My experiences with data driven and research informed educational decision-making began when I took a course in statistics many years ago at TC. While I never ended up enrolling in the graduate program that prompted me to take statistics, the course did make me a better consumer of educational research and changed the way I thought about the role research should play in educational change. These understandings were confirmed when I took a course in research methods and design as a student in the Administration and Supervision Certificate Program at Hunter College several years later. As the chair of Middle Division History at the Horace Mann School for the past eight years, I have used the skills I gained in these courses to become an avid consumer of educational research and have used this knowledge to lead my department in curriculum revision initiatives and to provide professional development. Although my interest in research-based evidence has spanned much of my career, I have little formal training beyond the rudimentary knowledge I gained in these two courses. I have no experience with particular models or frameworks; much of what I have been able to learn has been the result of following my instincts and self-study.

Last year, our head of school tasked me with investigating how we were using technology in the middle school and how our use corresponded with best practices. The Middle Division had recently transitioned to a 1:1 iPad model, sparking a battle among administrators, teachers, and parents over the role of iPads in middle school classrooms. Much to my surprise and disappointment, I found that the research was sparse and that the few studies that did exist were poor in quality. I was able to use the skills I acquired in those statistics and research methods courses to delve into the literature, but it was clear that my skills were quite rusty. Luckily, one of our student interns had lots of research experience, and I was able to learn from him. Our collaboration allowed me to design several studies of my own, including one on the effect of eBooks on incidental vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension that became the basis of a poster presentation at the 2018 APA Annual Convention.

This year, I have a new position as Coordinator of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment at Horace Mann. My responsibilities include helping the faculty to adopt a more developmentally appropriate curriculum model, assisting department chairs and teachers in aligning educational goals, instruction, and assessment, as well as continuing to lead the transition to an evidence-based, research informed decision-making model. These are big tasks. As is typical of most independent schools, few teachers have adequate training in curriculum design or have any formal knowledge of research methods. Most are infrequent consumers of the educational research in their fields because of a school culture that emphasizes content knowledge over pedagogy. Little professional development has been provided to equip our teachers with the tools to articulate and evaluate curriculum. Since I have been largely self-taught, my need for more formal training is urgent. I view my participation in this course as one of the ways I can begin to acquire some of this training. I have also encouraged five colleagues to enroll in the course with me. Along with some other like-minded faculty, they will form the beginning of a critical mass of teacher-researchers who can help to transform our school

I view data, research, and evidence-based improvement cycles as the key to the changes we are looking to make at the Horae Mann School. Since we are embarking on a major overhaul of our curriculum, we need standard processes and practices to guide us. We also need to develop research and data literacy. For example, we administer the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) sponsored by the Educational Research Board to all of our 6th graders at the end of the school year, but little is gained form the rich data provided by this assessment, because the test is administered too late in the year to be of much use and because the overwhelming majority of the faculty have no idea how to understand let alone use the data effectively to improve their curriculum or to enhance the educational experiences of their students. Even worse, we have never even investigated whether or not the content standards of the test match our curricular goals, partly because we don’t have clearly stated educational goals in each of our departments. Teaching teachers to use the CTP standards to develop and hone our own educational goals would be one step in developing a comprehensive, clearly articulated and developmentally appropriate curriculum design for our middle school. An effective next step would be to use the results of the test to look at weaknesses in our curriculum, so we can address them. However, none of these steps will resonate with the faculty unless they recognize that there is a problem in how we don’t use or misuse these data. Implementing an evidence-based improvement cycle would be a very effective way to get faculty onboard and to involve them meaningfully in change. This, of course, requires training and cultivating a culture that encourages faculty to not only view asking the question “What evidence do you have for that statement?” positively but to actually think of asking the question at all.

I believe that our faculty is not only ready but eager to make these changes. They have suffered from lack of direction and professional development for many years. They are a highly intelligent group of educators who care deeply about the students they teach. They are diligent, perseverant, and extremely collaborative. Teaching them to use evidence-based improvement cycles will enable them to work on the problems that they know exist in our school in a meaningful way, empowering them to make the changes they know intuitively will benefit their students. The problems that currently plague our middle school – lack of educational goals, developmentally inappropriate instructional strategies and assessments, lack of alignment and articulation – are more the result of lack of leadership than lack of faculty willingness or ability. With new vision, consistency, and inspiration, change is still difficult, but possible. As Chenowith argues, with the right training and support, teachers can make these changes. My role as Coordinator of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment is to provide teachers with the tools they need to make these changes.

Therefore, my main learning objective is to acquire the skills that our faculty needs to implement change so I can, in turn, help them acquire the skills they need. While I already possess some of these skills, I need to be confident in my knowledge so I can be an effective trainer. In particular, to continue to lead and develop a cohort of teacher-researchers, I need to have solid research skills myself. While this course does not address *conducting* valid and reliable research, it is equally important that our faculty become adept at finding relevant research studies in their fields and critiquing then. The differences between internal and external validity are critical understandings for our team of teacher-researchers. Knowing how to read and interpret data is a fundamental component of being a 21st century educator. As Chenowith points out, students benefit not from the collection of data but from what teachers and administrators do with it.

I also hope to become more data and research literate so I can help our faculty understand the purpose of assessment better. Of course, we will have to start with setting appropriate, measurable educational goals. Utilizing evidence-based research cycles will help us achieve these goals, but to move forward, teachers will also need to learn how to construct valid, reliable, and fair assessments. Knowing how to analyze the data produced by assessments and how to use it to evaluate curriculum and instruction are vital skills that every teacher should have. While I have some experience, mainly self-taught, in assessment design, again I am looking to solidify *my* understanding so I can, in turn, share it with our faculty. I will know I have achieved my goals when I can confidently and effectively help our faculty achieve data and research literacy and when curricular change is research informed.

My learning objectives stem directly from my experiences as a fledgling teacher-researcher and my current responsibilities as Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Coordinator. In order to do my job well, I need to acquire and solidify the skills necessary to cultivate an evidence-based, research informed education model in the Horace Mann Middle Division. Additionally, to assist department chairs and members of the faculty as they revise, design, and ultimately evaluate their curriculum so that it aligns learning goals, instruction, and assessment in developmentally appropriate ways, I need to not only understand the relevant educational literature but to be able to convey this understanding to my colleagues in ways that are relevant to them as educators. I view this course as an opportunity to hone the skills I already possess and to acquire the skills I still need in order to create the changes that will enhance the educational experiences of all of our students.