apart from other Endeavor schools?
- **Research Question 3**: How do the unique factors at the selected site impact teacher and administrator experience of the Endeavor turnaround effort?
This chapter will conclude with the presentation of key themes that highlight teacher and administrator experience at the selected Endeavor turnaround school. Throughout the chapter, findings will be presented utilizing pseudonyms to protect the identity of the school district, the school, and the teachers examined in the case. The Broward County school district represents a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States, and Broadview Elementary is one of the schools located on the southeastern side of the district’s largest city.

**Research Question #1: The Endeavor Turnaround Theory of Action**

As interviews began, teachers and administrators were asked to share what they understood to be the purpose of the “Endeavor” turnaround program. The word cloud below highlights key ideas educators associated with the program.

*Figure 3. Key Endeavor Turnaround Pillars Word Cloud*

*Figure 3.* The word cloud highlights key words teachers and administrators associated with the purpose of the Endeavor program, as phrases that are repeated often between informants increase in size. As illustrated in the figure, “improving student achievement”, “fresh start”, “low performing”, “new staff”, and “technology” were predominant ideas shared by teachers and administrators when they were asked to share their understanding of the purpose of the Endeavor program.
As illustrated Figure Three, staff overwhelmingly identified improving student achievement as a central goal of the Endeavor turnaround program. Underlying this goal was the labeling of the school as “low performing” in comparison to others in the district by teachers and administrators in the study. When asked to further describe the turnaround efforts underway at the school, staff mentioned the following: re-staffing with “quality” teachers, increased resources (which included additional teachers to support class size reductions and significant infusions of technology), and increased professional development through supports such as instructional coaches and face-to-face professional development in research-based best practices and principles of behavior management.

Figure Three clearly illustrates that technology was considered by teachers and administrators to be a significant part of the additional resources that came with the Endeavor turnaround program. Such resources included SmartBoards and document cameras for every classroom, interactive projectors, additional laptops for teachers, and iPods for every student. Sophia, a classroom teacher, mentioned that “the first thing we received was the technology. The first week we moved in, people were in here day in and day out, giving us everything. I mean everything. A lot of money created a lot of resources.”

Teachers also associated the turnaround efforts as an opportunity to have a “fresh start.” Several teachers remarked that they sought to be a part of the Endeavor program because they were looking for a challenge and wanted to be part of something new and innovative. Mel, another classroom teacher, shared “I was eager to have that opportunity. I thought it would be a cool idea to start a school and do everything over again.” Miles, the
lead teacher, also echoed the desire to be a part of something innovative. He commented that he saw it as “the opportunity to make a difference. Knowing that the school was in basically, turmoil, and my knowledge and expertise…[could] make a change. It makes me want to work harder, and drives me to put more into it.”

As the turnaround effort was initiated, the district put a significant focus on the “quality” teachers pillar. New administrators were selected for all but one of the schools, and all existing staff members were required to re-apply for their position if they desired to remain at the school. The district instituted recruitment and performance bonuses at the schools in the Endeavor cohort in an effort to attract “top” talent. A report issued by the district indicated that over the course of the three-year program, the district issued over $2.4 million in signing and performance bonuses. District documents indicate that any certified staff member joining one of the schools was eligible for a signing bonus if they were selected as a result of the interview process using a “highly-defined rubric”.

Bonus allotments for each instructional position were created based upon the amount of growth an individual made in their annual performance evaluation and value-added growth indicators based upon a teacher’s individual performance. If a teacher was in a position where value-added student achievement measures were not calculated (such as lower elementary or electives), then the student achievement portion of their bonus was calculated based upon a school-wide growth factor.

Although the district marketed the signing and performance bonuses, no teachers participating in the study indicated that the bonuses were a significant factor that compelled
them to join the staff. Rather, nearly all staff members communicated that they sought the opportunity because they had a strong desire to work with the population, a sentiment shared by many and expressed well by Blanche: “I love these kids…this is the kind of kid I’ve always taught and wanted to teach…that makes me feel rewarded because I can love them, and they love me back.”

At the end of the first year of the Endeavor program, the district completed an initial program evaluation. The evaluation report detailed some of the reform efforts undertaken as part of the turnaround, and explored some of the teacher and administrator reactions to the different Endeavor reform components. This study also found that the bonus plan was not a major component attracting staff to Broadview nor was it an incentive for them to perform even better. Additionally, the report also highlighted a need for better coordination between the central office and school leaders, and more training opportunities for staff going forward. The evaluation report was analyzed as a secondary source of data. As with the interview data, it will remain confidential and not be directly cited in an effort to protect the identity of the school and the study participants.

A written plan detailing the turnaround effort was difficult to locate, as both the principal and assistant principal shared that they never saw a formalized plan on paper. Although different components existed (such as the interview rubrics and the bonus plan), it appears as if most of the knowledge was kept within central services administrators. This became problematic as the Endeavor program progressed in the district. Miles expressed, “The problem I think that we’ve had overall is that when they developed the model, and we
were finished with the program, the people that were originally in charge were no longer there.” Charmaine, the assistant principal, explained further:

the changes weren’t clearly defined, and then you had someone leave [referring to central leadership], who in my mind was the holder of the knowledge and the vision, then they left, so it was hard for someone else to come in and carry that vision out when it wasn’t articulated.

Freda, the principal, voiced her concerns with the lack of a clear plan in the following statement: “It [the program] just kept getting passed from one person to the next. I got vocal because we needed some answers and we needed stability.”

Although teachers and administrators could identify key program pillars, such as technology and class size reductions, and available documents point to district efforts to recruit and retain high-quality teachers through additional compensation, the Endeavor program lacked a clear theory of action to guide efforts within the schools. As a result, teachers and administrators were left with many questions regarding program specifics and how particular elements were to be implemented in a way to lead to improved student outcomes.

**Research Question #2: What Sets Broadview Elementary Apart from the Other Endeavor Schools?**

Within the Broward County School District, four elementary schools were chosen to be a part of the Endeavor program based upon their performance on state standardized testing in the 2009-2010 school year. Tables Five, Six, Seven, and Eight present an overview of key
indicators that encompass factors such as the organizational structure of the school, the school climate, teacher turnover, and academic performance.

Table 6

Organizational Profiles of Endeavor Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Winston Park</th>
<th>Chapel Trail</th>
<th>Bennett</th>
<th>Broadview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade-Span</strong></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Calendar Type</strong></td>
<td>Year-Round</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Year-Round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Magnet Status</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnaround Principal Tenure</strong></td>
<td>24 mos.</td>
<td>28 mos.</td>
<td>21 mos.</td>
<td>37 mos.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table Six, all of the schools in the Endeavor cohort are elementary schools. However, beyond that, there are differentiating characteristics, including the type of instructional calendar and whether or not the school has magnet status. As indicated above, one major differentiating characteristic for Broadview is the tenure of the original turnaround principal. All of the initial turnaround principals started at the same time in the Spring of 2011, however, they all transitioned out of the turnaround principalship at different points, with the Broadview principal being in the role the longest compared to the other original Endeavor principals.

Tables Seven, Eight, and Nine present an overview of major performance indicators for the schools in the Endeavor cohort over the course of the program. Academic performance indicators include the reading and math composite scores on state standardized tests.
testing and the number of federal Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) each school attained. Organizational performance metrics presented below include the teacher turnover rate, as defined by the state (from March of one year to March of the next), the percent of beginning teachers (those that possess 0-3 years of complete experience, as defined by the state) as total staff, and results from a key question used by the district to gauge a school’s cultural conditions and teacher perceptions, as measured by the state’s biannual Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWC).

Table 7

Performance of Endeavor Schools in Year 1, 2011-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1: 2011-2012</th>
<th>Winston Park</th>
<th>Chapel Trail</th>
<th>Bennett</th>
<th>Broadview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading/Math Composite (percentage)</td>
<td>56.1/68.2</td>
<td>53.3/67.4</td>
<td>59.8/79.3</td>
<td>63.3/81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMO Targets Met</td>
<td>23/29</td>
<td>24/27</td>
<td>20/21</td>
<td>25/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover Rate</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Beginning Teachers</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWC: “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.”</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. As illustrated in Table 7, the performance composite for all Endeavor schools dropped significantly from Year 1. Year 2 represented the first year of the state’s Common Core implementation, and performance dropped at all schools across the state. Additionally, the TWC is a bi-annual state survey, and therefore, was not administered in 2012-2013.
Table 8

*Performance of Endeavor Schools in Year 2, 2012-2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 2: 2012-2013</th>
<th>Winston Park</th>
<th>Chapel Trail</th>
<th>Bennett</th>
<th>Broadview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading/Math Composite</strong></td>
<td>32.0/38.8</td>
<td>33.7/35.8</td>
<td>28.6/30.8</td>
<td>32.3/33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnover Rate</strong></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent BTs as total staff</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWC:</strong> “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMO Targets Met</strong></td>
<td>26/29</td>
<td>25/29</td>
<td>23/25</td>
<td>22/25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

*Performance of Endeavor Schools in Year 3, 2013-2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3: 2013-2014</th>
<th>Winston Park</th>
<th>Chapel Trail</th>
<th>Bennett</th>
<th>Broadview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading/Math Composite</strong></td>
<td>43.6/43/6</td>
<td>31.2/42.3</td>
<td>44.3/48.9</td>
<td>39.3/42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnover Rate</strong></td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent BTs as total staff</strong></td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWC:</strong> “Overall my school is a good place to work and learn.”</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMO Targets Met</strong></td>
<td>26/36</td>
<td>23/33</td>
<td>19/27</td>
<td>22/31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated in Table Seven, Broadview had the strongest academic performance in the first year of the program, compared to other schools in the Endeavor cohort. Several teachers referred to this strong performance in the interviews. As Stan expressed, “Yeah, the first year, it was awesome, the growth was awesome. But, towards the end of the Endeavor model, it was back to where it started.” Although a decline in performance is evident, it is also important to understand that during the course of the Endeavor program the Common Core curriculum was implemented and new assessments were adopted. Consequently, the scores of all schools in the state dropped in the 2012-2013 school year.

Although the performance of all schools dropped at this time, it can be noted from the figures above that the relative performance of Broadview, as compared to other schools in the Endeavor cohort, declined. During the first year of the program, Broadview demonstrated the highest academic performance, as indicated by the number of AMO targets met and the Reading and Math performance composites. However, as the program progressed, the performance of Broadview fell in line with other schools in the Endeavor cohort.

Tables Seven, Eight, and Nine illustrate that the schools maintained other performance indicators at a relatively consistent level, such as the percent of beginning teachers as total staff, the teacher turnover rate, and the TWC indicator of “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.” Although the teacher turnover rate remained relatively consistent with that of other Endeavor schools, several staff members described the negative impact of teacher turnover at the school. Mel elaborated, “I got to witness, firsthand,
how the turnover rate has affected us. Even after the first year, we lost so many teachers, and those teachers were quality teachers…they would just leave in the middle of the year.”

A key theme of the literature around school turnaround is that strong leadership is a condition present in nearly all successful school turnarounds. Given that the leadership of Broadview was the most consistent during the entirety of the Endeavor program, Broadview became an appropriate site to “dig deeper” and explore the impact of school leadership in establishing the vision and creating the conditions necessary for a successful school turnaround. However, Broadview also presents other unique features that set it apart from the other schools, which includes a shift from the strongest academic performance in year one of the program to performance that is consistent with, or even lower than, other schools in the cohort by the time the program concluded.

Although other data points are in line with other schools in the cohort, Broadview presents an opportunity to identify why its teachers felt that teacher turnover was a key barrier that prevented the school from moving forward. As such, unique factors associated with Broadview set it apart from others in the cohort and justify its selection as a single case to explore in order to better understand teacher and administrator experience in this particular turnaround program. The next section will further explore the experiences of Broadview teachers and administrators in relationship to some of the school’s unique conditions discussed above.
Research Question #3: How do the Unique Conditions at Broadview Elementary Impact Teacher and Administrator Experience?

Within this section, key themes associated with the experiences of teachers and administrators at Broadview will be presented. The themes contained within this section were identified as a result of in vivo and inferential coding of interview data collected across a seven month time span at Broadview. Ten individuals representing various roles within Broadview were interviewed in an effort to develop a rich pool of data to develop emergent themes. Utilizing the constant-comparative method of data analysis, emergent themes were continually checked as additional data was collected and analyzed.

Theme 1: Passion and Commitment Provide a Jump Start, but Challenges Stall Turnaround Efforts

As the Endeavor program began, all staff indicated that they possessed a strong desire to make a difference with students in a high poverty school, and as a result, they had a high level of commitment to the key program goal of improving student achievement. Teachers expressed that they enjoyed being a “part of something new” and that they were seeking a challenge as they entered Broadview. As the program started, several teachers described a strong sense of energy and enthusiasm among staff and students. However, as time passed, staff described how the energy dissipated as the school faced several challenges, which most notably included high rates of teacher-turnover, unfulfilled promises, and unanticipated challenges. Rose explained, “…but as a whole, what was promised, did not quite happen the way they said it was going to happen. I think that was a little discouraging, but you know, it
what it is, and you just keep going.” Regarding teacher turnover, Blanche reflected, “I’ve got to get to know that teacher, I’ve got to figure out what kind of style they have, and I’ve got to figure out where they need support. So, every year, in my mind, I’m having to recreate everything I’ve already done.”

As part of the turnaround efforts, expectations were established of teachers, which included increased accountability, constant data analysis, collaboration with colleagues, and building strong relationships with students. Although there were similarities noted to other schools where staff previously worked, several teachers shared that the expectation levels were higher at Broadview, which resulted in a lot of pressure. Teachers and administrators shared that expectations changed often, which resulted in some teachers feeling “overwhelmed” and “emotionally strained.” Mel shared, “You do more work. Even if it’s not more paperwork, it’s more of an emotional strain.” Several teachers also mentioned that there was an increased workload, citing examples that included increased accountability, more paperwork, and numerous meetings. Regarding increased workload, Blanche explained:

…there was a lot of work, a lot of meetings, a lot more paperwork, a lot more data, a lot more that we had to do. There was some extra compensation, but it really wasn’t worth it. You weren’t doing it for the money, that was for sure.

Some staff shared that there were significant capacity issues at Broadview due to a high proportion of beginning teachers and a high teacher turnover rate. As a result, some educators shared that as the reform efforts progressed, the expectations of the staff lowered, as there was an absence of qualified candidates to fill open teaching positions at the school.
Regarding difficulties with hiring suitable candidates as time progressed, Freda reflected, “I remember how exciting the initial hiring was, but we couldn’t find those people anymore. They just weren’t coming to the state. There was no way we could replace the people we were losing.” Discussing teacher turnover, Sophia shared that turnover could also be attributed to internal conditions in the school:

…these teachers are going to other schools in the district, so that leads me to believe that [low pay] can’t be the problem…this is not a place for everybody, and some of them quickly learned that, while it took longer for others.

Further describing conditions at the school, Mel explained:

We’re the only school of our type in the area—we’re an overflow school, and we have a program in place to try to improve data. We wanted smaller class sizes, and we got the same. We wanted quality teachers, and we got them, but there was nothing in place to keep them…. it’s just the overwhelming question, ‘Why do you want to come here?’ I guess, we got signing bonuses, but I guess that wasn’t enough…there has to be some sort of incentive to make teachers want to come here. And, not just teachers, but quality, experienced teachers. I think that is huge for us…

While Broadview’s turnover rate was comparable to other Endeavor schools, teachers and administrators were well aware of the impacts that the turnover created, particularly as the candidate pool shrank within the district and state.

Although student achievement improved after the first year, several teachers described how resources seemed to “dry up” after initial successes, which in turn, created
sustainability challenges that had a negative impact on teacher morale. When speaking of support from the district, teachers shared that they were not as aware of the supports offered. Teachers expressed that from their perspective, the district could have done more in regards to establishing and communicating a clear plan for the turnaround efforts. Teachers also noted that the level of district support decreased dramatically after the first year, as resources disappeared and visibility of district staff decreased. Stan explained:

> In the beginning…the Superintendent was there all the time. You always had people coming in and doing speeches, and things like that. But, after that, it was kind of nonexistent…whether it was through the professional development or support from the district, everything just kind of fell off after that first year.

Although teachers acknowledged that the district did initially provide a great deal of material resources, they expressed that support goes beyond money to include knowledge and a physical presence. Regarding the district’s walkthrough observations, Sophia reflected, “Well, I guess that wasn’t support, it was just giving feedback. It was a way to fix the problem that they saw.” Miles provided additional elaboration on this point:

> I think the district wanted to support the program…but it takes more than money to run a program—it takes bodies and knowledge…it would have been nice to see them in the building more often…it’s seeing the physical presence, and actually doing a walkthrough with us and sitting down to go through the data…give us suggestions on how we can make it better or take it to the next step.
To that end, coaches and instructional support teachers expressed that there were several changes to the district leadership of the program, which created conditions where new district staff came on board and lacked a context of where turnaround efforts had focused previously and the unique conditions each school faced.

As expected, significant turnaround efforts at the school level often pose some challenges, and the experiences of teachers in this study illustrate some of those challenges. Several teachers shared how staff turnover was a significant challenge, as it often resulted in instability for grade-level or departmental teams and for the students. Stan offered an example of how frequently turnover occurred at the school, explaining that “…a long-term sub got in her car and just never came back. Then, we had another teacher come in, and that happened like five times that I was there. People just quit—they just walked out. I’ve never seen that before.”

Teachers also vocalized that they sometimes felt that “things came down”, which affected staff investment in different reform efforts. Some teachers expressed that at times, they felt that the turnaround efforts could have been more successful if teachers were given more of a voice in deciding what reforms the school needed and how they would be implemented. At times, teachers indicated that it seemed as if the turnaround efforts were being implemented without a plan, or put into place at too fast of a pace. Mel stated, “It was like, ‘Ready, go!’ It felt like everything was all of the sudden, we had this money, and let’s hurry up and spend it real quick.”
Such statements indicate that although teachers may have had a general understanding of the overall goal of the turnaround efforts, they needed a more comprehensive understanding of how all of the key levers were to work together to facilitate academic improvement. Some of the instructional coaches attributed this “lack of a plan” sentiment to the fact that there was district turnover in the leadership of the turnaround effort as different leaders entered at different points in time and their knowledge and expectations were inconsistent with what the school had experienced previously. Regarding leadership changes within the district, Freda commented, “the former superintendent left me alone and let me do what I needed to. I said I needed someone to trust me enough to trust my teachers. He agreed with me, said do it, and walked out the door.”

All teachers and administrators agreed that Broadview did make progress in regards to achievement gains in the first year of the turnaround effort, but after that, things seemed to “take a step backwards.” Miles reflected, “but as the years have gone on, support has declined, from not having bonuses, not having consistency in central services, not having the materials or the equipment…our scores have actually declined.” When asked to describe why they felt that the school regressed after the first year, teachers often cited many of the challenges that were mentioned above, but also added that some district decisions affected the school in a negative manner.

All teachers and administrators expressed that while small class sizes were one element of the turnaround effort, this did not turn out to be the case because the district made the school an overflow site for another school in the area. While teachers did not shy away
from their responsibilities in growing students academically, they mentioned that this was challenging because the students coming from the other school were on a different instructional calendar, which meant that they entered the school often having missed over an academic quarter of instruction.

Although passion and commitment were initially high, it waned quickly as challenges arose. Staff expressed that they often felt they lacked a voice in “imposed” reform and that factors such as un-kept promises, implementation challenges, and lack-luster district support led to a decline in cultural conditions in the school, which in turn, resulted in increased teacher turnover and organizational instability.

**Theme 2: Working Harder vs. Working Smarter—Numerous Priorities and Incoherent Plans Lead to Unfocused Efforts**

Although teachers and administrators readily identified improving student achievement as the primary goal of the Endeavor reforms at Broadview, they frequently shared that efforts often seemed numerous and ill planned. Accordingly, teachers and administrators expressed that they felt these constraints hindered the school’s efforts to work efficiently and effectively towards moving improving student achievement.

Teachers and administrators in the study commented that expectations coming from both the district and the leadership of the school were at times unclear, which resulted in confusion and inconsistent implementation of reforms. Charmaine described the impact of this further:
I’ll be honest, in the beginning, I don’t think the expectations were as clear as they could have been. I mean from the district to building level, and from the building level to teachers. You know, it’s kind of hard to tell our staff what the expectations are when they haven’t been clearly defined for us, other than ‘You need to raise test scores.’ OK—what else, and how?

As Rose reflected, she expressed that she had some understanding that expectations were not as clear as they could have been, but she did not fault Broadview’s leadership. She explained that they “were doing the best they could”, and that they “had great intentions, but they did not necessarily think out all of the details”, which led to confusion at the school. Reflecting upon the expectations established as part of the Endeavor reforms, Stan commented that there were often “so many other factors involved” that were not necessarily originally considered, but ultimately impacted the success of the school. Such factors mentioned by teachers and administrators in the study included transitions in district leadership, transitions to the Common Core curriculum, changes in the state educational policy landscape, and student assignment patterns in the district.

Further discussing the concept of unclear expectations, teachers and administrators also described that at times it appeared as if the Endeavor program was not clearly planned out from its inception. As a result, staff voiced concerns that they were often not given enough time to process different reforms and implement them as intended. Mel expressed that there was a significant portion of professional development put into place throughout the turnaround, but he was unsure if it was always relevant to his needs as a professional or those
of the school. He commented that his understanding of the rationale for professional
development provided was that “because you are an Endeavor school, you get different
professional development.”

As evidenced in his remarks, Mel was unable to link professional development
opportunities at Broadview to specific school goals or needs. Reflecting upon all of her
career experiences and comparing them to her Endeavor experience, Dorothy elaborated that
change is “…a process, and you need to go slow to implement it. I think everything just takes
time, and we don’t necessarily give people time to assimilate it.” Regarding the pace of
implementing change, she further explained:

…you can’t just take someone and say to them, ‘There you go.’ You have to show
them, just like we model for kids what we want, you have to do it together with
teachers, then expect them to do it on their own.

While there were numerous reforms that were associated with the program, teachers and
administrators articulated that the likelihood of success would have increased had teachers
been given more time to process and implement measures continuously.

Exploring the planning process further, some staff articulated that they felt that the
program would have been more effective if school staff were brought into the planning
process and there was greater transparency in planning and decision making at both the
school and district levels. Miles best expressed this sentiment, commenting:

…if we could have been part of the planning process from day one, I think we could
have done a fabulous job. I mean I think we did a good job, but I think we could have
done so much more if we had been part of the whole planning process. If they [the district] would have listened to some of the folks that were in the schools or in those departments making those decisions, I think we would have had a better product at the end.

Regarding transparency, Blanche stated:

It was like this is the top…and there was no conversation with the staff….I don’t feel like the teacher’s voices were heard, as far as what can we do. Like, what do you need in your classroom to help you make the students be successful.

Notably, many teachers mentioned that there were unintended consequences that seemed to arise as a result of the reform efforts. When asked to give examples, teachers often cited difficulties with technology as one example. Teachers described that they often did not have enough training on how to use the technology in a meaningful way, or that there were issues with infrastructure, such as not having enough bandwidth in the building to support numerous devices. Teachers also mentioned that the technology did not seem sustainable, explaining that so many things were put in place all at once, but as items needed replacing or maintained, the school lacked the in-house funds to be able to do it.

When discussing unintended consequences further, some teachers also referenced the high number of beginning teachers, explaining that the district required the re-staffing mandate, but did not think of the capacity that would be needed at the school to support wide-scale re-staffing. Freda described this further, commenting. “We realized we hired so many new teachers, and then the evaluation system and guidelines changed, and it became
very daunting.” Teachers and administrators acknowledged that the unforeseen consequences all presented challenges, but that had school officials been given a greater voice in planning the turnaround efforts, some challenges unforeseen by the district may have been considered by the school prior to implementation and planned accordingly.

Autonomy can also be linked to the comments made regarding transparency and planning, as teachers shared that they felt that they were trusted as instructional professionals by school leaders, but that Broadview did not always have the ability to take its unique needs into consideration and plan accordingly, especially when it came to professional development or resources that the school was provided. Rose explained that “…if you asked for professional support, they would give it to you. But on a lot of things, it was just out of their hands, and there were other things that just got in the way.” Similar to Rose’s comment, Freda remarked, “They [the teachers] have to be able to go out there and do what they need to do—and it wasn’t me that was getting in their way—there were other factors.” Miles described that although there was a cohort of Endeavor schools in the district, they were often held to the same expectations as the non-Endeavor schools in the district. He explained further:

We were grouped with all the other schools, so this school had to look like all the other schools. We got the same e-mails, the same curriculum, the same materials, but they could have done things a little different because we’re not in the same mold as all of the other schools in the district.
Related to planning and expectations was the concept of priorities. Teachers shared that at times, they felt that either Broadview was focused on too many things at once, or that the school was focused on the wrong thing altogether. As she discussed the school’s focus on project-based learning, Kiersten explained “…as time went on, there was a huge focus on the way things looked, such as bulletin boards, over instruction in the classroom.”

Echoing a similar sentiment, Stan explained that the leadership of the school constantly encouraged him to enter contests, and that the leadership of the school was big on publicity. He went on to explain that, “It was more like things were about showy stuff, and not academics.” Sophia also shared that she felt that the school was “always out in the limelight for different programs”, but that she was excited for the program to end because the school was “…about to slim down our priorities, and get down and back to what’s most important, which is student achievement. Instead of doing lots of things to say we’re doing them, let’s just do three things really, really, well.”

With the brisk pace at which the turnaround reforms occurred, staff shared that it became difficult to know what strategies worked or which teachers were effective. Consequently, the school may have been too quick to abandon potentially successful elements that could have produced gains in achievement. As part of the re-staffing that occurred, both Dorothy and Kiersten reflected that they were not sure “if it was necessary to throw the baby out with the bathwater.” Dorothy (who had taught at the school prior to the turnaround) further explained: “we had some very fine teachers…we made great gains the
year before we became an Endeavor school.” In discussing the multitude of changes at the school, Kiersten expressed:

…it becomes difficult to truly understand what was wrong and needed to change if you throw everything out at once. By changing everything, how are you to ever truly figure out what was wrong. Was it the staff? The leadership? The curriculum? The schedule? Who knows when you change it all?

A common rhetoric heard in schools is that “we do what is best for students.” In reflecting upon the changes that occurred throughout the course of the program, Charmaine explained:

…you’re going to have to tweak some things a bit. And, if you are truly reflective and realizing that you want what is best for kids, you can’t get stuck in the same thing the same way, over and over again.

However, some staff attributed the changes Charmaine described in “doing what’s best for kids” with conditions that created turbulence and inconsistency, which potentially led to increased stresses and potential teacher turnover. Describing frequent shifts in structures or programs at the school, Rose stated that “…we’re just plucking along…nobody seems to stick with anything long enough to give it a chance to work.” Discussing scheduling and program changes at the school throughout the course of the turnaround effort, Sophia felt that decision making processes at the school seemed to be flawed— “In trying to please everybody, if they could not come to a consensus, instead of saying ‘Majority rule, and it’s ok for people to be upset”, they would just smash it.” She explained further:
…we’ve been going down and down, and I give most of the credit to a lack of consistency…if every year you have a new team, new schedule, and new program, how do you ever achieve consistency? That’s just vital to getting everybody on the same page so that we all work with fidelity towards a common goal.

As discussed above, numerous priorities at the school led staff to believe that efforts were uncoordinated and not always supportive of the goals of the turnaround effort. As such, Broadview teachers and administrators felt that this was one factor that decreased morale at the school and led to other rifts in the school’s culture.

**Theme 3: We Shall Overcome—Challenge Leads to Significant Professional and Personal Growth**

A third theme that emerged as teachers and administrators discussed their experiences with the Endeavor turnaround at Broadview was that the challenges faced led to significant professional and personal growth. Teachers and administrators shared that through the experience, their commitment to helping students in low-income communities has been reinforced. Additionally, teachers and administrators expressed that they feel they gained a sense of empowerment and confidence in their abilities as a result of the challenges they overcame at Broadview during the Endeavor reforms.

As teachers and administrators further reflected upon their experiences, they all shared that the best part of their experience was the relationships built with students and colleagues. Rose expressed this idea best: “…maybe it doesn’t matter how much money you put into it, that might not be the issue. It’s building the relationships and getting to know the
kids, it’s not about having the fancy stuff.” Reflecting back upon her experiences as a student from a low income community, Charmaine reinforced the importance of teachers building relationships with students. She commented:

How powerful that connection is, especially for a child that does not come from a lot or have a lot at home. But, having that teacher that they know they can go to and count on will get them wanting to come to school, and will get them wanting to perform and do well. So, that was my case and my story.

Realizing the importance of building relationships with students, Freda summarized, “It’s the culture in the building that makes the difference for those kids. I really got to put that into practice, and for that, I am grateful.”

Teachers and administrators also referenced the opportunities for professional and personal growth that the turnaround effort presented. They shared that while the experience was challenging, they were provided the opportunity to be flexible and creative, which in turn, allowed them to take more risks with their students to support learning. Sophia described her experience:

The amount of growth I’ve had as an adult, as a leader, has been absolutely phenomenal. So, even in the midst of all of the challenges and obstacles that are here, I know that because of this place, I am a better educator—not just that, but also a better person and a better leader.

Sharing similar sentiments, Mel expressed, “I went through a lot of things here, and a lot of hardship, but I think it made me a better teacher. It made me more flexible…I feel like I can
go anywhere and flourish.” Teachers expressed that they appreciated the autonomy they were afforded when it came to making instructional decisions. Miles recounted the process of when he realized that the students at Broadview did not have the same needs as other students in the district, and administration allowed teachers flexibility in arranging the sequence of objectives and encouraged opportunities for content integration, even if they did not align to recommended district pacing or practices.

Some staff also shared that since they “were chosen to do this”, they felt empowered to rise up to the challenges associated with turning the school around. Several staff members also pointed to the gains made by students as a positive element of their turnaround experiences. Teachers shared that while the academic growth desired was not maintained after the first year, students made notable gains in their behavior, levels of engagement, and self-esteem. Mel best summarized this sentiment, explaining:

I think what you don’t see on paper has been the best part overall. I think everyone has looked at our test data and said, ‘You have poor data.’ I just think that overall, behavior and mindset in this school has changed so much…I feel like now, we got a totally different kid than what we had our first year. A lot of that has gone unnoticed, but I do feel like there has been a big change there.

Such comments reflect strong sentiments existing among teachers that non-academic gains made by students were just as, if not even more important than the academic gains the school sought to make.
Although challenges were faced, all staff agreed that despite the challenges, they felt they grew as professionals and acquired skills that could help them be successful in challenging circumstances. Teachers also shared that although the achievement and testing data would appear to say otherwise, that students did make a great deal of growth on non-academic measures such as self-esteem, engagement, mindset, and behavior. Miles explained, “It actually makes me want to work harder, because scores go up and down, we have our bad days, but they’re our students, and we have to educate all students, so it actually drives me to put more into it.” In summarizing her experiences, Freda reflected, “I felt validated. I knew what I needed to do and I could do it.”

As a result, every teacher and administrator that participated in the study indicated that they would do it all over again if given the option. Teachers shared that they found the experience to be rewarding through the relationships they built with students and colleagues. Rose narrated further:

I just really enjoy it—it’s just the population. It’s what I was used to, it’s the kids that I wanted to be with. The little extra bonus money that we got to come, even if it wasn’t there, I would have come anyway.

Sophia also expressed this sentiment, explaining “…these kids need you, and they grow to love and respect you in a way that, you go home every day, and you may be tired, but you’re excited.”

In reflecting upon their experiences with the Endeavor turnaround reforms, teachers and administrators shared that their own sense of confidence and perseverance grew, and that
they were a better educator as a result of the turnaround experience at the school. Particular strengths highlighted by study informants included increased professional autonomy and confidence, increased perseverance, and a strong sense of efficacy that fueled their commitments to help students in low-income communities succeed.

Teachers and administrators frequently referred to the realization that there was more to their experiences than just improving achievement—they saw their work as a means to alter students’ trajectory in life and found the experience to speak to a higher calling that brought them into education as a profession.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings associated with three research questions aimed at further understanding the experiences of teachers and administrators at one particular Endeavor turnaround school. Research question one explored the theory of action associated with the Endeavor program and found that the program’s overall goal was to improve student achievement through key actions such as the implementation of technology and other research-based best practices, but that the theory was not translated into a well-defined plan to drive reform at the school.

The second research question explored organizational and performance conditions across schools within the Endeavor cohort and found that Broadview presented a unique case for study due to the longest tenure of the leadership (compared to other schools in the cohort) and Broadview’s downward shift in performance beyond the first year of the program.
Teacher and administrator experience was exclusively the focus of research question three. Three key themes emerged as experience was further explored: initial optimism faded as challenges emerged, numerous priorities and a lack of a cohesive plan led to unfocused reform efforts, and significant personal and professional growth was achieved by persevering through the identified challenges.

The final chapter will explore the connections of the findings to previous research on school turnaround. Additionally, the final chapter will explore the implications of the findings in regards to future research and professional practice.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Responding to a gap in understanding teacher and administrator experience in previous school turnaround research, a case study was conducted in order to explore how unique factors and conditions associated with a turnaround effort at one particular school impacted teachers’ and administrators’ experiences of the reforms. This chapter will highlight how the findings of this study relate to the existing body of research on school turnaround. Additionally, the findings will be discussed as they relate to directions for future research and implications for policy and professional practice.

Connections to Prior Research

Findings from this study illustrated similarities to existing research on school turnaround, including the need for turnaround leaders to articulate a vision for success, which includes establishing clear expectations of staff members (Duke, 2006; Harris et al., 2006; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010; Penuel et al. 2010). All Broadview teachers and administrators understood that the purpose of the reform effort was to improve student achievement and they could loosely articulate the importance of their efforts to future student success. However, throughout their comments, they often shared that they were driven to engage in such work out of a personal calling and commitment. As such, the program could have been better served with a clearer connection between the vision of improving student achievement and individuals’ personal beliefs regarding the critical nature of the work.
Furthermore, teachers and administrators frequently indicated that expectations were often not clear enough to drive turnaround efforts. Both Charmaine and Freda stated that beyond raising student achievement, expectations from the district were not clear, and as a result, it was difficult to clarify expectations for the staff. Teachers expressed that they knew that their mission was to improve student achievement, but they were often left asking themselves “How?” In response to ambiguity, teachers came together and collaborated, sharing best practices and resources, a strength noted in Broadview’s school culture by the majority of respondents.

Noting the need for clear expectations flowing down from districts to schools, several authors (Leithwood et al., 2010; Marks & Nance, 2007; Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010) have argued that when turnaround efforts are implemented, the school district’s role is to clarify expectations, communicate them clearly to schools, and allocate resources aligned to those expectations. Marks and Nance (2007) contend that the district influence on turnaround efforts is generally viewed as positive when districts focus their efforts on improving instruction over ensuring compliance (p. 23).

Another similarity noted between the findings of this study and the larger body of research on school turnaround is the need for turnaround plans to be differentiated to correspond to the unique conditions surrounding each school (Duke, 2006; Gayles, 2004; Harris, Chapman, Muijs, Russ, & Stoll, 2006; Herman et al., 2008; Kowal & Ayscue, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2010; Marks & Nance, 2007; Reynolds, Harris A., Clark, Harris B., and James, 2006). Although the schools in the Endeavor cohort were similar in that student
achievement was low and the majority of their students were identified as economically
disadvantaged, there were many other characteristics that set the schools apart, including
their calendar types, staffing demographics and experience levels, and magnet programs.

With the Endeavor schools being located within a larger district context, teachers and
school leaders shared that district support personnel often held the schools to the same
expectations regarding implementation and use of particular resources that all schools in the
district were using, even if it ran counter to other turnaround efforts underway at the
Endeavor schools. As such, this led to confusion and frustration among teachers, as directives
coming from the district ran counter to improvement efforts at the school. Teacher leaders,
such as Miles, reported that district support personnel could have spent more time in the
school understanding the unique conditions the school faced and could have communicated
more frequently with teacher-leaders at the school. In Miles’ opinion, such improved
visibility and communication could have led to improved implementation of existing efforts.
Such approaches would support the argument advanced by Leithwood et al. (2010) that while
core conditions among turnaround schools may be similar, “…how these practices are
enacted depends very much on the context in which leaders find themselves” (p. 177).

Teachers and school leaders at Broadview also expressed that they felt as if there was
not a clear and comprehensive plan to guide the Endeavor turnaround efforts, and that as a
result, improvement efforts were not implemented strategically. Teachers shared that
improvement efforts were often implemented all at once, which led teachers to feel
overwhelmed. Furthermore, Miles commented that as turnover occurred at the school, it was
challenging to bring new teachers up to pace with existing professional development initiatives that occurred with staff. Olsen and Sexton (2009) recommended that as districts and schools implemented turnaround efforts, they should “go slowly…implement multiple reforms in sequenced ways…[Consider] school context as an active variable” (p. 39). Similarly, Herman et al. (2008) recommended that turnaround plans should focus first on conditions that can be improved quickly (such as discipline or the use of data to drive instruction), wins should be celebrated, then schools should shift their attention to other important goals. Such approaches reflect a cyclical approach to improving performance and conditions in a turnaround school (Leithwood et al., 2010).

As teachers and administrators shared elements of their experiences with the turnaround efforts at Broadview, they frequently identified increased pressure, anxiety, and a sense of being overwhelmed with the organizational conditions at the school. In their theoretical model of school turnaround, Leithwood et al. (2010) associate such feelings with Theory E (economic) approaches to school reform. Leithwood et al. (2010) argue that Theory O (organizational) approaches often produce more significant, sustainable improvements in struggling schools. While leaders at Broadview expressed that they desired long-term improvements in the teaching and learning conditions at the school that would come from collaborative approaches and capacity building, they also discussed how particular conditions, such as the reduction in funding, decreased support after Year 1, and the lack of experienced mentors to support beginning teachers inhibited capacity building and long-term improvements.
Although similarities were noted between the findings of this study and the existing school turnaround research, some points of departure also emerged. Within the research, there has often been a “symbolic” function associated with the role of the turnaround leader (Day & Smethem, 2009; Herman et al., 2008; Kowal & Ayscue, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy, 2008; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Apart from establishing a vision of improved achievement, these authors argued that turnaround leaders utilize “hands-on” approaches and provide a “moral purpose” to the challenging work associated with school turnarounds.

While teachers mentioned that the work associated with improving student achievement at Broadview was largely emotional work, they did not attribute this to actions on the part of the leaders at Broadview. Furthermore, several teachers described how school leaders were not as visible or active in leading instruction as teachers had initially expected. Such findings run contrary to the existing tenets on the role of the school leader in turnaround settings. However, it is important to note that when probed further, most teachers commented that while school leaders may not have been as active or visible as expected, they attributed this to the managerial and capacity challenges associated with organizational factors at the school, not to a perceived lack of interest or desire to be actively engaged in instructional leadership at the school.

Another departure from the existing turnaround research highlighted by this study relates to the role of teacher efficacy in school turnaround settings. It has been argued that teacher efficacy increases as a result of many factors, including teacher empowerment and
partnership with school leaders (Gigante & Firestone, 2009; Marks & Nance, 2007; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010), mastery learning experiences (Kanuika, 2012), a vision of success, and high expectations of staff to produce such success (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Within this study, most teachers and leaders expressed a high degree of efficacy, but they generally did not attribute it to the factors mentioned above. Rather, staff at Broadview attributed their sense of efficacy to being committed to the cause of improving outcomes for students. Such sentiments were expressed by Miles, as he shared that he is driven to work harder because “they are our students, and we have to educate all students.” Some staff members connected this sense of efficacy to their own experience of having a teacher that made a difference in their lives, or that they gained a sense of efficacy through measuring the non-academic gains made by students, such as those in confidence, self-esteem, or the ability to build and maintain relationships. Mel reflected on the change in students over the course of the turnaround effort, noting “...overall, behavior and mindset has changed so much. As the years progressed, I noticed a change in the students…the way they walk in the hallways, the structure, seemed to be higher expectations than before.” Furthermore, based upon the prior research, one would expect Broadview teachers’ notions of their own efficacy would have decreased as challenges increased in Years 2 and 3 of the turnaround effort and student achievement decreased. This finding raises many questions worthy of additional research, particularly since interviewed staff members expressed notions that they were effective with students, although academic data would indicate otherwise.
As illustrated in the body of research around the correlates of effective schools over the past twenty years, high achievement is possible at high poverty schools. Summarizing this research, Lezotte and Snyder (2011) contend that highly effective schools encompass characteristics of quality, equity, and efficiency. These principles underlie seven different “correlates” that have emerged across high-poverty, high-achieving schools. Table Ten provides evidence of these correlates in action at Broadview and includes recommendations for practice.

Table 10

*Implementation of Effective Schools Correlates at Broadview Elementary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlate</th>
<th>Evidence of Implementation at Broadview</th>
<th>Recommendations for Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High expectations for success</td>
<td>Some staff expressed beliefs that all students could learn at high levels, but they also attributed barriers to success that included a lack of district support or parental involvement. Some teachers reported that the school was too focused on “showy” elements.</td>
<td>Increase academic press at the school: engage students in goal setting and monitoring, promote opportunities for rigorous instruction across the board, align staff efforts and priorities to variables most within their locus of control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong instructional leadership</td>
<td>Leaders worked to implement structures such as PLTs and encouraged teachers to collaborate.</td>
<td>Revise school structures so that PLTs are staggered and Administrator participation can increase. The district should provide increased supports such as additional administrators to support increased evaluation demands with beginning teachers. The district should engage turnaround schools in developing professional development opportunities specifically aligned with each school’s needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear and focused mission</td>
<td>All staff members expressed that their mission was to dramatically improve student achievement.</td>
<td>School and district leaders should better articulate ways in which particular program elements would improve achievement. Measurable, formative benchmarks should be established in order for the school to identify if it is making progress towards turnaround goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to learn/time on task</td>
<td>At different stages, the school offered after-school tutoring.</td>
<td>Provide consistent offerings for after-hours academic support and extended learning. Engage community stakeholders (churches, community groups, local colleges) to be part of this effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent monitoring of student progress</td>
<td>Staff frequently reported that the school was very “data-driven” and that teachers met frequently to discuss results.</td>
<td>Develop data discussion protocols to be used in coordination with data collection tools to move into deeper discussions regarding student learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many staff expressed that they had noted a significant improvement in student behavior and attitude, but that particular elements, such as the behavioral reflections, posed challenges. Develop and implement a clear system for teachers to use in regards to timing of reflections. Support teachers in preventing and managing significant classroom behavior concerns.

Some staff reported increased efforts to involve parents, but this was largely an unexplored area with the school’s teachers and administrators. Explore alternative solutions to engage parents, such as offering job development skills classes or English-language classes for non-native parents.

However, most staff members expressed that the continued challenges, while emotionally draining, kept them engaged in their work and illustrated that their work was not done. Such a sentiment runs in direct contradiction to findings from researchers such as Bascia and Rottman (2001), who argued that “it is in fact difficult to disentangle factors that influence teaching from those that influence learning, and the degree of satisfaction teachers experience appears to arise from the extent to which they believe they can successfully meet students’ needs” (p. 798). Although challenges abounded at Broadview and teachers expressed frustration at such challenges, they did not let such challenges impact their notion that they could make a positive difference in the lives of their students. Contradictory findings, such as the ones discussed above, warrant the need for further research on school turnaround, which is discussed more fully in the following section.
Implications for Future Research

Although the findings of this study are limited in scope to the particular case studied, some important questions regarding school turnaround were raised which can provide directions for future research. In particular, additional research should focus on comparing experience and organizational conditions across the cohort of Endeavor schools to determine if the experiences of the teachers and administrators at Broadview are similar to that of other schools in the cohort. Additionally, research could focus on how experiences within the Endeavor turnaround efforts compare to that of other turnaround efforts across the state or nation. The study was also limited in scope to the elementary level, so future comparative research could focus on how teacher and administrator experiences differ between elementary, middle, and high schools implementing turnaround efforts.

Throughout the study, teachers and administrators overwhelmingly identified that the key component that brought them to Broadview and influenced their decision to stay was the degree of passion and commitment that they demonstrated towards improving the academic achievement and future of the students they served. Although this mindset alone was not enough to sustain improvements at the school over the course of the turnaround, it did have a significant impact on the overall culture of the school and it brought teachers and leaders together towards a common purpose.

As identified in the body of research around school turnaround, efficacy is an important component that impacts teacher success with students in school turnarounds and other challenging circumstances. However, the body of research on efficacy and school
turnaround could be further enhanced with greater insight in regards to how to operationalize the particular mindsets and beliefs that constitute a strong sense of efficacy. A possible avenue of future research on efficacy could examine the degree to which efficacy is impacted by academic versus non-academic gains with students.

Quantitative and mixed-method approaches could also be beneficial in determining the success of turnaround efforts and identifying how successes are correlated to teacher and administrator perception of their experiences. Within Broadview’s case, teachers and administrators associated rapid implementation of numerous strategies, a perceived lack of district support, and organizational turbulence associated with teacher turnover as negative factors impacting their experiences. Teachers and administrators concluded that academic progress beyond the first year was stifled because of such factors. Therefore, future research could utilize surveys to quantify teacher and administrator perception of turnaround experiences and correlate such experiences to student performance on standardized test measures to identify if there is a potential relationship between the two.

Both teachers and administrators at Broadview acknowledged that school leaders had limited opportunities to truly lead and influence instruction at the school. Teachers and administrators attributed limited instructional leadership to both managerial challenges (such as navigating time obstacles associated with evaluation cycles) and contextual factors within the district and state (such as curriculum changes, shifts in district leadership, and lack of sustained support).
Given these challenges, future avenues for research on school turnaround could also focus on identifying ways to modify existing school structures and conditions in order to find the most effective ways to maximize leaders’ time to influence and lead instruction, which has been a factor highlighted in previous turnaround research to have a positive impact on student achievement. Such studies could focus on how opportunities for instructional leadership are similar or different between charter schools and traditional district schools, or between traditional district schools and other district schools with unique programs or structures, such as magnet schools, STEM programs, early-college high schools, or opportunity culture schools.

One of the key factors the Endeavor turnaround that the district focused on was wide-scale staff replacement and the institution of recruitment and performance bonuses. Teachers and administrators within this study stated that the bonuses had little impact upon their decisions to teach and remain at Broadview. Furthermore, teachers and administrators also described how wide-scale staff replacement led to many beginning teachers entering Broadview, which created capacity challenges such as limited numbers of mentor teachers and numerous evaluations which negatively impacted the time that school leaders could spend influencing instruction elsewhere.

As identified within the larger body of research on school turnaround, there are a wide variety of approaches that districts or schools can utilize to turnaround lower-performing schools. Future research on school turnaround could focus on comparing improvements in achievement across different turnaround approaches, such as wide-scale
staff replacement, chartering, structured instructional programs, or school redesign models. Research into this topic could provide leaders and policy makers with further evidence to channel limited fiscal resources into turnaround strategies that have been shown to produce increased academic achievement.

**Implications for Policy and Professional Practice**

Although the scope of the study was limited to one particular school and findings are difficult to generalize to other turnaround schools or districts, the study did illuminate some of the challenges associated with implementing school turnaround. These implications for professional practice are discussed below.

One of the most salient challenges identified by teachers and administrators was that the district appeared to lack a clear plan to guide the turnaround effort. While district strategies were aligned to some of the key pillars of the Race to the Top program, the district’s efforts were largely guided by an implicit plan that focused primarily on the institution of recruitment and performance bonuses and a significant investment in technology. Teachers and administrators at Broadview provided examples of several unforeseen challenges that seemed to arise suddenly. Such challenges included the sustainability of the technology, the associated costs of maintaining it, the limited capacity of the school to support several beginning teachers, and professional development that was instituted all at once. Had teachers and administrators of the Endeavor schools been brought into the planning process, potential obstacles such as those mentioned above could have been identified and proactively planned for. Some of the teachers and administrators also
identified turnover at the district level as a challenge in implementing the reforms associated with the Endeavor program. Had clear, detailed, written turnaround plans been developed and shared with schools, successive school and district leaders could have had a more developed understanding of previous reform efforts and the work that needed to occur going forward.

Aligned with challenges associated with planning, teachers and administrators also mentioned that they felt the turnaround efforts occurred with little consideration in regards to the timing of implementation. As a result, the majority of the turnaround strategies were implemented all at once, which led teachers and administrators to feel overwhelmed, which resulted in teacher turnover and decreased staff morale. Teachers and administrators did state that they saw value in many of the efforts the school was putting into place. However, they commented that with so many things going on all at once, implementation of improvement efforts was often half-hearted and the school was at times too quick to change course in the midst of implementing particular improvement strategies.

As such, the school could have missed some opportunities to fully implement selected reforms and identify ways in which they resulted in improved student achievement. The rapid pace of change made it difficult to identify what was or was not working to improve student achievement at Broadview. Turnaround research supports strategic implementation of improvement efforts, as turnaround leaders are encouraged to focus on a few conditions which can be improved relatively quickly, celebrate their “wins”, and use that momentum to change a few selected, high-impact organizational conditions at a time.
Differentiated supports were also identified by teachers and administrators as something that the district could have done to better support schools. Although the schools within the Endeavor cohort were similarly targeted for improvement because of their low academic performance, the schools possessed many differentiating characteristics, such as the instructional calendar followed, communities served, or special magnet programs that may have been in place. As the district directed schools to institute particular turnaround elements, the teachers and administrators at Broadview shared that some of the directives were difficult to implement or attain because of the year-round instructional calendar that Broadview followed.

It can be concluded that the magnet schools in the Endeavor cohort may have also faced a similar challenge. Additionally, the district’s central services academic support teams are responsible for supporting programs at over one hundred elementary schools. As such, some teachers and administrators shared that central services support team members were insistent that Broadview put in place some initiatives that all schools in the district were being held to, but ran contrary to elements of the turnaround efforts at Broadview. Improved communication and coordination from the district could have produced enhanced understanding at the central level of the unique conditions in place at Broadview, and therefore, impacted the directives that came from the district’s academic support team.

As districts and schools implement turnaround efforts, they should be cognizant of the impact of high expectations. Although staff members were all able to identify that raising student achievement was the top priority of the Endeavor program, they shared that
expectations of teachers and students may not have been as high as they could have been at times. All staff members described relationships with students as being essential, and shared that they thrived off of such relationships, but leaders must be cautious in balancing this dynamic so that expectations are not lowered, and “tough love” is provided. As Sophia reflected upon professional development provided around working with students in poverty, she remarked, “…but do all circumstances apply to this school? No, they do not…making people apply all those philosophies here, and get people’s mindsets to believe that this is the way these kids live, I think that is a disservice to these kids.” Regarding expectations, Charmaine explained further that the school focused heavily on student growth for the majority of the turnaround effort, as students often entered their respective grade-levels far below benchmark. She shared “…but, if you are growing them, and getting a year’s worth or growth, you are lessening the achievement gap, which is more important that getting a Level 3 [proficient] on a test.” Such a sentiment being held by leaders of the school could be problematic in that it could set a standard that growth is enough, and that once attained, goals are reached. However, when held widely, such paradigms can limit a school’s potential to excel even further, and turnaround leaders should be advised to set and maintain high expectations around moving all students towards proficiency and beyond.

Finally, Broadview teachers and administrators overwhelmingly identified teacher turnover and the organizational turbulence that it produced as a challenge impacting the success of the turnaround efforts. Teachers and administrators shared that it became
increasingly difficult to find suitable candidates to replace exiting teachers, and that as organizational conditions changed, strong teachers left the school in high numbers.

With the turbulence that was occurring at the school due to teacher turnover, the school could have benefited from increased district efforts to recruit and retain highly effective teachers at the school. Part of this process could have included a standardized recruitment strategy to identify the characteristics teachers need to possess in order to be effective at high-needs schools, as Broadview staff identified that some of the original teachers selected to be a part of the turnaround effort did not realize the challenge they were accepting nor did they possess the characteristics needed to persevere and succeed through it.

Furthermore, the district touted the signing and performance bonuses as a means to recruit and retain top talent, but teachers and administrators explained that the financial incentives had little impact on decisions to stay or leave the school. Some staff members shared that other incentives, such as child-care support or tuition reimbursement could have been creative approaches to incentivizing employment at Broadview. Given the constraint of state and federal funding and its impact on salaries, the district would be well served to investigate such alternatives as a means to recruit and retain top talent at the most challenging schools.

Although well intentioned, it can be concluded that based upon the results of this study, the turnaround efforts at Broadview were largely unsuccessful. While behavior at the school improved and efficacy remained high for teachers who remained at Broadview for the Endeavor program, achievement did not markedly improve and the school faced significant
challenges associated with teacher turnover, professional development, and technology implementation. While some conditions could have been changed at the school to possibly mitigate the impact of these challenges, it is impossible to divorce Broadview from the larger district and state context in which it resides. Throughout the study, several staff members shared their perceptions that overwhelmingly illustrated a perceived lack of district planning and support for the program, which ultimately contributed to its demise.

Lessons can be learned from this study and used by other districts seeking proactive approaches to turnaround reform. First and foremost, this study illustrates the need for districts to have clearly articulated turnaround plans that are developed in coordination with school-level stakeholders. The fact that no informant in the school could locate the plan or provide the researcher with specifics illustrates that the school was operating largely on a “build as you go” model. This presented significant challenges as the district leaders who created the plan left the district and their successors were not left with a clear understanding of the specifics or theory of action around the Endeavor plan. Furthermore, the lack of plan also allowed competing priorities to emerge that may not have ultimately served the overall goal of improving achievement in an effective and efficient manner at the school.

As districts create turnaround plans, they should include clear objectives, measurable benchmarks of success, and reasonable timelines for implementation. All staff members who participated in the study shared that they often felt overwhelmed because so much was put on them at once. As a result, they shared that they did not always implement improvement strategies as they were intended because they either did not understand the purpose or there
were too many other competing priorities. Several staff members also shared that while teachers were held accountable for using data, the school often fell short of really understanding it and using it to purposefully plan instruction. When measurable targets for success are included in turnaround plans, it becomes easier for staff to identify if they are on track to meet particular goals, and they become aware of when a course adjustment may be needed in order to reach the targets included in the plan.

Another takeaway from this study that school districts must consider the overall impact of human capital strategies in turnaround efforts and plan accordingly. Although recruitment and performance bonuses were included as program elements, they did not support increased achievement at the school. Broadview staff members shared two key insights regarding the bonuses. First, most staff shared that they would have come to the school anyways regardless of the bonus because it was the type of school they wanted to worn in. Secondly, staff expressed concern regarding other staff members who had received the signing bonus and then left the district. These concerns speak to the need for school districts to consider alternatives to bonuses to attract and retain top teachers at high-needs schools. Such alternatives could include business partnerships to support housing or childcare stipends or opportunities for teachers to engage in alternative career paths such as multi-classroom leaders or peer coaches. Furthermore, leaders of the school spoke regarding challenges recruiting teachers given the multitude of schools within the district that candidates have to choose from. Districts pursuing proactive turnaround approaches should include initiatives in human capital plans that include strategic staffing for high-needs
schools, which could include alternatives incentives such as those mentioned above, exemptions from hiring freezes, or priority access to recruitment leads or student teachers who have just completed their pre-service training in the district.

**Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

Although this study is limited in that only one particular school at one point in time was examined, the findings illustrate the need for school turnaround efforts to be thoughtfully planned and executed. Furthermore, the study illustrates that although turnaround schools may be united in that their performance fails to meet expected standards of accountability, they are all unique in regards to the organizational, social, and community factors which ultimately influence the success or failure of turnaround efforts. The study also illuminates the need for continued research on the topic of school reform in order to identify and further understand particular organizational and cultural conditions that impact the success of turnaround efforts.

It is with a degree of irony that after a three-year turnaround effort, some staff shared that they felt they were “back to where we started” and Broadview finds itself included in a new (but larger) cohort of low-performing schools where significant turnaround efforts are planned yet again. This study illustrates that just channeling resources towards these schools will do little to improve performance. Rather, the schools will need resources, support, and improved communication and coordination from the district and its leaders in order to achieve success. The Broward County School District would be well served to carefully
examine the Endeavor program and identify elements which should be carried forward or abandoned in order to lead a more successful, sustainable turnaround effort.

For districts looking to take a more proactive approach to school turnaround, some recommendations emerge from this study. First and foremost, if a district is unable to commit to providing the necessary financial resources and support to turnaround schools, it is recommended that turnaround efforts not be pursued. Such a recommendation is warranted given Broadview’s decline in performance over the course of the Endeavor program, which many teachers and leaders at Broadview attributed to a lack of district support. Study participants gave examples of how resources were removed once success was achieved, and how turnover in district leadership undermined the consistent communication and coordination that was needed between the school and the district for efforts to proceed smoothly.

Proactive approaches to school turnaround should also include long-term planning efforts that involve multiple school stakeholder groups. Although planning for the Endeavor turnaround began at the district level prior to program implementation, schools were brought into the planning process entirely too late. School leaders expressed that it was challenging to hire in such short time frames, which in turn, resulted in a high proportion of beginning teachers at the school and the capacity to support them was not available. Instructional leaders and Broadview administrators also advocated that their voices were often left out of district decisions around curriculum, program expenditures, and professional development. Consequently, buy-in at the school level was never fully achieved, nor were all district
decisions supportive of turnaround efforts at Broadview, such as the decision to make Broadview an “overflow” school for another high-needs school in the area. Turnaround research consistently recommends that schools be given at least a full year to plan turnaround efforts, and that success is measured over a period of two to three years. Any planning efforts should establish realistic timeframes and include benchmarks for achievement to determine if mid-course corrections are necessary.

It is of note and cannot be ignored that Broadview (along with all of the other schools in the new turnaround cohort) are predominately located within low-income communities and serve overwhelmingly economically disadvantaged and minority students. With this statement, I do not mean that such schools and populations cannot achieve significant academic achievements—quite the contrary, as several other cases within the larger body of turnaround research have indicated. Rather, we should continue to look at the societal contexts surrounding education and develop multi-faceted approaches that seek to empower impoverished communities and historically disadvantaged populations in order to provide students a firm foundation for a successful school career. As argued by Fusarelli (2011), traditional, one-dimensional educational reforms are unlikely to provide long-term relief to struggling schools and systems. Rather, “holistic” approaches hold more promise and are possible if policy makers are willing to re-align existing priorities and resources towards prevention, intervention, and establishing stronger community support systems for schools (p. 231-232). Teachers and leaders in this study alluded to such “holistic” approaches such as job development resources for parents, childcare for teachers to attract top talent to the
school, funding and resources for early childhood education, and turning schools into community centers that could be utilized to unite the community and provide additional social supports. Therefore, until we make a commitment and concerted effort as a society to tackle the problems associated with poverty and all of the -isms that exist within impoverished communities, the need for school turnaround efforts will continue as we have failed to address the root cause of poor school performance.
REFERENCES


Appendix A
Interview Protocol

1. What do you understand to be the purpose of the Endeavor turnaround effort at this school?

2. What motivated you to participate in this effort? Have your thoughts or feelings changed throughout the course of the turnaround?

3. What expectations have been placed upon you? Have those expectations changed throughout the course of turnaround efforts?

4. What has been the best part of your experiences with the Endeavor model?

5. What has been the most challenging part of your experiences with the Endeavor model?

6. How have your needs as a professional been met during the turnaround effort?

7. What have been the biggest lessons you have learned along the way?

8. How have you been supported in this work by your colleagues? By administrators? By the district?

9. Do you feel like the school has made progress towards the goals it has established? Why or why not?

10. If you had to do this all over again, would you? Why or why not?

11. What else do you think I should know about the turnaround efforts at the school or your experiences with them?