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Implementing the MSTAR Teacher Evaluation Program

Christopher L. Hill

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Implementing the MSTAR teacher evaluation program

By

Christopher Hill

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary School Administration
in the Department of Educational Leadership

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2016

Implementing the MSTAR teacher evaluation program

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This study was conducted to gain insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new (2nd year on the job) principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers using a state mandated program referred to as Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (MSTAR). Okolona High School (OHS), a secondary school, in a problem-laden school district located in Okolona, Mississippi served as the site for the study.

The MSTAR acronym refers to the state's new evaluation program for teachers developed by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this body of work to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I would also like to dedicate this research to Carrie Haynes, Yvita Hill, and Christopher Hill Jr., they have supported me through all phases of this process and have sacrificed and motivated me to remain focused in my studies. A special thanks to my mom, Carrie Hill. who taught me to value an education at an early age, and pushed me to excel academically and to settle for nothing short of my best in all that I pursue.

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Jack Blendinger for serving as the director of my dissertation. Without Dr. Blendinger's knowledge, expertise, and advisement, the dissertation process would have been insurmountable. I appreciate Dr. Blendinger's intellect, wit, and enthusiasm for education, which has made my experience at Mississippi State University more fulfilling and rewarding.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted to gain insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new (2nd year on the job) principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers using a state mandated program referred to as Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (MSTAR). Okolona High School (OHS), a secondary school, in a problem-laden school district located in Okolona, Mississippi served as the site for the study.

The MSTAR acronym refers to the state's new evaluation program for teachers developed by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE, 2014).

The phrase "problem-laden school district" pertains to the Okolona School District of which the school is a part. In 2010, MDE took over governance of the school district due to financial issues, and a host of violations of Mississippi accountability standards. MDE then installed conservators charged with the duties of improving the academic, financial, and day-to-day operations of the school district (MDE, 2012).

Administrator and teacher turnover has been high in the district ever since the beginning of the conservatorship: several teachers and administrators have left the district. Every year, the school district replaces over 50% of the teachers. Jeannete Simone Smith was a former school principal within the district, she communicated the following statement. In regard to employee retention, state conservatorship and control

appears to have created more problems than solutions (J. S. Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

The secondary school providing the setting for the study served Grades 5 through 12 in a rural area of Mississippi. The student enrollment total was 415 for the eight grades. Student standardized test scores were low in all areas, but particularly in mathematics and language arts.

The study is presented in five chapters: (1) introduction; (2) literature review; (3) method; (4) findings and discussion; and (5) summary, conclusions, and recommendations. The study also includes a bibliography and appendixes providing resource references and specific materials relative to the investigation. Subdivided into four sections, the introductory chapter addresses (1) problem statement, purpose, and research questions; (2) significance of the study, (3) method, and (4) limitations and delimitations. Terms unique to the study are defined in context as needed.

Statement of the Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

Implementation of the MSTAR evaluation program for teachers presents a complex and formidable challenge, especially for relatively new high school principals in rural environments. Since the MSTAR program presents a new approach to evaluating teachers in Mississippi, it's reasonable to conclude that principals are uncertain how to best implement it to effectively evaluate teachers.

This investigation focused on the following four-fold problem imposed by MSTAR for a rural principal relatively new on the job: (1) identifying the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program, (2) determining the

amount of time required of the principal to address the difficulties, (3) developing strategies to address the difficulties, and (4) taking action to resolve the difficulties.

The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the challenges and issues facing a second-year principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers in a secondary school using the state mandated program referred to as MSTAR. Four research questions guided the investigation:

1. What are the difficulties encountered by the principal in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
2. How much of the principal's time is required to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
3. What strategies need to be developed to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
4. What action needs to be taken to resolve the implementation difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?

Important and useful information was gained in regard to implementing MSTAR by addressing the difficulties encountered, the amount of the principal's time required to implement the program, the strategies that needed to be developed in order to implement the program, and the future action that needs to be taken to resolve implementation difficulties.

It should be noted that this self-study did not involve human subjects other than the researcher himself. Data collected and analyzed were limited to the researcher's administrative behaviors and later reflections regarding the behaviors.

Permission to conduct the study was sought and received from the Office of Research Compliance. The Office's mission is to respectfully guide and serve the Mississippi State University community while engaging in research through compliance and ethical practices in order to protect the University, researchers, and research subjects.

Although the study required some personal communication, data collection was limited to the researcher's behaviors and reflections as he carried out his administrative tasks and responsibilities. Other administrators, teachers, and staff members at the school were not identified during the collection of data. In brief, the only human subject involved in this self-study was the researcher himself.

Correspondence granting permission to conduct the study from the Office of Research Compliance staff, a subsidiary of the Office of Research and Economic Development (ORED), and information pertaining to personal correspondence may be found in Appendix A.

Significance of the Study

This investigation was significant because it provided insight into the challenges and issues facing a second-year principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers using a state-mandated program referred to as MSTAR. Little is known about the state's new evaluation program for teachers developed by MDE, especially in regard to the difficulties encountered by a relatively inexperienced principal attempting to implement it effectively while still overseeing numerous other tasks and responsibilities.

MSTAR's goal is to improve teaching and learning. The program grew out of a federal model for teacher evaluation reform calling for an improved evaluation system, an improved educator, and consequently improved student achievement.

MSTAR's aim is noteworthy, but the difficulties associated with implementation of the program may outweigh any benefits that may accrue. This investigation provided officials with much needed authentic, practical knowledge.

Method

The research design utilized in the investigation may best be described as a single-subject case study utilizing self-study techniques. The author of this dissertation participated as the investigation's single-subject: the relatively new (second year) principal of OHS. The case involved a principal going about his administrative responsibilities in regard to implementing MSTAR to evaluate teachers in a rural high school. The case occurred within the setting of OHS. Self-study techniques (e.g., reflections transcribed into journal notes) were featured in the investigation.

Qualitative research techniques were employed to identify the pros and cons encountered in attempting to put the MSTAR program into practice. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) describe qualitative research as involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest.

Data were collected throughout the 2014-2015 school year from August through May. Whenever the MSTAR program or facets of the program were implemented during the school day, neuronal impressions were stored in short-term memory and then transferred, via reflection, to written journal notes after the day ended.

Throughout the duration of the investigation, data (via neuronal impressions stored in short-term memory) were continually collected through field notes. The notes were first recorded in a journal by hand, then typed and transferred to a computer. After transferring the notes, hardcopy journal pages containing the handwritten were destroyed through the technique of document shredding. Computerized data were encrypted and secured through the use of a controlling password.

Data collected were analyzed searching for themes, patterns, and reoccurring elements contained in the written notes made from stored neuronal impressions in short-term memory and then regularly entered in a journal.

Limitations and Delimitations

The major limitation of this investigation was that it may be categorized as a single-subject case study utilizing self-study techniques. The study focused on the experiences of one participant (the investigator) and neuronal impressions stored in short-term memory: that is, the reflections of a single principal performing tasks and carrying out responsibilities in one rural high school in a Mississippi school district. The findings cannot be readily generalized to the larger population of principals serving rural schools in Mississippi or elsewhere.

The fact that the investigation consisted of a self-reported case study comprised of a single-subject (i.e., the researcher himself) constituted the major delimitation imposed upon this research. Due to its design, the focus was limited to the personal perceptions (i.e., neuronal impressions stored in short-term memory) of the investigator in relation to implementing the MSTAR evaluation program for teachers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

The literature review chapter is subdivided into six sections. The sections address the Darling-Hammond contribution to teacher evaluation, the Marzano perspective of teacher evaluation, the Mississippi Teacher Assessment Instrument (MTAI), the Davis Study, the work of Danielson, and the MSTAR.

The content provided in each of the six sections provided the framework for this self-study investigation of a relatively new secondary school principal in a rural setting attempting to implement the very demanding MSTAR teacher evaluation program.

The Darling-Hammond Contribution to Teacher Evaluation

Based on longitudinal investigations of teacher evaluation programs, Darling-Hammond (2012) suggests that the most effective way to improve teacher evaluation is to ensure that educators start with a fundamentally strong foundation emphasizing mentoring and developing new teachers professionally: a strategy that moves through a tiered approach calling for carefully evaluating beginning teachers with formative and summative assessments.

Darling-Hammond (2012) contends that the start of teacher evaluation programs should begin with the curriculum standards. These standards should clearly articulate what teachers and students should be able to accomplish at the end of instruction.

Furthermore, Darling-Hammond (2012) visualizes a system of tiered performance and attainment involving three tiers.

Tier one is the probationary or entry level, wherein applicants take an assessment for initial licensure. Within this phase, teachers are probationary and are expected to make adequate gains in the areas of instructional technique that is used, and meet specifications regarding practice as established by the college of teacher preparation.

Tier two is a slightly more progressive stage, in which teachers will again have another assessment for professional license, and evaluators determine whether the candidate has made sufficient progress and has proper competence before progressing on to tier three. The teaching candidate has not yet accomplished tenure, but instead evaluators are systematically collecting evidence of proper teaching and determining whether the candidate has promoted the desired and acceptable level of student mastery of objectives.

Tier three is the most comprehensive of the stages: at this stage, the candidate has accomplished tenure, demonstrates evidence of successful practice, and indicates interest in pursuing supplementary endorsements such as National Board Certification. Within this stage, the educator should clearly exhibit the qualities of a competent teacher who is capable of producing a quality learning experience within a classroom.

At third tier level, Darling-Hammond (2012) postulates that the teacher may begin to seek out raises for demonstrated expertise and consider pursuing leadership roles within the school. Also at this level, the teacher should be evaluated based on performance assessments, in terms of what and how teaching has affected what students know, and what they are able to do. The focus should be on instructional technique,

remediation, self-assessment and reflection, and building a portfolio based on evidence of good practice.

Darling-Hammond (2012) stresses that ongoing professional support, feedback, and monitoring is paramount. Professional development should be job embedded, timely, and specific to the teacher. Teachers should receive the feedback from evaluations with targeted areas for improvement and how to make the needed adjustments to improve in the areas. In brief, an effective appraisal system requires continuous monitoring, adjustment, and professional development in targeted areas intended to produce improvement.

The Marzano Perspective of Teacher Evaluation

Marzano (2012) states that teacher evaluation has two fundamental purposes: (1) to measure the level of effectiveness of a teacher, and (2) to develop teachers professionally. Determining the purpose of teacher evaluation has a significant impact on the design, and outcome of the plan. A teacher evaluation program built to measure effectiveness often functions differently from a program to develop teachers professionally and increase their capacity.

Marzano (2012) contends that teacher evaluation programs have distinctive differentiating qualities. A teacher evaluative program focused on development possesses three basic qualities: (1) it is extensive and detailed, (2) it emphasizes a developmental scale showing differing degrees of mastery (emerging, not meeting, exceeding), and (3) it identifies and rewards teachers for making progress.

Marzano (2012) based his contentions on studying 3,000 educators to determine which component of the teacher evaluation they believed to be most significant:

measuring effectiveness or developing teachers professionally. He then developed a scale that assessed educators' opinions of whether measurement or development is most important in teacher evaluations. Findings indicated that 76% of the respondents said that professional self-development should be the primary focus of stemming from evaluation, but that administrative measurement regarding teacher effectiveness was also important.

The Mississippi Teacher Assessment Instrument (MTAI)

The Mississippi Education Reform Act of 1982 (MERA) motivated Mississippi educational leaders to become more aware than ever about the importance of teacher evaluation. Simply put, good schools require effective teachers (MDE, 2002).

Georgia was identified as the model state to emulate due to the simplicity of the evaluation system that they had in place, the validity and reliability of the instrument used, and the fact that teachers challenged the system through the judicial process without success. The Mississippi approach emulated what was occurring in Georgia (Cole, 1992).

Using the Georgia model as an example, the Mississippi Teacher Assessment Instrument (MTAI) was developed in response to the MERA and used across Mississippi. The instrument was developed as part of a national push to redevelop rigorous standards and expectations for teachers and administrators. The MTAI was essentially an evaluation instrument designed to determine new teacher competency to deliver instruction to the students; it was never meant for the purpose of appraising veteran teachers.

The MTAI consisted of 16 competences, each measured by a variety of sub-instruments. The 16 indicators were scored on a 1-5 Likert-like scale. Evaluators used a

variety of sources during observations including: lesson plans portfolios, classroom observations, classroom climate, and educator self-efficacy (Amos & Cheeseman, 1992).

Once the program was adopted by MDE, every new teacher in Mississippi was evaluated using the MTAI starting in 1985. An incentive pay program was also implemented to support novice teachers; however, teachers had to demonstrate ability and mastery in order to earn the extra salary stipend. In the beginning, it was hoped that all Mississippi school districts would use the MTAI approach for all their teachers. Some districts did adopt the MTAI as their primary teacher evaluation program, but many others did not (Amos & Cheeseman, 1992).

The MTAI program was carried out at the school level by a team. The evaluative team consisted of a principal, a seasoned teacher, and an external evaluator, all of whom had to undergo extensive training in order to conduct observations. Analysis of the results of the evaluations across several schools and school districts revealed that the vast majority of teachers being evaluated through the MTAI process received favorable evaluations (Amos & Cheeseman, 1992).

The MTAI was used from 1985 through the early 1990s, slow and quietly, the MTAI, once highly touted, sank into oblivion. At some undetermined point during the late 1990s, it simply disappeared (Amos & Cheeseman, 1992).

The Davis Study

With exception of the Davis (2000) investigation, very few studies focusing on teacher evaluation programs have been conducted in Mississippi. Davis conducted a study to determine selected Mississippi teachers' perceptions of evaluation systems; the study involved three rural school districts.

Participants were chosen from elementary, middle, and high schools. The selection process required that selected teachers have at least 2 years of experience and up to 25 years of experience. The study involved 262 teachers from school districts throughout the state of Mississippi. At the time of the study; each of the school district used various methods of teacher evaluation within their schools. Participants were asked to respond to a 35 item survey measured by a Likert-like scale: measurement choices ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Davis, 2000).

The focus of the study was to determine the following: if teacher perceptions varied concerning teacher evaluation, if teachers desired to alter the teacher evaluation system in any way, if qualifications of building level administrators to evaluate teachers matter, and if receptiveness to try new alternative forms of teacher evaluation was given importance (Davis, 2000).

It should be noted that at the time of this study, all teachers in the state of Mississippi had to be evaluated based on state law. However, each district had their own varying form of evaluation: there was not a universal mandated state instrument (Davis, 2000).

The study's findings revealed that the school districts using alternative forms of evaluations (e.g., portfolios or student evaluations) received more favorable ratings than those using traditional methods (e.g., classroom observation). Gender did not make a significant difference in regard to favorable or unfavorable perceptions of the evaluation programs. Another important finding was that if the school district's evaluation program depended solely on classroom observations, teachers suggested a change was strongly needed (Davis, 2000).

The Work of Danielson

MDE appointed a leadership team comprised of former and practicing teachers, administrators, professors, and superintendents to develop a state mandated teacher evaluation program. To develop the program, the department relied heavily on the work of Danielson (2012). Danielson's work provided the foundation for fashioning Mississippi's comprehensive evaluation system (Danielson, 2012).

Danielson (2012) contends that primary two goals of any evaluation system should: (1) promote teacher quality, and (2) promote professional development relevant to the teacher's practice. Teacher quality affects instruction. Quality instruction improves student learning. Relevant professional development possesses potential for improving teacher quality.

Danielson (2012) believes that school administrators must become highly skilled in appraising instructional practice, providing appropriate feedback, and making professional development recommendations that lead to enabling teachers in providing objective evidence that their instruction is effective.

Evaluation program components requiring teachers' mastery of assessment strategies and personal reflection skills leading to improvement of practice represent key factors in Danielson's (2012) framework for teacher evaluation. Teacher self-assessments, student surveys, and definitive rubrics constitute other Danielson-recommended components (Danielson, 2012). Simplistic checklist evaluation items such as "needs improvements" or "outstanding" possess little value for Danielson because they provide no specific data relevant to a teacher seeking to improve practice.

Danielson (2012) further believes that for an evaluation system to be effective, reliable, and valid; everyone involved must understand the standards that the program is based on. Danielson's (2012) evaluation framework requires that school administrators participate in focused training on a regular and ongoing basis.

The Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (MSTAR)

In 2014, MDE developed a new evaluation program for teachers called MSTAR. The program's primary goal is to improve teaching and learning in the state's public schools (MDE, 2014).

The MSTAR procedure calls for two formal evaluations per school year for all certified teachers (MDE, 2014). The program's first formal evaluation is formative in nature and meant to identify strengths and areas of focus. The term "formative" refers to evaluation that is not conclusive or used to make employment decisions, but is used to gauge the level of effectiveness of a teacher.

In addition to two lengthy classroom observations, the MSTAR procedure further requires a minimum of five, relatively brief, unannounced walkthrough observations (i.e., classroom drop-in visits) per school year (MDE, 2014).

The second formal evaluation required by MSTAR is summative. The term "summative" is defined by MDE to mean an evaluation that is conclusive and used to make employment decisions based on teacher performance (MDE, 2014).

The summative portion of MSTAR provides an overall assessment of a teacher's capacity to deliver instruction based on four levels of effectiveness: (1) unsatisfactory, (2) emerging, (3) effective, and (4) distinguished. The phrase "levels of effectiveness" as

used in the MSTAR program means to determine the current level of a teacher's competence in optimizing student learning (MDE, 2014).

In addition to the two levels of formal evaluation, MSTAR addresses five domains relevant to teaching and learning: (1) planning, (2) assessment, (3) instruction, (4) learning environment, and (5) professional responsibilities (MDE, 2014).

The planning domain involves planning lessons that demonstrate knowledge of content and the rigor associated with a high-level curriculum encourages higher level thinking activities for all students, as well as ensuring that lessons meet the needs of diverse students (MDE, 2014).

The assessment domain requires teachers to collect and organize data for students. Assessments include formal tests, quizzes, oral assessments, homework, and other informal methods of assessments (e.g., oral assessments) (MDE, 2014).

The instruction domain requires teachers to actively engage students, communicate clearly and effectively, and demonstrate deep knowledge of content during instruction. Focus is place on producing evidence of student-centered learning. Evaluators look for tangible proof that students can demonstrate mastery of objectives. The phrase “demonstrate deep knowledge of content” means that the teacher's instruction has enabled students to think critically and analytically about what they are learning (MDE, 2014).

The learning environment domain addresses managing classroom spaces and resources effectively. The domain also covers maximizing the time allocated for instruction. MSTAR postulates that very little time should be lost due to inadequate planning, poor instructional delivery, inappropriate transitions, and dysfunctional

organization of resources. In addition, the classroom environment (e.g., arrangement of chairs and desks) should be conducive to learning; the instructor should teach from bell to bell; and students should be frequently engaged in meaningful and purposeful learning activities (MDE, 2014).

The professional responsibilities domain requires teachers to be active members of a professional learning community, communicate with families, and abide by the Mississippi Code of Ethics. Professional responsibilities include all activities related to teachers growing professionally (planning, researching, collaborating, reflecting, assessing, adjusting instruction, evaluating, progress monitoring). To satisfy this domain, teachers must continuously reflect upon and adjust techniques in teaching, assessing, remediating, and evaluating their students, as well as their own development regarding professional practice (MDE, 2014).

Within the context of the MSTAR program, the five domains are further subdivided into 20 standards: each of the 20 standards is located in a specific domain (MDE, 2014).

The planning domain contains standards 1-4. These four standards require that the teacher: (1) plans lessons that demonstrate knowledge of content and pedagogy; (2) plans lessons that meet the diversity of students' backgrounds, cultures, skills, learning levels, language proficiencies, interests, and special needs; (3) selects instructional goals that incorporate higher-level learning for all students; and (4) plans units of instruction that align with Mississippi's state content standards, or when applicable, the Common Core State Standards (MDE, 2014).

The assessment domain contains standards 5-6. These two standards require that the teacher: (5) collects and organizes data from assessments to provide feedback to students and adjusts lessons/instruction as necessary and (6) incorporates assessments into instructional planning that demonstrate high expectations for all students (MDE, 2014).

The instruction domain contains standards 7-11. These five standards require that the teacher: (7) demonstrates deep knowledge of content during instruction, (8) actively engages students in the learning process, (9) uses questioning and discussion techniques to promote higher order thinking skills, (10) brings multiple perspectives to the delivery of content, and (11) communicates clearly and effectively (MDE, 2014).

The learning environment domain contains standards 12-16. These five standards require that the teacher: (12) manages classroom space and resources effectively for student learning; (13) creates and maintains a climate of safety, respect, and support for all students; (14) maximizes time available for instruction; (15) establishes and maintains a culture of learning to high expectations; and (16) manages student behavior to provide productive learning opportunities for all students (MDE, 2014).

The professional responsibilities domain contains standards 17-20. These four standards require that the teacher: (17) engages in continuous professional development and applies new information learned in the classroom, (18) demonstrates professionalism and high ethical standards/acts in alignment with Mississippi Code of Ethics, (19) establishes and maintains effective communication with families, and (20) collaborates with colleagues and is an active member of a professional learning community in the school (MDE, 2014).

All MSTAR principals and others who are selected to be evaluators must undergo extensive full two-day state training sessions before conducting appraisals (MDE, 2014).

As stated earlier in this section, MSTAR requires a minimum of two formal observations, one in the spring and one in the fall. During formal observations, the evaluator focuses only on two domains during the visit: instruction and the learning environment. Instruction and the learning environment are the two observable domains that are considered most important (MDE, 2014).

MSTAR requires the use of an evaluation instrument based on the assumption that the instrument removes subjectivity and adds objectivity to the observational process by requiring evaluators to look at artifacts. Artifacts include lesson plans, student work samples, presentations, tests, and projects (MDE, 2014).

The MSTAR instrument is assumed to be reliable and valid because it includes multiple measures; it is based on student growth, and looks at artifacts and other so-called “hard” evidence. The instrument’s intent is to demonstrate student learning within the domains and standards comprising the evaluation program (MDE, 2014).

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The research methodology chapter is subdivided into four sections. The sections address the research design, the case (setting), collection of data, and the analysis of data. The content presented in each of the four sections describe the research design utilized in this particular case study, information about the setting for the case, how data were collected staying true to the MSTAR framework, and how collected data were analyzed in relation to the MSTAR framework.

As stated in Chapter I of the dissertation, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers in a secondary school using the state mandated program referred to as MSTAR. Four questions guided the investigation.

1. What are the difficulties encountered by the principal in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
2. How much of the principal's time is required to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
3. What strategies need to be developed to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
4. What action needs to be taken to resolve the implementation difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?

Important and useful information was gained in regard to implementing MSTAR by addressing the difficulties encountered, the amount of the principal's time required to implement the program, the strategies that need to be developed to implement the program, and the future action that needs to be taken to resolve implementation difficulties encountered. Information acquired from conducting the investigation holds potential value for assisting secondary school principals working in rural settings to more effectively use the MSTAR program to evaluate teachers.

Important and useful information was gained in regard to implementing MSTAR by addressing the difficulties encountered, the amount of the principal's time required to implement the program, the strategies that need to be developed to implement the program, and the future action that needs to be taken to resolve implementation difficulties encountered. Information acquired from conducting the investigation holds potential value for assisting secondary school principals working in rural settings to more effectively use the MSTAR program to evaluate teachers.

Research Design

The research design utilized in the investigation may be described as a single-subject case study utilizing qualitative self-study techniques. Simply put, the investigator participated in the role the study's single subject: that is, as the relatively new (second year) principal of OHS. The case involved a principal going about his administrative responsibilities and tasks in regard to implementing MSTAR to evaluate teachers. The case occurred within the setting of OHS. Self-study techniques (e.g., journal notes and reflection) were featured in the investigation.

Essentially, the investigation also fell within boundaries of a research category referred to as an auto-ethnography study. According to Gay et al. (2012), an auto-ethnography is a case analysis of one person, event, activity, or process set within a cultural perspective.

Qualitative research techniques were employed to identify the pros and cons encountered in attempting to put the MSTAR program into practice. Gay et al. (2012) describe qualitative research as involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest.

According to Berg (2009), qualitative research takes longer quantitative statistical methods, requires greater clarity of goals during the design stages, and cannot be easily analyzed by running computer programs. In support of Berg's contentions, Pring (2000), at an earlier date, contended that qualitative research is worth the additional time required, because it addresses that which is distinctive of the personal and social; namely, the "meanings" through which personal and social reality is understood.

The Case (Setting)

The case (setting) for the investigation consisted of OHS: a relatively small rural secondary school in the Okolona Municipal Separate School District (OMSSD). The school is geographically located in Okolona, Mississippi. During the period of the investigation, OHS served Grades 5 through 12, with an approximate enrollment of 450 students (Okolona Chamber of Commerce, 2015).

The OHS campus is divided into two parts: one part serves Grades 9-12; the other part serves Grades 5-8. The auditorium is located in the part serving Grades 9-12. The

band hall and alternative school are located in separate buildings on the school campus. All classrooms are equipped with smart board technology.

During the 2014-2015 School Year, OHS was served by a total of 40 faculty and staff members. The faculty was comprised of 22 regular education teachers, 4 special education teachers, 2 special education assistants and 2 regular education assistant teachers. In addition, the school had one counselor, one social worker, one assistant principal (who also serves as the athletic director), one librarian, one speech teacher, two office workers, two custodians, and one grant coordinator (MDE, 2015).

OMSSD is geographically located in the northeastern corner of Mississippi in Chickasaw county and falls within the physical confines of the city of Okolona. As of the 2010 United States Census, there were 2,692 people residing in the city: 70% were African American, 28% White, and 2% were classified in an “other” category. The median income for a household in the city was \$20,000 and the median income for a family was \$32,147. Out of the total number of people living in poverty within the district, 75% were under the age of 18 and 21% were 65 or older (Okolona Chamber of Commerce, 2015).

The district serves rural areas in eastern Chickasaw County and extends into a small portion of neighboring Monroe County. In the 2014-2015 School Year, OMSSD enrolled 695 students Grades K-12. The gender makeup of the district was 50% female and 50% male. The racial makeup of the district was 96% African-American and 4% White. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of the district's students were eligible to receive free or price reduced lunches (MDE, 2015).

In 2011, MDE took over governance of the school district due to financial issues, and a host of violations of Mississippi accountability standards. MDE then installed conservators charged with the duties of improving the academic, financial, and day-to-day operations (MDE, 2012).

Administrator and teacher turnover has been high since the conservatorship. Teacher retention also presents a problem. Several teachers and administrators have left the district. Every year, the school district replaces approximately 50 to 75% of the teachers. Jeannete Simone Smith was a former school principal within the district, she contributed the following statement. OMSSD student standardized test scores have been traditionally low in all areas, especially in mathematics and language arts (J.S. Smith personal communication, April 10, 2013).

Data Collection

Data were collected throughout the 2014-2015 School Year from August through May. Whenever MSTAR or facets of the program were implemented during the school day, neuronal impressions were stored in short-term memory and then transferred, via reflection, to written journal notes after the day ended.

Attention was given to storing neuronal impressions in short-term memory while observing activation of the planning domain involving teachers planning lessons that demonstrate knowledge of content and the rigor associated with common core. Furthermore, special consideration and focus was given to planning for higher level thinking activities for all students and ensuring that the lesson contained the diversity to meet the needs of all students (MDE, 2014).

In addition, neuronal impressions were made regarding observing activation of the assessment domain requiring teachers to collect and organize data for students (e.g., formal tests, quizzes, oral assessments, homework, etc.); as well as observing activation of the instruction domain requiring teachers to actively engage students, communicate clearly and effectively, and demonstrate deep knowledge of content (MDE, 2014).

Further, neuronal impressions were made observing activation of the learning environment domain focusing on managing classroom spaces and resources effectively and maximizing the time for instruction. Finally, neuronal impressions were made observing activation of the professional responsibilities domain requiring teachers to be active members of a professional learning community, communicate with families, and abide by the Mississippi Code of Ethics (MDE, 2014).

Attention was also given to storing neuronal impressions in short-term memory whether one or more of the 20 standards falling under a specific domain were observed. Standards falling within the parameters of the planning domain addressed whether teachers: (1) planned lessons that demonstrate knowledge of content and pedagogy; (2) planned lessons that meet the diversity of students' backgrounds, cultures, skills, learning levels, language proficiencies, interests, and special needs; (3) selected instructional goals that incorporate higher-level learning for all students; and (4) planned units of instruction that align with Mississippi's state content standards or the Common Core State Standards (MDE, 2014).

Standards falling within the parameters of the assessment domain addressed whether teachers: (5) collected and organized data from assessments to provide feedback to students and adjusts lessons/instruction as necessary, and (6) incorporated assessments

into instructional planning that demonstrate high expectations for all students(MDE, 2014).

Standards falling within the parameters of the instruction domain addressed whether teachers: (7) demonstrated deep knowledge of content during instruction, (8) actively engaged students in the learning process, (9) used questioning and discussion techniques to promote higher order thinking skills, (10) brought multiple perspectives to the delivery of content, and (11) communicated clearly and effectively (MDE, 2014).

Standards falling within the parameters of the learning domain addressed whether teachers: (12) managed classroom space and resources effectively for student learning; (13) created and maintained a climate of safety, respect, and support for all students; (14) maximized time available for instruction; (15) established and maintained a culture of learning to high expectations; and (16) managed student behavior to provide productive learning opportunities for all students (MDE, 2014).

Standards falling within the parameters of the professional responsibilities domain addressed whether teachers: (17) engaged in continuous professional development and applied new information learned in the classroom, (18) demonstrated professionalism and high ethical standards/acts in alignment with the Mississippi Code of Ethics, (19) established and maintained effective communication with families, and (20) collaborated with colleagues and are active members of a professional learning community in the school (MDE, 2014).

Special attention was especially given to storing neuronal impressions in short-term memory focusing on the two domains—instruction and the learning environment—considered highly important within the MSTAR context (MDE, 2014).

As stated previously in the chapter, MSTAR requires the use of an evaluation instrument intended to remove subjectivity and add objectivity to the observation process by requiring the evaluator to look at artifacts. Artifacts include but are not limited to lesson plans, student work samples, presentations, tests, and projects (MDE, 2014).

Neuronal impressions produced through the activation of the MSTAR program were stored in short-term memory and then transferred, via reflection, to written journal notes after teachers left campus when the school day ended.

As stated in Chapter I, it should be noted that this self-study did not involve human subjects other than the researcher himself. Data collected and analyzed were limited to the researcher's administrative behaviors and later reflections regarding the behaviors as he carried out his administrative tasks and responsibilities. Other administrators, teachers, and staff members were not identified during the collection of data: the only human subject involved in this self study was the researcher himself.

Data Analysis

Specific data collected throughout the 2014-2015 School Year from August through May in relation to MSTAR were analyzed searching for themes, patterns, and reoccurring elements contained in written notes made from stored neuronal impressions in short-term memory. The notes were regularly entered in a journal.

The written journal notes were analyzed searching for themes, patterns, and reoccurring elements in relation to the following questions:

1. Did teachers plan lessons that demonstrate knowledge of content and the rigor associated with common core?
2. Did teachers plan for higher level thinking activities for all students?

3. Did teachers ensure that lessons contain the diversity to meet the needs of all students?
4. Did teachers collect and organize student data?
5. Did teachers actively engage students?
6. Did teachers communicate clearly and effectively?
7. Did teachers demonstrate deep knowledge of content?
8. Did teachers managing classroom spaces and resources effectively?
9. Did teachers maximizing the time for instruction?
10. Did teachers function as members of a professional learning community?
11. Did teachers communicate with families?
12. Did teachers abide by the Mississippi Code of Ethics?

In addition to the aforementioned questions, data were further analyzed in relation to the four key questions that guided the investigation:

1. What are the difficulties encountered by the principal in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
2. How much of the principal's time is required to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
3. What strategies need to be developed to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?
4. What action needs to be taken to resolve the implementation difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?

Information gained from implementing MSTAR in regard to the difficulties encountered, the amount of the principal's time required to implement the program, the

strategies needed to be developed to implement the program, and the future action needed to be taken to resolve implementation difficulties encountered provided potential value for assisting secondary school principals in rural settings to more effectively use MSTAR to evaluate teachers.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion chapter is subdivided into five sections. The sections address summaries of journal notes, difficulties encountered using MSTAR, amount of the principal's time required in using MSTAR, strategies developed for using MSTAR, and actions taken to resolve difficulties encountered in using MSTAR.

As stated in Chapter I of the dissertation, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers in a secondary school using a state mandated program referred to as MSTAR.

Summaries of Journal Notes

Summaries of journal notes are divided into 10 monthly periods: August through May.

Journal Notes Summary (August 4, 2014 through August 29, 2014)

During the first month of school, I found that it required a significant amount of time, energy, and training necessary to communicate to new teachers and also veteran teachers what is required and expected to achieve “level 3” (meeting expectations) and “level 4” (exceeding expectations). We started with a training activity and videos of actual teachers teaching and the MSTAR rubric, to allow teachers a chance to view the

rubric extensively and then to determine what rating the teacher should receive. Most teachers thought that it was rather difficult to obtain a “level 3” (meeting expectations). I communicated that it is all about ensuring that certain protocols are in effect and planning extensively. I referred teachers continually to the rubric. This made the process a lot easier to make ratings and to maintain teaching performance throughout the school year.

Extensive planning is critical: I discovered that if it’s not stressed, even veteran teachers will fail to put the proper time and energy into lesson planning to ensure that their lessons are engaging, challenging, interesting, aligned, and rigorous enough to accomplish the learning goals and targets that we have established as a school. Training videos in which we actually see teaching in practice and critique the practice have proven to be extremely helpful. I also established a template to create lesson plans with particular components including (bell ringer, guided practice, independent practice, closure, assessment, exit ticket, etc.). Establishing a uniform template and leaving coaching comments can help novice and seasoned teachers improve their craft; it’s important to provide guidance regarding what is expected.

Instruction and learning environment are the only two observable domains that evaluators can access on a visit to a classroom. However, without proper and extensive planning, the learning environment and instruction will not be as productive as it should be. Continuous training (weekly or bi-weekly) must occur to ensure that teachers have the capacity to teach, plan extensively, and internalize the motivation to do it because it is in the best interest of students, without being prompted to do so. As important as the training and planning are, implementation is just as important, because the execution and implementation of such plans must also be closely monitored. New administrators must

devote resources (consultants, trainers) into training themselves and their staff on the expectations of the evaluation system, once properly trained, teachers can be held accountable for productivity. Coaching is the best way to approach improvement in teaching practice, with evaluators identifying strengths and areas for improvement for teachers. Evaluators must be able to articulate the area for improvement, model or provide training on how to improve, and follow-up to see adjustments have been made based on the recommendations. This is a continual process and cycle that has to be repeated and started over again, until the desired level of productivity is achieved.

Journal Notes Summary (September 1, 2014 through September 30 2014)

During the second month of school, I facilitated additional training on the MSTAR rubric and what it requires of teachers within the classroom. The trainings lasted for 1 hour and 35 minutes each day, and occurred over the course of 4 days for a total of over 6 hours devoted to introducing teachers to the content, expectations, and rigor of teaching expected with MSTAR evaluations. The rubric and the instructional videos explained how to obtain “effective” and “distinguished” rating by clearly articulating what activities that must occur by teachers and students within the classroom on a daily basis.

During the training, one of the areas of focus was on the emphasis on teaching and learning that must occur with visual evidence in the classroom. The evaluator (principal) writes (scripts) what teachers (teaching) are doing in one column and what student (learning) looks like in another column. This activity was facilitated with the staff in several sessions, so that they could begin to conceptualize the connection between their teaching and student learning. It was also helpful to promote teachers critiquing other

instructors (via video) comfortably, with hopes that they become disciplined enough to self-reflect and critique their own efforts after instruction each week within the classroom.

Considerable time must be given by principals to adequately training and introducing teachers to the high expectations of MSTAR, modeling what distinguished and effective teaching looks like, and what results it produces. Similarly, time and attention must be devoted to examples of ineffective practice, without ridiculing or drawing attention to individual staff members.

It is very important that teachers understand that learning is a product of careful planning, effective teacher delivery, and the continuous engagement of the student in specific learning activities (evidence) during the delivery of the lesson. One of the challenges is getting teachers to understand that they must devote the proper amount of time and attention to planning lessons that are engaging, interesting, and that are aligned to the standards that will be tested. In addition, the teacher must be trained in the pedagogy of teaching and must know and understand how their students learn best. In order for teachers to be successful within MSTAR parameters, they must be able to understand that planning, instruction, and assessment are interrelated in a continuous cycle that produces student success and that what they do each day in the classroom and as they prepare for instructional delivery have a direct effect on student learning and student engagement. Establishing and reinforcing non-negotiables related to classroom expectations and practice is critical. Examples include: bell ringers (do now activities), objectives clearly written on board (aligned to tested objectives), curriculum considerations, and testing conditions.

It is important for the principal to stress to teachers what really matters, what you consider important, and to reinforce through recognition and acknowledge, those teachers who consistently meet and exceed your expectations.

Journal Notes Summary (October 1, 2014 through October 30, 2014)

During the third month of school, after professional development on lesson planning and the domains of MSTAR and after appropriately modeling to teachers how to obtain “effective” and “distinguished” ratings according to the MSTAR rubric through modeling and demonstrating what effective teaching and learning looks like, attention was turned to the learning environment domain of MSTAR.

The learning environment domain, as indicated, critically examines the components of the learning environment to ensure that it is conducive to learning. The standards include: maximizing time for instruction, establishing and maintaining a culture of learning to high expectations, managing classroom space and resources effectively for student learning, managing student behavior to provide productive learning opportunities for all students, and creating and maintaining a climate of safety, respect, and support for all students.

One of the difficulties in implementing MSTAR, as a new principal using MSTAR in a small school is teacher retention. When you invest money in consulting, professional development, and training, you hope to retain the staff, so that this training eventually has a direct impact on student instruction. However, when retention is an issue, very little of this training is retained from previous years, therefore it must be repeated each year; essentially, you start over with professional development each year. It

becomes a serious issue when relatively new teachers with little to no experience in teaching make up the majority of the staff every school year.

New teachers must be taught and developed professionally in appropriate classroom management techniques, as well as effective teaching strategies. Without effectively establishing a strong environment for learning, very little learning occurs.

It is very important when you have a faculty of new teachers to have a strong emphasis on professional development. It must be ongoing and specific to meet the various needs of the faculty and staff. For example, two of the standards in MSTAR under the learning environment domain are to establish and maintain a culture of learning to high expectations and to maximize time for instruction. Many new teachers lack the ability to excel at both standards without training support and ongoing professional development. Professional learning communities (PLC) are a great organizational structure to implement in a school for a new principal using the MSTAR teacher evaluation process. PLCs meet for at least an hour and fifteen minutes each week specifically to discuss teaching strategies and data important to students' learning.

The principal must first establish the procedure, purpose, and structure of the PLCs and communicate to teachers the significance of having them. This should be accompanied through asking questions to facilitate conversation, looking at students' work samples, and focusing on teacher and student learning.

Journal Notes Summary (November 3, 2014 through November 28, 2014)

During the fourth month of school, after professional development on MSTAR, lesson planning and the learning environment, attention was given to instruction. This was a relatively short month, due to the Thanksgiving break. Nevertheless, we began to

focus on the instructional domain of MSTAR. This domain is critical in that teachers need to know and understand what is expected of them before they can be productive.

The instructional domain focuses on content knowledge, student engagement, questioning, bringing multiple perspectives to the delivery of content, and communication. Teachers must possess content knowledge; they must continually refresh themselves and stay abreast of the latest developments in their prospective fields. To promote higher order thinking skills, they must possess knowledge of teaching pedagogy.

Another difficulty associated with implementing MSTAR is the new curriculum and assessments in education with the arrival of PARCC assessments and common core. Principals and teachers are focusing on a “moving target” as they determine what teaching strategies are needed to obtain distinguished evaluation ratings. For example, one of the standards in MSTAR under the instructional domain requires that teacher’ actively engage students in the learning process; however, many seasoned and new teachers are unsure what the new assessments look like. Also, there are not any sample questions available at the present time. It is difficult to teach students what you do not adequately understand yourself. Another standard of MSTAR under the planning domain requires teachers to always include the knowledge and skills necessary for expected student performance on state assessments in all areas. Without practice questions, it is difficult to implement this practice within a classroom.

The principals must “stay in the know” as it relates to teaching and learning; he should continuously attend professional development provided by the state department on MSTAR. It is also helpful to visit neighboring schools that have effective practice and high student performance to see if he can emulate and replicate these practices. The

principal should seek out and contact seasoned and experienced consultants. Consultants need to work continuously and collaboratively with new teachers to coach and mentor them in how to best direct instruction to obtain optimal benefit for students. Consultants should be required to co-teach, model, provide resources, provide teaching strategies, provide updates to curriculum and testing, provide sample testing items, and motivate and assist the classroom teacher.

There must be a culture of accountability that is promoted within a school by the principal regarding student outcomes. This culture includes measures and standards for planning, assessment, classroom management, professional responsibilities, and the learning environment. The principal must be the visionary that champions and spearheads this accountability so that teachers feel compelled to go above and beyond for the benefit of students. The principal should also be an avid reader and researcher of best practice.

The new curriculum and assessments appear to be causing a shift in how we teach and how students learn. Consultants should be informed on changes and keep the teachers and administrators current on what they need to do and how to best prepare. New teachers must have mentor teachers and consultants, as well as a principal who conducts regular drop in visits to and provide feedback to teachers. In using MSTAR, the principal spends a considerable amount of time conducting drop-in visits, training teachers, and implementing the evaluation program within the school.

Journal Notes Summary (December 1, 2014 through December 19, 2014)

I quickly discovered that the drop-in evaluation visits regularly provide a clearer picture of day-to-day practices than the two formal observations. In fact, continuous drop-in visits with feedback can improve practice, if the teacher or instructor is willing to

approve. It is extremely important to analyze the data and have “instructional conversations” with teachers so that they can improve their practice. These conversations need to be solely focused on practice; administrators must provoke teachers to change ineffective practices for the benefit of students.

An apparent difficulty associated with MSTAR is teacher reluctance or failure to adapt classroom practice, based on recommendations made by the principal according to MSTAR. One example is that teachers are required to use questioning and discussion techniques to promote higher order thinking skills. However, novice teachers may lack the confidence or capacity to successfully facilitate this within their classrooms.

MSTAR also suggests a pre-conference, observation, post-conference, walk-through, and an artifact (lesson plans, student work samples, tests, etc.) review. The principal must determine whether to have the pre-conference with all teachers, or split duties with an Asst. Principal, if one is available, to spend more actual time conducting observations.

Teachers who consistently perform poorly on drop-in evaluations have to have a structure which compels them to change practice. This can be accomplished through consultants, professional development, peer observations, or improvement plans. A significant factor to consider for a principal is, if a teacher needs additional support and professional development to change practice change, or if the teacher lacks the capacity and motivation to change for the best interest of students. Every principal should have professional development resources scheduled prior to the beginning of the school year.

It takes a considerable amount of time to conduct a pre-observation conference, observation, post observation conference, and follow-up conference for each teacher.

There is a 30 minute requirement for formal observations and a 10 minute suggested time for informal observations. A principal must determine from the start how he wants to approach scheduling all of the components of MSTAR.

Journal Notes Summary January 1, 2015 through January 30, 2015)

During the sixth month of school, we continued with the instruction domain. This was the month that we returned from winter vacation. It was a bit challenging to settle teachers and students back into the routine of school.

In referring back to previous reflections, there are quite a few challenges associated with the implementation part of MSTAR. Predominately, one of the greatest challenges is ensuring that all instructors (novice, seasoned, veteran) are properly trained and adept at ensuring that they “maximize time available for instruction” and that they consistently engage and challenge students to meet high expectations.

Several classroom observations and conferences indicated that many teachers are unaware of why their efforts do not match student outcomes. One of the reasons is the level of student engagement and ensuring that students are engaged and interacting with the lesson and material in a way that will lead to a retention of knowledge and proficiency.

In several previous reflections, I mentioned the significance of training and support for teachers. Now I want to emphasize the significance of establishing sustainability in instructional practice once consultants, professional development, peer observations, and professional improvement plans conclude. Failure to maintain sustainability presents a major problem. Retention is the problem: the principal must

retain the recommended practices and continue to help teachers replicate them in their classrooms.

Journal Notes Summary (February 2, 2015 through February 27, 2015)

During the seventh month of school, we continued with the domains of instruction, planning, and learning environment. I looked holistically at our efforts thus far within the school year and thought about what specifically we could improve on as a school to improve teacher evaluation.

As seen with a self-reflection, preconference, observation, post conference, and multiple drop-in visits to follow up to see if suggestions were actually being implemented within the classroom can consume quite a bit of time for 28 teachers. Therefore we elected to seek-out electronic solutions that would streamline the observation instrument, compile data in one place, instantly give feedback to teachers electronically and support the instructional accountability that we desire to have as a school.

We reviewed a Request for Proposals (RFP). We selected School Status, due to the fact that it was cost effective, met the requirements of our RFP, and aligned with MSTAR better than any other online application or program.

Teacher expectations must be communicated to them immediately after drop-in visit observations in order to change practice. The principal must also continuously follow-up visitations to check on changes taking place in practice. The principal must identify procedures that make the process of teacher evaluation less time consuming, without sacrificing the reliability and validity of the evaluation.

Teachers appreciate instant, specific to practice, evaluation. They appear to like commenting and viewing pictures, or videos, of themselves teaching lessons. The

principal benefits from efficiency and organization: this helps him become more effective in conducting observations, as well as identifying those teachers whom have not been observed and need additional assistance. Principal efficiency proves to be powerful in producing positive change.

Journal Notes Summary (March 2, 2015 through March 31, 2015)

During the eighth month of school, I continued to conduct drop-in visits and made formal observations of classrooms. At this critical point of the MSTAR process, I looked at strategies that we need to examine to strengthen the MSTAR process and ways to improve it for the upcoming school year.

I determined that we first needed to critical examine and determine the readiness level and capacity of our teaching staff to be able to reach the “effective” level (level 3) and the “distinguished” level (level 4) designations on MSTAR. I looked at current observation notes and made several determinations and decisions concerning our readiness level as a school to do well with MSTAR evaluations. I began to plan and center professional development activities for next school year and conducted an evaluation needs assessment for teachers.

It is extremely important that everyone serving on the evaluation team has the same vision concerning the implementation of MSTAR; they must also be thoroughly trained and attend the training MDE updates.

Taking inventory of where you are and having a vision of what you want teacher evaluation to look like is very important for a school. Identifying what teachers are currently doing well is essential. At this point we are maximizing time available for

instruction, actively involving students in the learning process, and using questioning and discussion techniques to promote higher order thinking skills.

Professional development activities were planned to discuss specifically how to obtain higher ratings on MSTAR. Best practices in teaching strategies were modeled. PLCs were given additional time to discuss, co-plan, and prepare. This process should be a continuous cycle. Continuous drop-in visits to classrooms to check if teachers have made suggested adjustments in their classrooms for the benefit of students are a must.

Journal Notes Summary (April 1, 2015 through April 30, 2015)

During the ninth month of school, I continued to do informal observations of classrooms. At this point, as we are bringing a close to the school year, I continue to identify barriers to the successful implementation of MSTAR. One difficulty encountered by a new principal implementing MSTAR is how to obtain resources for professional development for teachers; another is how to meet the rigorous instructional demands outlined by MSTAR.

Networking and building relationships with former and existing principals, state department officials, consultants, and individuals with expertise prove to be extremely helpful in gleaning privileged information on how to make school improvement a reality.

As a new principal implementing a new evaluation system in a small rural secondary school, it was important to establish and maintain relationships with key department of education officials, former and practicing successful principals, mentors, college professors, and others that can connect you to information, resources, and people that can help you to be successful.

It is also vital to be an avid reader, researcher, and interest in developing his/her personal skills to be able to assist teachers. The principal should also attend professional development as often as needed to develop skills and stay abreast of the latest developments in education. The new principal must become aware of free resources, visit successful and high-performing schools, and collaborate with other principals. It is also critical that the new principal be assigned a seasoned and successful mentor.

Journal Notes Summary (May 4, 2015 through May 29, 2015)

During the final month of school, I reflected on the MSTAR evaluation as a whole: identified barriers and difficulties associated with implementation, and prioritized the most important areas. I also estimated how much time it would take to address MSTAR in the coming school year and planned future professional development activities.

Reflecting upon the MSTAR process as a whole has been a challenging experience. MSTAR, if implemented correctly, takes great amounts of time and energy.

The greatest capital to be acquired is “human” capital in regard to implementing MSTAR successfully. Developing a teaching staff that is dedicated, accountable, and willing to undertake this program is essential to effective implementation.

MSTAR’s ultimate goal is to improve teaching and learning. When the principal looks analytically at the teacher evaluation process, there is always room for improvement. Individual teachers vary in their capacities and abilities to deliver instruction effectively. The principals must embrace the concept of continuous, job-embedded professional practice to improve teachers’ instructional effectiveness.

PLCs, peer observations, videos, simulations, co-teaching, mentoring, and professional development are essential structures that a principal must institute to assist with the effective implementation of the MSTAR Program.

Difficulties Encountered Using MSTAR

The first question that guided this investigation focused on gaining insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers using a state mandated program referred to as MSTAR.

The questions asked: What are the difficulties encountered by the principal in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?

The findings suggest there were four major difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program. The difficulties were:

1. The new “common core” curriculum and new assessments in English and Mathematics called The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) required by the MDE were difficult to comprehend.
2. Inadequate teacher preparation to enter the teaching field caused many new teachers to be poorly prepared to serve in the role of classroom teacher. MSTAR expectations were much too difficult for them to meet.
3. Financial resources necessary to secure proper professional development for teachers presented a significant. School district fiscal resources were inadequate to provide the level of staff development required. MDE did not provide adequate professional development funding.

4. Implementing the MSTAR program proved very time intensive. The program's multiple components made heavy demands on the principal's time, energy, and attention. Implementing MSTAR correctly requires a significant commitment of time and resources.

Principal's Time Required in Using MSTAR

The second research question that guided this investigation focused on gaining insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers using a state mandated program referred to as MSTAR. The question asked: How much of the principal's time is required to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?

The findings identified three elements related to the amount of the principal's time required to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program. The elements were:

1. MSTAR implementation required approximately 2-3 hours weekly in relation to professional development, teacher observations, conferences, and meetings. Although 2-3 hours per week may not seem to be excessive, principals, as a rule, have very little time to spend for teacher appraisal.

2. In addition to effort related to teacher supervision, MSTAR implementation required approximately an additional hour and 30 minutes per week earmarked for evaluation purposes per se. This amount of time was spent on prioritizing needs, meeting with the school district business manager to continuously request funds for professional development and other incentives (e.g., high performance, student growth, teacher of month tasks), and searching for supplemental funding to provide needed additional resources and instructional supports.
3. MSTAR implementation required approximately 10-12 days (at 6 hours per day) both on-site and off-site for principal training to stay abreast of latest developments in relation to “common core” curriculum demands, modifications to assessment instruments, and increasing the capability to more effectively and efficiently carry out teacher appraisals.

Strategies Developed for Using MSTAR

The third research question that guided this investigation focused on gaining insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers using a state mandated program referred to as MSTAR. The question asked: What strategies need to be developed to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?

The findings suggested that five strategies were needed for addressing the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program. The strategies were:

1. Shared accountability among teachers regarding classroom expectations, instruction, assessment, discipline, progress monitoring, and data analysis. Sharing accountability is not common practice for teachers. They do not have a natural inclination for teamwork: teachers appear to be natural loners. Therefore, the principal needs to take overt action to encourage shared accountability. The strategy developed at Okolona High School featured shared accountability through peer observations, ongoing progress monitoring, and holding all teachers accountable for student performance with data meetings, Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and specific job embedded professional development.
2. OHS administration, faculty, and staff implemented the PLC concept for the purpose of strategically improving teaching practices.
3. OHS administration, faculty, and staff developed a job-embedded, continuous professional development program. The program provided teachers “specific” professional development. Hiring capable, competent consultants who were willing to provide needed expertise and support to teacher was an integral facet of the school’s strategy.
4. Another strategy developed called for the development of school board policy requiring central office to provide services, coupled with a timeframe for doing so, in order to meet MSTAR demands.

5. The final strategy consisted of recommending the purchase of an electronic program designed to organize, track, and store teacher evaluation data. Such a program provides the means to communicate electronically (quickly and efficiently) evaluation results for the purpose of making recommendations, awarding commendations, and identifying areas for improvement.

Actions Taken to Resolve Difficulties

The fourth research question that guided this investigation focused on gaining insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new principal of a rural high school in relation to effectively evaluating teachers using a state mandated program referred to as MSTAR. The question asked: What action needs to be taken to resolve the implementation difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program?

The findings suggest that five actions needed to be taken to resolve the implementation difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program. These actions were:

1. Develop common meeting times, places, expectations, and focus for PLC meetings and professional development sessions.
2. Facilitate a strong professional development program intended to help novice teachers and offset the demands of the “common core” curriculum, assessments, and accountability system.

3. Develop criteria (expectations) for the selection and employment of knowledgeable, dedicated, and competent consultants. Consultants need to work alongside teachers throughout the school year.
4. Develop and implement incentives to recruit and retain effective teachers.
5. Research, analyze, and purchase an electronic system designed to alleviate the amount of time and energy that is directly focused on teacher evaluation.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V is subdivided into three sections. The sections provide a summary of the investigation, implications based on the findings, and recommendations.

As stated in Chapter I of the dissertation, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the challenges and issues facing a relatively new secondary school principal using a state mandated teacher evaluation program referred to as MSTAR.

Summary

One of the most important functions of the school principal involves evaluating teachers because they have the most direct impact on student achievement. In Mississippi, teacher evaluation changed dramatically with the development and implementation of the state's new MSTAR evaluation system.

The evaluation of teachers is a formidable task in itself, however it is especially so for new principals in a rural school with a history of low teacher retention, high administrative turnover, newly implemented curriculum focusing on college and career readiness standards, and rigorous assessments.

The review of literature addressed in Chapter II indicated that there is a wealth of information regarding teacher evaluation, but a shortage of information in relation to three specific areas: (a) research done from the perspective of a practicing principal using the MSTAR program to evaluate teachers in Mississippi, (b) research done by a relatively

new (less than two years on the job) principal using the MSTAR program to evaluate teachers in Mississippi, and (c) research done by a principal serving in a rural school recovering from conservatorship (state takeover) using the MSTAR program to evaluate teachers in Mississippi.

In brief, the majority of the literature reviewed was written from the perspective of researchers, not practicing school administrators. This particular study is significant because it was conducted by a practicing principal.

The research design utilized in the investigation may best be described as a single-subject case study utilizing qualitative self-study techniques. The researcher participated in the role of the investigation's single-subject.

The case involved a principal carrying out his administrative responsibilities and tasks in relation to implementing MSTAR to evaluate teachers in a rural high school. The case occurred within the setting of OHS. Qualitative self-study techniques (e.g., reflections transcribed into journal notes) were featured in the investigation.

The four research questions that guided the investigation, accompanied by summaries of related findings, follow:

1. What are the difficulties encountered by the principal in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program? Significant time must be dedicated to the training and professional development of teachers and the administrators implementing MSTAR; also, the training must be job embedded, specific, and relevant to the individuals being trained. MSTAR implementation constitutes a time consuming process.

2. How much of the principal's time is required to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program? Investment of time proved critical to the implementation of MSTAR in the way of training and professional development; also, structures for professional learning communities, peer observations, and professional development must be put in place. MSTAR implementation is costly not only in terms of time required, but also in regard to additional purchasing costs.
3. What strategies need to be developed to address the difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program? Development of an electronic computerized system closely aligned with the components of MSTAR would make the process of teacher evaluation more efficient and less time intensive. Although potentially costly, an electronic computerized system needs to be developed.
4. What action needs to be taken to resolve the implementation difficulties encountered in using the MSTAR teacher evaluation program? A culture of shared accountability must be encouraged, developed, and implemented in order to bring about sustained positive change in teachers' instructional practices resulting from MSTAR evaluation findings. Within the created culture, district executives and board members must be held accountable for providing necessary resources.

Implications

The purpose of this investigate was to explore the difficulties encountered in implementing MSTAR, the amount of time that it took to resolve difficulties, the

strategies that needed to be developed for successful implementations, and the actions that needed to be taken.

The amount of time required to put MSTAR into action turned out to be an almost overwhelming implementation factor (e.g., finding the time during the school day to train teachers or the time required for conducting conferences). To successfully implement MSTAR, the principal must manage time wisely.

Secondly, the MSTAR program makes heavy demands on resources such as consultants to conduct training sessions for teachers in relation to learning effective instructional strategies. To successfully implement MSTAR, the principal must continuously seek and secure resources.

Thirdly, the MSTAR program calls for the principal to become skillful in motivating teachers, through the evaluation process, to become the best instructors they can possibly be; such teachers, in turn, can assist students to become all they can be as learners. In brief, to successfully implement MSTAR, the principal must become a master motivator.

When the three aforementioned MSTAR program implementation factors—time, resources, and motivation mastery—are viewed holistically, in concert with the many responsibilities and tasks required of a relatively inexperienced principal (e.g., student discipline), the challenge becomes daunting.

Without significant and ongoing support from the state's educational department, it appears dubious that the MSTAR program can be successfully implemented and continued in any lasting way, especially in regard to its used by relatively new principals

in small rural school districts short on resources. Based on this investigation, state level support appears to be a must.

Recommendations

Four recommendations are made based on the findings and implications stemming from this investigation into the implementation of the MSTAR program for evaluating teachers.

First, it is recommended that the state department of education provide intensive technical support, professional development, and administrative guidance to principals and teachers implementing the MSTAR program. Implementation should be done slowly, perhaps over several years. Also, the school district's capability and readiness to make change in the evaluation process should be taken into account.

Secondly, it is recommended that the state department of education work with colleges and universities to develop teacher evaluation workshops for aspiring administrators seeking administrative licensure. The workshops should focus attention on how best to implement any new state mandated teacher evaluation program like MSTAR. The workshop should address strategies for developing professional learning communities, discuss instructional practice, provide methods for analyzing student work samples, present techniques for evaluating student test data, demonstrate ways to conduct peer observations (e.g., teachers observing fellow colleagues in practice), how to select consultants, and so forth.

Thirdly, it is recommended that continued investigations be conducted focusing on MSTAR implementation by principals in various educational environments, ranging

from rural to urban settings and from small to large school district. Principals should be encouraged to describe their experiences implementing the MSTAR program.

Finally, practicing principals should be encouraged by the state education department to make presentations in university and college educational administration courses for aspiring school leaders. Authentic sharing of experience implementing the MSTAR program should prove invaluable to the education of wannabe principals preparing to serve as school leaders.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

September 27, 2013

Christopher Hill

Leadership and Foundations

RE: HRPP Study #13-254: A Study of Mississippi Statewide Teacher Assessment Rubric (MSTAR)

Dear Mr. Hill:

This email serves as official documentation that the above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 9/27/2013 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, in accordance with SOP 01-03 Administrative Review of Applications, a new application must be submitted if the study is ongoing after 5 years from the date of approval.

Additionally, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the HRPP prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The HRPP reserves the right, at any time during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please note that the MSU HRPP is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. One of these changes is the implementation of an approval stamp for consent forms. The approval stamp will assist in ensuring the HRPP approved version of the consent form is used in the actual conduct of research. Your stamped consent form will be attached in a separate email. You must use copies of the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.

Please refer to your HRPP number (#13-254) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at nmorse@orc.msstate.edu or call 662-325-3994.

Finally, we would greatly appreciate your feedback on the HRPP approval process.

Please take a few minutes to complete our survey at

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YZC7QQD>.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse, CIP

IRB Compliance Administrator

APPENDIX B
MSTAR OBSERVATION FORM

Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric
Summary Score

Teacher: _____ School: _____
 Teacher's Educator ID: _____ Grade/Subject: _____
 Date: _____ Evaluator: _____

| Standards | Distinguished (4 points) | Effective (3 points) | Emerging (2 points) | Unsatisfactory (1 point) | Score |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| Domain I: Planning | | | | | |
| 1. Plans lessons that demonstrate knowledge of content and pedagogy | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 2. Plans lessons that meet the diversity of students' backgrounds, cultures, skills, learning levels, language proficiencies, interests, and special needs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 3. Selects instructional goals that incorporate higher level learning for all students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 4. Plans units of instruction that align with the MS Curriculum Framework, the Standards, or other applicable state content standards | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| Domain score (average of Standard scores) | | | | | 0.00 |
| Domain II: Assessment | | | | | |
| 5. Collects and organizes data from assessments to provide feedback to students and adjusts lessons and instruction as necessary | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 6. Incorporates assessments into instructional planning that demonstrate high expectations for all students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| Domain score (average of Standard scores) | | | | | 0.00 |
| Domain III: Instruction | | | | | |
| 7. Demonstrates deep knowledge of content during instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 8. Actively engages students in the learning process | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 9. Uses questioning and discussion techniques to promote higher order thinking skills | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 10. Brings multiple perspectives to the delivery of content | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 11. Communicates clearly and effectively | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| Domain score (average of Standard scores) | | | | | 0.00 |

August 2014

| Standards | Distinguished (4 points) | Effective (3 points) | Emerging (2 points) | Unsatisfactory (1 point) | Score |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| Domain IV: Learning Environment | | | | | |
| 12. Manages classroom space and resources effectively for student learning | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 13. Creates and maintains a climate of safety, respect, and support for all students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 14. Maximizes time available for instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 15. Establishes and maintains a culture of learning to high expectations | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 16. Manages student behavior to provide productive learning opportunities for all students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| Domain score (average of Standard scores) | | | | | 0.00 |
| Domain V: Professional Responsibilities | | | | | |
| 17. Engages in continuous professional development and applies new information learned in the classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 18. Demonstrates professionalism and high ethical standards; acts in alignment with Mississippi Code of Ethics | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 19. Establishes and maintains effective communication with families | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| 20. Collaborates with colleagues and is an active member of a professional learning community in the school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 0.00 |
| Domain score (average of Standard scores) | | | | | 0.00 |
| M-STAR summary score (average of Domain scores) | | | | | 0.00 |
| Areas of strength: | | | | | |
| Areas for growth: | | | | | |
| Next steps: | | | | | |

This form is for district or school level documentation. It should not be submitted to MDE.

APPENDIX C

MSTAR POST CONFERENCE FORM

6. What do the results of the artifact review reveal about the teacher's practice and student learning?

7. Areas of strength:

8. Areas for growth:

9. Short term next steps (when applicable):

10. Long term next steps:

11. Teacher Comments (optional):

12. Evaluator Comments (optional):

Teacher signature: _____

Date: _____

Evaluator signature: _____

Date: _____