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Narrowing of Curriculum: Teaching in an Age of Accountability:

A Phenomenological Study

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Donna Newberg-Long

August 2010

Advisors: Linda Brookhart, Ph.D.; Kent Seidel, Ph.D.

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Degree date: August 2010

Abstract

Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation made clear the need for increased accountability of U.S. public schools in 2002, there has been a trend toward narrowing curriculum in social studies and other core subjects to focus predominantly on what is tested through state exams. Concerns exist regarding the unintended consequences of curriculum narrowing on low, middle and high socioeconomic status (SES) students in public schools.

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) have been tracking the effects of NCLB since it took effect in 2002 and found that 71 percent of districts nationwide reported increasing instructional time for the tested subjects of reading, writing and math at the expense of other core subjects, especially social studies and science (Jennings, et.al 2006). Though the intention of NCLB has been to raise achievement, the results are less than promising (NCES, 2009; CEP, 2008; NAEP, 2007).

This phenomenological study explores three teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing, how these changes are impacting teachers, and teachers' beliefs about their role and responsibilities in light of what is expected by districts in an era of increased accountability.

Findings include teachers' perceptions of lack of time as a major stressor to accomplish all that is required for raising achievement and to meet the standards with

students. The district mandated focus of instruction was found to be on tested subjects of reading, writing, math and recently science, while social studies was found to be marginalized—not receiving adequate instruction time or resources. P.E. and music were also found to be narrowed, while art had increased over time.

A recurring theme was the stress experienced by teachers who are required to teach scripted curricula with the pressure to produce high achievement on state tests. Such curricula were not perceived to be meeting student needs or to be successful in raising student achievement in reading. Teachers thought teaching in integrated units would allow them to accomplish more instructional goals in the limited time they have with students. They also felt this approach made more sense for student learning of background knowledge and vocabulary essential to student academic success.

Teachers subjected to scripted curricula and evaluation based on high-stakes testing did not feel trusted and experienced a great deal of stress related to following district directives when they did not coincide with teacher beliefs regarding their role as teachers. They understood the need for scripted programming only to support new teachers in hopes of retaining them in the profession.

Overall, the greatest negative impact was found to be on the social studies which have lost importance in these schools. This marginalization left teachers feeling conflicted, as their stated goal of education was to educate students who would become good citizens.

Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation goes to my Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Linda Brookhart for her insight, care, approachability, unlimited time, quick response, and her extraordinary ability to see the details.

Dr. Kent Seidel for narrowing my focus so that it was manageable, and leading me to a brilliant topic and enjoyable journey.

Dr. Susan Korach, whose classes brought me great understanding, and for her insight into a better, more exciting dissertation.

Dr. Salter for agreeing to be my Outside Chair and refereeing my defense.

And last, but not least,

To My Husband, Tim Long, whose constant support and encouragement have sustained me through this long process.

The greatest challenge of this work was to narrow it down to something manageable. Thanks to my professors who helped this researcher do just that. The journey has been truly enjoyable—completing the literature review, listening to teachers, discovering themes. To prove anything through this study would be difficult. The number of teachers interviewed was only three, but their voices rang out loud and clear. The teachers expressed many similarities in what they are experiencing in education today compared to in the past, and we can learn much from their wisdom.

Thanks to the teachers whose precious time was taken to share their perspectives in hopes of improving our public schools.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

The reform efforts of *A Nation at Risk* established the need for content standards in public schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, NCEE, 1983). As a result, public schools focus on standards-based education and closing the achievement gap for groups of students based on gender, race, English Language Learners (ELLs), Special Education and socioeconomic status (SES.) Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation increased federal and state oversight and accountability of public schools in 2002, there has been a trend toward narrowing curriculum to focus predominantly on what is tested through state exams (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2007; Center for Education Policy, CEP, 2008).

Curriculum narrowing is the practice of increasing instructional time spent on state-tested subjects like reading, writing, and math at the expense of other core subjects. At the elementary school level, narrowed subjects have included social studies, science, physical education and the arts (CEP, 2007; NCES, 2007; von Zastrow & Janc, 2004). As of 2007, NCLB mandated that students also be tested in science once between grades three and five which has increased instruction and resource allocation in this subject. While schools and districts must target instruction to meet state and federal achievement goals, there have been unintended consequences relative to lost instruction in non-tested, narrowed subjects (von Zastrow & Janc, 2004).

Research on the consequences of negatively impacted subjects is ongoing, including the loss of content background knowledge, vocabulary, sense of citizenship and more (Center for Comprehensive School Reform & Improvement, CCSRI, 2006; National Council for the Social Studies, NCSS, 2008). However, study of curriculum narrowing and the impact of such practices on teachers and students needs more exploration. This study focuses on teacher experiences of curriculum narrowing, as well as their perception of its impact on teachers in the current environment of increased accountability.

Social studies instruction provides the foundation for contextual learning needed by students to become informed citizens and to compete in a global economy (NCSS, 2008). In a speech to students nationwide given on September 8, 2009, President Barack Obama addressed the need for social studies, science, and the arts:

You'll need the knowledge and problem-solving skills you learn in science and math to cure diseases like cancer and AIDS and to develop new energy technologies and protect our environment. You'll need the insights and critical-thinking skills you gain in history and social studies to fight poverty and homelessness, crime and discrimination, and make our Nation more fair and more free. You'll need the creativity and ingenuity you develop in all your classes to build new companies that will create new jobs and boost our economy (para. 15).

The practice of narrowing curriculum in social studies and other core subjects may have unintended consequences for the very students we are targeting for help through NCLB—minority and underachieving students—and potentially, for the future of the nation. In a study done by the Council for Basic Education (CBE, 2004), nearly one thousand elementary and secondary principals participated in a survey and focus groups to assess the condition of liberal arts in American education. Von Zastrow states, “We

...saw ample evidence of waning commitment to the arts, foreign language, and elementary social studies” (p. 7).

This shift to focus more instructional time on tested subjects like reading, writing and math to be taught in isolation is unfounded as a strategy to raise student achievement (Marzano, 2001; Willingham, 2006; Hirsch, 1996 & 2006). Reading comprehension skills are best learned and practiced in context, since each subject requires different lenses through which to make meaning of complex text. According to the National Reading Panel, understanding of different content areas requires different comprehension strategies (Kamil, 2004).

Content rich subjects like social studies and science provide essential sources of background knowledge for elementary students. Such knowledge and vocabulary are deemed imperative for successful reading comprehension and higher level thinking (Catts & Kamhi, 2009; Hirsch, 2006). According to research done by Catts (2009), “...schools need to provide children with opportunities to gain broad content knowledge” (p. 179). If we want to raise student achievement in reading, we need to build background knowledge and vocabulary.

Cognitive science research is making it increasingly clear that reading comprehension requires a student to possess a lot of vocabulary and a lot of background knowledge...No amount of reading comprehension ‘skills’ instruction can compensate for that lack of knowledge (AFT, 2006, para. 4).

Rationale for the Study

Despite all of NCLB’s efforts, improvements in achievement are slight nationwide (CEP, 2008; NCES, 2008; NAESP, 2009). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the average achievement scores in reading and math

have increased modestly since 1972 for elementary and middle school students. Achievement for high school students, however, has remained flat—even decreased. In 2006, Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project released a rigorous review of achievement gains. The study concluded NCLB has had no significant impact on improving reading or math achievement. Math has improved at the same pace as it did before 2002. In addition, no significant narrowing of the achievement gap is reported (Lee, 2006).

The NCES (2009) demonstrated increases in fourth grade student achievement in reading since 1992. However, the percentage of students who are performing at or above proficient levels is only 33% versus 29% in 1992, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment. Results for 8th graders were not measurably different between 2005 and 2007. Of great concern are results of 12th grade students. Reading achievement went down between 1995 and 2007. 12th grade students performing at or above proficient was 35% in 2005 versus 40% in 1992 (NCES, 2009, p. 30).

Thus, educators and policy-makers may conclude that something more is needed to reach our struggling students. A sensible way to teach standards might be to integrate skills into rich contextual learning through meaningful social studies and other core subjects (CEP, 2007; Willingham, 2006; Schmoker & Marzano, 2001; Jerald, 2006; CEP, 2007). In order to prepare students successfully for the 21st century, educators and legislators are concerned about the gap in achievement that exists for low socioeconomic status (SES) students ‘at risk’ of failure in school. Although NCLB professes to address

the achievement gap, many do not agree. Senator Paul Wellstone was a harsh critic of high-stakes testing.

Nichols and Berliner (2008) quote Wellstone,

I want to speak out boldly against this trend toward high-stakes testing. It is a harsh agenda that holds children responsible for our own failure to invest in their future and in their achievement (p. 171)...If one does not believe that failure on tests has to do with this crushing lack of opportunity, look at who is failing (p.172).

Such imbalances as lack of background knowledge and vocabulary between low SES students and their higher SES peers have been found to be a root cause of the achievement gap. Decreasing time in social studies and science decreases opportunities to build this knowledge. Focusing on tested subjects at the expense of rich content learning is a missed opportunity for low SES students (Willingham, 2006; AFT, 2006; Hirsch, 1996).

This phenomenological study will take an in-depth look at curriculum narrowing and how it effects teachers in elementary classrooms. The research will render insight into the experiences of teachers regarding curriculum narrowing and their beliefs about their role as educators before and after the implementation of No Child Left Behind.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to add to the body of evidence on how curriculum narrowing is affecting teachers in elementary classrooms. The phenomenological study will contribute to what we know about the effects of increasing accountability on core subjects and how these changes in focus to tested subjects are experienced by teachers. Belief systems concerning their goals as teachers and district expectations are explored, including teacher perceptions of the impact of curriculum narrowing in non-tested

subjects on students through the eyes of their teachers. Ideally, the findings of this study will assist and inform districts who are currently making decisions about curricular choices for elementary students.

Research Questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers relative to district expectations?
3. How have changes in accountability expectations impacted teachers?

Effective Curriculum and Instruction

Each core subject has its purpose in providing public school students with a complete educational foundation upon which they can forge a successful future. Core subjects include: literacy, math, social studies, science, the arts and physical education (PE), according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines the purpose of social studies as follows, "The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (NCSS, 2008, para. 1). In their position statement (2008), NCSS states, "Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active" (para. 1).

Social studies instruction builds students' cultural literacy. According to E.D. Hirsch (1996), "Joseph Pentony and others have shown that cultural literacy is highly

correlated with academic achievement. Thomas Sticht and his associates have show the level of cultural literacy is highly correlated with annual income” (p. 12). President Thomas Jefferson conceived of the need for a common curriculum so that the masses of the people would be taught history, not just reading, writing and math. Cultural literacy has been supported by such education greats as Horace Mann and John Dewey. Horace Mann referred to the need for a common school that would keep all children economically independent and free.

John Dewey said, “Education and education alone, spans the gap...Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common...What they must have in common are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding” (Dewey, 1916, p. 3-4). Social studies accommodates a platform upon which common understanding can be created.

Effective social studies curriculum furnishes a source for teaching students about their world. “Well-taught liberal arts education equips us to make sense of the world in all its variety” (von Zastrow & CBE, 2004, p. 11). Good instruction should help students connect social studies to the content of their lives. This is considered culturally responsive social studies teaching (Gay & Howard, 2000; Irvine, 2009; Howard, 2003; Bennett, 2008; Kea & Utley, 1998; Montgomery, 2001).

According to the NCSS (2008), excellent social studies teaching is about teaching students to think critically about history, civics, and other social studies subjects. It is no longer considered an acceptable framework for meaningful social studies when we teach about food, fun, family, festivals, flags and films:

A piecemeal approach to social studies programming can result in a disconnected conglomeration of activities and teaching methods that lack focus, coherence, and comprehensiveness...Social studies teaching is integrative by nature. Powerful social studies teaching crosses disciplinary boundaries to address topics in ways that promote social understanding and civic efficacy (NCSS, 2008, para. 11-12).

The integrative nature of social studies facilitates the acquisition of essential knowledge that works to empower students to become good citizens while building skills in tested subjects.

No Child Left Behind's concern for raising student achievement in reading can be addressed by teaching students content knowledge along with the logistics and mechanics of reading (Hirsch, 1996 & 2006; Willingham, 2006; American Federation of Teachers (AFT), 2006). Skill in reading comprehension is facilitated by building background knowledge so essential for making connections and inferences when reading.

“Comprehension demands background knowledge because language is full of semantic breaks in which knowledge is assumed and, therefore, comprehension depends on making correct inferences” (Willingham, 2006, p. 2).

According to Willingham (2006), background knowledge speeds and strengthens reading comprehension, learning and thinking. In his article, *How Knowledge Helps*, Willingham acknowledges the need to provide students with something to think about—subject content—when teaching students to think critically.

...(R)esearch literature from cognitive science shows that knowledge does much more than just help students hone their thinking skills. It actually makes learning easier. Knowledge is not only cumulative, it grows exponentially (Willingham, 2006, para. 2).

Cultural Proficiency and Culturally Relevant Instruction

Much has been said about the need to create multicultural classrooms and the importance of giving appropriate attention to cultures with other than Eurocentric perspectives in our instruction (Kea and Utley, 1998). Because a majority of our nation's public school teachers are from White dominant culture (Howard, 2003), the need for teachers to be sensitive and conscious of the backgrounds of diverse students is essential when designing instruction to meet their needs.

The majority of teachers in our nation's low SES schools have different backgrounds than their students:

U.S. schools will continue to become learning spaces where an increasingly homogeneous (mostly White, female, and middle class) will come into contact with an increasingly heterogeneous student population (primarily students of color, and from low income backgrounds) (Howard, 2003, para. 1).

This difference in background between teachers and the students they teach may be one of the problems at the heart of low student achievement of diverse populations in public schools. Research has shown the importance of cultural responsiveness as a means of raising student achievement in low SES classrooms; an area that has not received attention in either teacher training or professional development (Kea & Utley, 1998).

Nearly seventeen percent of our nation's school age children live below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2007). Poverty is a culture very different from that of most main stream teachers (Howard, 2003; Bennett, 2003). Becoming aware of the culture of poverty in order to meet the needs of these students is one of the focuses of culturally relevant and responsive classrooms intended to help educators better meet the needs of all students—not only those from the dominant culture (Howard, 2003).

The role of social studies in today's elementary public education is to connect students to the world and increase their ability to become contributing citizens of our democratic society. Although schools are now focusing on the teaching of reading to raise student achievement scores for low income students, achievement results are less than promising (CEP, 2008; NCES, 2007; Noguera, 2009).

A history of failing students reveals a gap between students from low SES and higher economic status (Lee, 2006; McCluskey & Coulson, 2007). Culturally responsive teaching will do more to raise achievement for diverse and low SES students through positively engaging students in the learning process and helping them to make connections that are relevant to what they already know.

Culturally relevant teaching isn't about lowering those 'high expectations.' It's about providing strong supports by approaching effective instruction through a cultural lens. I believe that many diverse students fail in schools because their teachers haven't made the connections between the content and their students' existing mental schemes, prior knowledge and cultural perspectives (Irvine, 2009, p. 43).

The teaching of social studies provides many opportunities for filling the gaps in student understanding and perception about the world. According to the NCSS (2008),

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence... Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics and natural science (p. 211).

As we teach children about the world, they are better able to find where they fit into it. Such is the role of social studies in a liberal arts education. According to von Zastrow & Janc (2004),

Ultimately, a liberal arts education fosters an understanding of what it means to be human—an understanding that transcends limiting conceptions of occupation, social class, race, or nationality—and makes us active and ethical participants in the world around us (p.11).

As children study history, geography, current social issues and other social studies, they build essential background knowledge and vocabulary in real world contexts that can be applied to new situations and to themselves (Hirsch, 1996; Willingham, 2006; AFT, 2006). The guidelines for social studies teaching and learning support the development of thinking and the building of content knowledge as important for learning.

The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 2008, p. 211).

Narrowing time spent in social studies and science to teach reading comprehension in isolation eliminates precious time to teach these skills in context while building essential knowledge and vocabulary upon which students can add to their understanding. According to D. Jerald Craig and the CCSRI (2006),

Denying students the opportunity to build social studies vocabulary and background knowledge can lead to lower literacy levels and, ironically, increases the achievement gap. (p. 2) ...once children fall behind in acquiring background knowledge, it becomes harder and harder for them to catch up. (p. 4)

Such thinking applies to both social studies and science. Classes that build content background knowledge and vocabulary promote greater access to curriculum.

Accountability and Standards-based Education

No Child Left Behind.

In spite of decades of reform, the achievement of low income minority students continues to be lower than wealthier, white peers. Over the last 20 years, billions of dollars have been spent in the name of reforming public schools with little evidence of success in schools that disproportionately serve poor children (Payne, 2008). Other research verifies these findings (CEP, 2008; NCES, 2009;).

Tajalli and Opheim (2005) support the role of social status in student achievement,

Researchers examining student performance consistently find that one of the most important influences on student achievement is socioeconomic status (SES) of students. The more affluent the student's background, the better he or she will perform (p. 44).

In most areas where poor children are concentrated, the level of achievement continues to be quite low" Cowley and Meehan (2003). Although there have been slight gains in achievement, many researchers continue to report wide gaps in achievement between students based on socioeconomic status (NCES, 2007; CES, 2007; & CEP, 2008).

There are many factors influencing the achievement of low socio-economic students. The degree and type of content background knowledge, vocabulary and early childhood learning experiences are very different for children from low, middle and high SES homes (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Examination of the findings from studies on the relationship between social status and school readiness largely conclude children who grow up in poverty more often than their wealthier peers arrive at school with

disadvantages and are unlikely to catch up without intense educational interventions (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005).

The CEP tracks the effects of NCLB and has found mixed results. Data on narrowing the achievement gap in United States public schools is questionable, due to the fact that some districts appear to have lowered standards and changed the levels required to attain proficiency, in efforts to achieve federal expectations (CEP, 2007). Jennings, et.al (2006) found a majority of districts, 71% nationwide, reported increasing instructional time for the tested subjects of reading, writing and math at the expense of other core subjects, especially social studies and science. Also of interest and concern are the differences between state proficiency levels and testing results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Gains on the NAEP are smaller than those on state tests, according to a 2008 CEP report, *Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002? State Test Score Trends Through 2006-07*.

Curriculum Narrowing, Equity and Student Needs

Data from the NCES (2007) reveals narrowing of curriculum in social studies and science while time spent in English and math has increased.

Despite overall declines in instructional time in social studies and science, total instructional time...increased...This overall increase is due to increases in English and mathematics instruction that compensate for the decreases in social studies and science instruction. (NCES, 2007, *Trends in instructional time, para. 5*)

According to research, CEP found that, "...71% of districts had reduced instructional time in elementary schools in at least one subject to make more time for English language arts or math" (CEP, 2007, p. 8). The report states the subject most

affected by curriculum narrowing is social studies. They reported social studies instruction decreased from 90 to 76 minutes per week in 36% to 51% of school districts in the nation. 51% of districts reported decreasing time in social studies as opposed to 43% in science, 30% in music and art (CEP, 2007, p. 7).

Rothstein and Jacobsen (2006) question the shift in education goals as a response to the accountability system resulting from No Child Left Behind.

At first glance, this approach seems reasonable. But few who debate the details of implementation have considered how this accountability system has begun to shift how we think about what schools should do. By basing sanctions solely on math and reading scores, the law creates incentives to limit—or in some cases to eliminate entirely—time spent on other important curricular objectives. This reorientation of instruction disproportionately affects low-income and minority children, so achievement gaps may actually widen in areas for which schools are not now being held accountable (para. 2)...A 2005 survey by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) found that 97% percent of high-poverty districts had new minimum requirements for reading, while only 55% of low poverty districts had them (para. 6).

The Council for Basic Education (CBE) supports these findings in a study to assess the condition of liberal arts in U.S. schools.

We found the greatest erosion of the curriculum is occurring in schools with high minority populations—the very populations whose access to such a curriculum has been historically most limited (von Zastrow, 2004, p. 7)...The possibility that minorities are more likely to experience a narrowing of the curriculum raises important questions of educational equity (von Zastrow et al., 2004, p. 9).

To accommodate a balanced education for our nation's children, the CEP recommends staggering testing requirements to include tests in other academic subjects besides reading, writing and math (CEP, 2007; McMurrer et.al, 2007). Another recommendation from the CEP's report, *Reauthorizing the elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, is that federal government, "Provide funds for research to

determine the best ways to incorporate the teaching of reading and math skills into social studies and science.”(CEP 2007, p.2).

Ideally, integrating reading and writing standards into other core subjects will increase student engagement, promote essential background knowledge and contextual vocabulary acquisition, allow for authentic and meaningful activities, and create multiple learning opportunities for students. In one report, a district official from Escondido Union school district explained:

The logical thing to do is to try to integrate some of this together so that...you are teaching social studies standards at the same time you're teaching...some of the literacy. But that's very tricky; it takes a pretty highly skilled teacher to be able to do that...(CEP, 2007, p. 9).

Summary

This study will investigate teacher experiences of and perceptions about curriculum narrowing. Teacher beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers before and after NCLB and changes in these beliefs will be explored.

The findings of this study may be helpful to districts and principals who are struggling to determine how to balance competing curricular choices for their students. Based on the understanding of the importance of social studies and science in providing opportunities for students to build essential background knowledge, improve reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, as well as relevant learning content, district leaders can address the trend of curriculum narrowing in these subjects. A deeper understanding of how curriculum narrowing affects teachers and their beliefs about their role in educating students will perhaps enlighten educational leaders and policy-makers

about some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing, and hence curriculum narrowing in elementary schools.

With increased accountability in public schools, leaders in education may be inspired to implement meaningful professional development for teachers to improve integrated approaches to teaching based on the research presented. Excellent social studies and science teaching, as well as culturally responsive teaching practices, may improve students' ability to learn new ideas and concepts they can apply to life and to their learning.

Definition of Terms

Affective: Consists of emotions, feelings and attitudes.

Best practices: Generally research-based instructional strategies and practices including school climate that lead to high achievement and safe environments for schools.

Case Study: An intensive, detailed description and analysis of a project in the context of its environment. Largely a descriptive examination, usually of a small number of sites, where the investigator combs available documents, holds formal and/or informal conversations with informants, observes ongoing activities and develops an analysis of both individual and cross-case findings.

Content Analysis: A process using a parsimonious classification system to determine the characteristics of a body of material or practices.

Content-rich: Units of study like social studies and science that are rich in concepts, vocabulary, information, and other declarative knowledge important for understanding the world—its problems and awesome wonders.

Cross-case analysis: Grouping data from different persons or settings to common criteria/questions or analyzing different perspectives on issues under study.

Culturally Relevant Responsive Pedagogy: Instruction that takes into account and builds on students' racial, ethnic, cultural, language and socio-economic background in discussions and selections of curriculum, creating an environment where it is safe to take risks and students feel they are capable of learning at high levels. (Banks, Cookson, Gay & Hawley, 2001)

Cultural proficiency: A way of being that enables both individuals and organizations to respond effectively to people who differ from them. It is a behavior that is aligned with standards that move an organization or individual toward culturally proficient interactions. (Lindsay, et. al., 2003).

Cultural relevancy: Teaching that integrates the culture of its students, whether it be ethnic, gender, or socio-economic status.

Cultural Literacy: the ability to converse fluently in the idioms, allusions and informal content which creates and constitutes a dominant culture. From being familiar with street signs to knowing historical references to understanding the most recent slang, literacy demands interaction with the culture and reflection of it. Knowledge of a canonical set of literature is not sufficient in and of itself when engaging with others in a society, as life is interwoven with art, expression, history and experience. Cultural literacy requires familiarity with a broad range of communal language and collective knowledge. Cultural literacy stresses the knowledge of those pieces of information which content creators will assume the audience already possesses. (Hirsch, 1996)

Curriculum narrowing: The practice of increasing instructional time spent on state tested subjects like reading, writing and math at the expense of other core subjects.

Descriptive data: Information and findings expressed in words, unlike statistical data which are expressed in numbers.

District Expectations: In the new era of No Child Left Behind, districts create expectations that are required of schools, principals and teachers for the benefit of raising student achievement and creating safe environments.

Dominant culture: People who are white and of middle to high socio economic status. Referred to as dominant culture because these are in the majority and generally have the power to make the rules.

Effect size: An effect size expresses the increase or decrease in achievement of the experimental group (the group of students who are exposed to a specific instructional technique) in standard deviation units. An effect size can easily be translated into a percentile gain (Marzano, et al., 2001).

Fourth Grade Slump: The dip in fourth grade testing scores for reading comprehension found particularly in students from low-income homes. Although young readers can manage simple texts, they struggle in grade four to comprehend more advanced academic texts.

Growth Model: For an individual, growth is the progress shown by a student in a given subject area over a given span of time. Colorado Growth Model quantifies annual growth for an individual with a student growth percentile in reading, writing and mathematics. For a school or district or other relevant student grouping, student growth is summarized

using the median of the student growth percentiles at the school or district. (Aurora Public Schools, Colorado)

In-depth interview: A guided conversation between a skilled interviewer and an interviewee that seeks to maximize opportunities for the expression of a respondent's feelings and ideas through the use of open-ended questions and a loosely structured interview guide.

Integrated curriculum: Teaching multiple standards across the curriculum to provide more meaningful instruction while practicing reading, writing and math standards within other core content like social studies and science or the arts.

Key informant: A person who has unique skills or professional background related to the issue/intervention being evaluated.

Meta-analysis: Research that combines the results from a number of studies to determine the average effect of a given technique. (Marzano et al., 2001, p. 4)

Multicultural education: "Multicultural education is a reform movement designed to bring about educational equity for all student, including those from different races, ethnic groups, social classes, exceptionality, and sexual orientation." (Banks 1992) (Kea 1996).

Phenomenology: Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view.

Purposive sampling: Creating samples by selecting information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the evaluation.

Standards-based: A set of expectations developed by the federal or state departments of education as a framework for learning expectations of all students within U.S. public schools.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Overview

In order to review the literature pertaining to curriculum narrowing in an era of increasing accountability for teachers, this chapter has been divided into six sections. The first section presents the research questions addressed in the study.

Section two provides insight on best practices for instruction and the framework for good teaching based on guidelines from the National Reading Panel, National Council for the Social Studies, and foremost researchers in the field of education. The two types of knowledge and research-based strategies for raising student achievement are also presented. Subsections include illustrations of culturally responsive instruction to meet the needs of diverse students, research on 21st century requirements for success, and the case for integrated learning across the curriculum.

In section three, research is presented on the effects of No Child Left Behind on student achievement in the environment of increasing accountability for public schools. Standards-based education is delineated as the impetus behind NCLB, as well as teacher and student perspectives on the importance of social studies. An historical view of standards-based education is also explored.

Section four includes research on the inequities of curriculum narrowing and presents the latest research on students' needs based on socioeconomic status, learning differences and diverse cultures. Facts on the trend toward curriculum narrowing,

especially in high-minority, low socioeconomic status schools are presented with a focus on content-rich subjects like social studies and science and their role in building background knowledge and vocabulary while fostering higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills. Chapter two ends with the rationale for the study and the purpose of the research.

Framework for Effective Curriculum and Instruction

Since not all knowledge can be learned in the same way, it is important for teachers to differentiate between the two types of knowledge and what is required for students to master them. Understanding the difference will lead to successful planning for instruction. There are essentially two types of knowledge—declarative and procedural (Marzano, et al., 2001).

One can organize subject-matter knowledge into five broad categories: (1) vocabulary terms and phrases, (2) details, (3) organizing ideas, (4) skills and tactics, and (5) processes. The first three categories are informational in nature and are sometimes referred to as ‘declarative knowledge’. The last two categories are more process oriented and are sometimes referred to as ‘procedural knowledge’. (Marzano, et.al., 2001, p. 123)

Declarative knowledge involves the learning of concepts, generalizations and ideas furnished by the content in subjects such as social studies, science and art. Students who have a broad base of knowledge have the essential background upon which other knowledge can be built (Hirsch, 1996; Willingham, 2009; AFT, 2006). Declarative knowledge requires most learners come into contact with declarative information multiple times, as many as three or four over two days, in context (Marzano, et al., 2001, p. 132).

Procedural knowledge includes the learning of processes like tactics and algorithms, skills that need to be learned in steps. Math and reading are skills that require

the learning and practicing of steps, either as formulas that require following the same steps each time, or in random order. For students to become proficient in procedural knowledge, the average student needs to practice the steps over and over, from 20—24 times, in order to master them with 80% accuracy (McREL Presentation, 2008). Since it takes fewer repetitions to learn declarative knowledge, integrating procedural knowledge into the vast declarative knowledge found in social studies is an efficient way to facilitate the learning of both (CEP, 2007; Willingham, 2009; McGuire, 2009). Social studies, science and the arts provide rich opportunities to teach both declarative and procedural knowledge.

Excellent social studies instruction includes learning activities designed to use research-based strategies found to raise student achievement: explicit vocabulary instruction; higher-level thinking; cooperative learning; connecting new learning to what is already known; understanding similarities and differences; allowing for non-linguistic representations of learning; generating and testing hypotheses; setting objectives, and more. Content found in social studies can build essential background knowledge and vocabulary while increasing students' ability to think at higher levels, solve problems and connect learning to real life situations, all areas defined as guidelines for good social studies teaching (NCSS, 2008). Exemplary science instruction is designed to build content knowledge while teaching students inquiry-based strategies such as generating and testing hypotheses, higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills.

In a meta-analysis of educational research to establish the most effective strategies for raising student achievement, Mid Continental Research for Education and

Learning (McREL) found a strong relationship between vocabulary and intelligence, one's ability to comprehend new information and one's income level. For effective vocabulary learning to take place, direct instruction on words that are critical to new content produces the most powerful learning (Marzano, et al., 2001, p. 123).

McREL's meta-analysis found students must encounter words in context more than once and up to six times to learn them (Marzano, et al., 2001, p. 125), supporting the case for integrated social studies instruction. To expect students to build substantial vocabulary through reading is unfounded. Research by Nagy and Herman (1987) shows that students have about a five percent change of learning a new word they encounter in their reading (Marzano, et al., 2001).

... the conclusion about the utility of wide reading as a primary vehicle for vocabulary development relies on the assumption that students will learn those words they encounter (p. 124)... The effects of vocabulary instruction are even more powerful when the words selected are those that students most likely will encounter when they learn new content (Marzano et al, 2001, p. 127).

Research on the effectiveness of vocabulary approaches that teach ten to twelve words per week are insufficient to accommodate the understanding students will need to fully access the curriculum and comprehend what they are reading. McREL also found associating words with non-linguistic representations had a profound effect on learning vocabulary (Marzano, et al., 2001).

To teach students details such as ideas, generalizations, facts, time sequences, and episodes, McREL's meta-analysis revealed:

Consequently, a sound instructional strategy is to plan a unit in such a way that key details are identified—details that students are expected to know in depth. In addition, teachers should find ways to expose students to these details multiple

times—at least three—and that, ideally these exposures are no more than two days apart (Marzano, et al., 2001, p. 132)

For students to achieve at high levels, effective instruction in social studies and other non-tested subjects may contribute to higher level thinking and best practices for developing students who are prepared for 21st century success. Students who have acquired a broad base of content knowledge could have greater access to higher level course work—number 12 in the above list found to facilitate success in school.

There are many strategies that are seen as best practices for facilitating learning in the classroom. The role of background knowledge in building reading comprehension cannot be undervalued (Willingham, 2006; AFT, 2006; Hirsch, 1996).

Cognitive science research is making it increasingly clear that reading comprehension requires a student to possess a lot of vocabulary and a lot of background knowledge...No amount of reading comprehension ‘skills’ instruction can compensate for that lack of knowledge....Susan Neuman, one of the country’s top researchers on early childhood issues and reading, argues that it’s time for the reading world to take the role of knowledge more seriously, from the earliest grades on (AFT, 2006, para, 4).

Teaching students a broad base of knowledge and vocabulary could be greatly facilitated through purposeful social studies and science teaching.

McREL’s research on raising student achievement identified ten top strategies—the most effective of which is teaching students to identify similarities and differences through classifying, categorizing, metaphors and analogies. The ‘effect size’ of this strategy, when taught properly, is 1.6 or one year six months growth in one year. The nine strategies and their effect sizes are as follows:

| | | |
|--|-------------|------|
| Identifying similarities and differences..... | effect size | 1.60 |
| Summarizing and note taking..... | effect size | 1.00 |
| Reinforcing effort and providing recognition.... | effect size | .80 |
| Homework and practice..... | effect size | .77 |

Non-linguistic representationseffect size .75
 Cooperative learningeffect size .73
 Setting objectives and providing feedbackeffect size .61
 Generating and testing hypotheses.....effect size .61
 Questions, cues, and advance organizerseffect size .59
 (Marzano, et.al., 2001, p. 7).

Within this group of strategies, we see cooperative learning opportunities and multiple ways of allowing students to use new knowledge and demonstrate what they have learned. Also demonstrated are ways to build critical thinking skills, as well as explicit instruction in skills often taken for granted, such as summarizing and note taking.

Current best practices for instruction include activating prior knowledge and making connections when introducing new subject matter. In reference to the learning of new things, Willingham (2006) says,

Comprehension depends on making correct inferences...People with more general knowledge have richer associations among the concepts in memory; and when associations are strong, they become available to the reading process automatically...This means the person with rich general knowledge rarely has to interrupt reading in order to consciously search for connections (para. 4).

Through the use of strategies such as KWL (What do I Know? What do I Want to Know? What did I Learn?), students access prior knowledge about a subject and think about their learning. Teaching students meta-cognition—to examine and reflect upon their own thinking—is considered best practice (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Fountas & Pinnel, 1996; Beers, 2003).

In addition to McREL’s research, others have studies what leads to student academic success. According to research gathered from multiple sources and published in the article, *Closing the Achievement Gap Between High and Low SES Students*, Williams et al., (2005) found that successful schools show results when:

1) The curriculum is rigorous and focused on the future; 2) expectations for student performance are high; 3) support is immediately provided to keep students on track through an early warning system rather than to remediate them once they have fallen behind; 4) teachers are well prepared and assigned based on capability rather than seniority or preference; 5) staff works collaboratively and stays on pace; 6) environments are orderly and safe; 7) data is used to improve instruction; 8) morale and school climate are positive; 9) class sizes are geared toward need rather than uniform; 10) curriculum is aligned to standards; 11) new teachers are socialized into the high academic focus and given support; 12) barriers to higher level course work are removed; and, 13) there is a focus on academic achievement and not rule-following. (p. 2)

Differentiated small group instruction is expected in public schools to assist students at various levels of achievement to meet standards. Differentiated instruction through curriculum that is adapted to meet the needs of the students is most successful in fostering achievement for diverse groups (Tomlinson 2005). Social studies and science could lend themselves to a multitude of learning strategies like group work and projects that can take many forms—considered best practice for raising students achievement (Marzano, et al., 2001; NCSS, 2008).

Assessing student mastery is expedited through both state and classroom testing. There are two types of assessment—summative and formative. Awareness of the need to implement alternative ways for assessing student knowledge is growing. Teachers are more aware than ever of testing and how these results should be used to inform instructional decisions (Stark Rentner, 2006). Summative assessments of the standards provide the state and federal governments with important data on student achievement. Schools can also use this data if they receive it in a timely manner to make instructional decisions.

The most powerful form of assessment is formative, according to the foremost researchers in the field such as Schmoker and Marzano (1999). One of the top ten

strategies for raising student achievement is ‘providing feedback,’ as found in a meta-analysis done by Marzano, et al., (2001).

...(F)eedback that produces these large effect sizes is ‘corrective’ in nature....Feedback should be timely...in general, the more delay that occurs in giving feedback, the less improvement there is in achievement (p. 96).

Feedback to students about their learning should take place often and be specific enough so they can practice and make appropriate adjustments to improve. Students should be made aware of their progress in meeting standards through the use of rubrics, self and peer feedback, modeling and student/teacher conferences. According to Banks, et al. (2001), multiple methods of assessment can be used to help combat racial, ethnic, language, and SES differences. Formative assessment that allows for non-traditional approaches can fairly measure learning for diverse students.

Included in the NCSS Guidelines for Social Studies Teaching and Learning is this statement suggesting appropriate assessment of student knowledge, “The program should be evaluated using data from traditional and alternative assessments” (NCSS, 2008, para. Challenging, 4.7). Such challenging social studies takes into account students diverse backgrounds and learning styles, important choices for planning that promote fairness to students with diverse backgrounds (Irvine, 2009; Gay & Howard, 2000).

Just as learning styles and cultural orientations are critical criteria for teaching, they are equally valuable for designing equitable, culturally appropriate, and authentic achievement measures for diverse students. It is unfair and unethical to depend entirely on written, individually competitive, standardized tests to determine the achievement of students whose cultural socialization gives priority to oral expression, cooperative group efforts, and performance demonstrations of mastery (Gay & Howard, 2000, Multicultural Performance Assessment, para. 1).

Social studies can be designed to furnish multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning that are more equitable for students from diverse backgrounds.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines the purpose of social studies education as citizenship for the common good. “The NCSS reaffirms that an excellent education in social studies is essential to civic competence and the maintenance and enhancement of a free and democratic society” (NCSS, 2008, para. 3). Social studies include history, geography, civics, economics, anthropology and other associated fields (NCSS, 2008). Instruction in social studies and science can facilitate the skills that are necessary for 21st century adults such as learning to reason and thinking at high levels (Wagner, 2008).

A framework for good social studies teaching based on research and current best practices for meeting national goals is provided by The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2008). They state, “Social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active” (NCSS, 2008, pg. 211). In summary:

Social studies should help students connect social studies content to their lives...Social studies should draw from currently valid knowledge representative of human experience, culture, and beliefs in all areas of the social studies. Strategies of instruction and learning activities should rely on a broad range of learning resources...The program should give students the opportunity to think critically and make value-based decisions...The social studies program should provide students with challenging content, activities, and assessments...with opportunities to engage in reflective discussion...critical, creative, and ethical thinking on problems faced by citizens and leaders...The social studies program should engage students directly and actively in the learning process (NCSS, 2008, p. 212—213).

These guidelines provide the framework for excellence in social studies teaching goals and practices. By integrating these with current best practices in research-based strategies for raising student achievement, social studies could render a wealth of opportunity for building essential background knowledge, vocabulary and critical problem-solving skills.

Effective social studies and science instruction is challenging and could fill in background knowledge for all students. The content of science and social studies could focus students' attention on opportunities and solutions, abundant in active learning, about human beings and the world they live in. Schools that serve low SES students are most successful when the curriculum is focused on the future and when teachers have high expectations for performance (Williams, et al., 2005). Historically and currently, leaders concentrated on excellent instruction understand social studies can bring a wealth of learning to social concerns, informed thinking of future citizens and opportunities for students to inquire about the world through questions and intellectual engagement (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2008; NCSS, 2008).

Culturally responsive classrooms.

Today's educators are faced with meeting the needs of very diverse students. At no time in the past have teachers been as accountable for the learning of all students as they are today. With different backgrounds than many of their students, teachers are called upon to understand and plan for multiple needs within one classroom.

...teachers find it increasingly difficult to ignore the diversity of learners who populate their classrooms. Culture, race, language, economics, gender, experience, motivation to achieve, disability, advanced ability, personal interests, learning preferences, and presence or absence of an adult support system are just

some of the factors that students bring to school with them in almost stunning variety (Tomlinson, 2006, p. 1).

Teachers are poorly prepared to address so many different requirements of today's students. Bennett (2008) reports on his group of teachers in training. Middle class pre-service teachers in his class responded to a driving tour and study of students in poverty they would be teaching,

...there is little if any instruction provided to pre-service teachers regarding working with low-income students...As a result of the driving tour and study, pre-service teachers realized many students only have access to their course content during the school day; they have limited outside resources with which to learn about content (Bennett, 2008, p. 251).

Teachers in the above study became aware of the necessity to provide class time to complete class-work, realizing there is often no possibility of support at home for students to manage a myriad of different responsibilities than those faced by dominant culture students. Teachers realized they had to reflect on their personal beliefs in order to render the kind of support students in poverty need to achieve. Being aware of the complex realities of students in poverty, teachers are better able to create realistic expectations for work assigned outside of class (Bennett, 2008).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), 16.66% of public school students are reportedly from families living on or below poverty. Development of culturally responsive teaching will allow teachers to make realizations about students from diverse backgrounds. According to the NCES (2008), 22% of public school students are Hispanic, 16% are African American and 3.7% Asian. Therefore, 42% or more students in public schools require culturally responsive teaching strategies to connect main stream programs to students' diverse backgrounds.

In the framework for what good teaching looks like today, teachers must be intensely aware of the backgrounds of the students they are teaching and how to best facilitate learning for their particular children. For many low income students, outside resources to support learning are limited (Bennett, 2008). Lessons need to include examples from students' own lives so that instruction can be more relevant to them (Howard, 2003; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2009). According to Bennett (2008), one student reflected, "Students from different backgrounds interpret information differently. It will be important to incorporate cultural lessons that have students take on different perspectives of other cultures" (p. 254).

The principles of the Responsive Classroom put out by the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC) guide us in meeting the needs of diverse students.

1) The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum; 2) how children learn is as important as what they learn; 3) the greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction; 4) know the children we teach; and, 5) to be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (NEFC, Guiding Principles, para.1).

Social studies and science instruction can contribute the foundation for rich contextual learning for students in poverty. "When elementary students experience learning through a strong social studies program, they acquire a critical foundation for life-long participation as citizens" (NCSS, Powerful & Purposeful, 2008, para. 3).

To employ effective content teaching and learning, teachers must gain knowledge about the cultural realities of the students they teach (Irvine, 2009; Gay & Howard, 2000; Montgomery, 2001). Strategies that can narrow the achievement gap in elementary schools include teacher professional development that will move teachers along the

continuum of cultural proficiency. Based on Lindsey (2003), there are five essential elements of culturally proficient behaviors school educators must develop:

1) Assess their own culture and that of their clients; 2) value diversity; 3) manage the dynamics of difference in positive ways; 4) adapt to diversity—committing to continuous learning; and, 5) institutionalize cultural knowledge (p. 25).

Joyce & Showers (2002), provide insight into meaningful professional development for teachers. They found that encouraging instructional innovation reaps good rewards. Many researchers point to the benefits of teacher collaboration in creating a culture of change and reflection. Such changes can have a profound effect on student achievement. This strategy is essential when changing beliefs regarding students from diverse backgrounds (Lindsey et al., 2003).

In addition to this, there is a fear of teaching diversity among many dominant culture teachers (Gay & Howard, 2000). Teachers who feel comfortable talking about differences are better able to address diverse needs. By learning and talking about our differences, students can develop empathy for others, while feeling valued and respected. Through a more open approach that manages conflict, we have the possibility of understanding one another and building community. “Culturally relevant teaching isn’t about lowering those ‘high expectations.’ It’s about providing strong supports by approaching effective instruction through a cultural lens” (Irvine, 2009, p. 43).

Teachers who incorporate students’ lived experiences into the curriculum provide connections that make learning relevant.

One of the central tenets of culturally relevant teaching is a rejection of deficit-based thinking about culturally diverse students ... The racial and cultural incongruence between students and teachers may be another factor that explains school failure of students of color (Howard, 2003, p. 197).

School culture promotes high achievement in students of color when staff members affirm students' racial, ethnic, language and SES identities in a comprehensive inclusive way (Nieto, 2004; Banks et. al., 2001). Culturally relevant pedagogy, "teaches *to and through* strengths of these students. It is culturally *validating and affirming*" (Howard, 2003, p. 196).

One solution districts are developing for teachers to follow is the planning and pacing guide. Such directives require teachers to teach the same thing on the same day. Michael Felt states, "There is no one-size-fits-all and the harder we work to create one the greater the number of children we will leave behind." (McCaw, 2008, Leading Insights, para. 8)

In public schools, significant funding is spent on programs and materials that are used as the curriculum for teaching. Research has shown negative test results when comparing students of scripted versus non-scripted programs (Ede, 2006, Negative Research Findings, para. 1). According to Montgomery (2001),

Teachers need to use instructional methods that are tailored to suit the setting, the students, and the subject. By varying and adapting these methods and materials, teachers can increase the chances that their students will succeed. (p. 5)

Multiple methods of assessment can be implemented to combat racial, ethnic, language, and SES differences (Banks, et al., 2001; Howard, 2003; Irvine, 2009). The culturally responsive classroom incorporates multiple strategies that help students from diverse backgrounds succeed in school and connect their learning to what they already know.

Meeting the needs of 21st century students.

According to McCaw (2008), “Research increasingly supports the development of a well-rounded student” (para. 11). She interviewed contemporary thinkers such as Daniel Pink and Stephen Covey and found support for rich learning opportunities and flexible teaching, concentrated on educating children for 21st century lives. Researcher Marcus Buckingham is credited with creating what is now known as the ‘strengths revolution.’ Pink finds this ‘strengths system’ to be more in line with 21st Century needs. According to Pink, we should be focused on students’ strengths, “...making sure students have the capacity to see the world fully” (McCaw, 2008, para. 9).

Skills needed in the world of work are creativity, flexibility, strong problem-solving and collaboration skills, as stated by Friedman in *The World Is Flat*. These requirements are supported by Wagner (2008) whose research included interviewing several hundred business, non-profit, philanthropic and educational leaders to determine what skills are paramount when looking for 21st century employees.

Today’s students need to master seven survival skills to thrive in the new world of work. And these skills are the same ones that will enable students to become productive citizens who contribute to solving some of the most pressing issues we face in the 21st century (Wagner, 2008, pp. 20-25).

According to the research done by Wagner (2008), the following skills are necessary for today’s students: critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration and leadership; agility and adaptability; initiative and entrepreneurialism; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; and, curiosity and imagination (Wagner, 2008). Excellent social studies, science and art instruction can facilitate the development of the fore-mentioned skills. Small-group problem-solving

tasks can enrich social studies, and problem-solving in collaborative groups is a social, inquiry experience—found in both science and social studies. Such orchestrated learning situations engage students in meaningful writing and speaking and have been found to raise student achievement (Marzano et al., 2001), as well as prepare students for 21st century careers (Wagner, 2008).

A case for integrated studies.

One recommendation from the CEP’s report, *Choices, Changes, and Challenges*, is that federal government, “Provide funds for research to determine the best ways to incorporate the teaching of reading and math skills into social studies and science” (CEP 2007, p.2). Ideally, integrating reading and writing standards into other core subjects will increase student engagement, provide essential background knowledge and contextual vocabulary acquisition, allow for authentic and meaningful activities, and create multiple learning opportunities for students.

In the CEP’s December 2007 report, *Choices, Changes, and Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era*, a district official from Escondido Union school district explained:

The logical thing to do is to try to integrate some of this together so that...you are teaching social studies standards at the same time you’re teaching...some of the literacy. But that’s very tricky; it takes a pretty highly skilled teacher to be able to do that... (p.9).

One of education’s greatest challenges is how to teach all of the standards in the limited time we have with students over thirteen years of elementary and secondary school. Some of our greatest educational minds, like Schmoker and Marzano, have argued for the integration of cross curricular skills. “Rugg advocated for an integrated

social studies, one that crossed traditional disciplinary boundaries such as history, economics, and geography” (Boyle-Base & Goodman, 2008, p. 34).

Montgomery (2001) speaks about the need for interdisciplinary units to “include and connect content area learning with language arts and culturally diverse literature” (p. 5). Leu and Kinzer (1999) refer to the relevance of thematic units that can offer excellent opportunities for children to explore a range of different forms of literature that look intensively into a single cultural or ethnic experience. Thematic learning yields context for children’s building of knowledge and understanding of vocabulary.

Within the context of social studies, students learn history, civics, economics and geography. Social studies and science contribute rich context, background knowledge, and vocabulary so essential to accessing education and learning in the United States. For those that lack these essentials, many ELLs and students growing up in poverty, it is probable we are missing powerful opportunities to furnish connections between and among diverse groups.

Hirsch (2006) also proposes that it is inadequate attention to building broad content knowledge that is responsible for our nation’s poor reading scores as compared to those of many other countries. He also believes that limited background knowledge lies at the heart of the achievement gap between America’s economically disadvantaged and advantaged children. Chall and Jacobs (2003) take this idea further and propose that it is a lack of domain-specific knowledge in many disadvantaged children that is responsible for the fourth-grade slump.

In order to improve reading scores, reading and writing skills are receiving more instructional time with the hope reading achievement will improve. In reference to the approach now being used whereby children are taught to comprehend text by learning and practicing a small set of rules or strategies in isolation, Kamhi (2009) says,

These strategies are often taught in reading comprehension units that are separate from the subject matter units (e.g., science, social studies) that form the content of the reading material. Such an approach is not likely to succeed because it underestimates the complexity of comprehension.

Purposeful social studies and science lessons render meaningful ways for students to integrate literacy and math skills. Within the context of social studies and science, students can write about domain specific content or read graphs—having first received or explored the essential background knowledge and vocabulary to do so. “Social studies can provide a purpose for developing and applying literacy and math skills” (McGuire, 2009, para. 3).

The CEP (2007) suggests that the federal government should, “Provide funds for research to determine the best ways to incorporate the teaching of reading and math skills into social studies and science” (CEP, 2007, p. 2). The standards are so immense that it is impossible to teach them all in thirteen years—K-12 (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Integrating reading and writing standards into interesting social studies and science units can facilitate proficiency of standards across the curriculum. Effective science and social studies engage students in learning, furnish essential background knowledge and contextual vocabulary acquisition, allow for authentic and meaningful activities, and create multiple learning opportunities for students in small groups and independently.

Accountability and Standards-based Education

Since the beginning of No Child Left Behind in 2002, the CEP has tracked the effects of this legislation on our nation's schools and student learning outcomes.

According to McCluskey et al., (2007), the evidence is not clear whether student achievement has benefited from NCLB or if other factors are at work in the data.

NCLB does not appear to have had a significant impact on improving reading or math achievement. Average achievement remains flat in reading and grows at the same pace in math as it did before NCLB was passed...the racial and socioeconomic achievement gap in NAEP reading and math persists after NCLB. Despite some improvement in reducing the gap in math right after NCLB, the progress was not sustained (McCluskey & Coulson, 2007, p. 3).

Jaekung Lee supports this data based on a study done by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University:

Trends in the Achievement Gap: The racial achievement gap persists after NCLB. The achievement gap between White and Black students and between White and Hispanic students remained unchanged in both reading and math in both grades 4 and 8. The only significant change was a small reduction in the achievement gap between White and Hispanic students in grade 8 math. Likewise, the gap between Poor and Nonpoor students remained (Lee, 2006, pp. 22—23).

The question persists: Has NCLB raised our standards for student achievement?

According to Rentner, et al. (2006), there are some positive results of NCLB: 1) 77% of districts report aligning curriculum to standards; 2) On the percentage proficient indicator, there were 133 instances of moderate-to-large gains on state tests and only 9 instances—a trend in a particular state—of moderate-to-large declines; 3) a trend toward student assessment to drive instruction; and, 4) some districts reported paying far more attention to open-ended questions and using scoring rubrics to evaluate children's writing.

There are three achievement levels on the NAEP: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced (Lee, 2006). McCluskey et al., (2007) deduct from the Institute of Education Sciences' report *Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards onto the NAEP Scales (2007, June)*, "...most states' 'proficient' levels are equivalent to NAEP's 'basic' designation. That is, except in 4th-grade reading, where most state proficiency levels are actually below NAEP's basic level" (p. 5). Of concern are the following effects of NCLB: Data showed smaller gains on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) than on state developed and administered tests; It is unclear if students are really gaining as much as rising percentages of proficient scores would suggest; A shift to greater emphasis on tested subjects at the expense of other core subjects; Integrating test preparation into the curriculum; State adjustments of their standards and the level of what is considered proficient to demonstrate greater success; and, The percentage of schools on state "needs improvement" is steady, but not growing (Jennings, 2006).

To counter the trend toward lowering standards, the CEP (2007) recommends that there be a provision in NCLB that, "Requires states to arrange for an independent review, at least once every three years, of their standards and assessments to ensure that they are of high quality and rigor" (p. 2). This recommendation comes as a result of findings that suggest some states are changing their levels of proficiency to reflect needed growth, as well as lowering the rigor of their state assessments.

Concerns remain over NCLB's inability to improve overall achievement or diminish gaps even when concentrating on just two subjects—literacy and math. If states are narrowing curriculum and lowering their standards to meet the requirements of

NCLB, then more analysis is needed to determine how districts can better meet the needs of students to raise student achievement, especially for low SES and minority students.

It may be essential for legislators and education experts to rethink the very theories that underlie NCLB. The good intentions of NCLB may lead to unintended consequences that may have a profoundly negative effect on both low, middle and high SES students.

The CEP reports bring new concerns to the fore. According to McCloskey et al. (2007), concerning the unintended consequences of NCLB, "...marginalization of academic subjects not covered by the law's standards and testing requirements...perhaps the hardest hit subject has been social studies" (p. 7). The unintended consequences of No Child Left Behind have been to put history into an even more marginal position. With some notable exceptions, the amount of class time given to history and other social studies, especially in the first eight grades, has been shrinking (Manzo, 2006; von Zastrow, 2004; Jerald, 2006).

Critics are clear that NCLB measurement models are facilitated by convenience and simplicity in a world of diverse individuals with unique needs. The new Growth Model for measuring progress in student achievement provides a better way of tracking student achievement over time, but there is evidence we need to promote alternative methods of assessment that support the diversity of the nation's student population. Recently, many school and district achievement scores were measured by comparing results of one grade level to the next year's same grade level. Instead, the Growth Model

provides a comparison of the same students year to year and gives a more accurate measure of school and student progress toward raising student achievement.

Standards-based education.

Starting in the 1980s with the administration of President Ronald Regan, there has been a realization by legislators that we are a “nation at risk”. Student outcomes, especially for low SES and minority students, were worrisome and continue to be. This concern resulted in the standards-based school reform movement. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) refer to its history as follows, “As a part of the new federalism, beginning with the Clinton administration and accelerated by the Bush II administration, the national standards movement has been gaining momentum” (p. 270).

Standards provide the meat of ideas and concepts federal and state governments have determined United States students should know. Social studies, science, PE and the arts are considered core subjects. Each of these subjects has delineated standards determined by the U.S. Department of Education to help students understand important concepts and ideas about themselves and the world. Reducing these rich sources of contextual learning limits students’ access to learning (Craig, 2006). Within the context of social studies, students become aware of economics and civics principles. These studies allow for higher level thinking and problem-solving opportunities with real world implications. Science promotes an understanding of how the natural world works and can foster tomorrow’s scientists who solve problems and improve life as we know it. The arts develop an appreciation of the human condition and of beauty in the world. They develop

our creativity and sense of aesthetics. Physical education fosters better health and the values of fitness, good nutrition and informs our physical life choices.

The standards movement has strongly impacted curriculum, instruction and assessment in United States' public schools. In our attempt to eliminate the achievement gap for low SES and marginalized populations, every effort is being made to clarify expectations and provide equitable treatment for all. Understanding what we expect students to know has been deemed essential in reaching this goal (Eaker & DuFour, 2002).

Instruction is driven by the standards. Assessment of the standards—formative and summative—is being developed in states, districts and individual schools, especially in tested subjects like reading, writing, math and recently science. The standards-based movement is uniting teachers in their understanding and use of assessment, planning for instruction and creating common expectations for students. Educators are becoming more professional through these practices, reporting student progress based on levels of mastery of standards (Rentner, 2006). High-stakes state assessments are based on the standards and are resulting in curriculum narrowing in non-tested subjects.

According to Schmoker & Marzano (2003),

Clear, common learning standards—manageable in number—promote better results... The chief problem is that there is simply too much to teach—arguably two to three times too much (Schmidt, McKnight, & Raizen, 1996)—and too many options for what can be taught (Rosenholtz, 1991) (Schmoker & Marzano, 2003, p. 18).

Curriculum narrowing has reduced instructional time spent on core subjects like social studies and science—not allowing sufficient time to teach the standards in these subjects.

Just as with state tested subjects, social studies, science, arts and P.E. standards are considered core curriculum necessary for the development of a well rounded individual (NCSS, 2008).

In studies assessing student and teacher knowledge and perceptions of social studies since NCLB, results revealed teachers and students did not feel social studies was important. Additionally, they found student knowledge of social studies to be significantly below national standards, signifying that students were not being taught social studies except in very superficial ways (Zhao & Hoge, 2005; VanFossen, 2003).

The data we collected...are similar to previous research findings: students almost universally hold negative attitudes toward social studies and do not understand the importance of social studies or its relation to their lives. The students demonstrated limited knowledge of basic topics, and we concluded that they were receiving little or no social studies instruction (Zhao & Hoge, 2005, p. 220).

According to Tanner (2008), "...most elementary teachers have not been taught the nature and purpose of social studies, because the majority of courses that they have taken deal with methodology and pedagogy rather than content" (p. 41). In the research done by Zhao and Hoge, they found, "... most teachers attributed their students' lack of interest in social studies to the subject not getting its fair share of effort in their school and to the increased emphasis on reading and math" (Zhao & Hoge, 2005, p. 218).

National standards for social studies are considered core subject matter—essential for all students in American society. "Only 39% of the teachers surveyed considered social studies very important, whereas reading and mathematics were considered important by 96% of the respondents" (Tanner, 2008, p. 43). Tanner (2008) surmises that

this loss of social studies is ‘just the tip of the iceberg’ and encourages scholars to begin the process of fighting this trend.

The value of standardized education has long been debated. Historically, many great educational thinkers did not agree with standardized education. According to Noddings (2007),

Dewey insisted that the content of study is not nearly so important as the method of inquiry and the level of thought invoked in its pursuit... Therefore, it does not really matter whether people have this particular knowledge; what matters is that what they acquire is recognized as important (p. 194).

Martin Buber, an existentialist philosopher who cared deeply about education, believed teaching accomplishes whatever it does through relationship with peers and the teacher. He would have objected to the standardized curriculum of recent school reform. Buber would want us to start with the importance of building environments that support strong relationships for learning.

Postmodernist, Jacques Derrida, was highly critical of standardized education. Noddings (2007) reports,

...(A)n effort to force all children into the same course of study—however well intended the attempt—is, from the perspective of the postmodernist, a totalizing move. It improperly assimilates all children to the model of an elite established by criteria constructed by an exclusive few... in the Deweyan tradition... education should be tailored as closely as possible to the interests and needs of individual children (p. 80).

Dewey did not believe in labeling one educational program better than another, as is done now with our public view of vocational education. Each program had its value in society and for the individual.

Owens (2001) & Owens & Valesky (2007) report,

Efforts to improve school performance by seeking to implement and orchestrate change from the school district central office, or from the state education department, or even from the federal agency have historically failed notoriously to improve the achievement of students at the individual school level, even when compliance is closely monitored and audited (Owens, 2001, p. 385).

At this time, however, with the organized push to improve our nation's schools, changes are occurring in how school leaders and teachers do business. In this age of accountability, everyone feels the pressure to align curriculum to standards and raise student scores in tested subjects. "The idea that principals should serve as instructional leaders—not just as generic managers—in their schools is widely subscribed to among educators" (Fink & Resnick, 2001, para. 1). Teachers are using student testing results to plan their lessons. The lofty goals for social studies teaching are not always realized because teachers at the elementary level are losing their understanding of the importance of social studies in the current environment of high-stakes testing (Zhao & Hoge, 2005).

Noddings (2007) addresses the need for intellectually rich learning, which can be related to social studies and other core subjects that integrate best practices,

Because it is the right thing to do, we should provide all children with safe, healthful, and intellectually rich environments...they must have choices...she or he should be able to choose any course of study the school offers with pride and confidence...make vocational courses as rich and respectable as academic courses (p. 204).

Curriculum Narrowing, Equity and Student Needs

The NCSS (2008) is deeply concerned about the tendency of schools to narrow curricular options for elementary students in order to focus more on the tested subjects of

literacy and math—resulting in decreases in time spent on social studies and science in particular. The NCSS (2008) states,

The marginalization of social studies education at the elementary level has been documented repeatedly...Denying students the opportunity to build social studies vocabulary and background knowledge can lead to lower literacy levels and, ironically, increases the achievement gap (para. 2).

According to Rentner (2006), districts are requiring more time be spent on tested subjects like reading, writing and math at the expense of other subjects, especially social studies and science. The report states,

The subject most affected is social studies...In addition, 60% of districts require a specific amount of time for reading in elementary schools. 97% percent of high-poverty districts have this requirement, compared to 55% - 59% of districts with lower levels of poverty (p. 6).

Another problem for low SES students “at risk” of failure in school is a lack of school readiness compared to their higher SES peers. School readiness is defined as academic, social and emotional skills. Academic skills include, “...vocabulary size, complexity of spoken language, basic counting, ‘general knowledge’...” (NCFF, 2008, What Defines, slide). Contributing to the risk to background knowledge, McGuire (2009) addresses the problem of curriculum narrowing for low SES students as fundamental to the development of moral and civic virtues,

Such education becomes even more important for children in poverty if they are to participate in and embrace the ideals of American democracy...Research suggests that students start to develop social responsibility and interest in politics before the age of nine...elementary school matters a great deal for their civic development (McGuire, 2009, para. 3).

According to Hirsch (1996), “In short, an early inequity in the distribution of intellectual capital may be the single most important source of avoidable injustice in a

free society” (p20). He goes on to say, “Psychological research has shown that the ability to learn something new depends on an ability to accommodate the new thing to the already known” (p23). Social studies and science instruction can promote the acquisition of rich background knowledge and vocabulary, giving students the intellectual capital upon which to build new knowledge (Hirsch, 1996; Willingham, 2006; AFT, 2006).

Although students enter school with a very diverse set of skills, Pestalozzi, a follower of Rousseau, demonstrated more than a century ago that poor children, well cared for and skillfully taught, could learn as much as wealthier children. Brooks-Gunn (2003) found the poorest children benefit the most from high quality early education programs that proactively address the lack of basic skills common to the poor when they enter kindergarten.

Children in poverty suffer additionally in the areas of health care, nutrition, housing and other areas. According to Noguera (2009), one out of five U.S. children is poor and another one-fifth comes from financially struggling households. A variety of studies have shown that these unmet needs invariably have an impact upon the ability of children to learn in school (Rothstein, 2004).

Reducing time spent on social studies and other non-tested core subjects reduces academic rigor and creates barriers to higher-level coursework (Williams, et al., 2005). Both of these are considered essential to raise student achievement for disadvantaged children. Civics, economics and science provide rich content that can furnish real life problems students can solve in groups through collaboration—skills that Wagner (2008) says are essential for 21st century employees, based upon his research.

Creative and thoughtful social studies teaching can provide meaningful opportunities for students to learn and practice skills necessary for success in school and life. “Denying students the opportunity to build social studies vocabulary and background knowledge can lead to lower literacy levels and, ironically, increases the achievement gap” (NCSS, 2008).

There is much to be lost if we take social studies out of the elementary curriculum. According to Wills (2007), “Recent research indicates that social studies is being “squeezed” from the elementary curriculum...” (Wills, 2007, para. 1).

Reduced instructional time in social studies has resulted in a reduction of the scope of the curriculum, the curtailment or elimination of opportunities to promote students’ higher order thinking, and an increased emphasis at times on the simple reproduction of content knowledge (Wills, 2007, Abstract, para.1).

In conclusion, Wills notes these results of curriculum narrowing in social studies as “...(U)ndermining the quality of students’ education in social studies, especially in low performing elementary schools serving poor students and students of color...reducing opportunities for thoughtfulness” (Wills, 2007, para. 1).

Many students are English Language Learners (ELLs) who live in low SES homes where a language other than English is spoken. According to the NCES (2004), 6.7 percent of public school students in the United States in 2000 were English Language Learners. According to Hill & Flynn (2006),

The number of ELLs attending U.S. schools has grown dramatically over the past 25 years, and it appears that this number will continue to increase. Between 1979 and 2003, the overall number of school-age children (ages 5-17) increased by 19 percent. However, during this same time period, the number of children who spoke a language other than English at home increased by 161 percent...Overall, 5.5 percent of the school-age population in the United States speaks a language other than English at home...(Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 2).

These students have acquired different levels of English language proficiency that require special strategies and teacher planning. ELLs comprehend course content in different degrees, and certainly not yet as well as their native English peers.

Experts in language acquisition say it takes five to seven years to achieve advanced fluency in reading, writing and speaking in a new language (Hill & Flynn, 2006). A natural gap therefore occurs between the scores of these students and their peers on state tests, since this challenge is not taken into consideration when scoring ELLs. Three years of English instruction in our public schools presupposes ELLs are ready to take achievement tests in English and contributes to the achievement gap. ELLs who come from poverty experience complex challenges in trying to meet the standards of proficiency on state tests due to lower levels of language acquisition, vocabulary and background knowledge.

The probable causes of the gap in achievement are many. Primary is our inability to address the needs of our nation's school-age children who live in poverty—16.66% according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008). Evans (2004) found that students from disadvantaged low SES homes come to school less prepared than their peers. They have fewer books in the home, less verbal responsiveness, greater incidence of family disruption, violence and lack of routines. A comparative lack of background knowledge and vocabulary has been found for low SES students who arrive for kindergarten lacking the basic knowledge of letters and numbers already known to their higher SES peers.

According to Schieffer and Busse (2000),

Socioeconomic status (SES) consistently is found to be positively correlated with achievement, and is one of the most important predictors of academic achievement in public school... Children from low SES urban communities face some of the worst learning conditions in the nation (Episito, 1999), and many children entering school from the inner-city are increasingly viewed as 'broken' and socially troubled (para. 1).

These findings are described in detail by Jonathan Kozol in his book, *The Shame of a Nation*. Students who are empowered by rigorous, culturally relevant and responsive instruction are able to achieve levels of success that work against old constructs of race, helping to redefine perceptions of students of color (Banks, et al., 2001).

According to Ruby Payne (1996), poverty can be defined as the extent to which an individual does without resources. She goes on to describe people in poverty as having a different focus than those from middle and upper class homes. They adopt a way of thinking concentrated on survival and relationships, as opposed to hard work and achievement which are middle class values.

Another possible cause of the achievement gap is that our middle class teachers do not understand the students they teach.

U.S. schools will continue to become learning spaces where an increasingly homogeneous (mostly White, female, and middle class) will come into contact with an increasingly heterogeneous student population (primarily students of color, and from low income backgrounds) (Howard, 2003, p. 195).

Culturally responsive teaching has been found to help low SES students' connect learning to their own lives (Howard, 2003; Irvine, 2009). The problem of non-adjacent backgrounds between teachers and their students is a gap that has not been widely recognized or addressed.

Evans et al., (2004) found schools with greater portions of low income children were more likely to have lower per pupil expenditures, lower teacher quality, less rigorous curriculum, lower expectations for academic performance, fewer demands to enroll in rigorous course work, and lower parent involvement. Jonathon Kozol brings to light the shift back to segregation in our public schools, and with that the inequities that exist when schools serve poor and minority students. Teachers in predominantly low SES schools may easily lose touch with what proficient work looks like at comparable grade levels with higher SES students. These lower expectations can fail our students and contribute to the achievement gap. Although there are great teachers in all settings, low SES schools do not always attract our best teachers (Evans, et al., 2004).

Due to the Coleman report published in 1968, educators have long had the misconception students of color, living in poverty, could not benefit from the factors present in schools the way White students could. According to Oakes and Wells (1998), there are deep-seated beliefs of limited intelligence, ability and racial differences of students of color and those living in poverty. Such beliefs may lead to practices such as curriculum narrowing to raise achievement scores in tested subjects.

Jimenez, et al. (1999) say these negative beliefs limit the educational outcomes of students of color, especially those living in poverty. According to Ladson-Billings & Gomez (2001), the common disparities these students face are overcrowded schools, tracking systems, and overrepresentation in special education.

Smaller schools may be better able to create and sustain changes in culture that will improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. Findings show

consistently there is a relationship between achievement and socioeconomic status.

Tajalli and Opheim (2005) found socioeconomic factors were less influential in smaller schools than larger schools. That is, students from impoverished communities are much more likely to benefit from smaller schools. On the other hand, a positive relationship exists between larger schools and the output measures of affluent students (Lee and Smith, 1996; Howley and Bickel, 1999).

Many of our urban schools are extremely large. Because our low SES students suffer from reduced levels of trust and the need to belong (Payne 1996), smaller schools with culturally responsive classrooms might create communities where students feel safe, known and valued. Students do better academically in safe and orderly environments (Williams et al., 2005), commonly found to be a strength of smaller schools. They report “...the larger the school, the less likely (poor) students are to achieve on standardized tests” (Tajalli & Opheim, 2004, p. 46).

Rationale for the Study

Despite all of NCLB’s efforts, academic improvements are slight (CEP, 2008; NCES, 2008; NAESP, 2009). Thus, educators and policy-makers must come to conclude something more is needed to reach our struggling students. One possibility is this “one size fits all approach” is not feasible for raising achievement for all students. A sensible way to teach standards might be to integrate skills’ standards into rich contextual learning through meaningful social studies and other core subjects (CEP, 2007; Jerald, 2006; CEP, 2007).

Due to widespread curriculum narrowing, 71% of districts nationwide (Jennings, et al., 2006), have reported increasing instructional time for the tested subjects of reading, writing and math at the expense of other core subjects, especially social studies and science. More recent data suggests districts espouse less of a narrowing effect. It is important to have an accurate understanding of the effects on social studies instruction in schools as a result of NCLB, especially since little is understood about the implications of curriculum narrowing in social studies and other core subjects. A clear picture of time actually spent versus time allocated for social studies and science as reported by districts is needed. As well, the quality of social studies and science teaching in elementary classrooms must be understood and improved.

In order to promote a balanced education for our nation's children, it might be essential to allow all core subjects to receive the attention they need. The loss of social studies and science may have serious consequences for students and hence for our nation's future. It is the responsibility of public schools to facilitate an education that develops well-rounded individuals who are knowledgeable and prepared to be successful in the world (NCSS, 2008; Hirsch, 1996).

In order to prepare students successfully for the 21st century, educators and legislators must be concerned about the gap in achievement existing for low SES students 'at risk' of failure in school due to lack of background knowledge and vocabulary compared with their higher SES peers. Decreasing time in social studies and science decreases opportunities to build this knowledge. Focusing on tested subjects at the expense of rich content learning is a missed opportunity for low SES students.

Students from poor urban schools are already on the fringes of society. They live in families that often feel marginalized and isolated from the American dream. Public schools have an opportunity to accommodate the acquisition of skills that will prepare students for successful employment when they graduate from school. Students may benefit from commencing with an understanding of the value of their contribution to society and to their ability to create futures they deem appropriate. Narrowing social studies and other core subjects may be a lost opportunity for providing knowledge and skills necessary to achieve this end.

Increasing numbers of students considered English Language Learners (ELLs) now attend our nation's public schools. Many of these are from low SES homes where a language other than English is spoken. As revealed in studies of low SES students who received educational interventions in early childhood before kindergarten, these ELLs will also need additional support if they are to be successful in school. Narrowing their opportunities to build background knowledge and vocabulary will limit the foundation upon which they can learn other things (Willingham, 2006; AFT, 2006). Knowledge is built upon knowledge (Hirsch, 1996). Reducing time spent building this knowledge will only decrease these students' ability to make connections—a necessity for successful comprehension and reading (Catts, 2009; Willingham, 2006).

Michael Felt in an interview by McCaw (2008) states, “There is no one-size-fits-all and the harder we work to create one the greater the number of children we will leave behind” (McCaw, 2008, *Leading Insights*, para. 7). Social studies render real opportunities for teachers to meet the needs of students based on the make-up of the class

and culturally responsive social lessons. Integrating interesting content, deepening thinking skills, and applying reading, writing and math skills through an integrated approach are possible and even preferable in effective social studies and science teaching. Social studies provide a place where current problems can be studied from diverse perspectives. Such content is relevant to students' lives.

Social studies and science are considered core subjects both by state and federal educational guidelines. Standards for social studies and science have been developed to help students understand important concepts and ideas about themselves and the world. Reducing time for social studies and science reduces this rich source of contextual learning and decreases opportunities for all students to learn valuable information that can connect them to their world and give them greater access to learning. These studies allow for higher-level thinking and problem-solving opportunities with real world implications.

Social studies are considered essential to raise student achievement for disadvantaged children, according to the NCSS and other researchers who have studied the needs of low SES students. Schools serving these students are most successful when the curriculum is focused on the future with high expectations for performance (Williams, et al., 2005). Social studies and science furnish opportunities for students to learn problem-solving skills, discuss current issues and work in a multitude of ways, including small groups. These are skills identified for successful 21st century employment (Wagner, 2008). Curriculum narrowing may be considered inequitable treatment of our minority and low income students.

Little research has been done on the effects of curriculum narrowing from the perspective of teachers. Changes in teaching and learning since NCLB have come as directives from districts and administrators as a result of increasing pressures to raise student achievement and reduce the gap in achievement between high and low SES students, as well as those of different genders and ethnic backgrounds. This phenomenological study will take an in-depth look at curriculum narrowing and its impact on teachers and their beliefs about their role and responsibilities as educators. It will provide insight into the experiences of teachers before and after NCLB and the atmosphere of high-stakes testing.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Background and Research Questions

The current trend toward curriculum narrowing threatens to undermine the well-rounded education of young people. Although there has been research done on the degree of curriculum narrowing in our nation's schools (CEP, 2006-8; NCES, 2007; von Zastrow, 2007), little research has been done to understand teachers' experiences of curriculum narrowing and their beliefs regarding their role as educators in an environment where they must concentrate on tested subjects at the expense of non-tested subjects like social studies, science, the arts and physical education.

This study provides insight into curriculum narrowing, the current age of accountability, and their effects on teachers. The purpose of this study is to describe, interpret and analyze the following:

What are teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing?

What are teachers' beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers relative to district expectations?

How have changes in accountability expectations impacted teachers?

Study Design

A phenomenological study has been selected to render an in-depth look at the effects of curriculum narrowing and increasing accountability on teachers. According to Creswell (2007), "A *phenomenological study* describes the meaning for several

individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57-58). Phenomenology fits the purposes of the study by contributing insight into teachers’ lived experiences of the current environment of high-stakes testing and curriculum narrowing, alongside their beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers.

Phenomenology presents conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view and is a research technique that involves the careful description of aspects of human life as they are lived. To provide insight into the world of teacher experiences and beliefs concerning curriculum narrowing and high-stakes accountability, a phenomenological approach documents the experiences of three teachers’ views on how these phenomena impact teaching.

The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2008, para. 2)

Due to the complexities of teaching in the era of No Child Left Behind, this phenomenological study sheds a unique light on teacher perceptions through stories that communicate the experience of teachers pertaining to accountability, the narrowing of curriculum, and their beliefs about teaching. Exploring teacher beliefs about their role as teachers in educating children and their perspective of the effects of curriculum

narrowing on teachers informs us about the results of both intended and unintended consequences of this practice on teachers in elementary schools.

The study documents the experiences of three teachers' views on how curriculum narrowing and district expectations impact teaching. To explore teachers' stories, in-depth interviewing has been selected as the method by which to gather data. This researcher interviewed three teachers about the phenomenon of curriculum narrowing and increased accountability to obtain a description of the lived experiences of the participants. Because as many as 71% of public elementary schools are narrowing curriculum to focus on tested subjects (CEP, 2006 & 2007; NCES, 2007; Nichols & Berliner, 2008), it is important to understand how this phenomenon is impacting teachers.

Subjects that may be narrowed include social studies, science, arts and physical education. Such narrowing creates lack of knowledge, vocabulary, experience and thinking skills in these subjects. These narrowed subjects are considered core material essential to a good education for students in the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The National Council for the Social Studies states its position regarding the importance of social studies for all students as:

The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 2008, para. 1).

The study of the impact of curriculum narrowing is multi-faceted, since there are many pressures that form teachers' perceptions of their role as educators and their beliefs concerning their responsibilities in an era of NCLB. A phenomenological study has been chosen because it allows for analysis of complex subjects, using the viewpoint of teachers

to assess their experience with curriculum narrowing in elementary education. In-depth interviewing was the means by which the researcher gathered stories of teachers' experiences of curriculum narrowing, increased accountability, and their effects.

Stake (1995) refers to qualitative interviews as useful to obtain multiple views through others' interpretations and descriptions. "Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road into multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p. 64). Interviews of one or more participants provided insight into these realities. In this case, this researcher interviewed three teachers about their experiences of curriculum narrowing to obtain a rich description and fresh perspective of the effects of this phenomenon on teachers.

In-depth interviewing furnished a window into teacher perspectives of curriculum narrowing and the environment of increased accountability. The selection of three public school teachers with ten or more years of experience provided a view of instruction over time. "In-depth interviewing allows the exploration of how ideas and emotions about events and people change through time and experience" (Mears, 2009, p. 18). This method fits the purposes of the study because it is possible within the context of interviews to obtain a wealth of information on the phenomenon of curriculum narrowing, as well as teachers' beliefs about their role as teachers relative to district expectations.

In-depth interviewing is a means by which the stories of narrators can be collected by a researcher to give meaning to the analysis. "Story telling...is what informants do

with us when they convey the details and courses of their experiences” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 696).

Yin (2009) speaks to the strengths of the in-depth interview.

You can ask key respondents about the facts of a matter as well as their opinions about events. In some situations, you may even ask the interviewee to propose her or his own insights into certain occurrences and may use such propositions as the basis for further inquiry (p. 107).

The research questions delve into teachers’ beliefs and perceptions regarding the phenomenon of curriculum narrowing and its impact on teachers, as educators are continually compelled to focus more on reading, writing and math to raise student achievement in an atmosphere of NCLB. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2002), “The nature of the research question determines whether or not the use of in-depth interviewing is advisable” (p. 105).

The purposes of the study are facilitated by in-depth interviewing as it promotes the type of story-telling that can give the reader an understanding of the feelings and experiences of the phenomenon of curriculum narrowing and accountability as lived by teachers over time. Because teacher evaluations are currently based in large part on their ability to raise student achievement, current practices of curriculum narrowing to focus on tested subjects have become common place. Therefore, teacher voice regarding the practice of curriculum narrowing is seldom solicited. In-depth interviewing of teacher perspectives offers a little heard, seldom articulated, perspective.

...(I)f one is interested in questions of greater depth, where the knowledge sought is often taken for granted and not readily articulated by most members, ...where different individuals or groups involved in the same line of activity have complicated, multiple perspectives on some phenomenon, then in-depth interviewing is likely the best approach...(Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 105).

In order to richly portray the findings, a narrative of stories and perceptions has been developed from the teachers' experiences. Making meaning of these experiences has led the researcher to examine what lies behind these stories.

According to Mears (2009),

Interviews that solicit stories of personal experience offer a powerful entry into a world from another's perspective (p. 13)...Interviews thus offer access to that place where interpreted human experience and response intersect with an educational, social, cultural, spiritual, or political dynamic, providing the means by which privately held contents of memory can be communicated to a listening researcher ...Abstract findings regarding the implementation of a political or social policy, for example, become powerfully real when an individual's account of that policy's effect on his or her life become clear (p. 15).

In-depth interviewing allowed some flexibility as the researcher asked guiding, open-ended questions that led to extended lines of inquiry based on the responses of the interviewee. "The open-ended nature of oral history questions invites narrators to focus on what they consider to be important and gives them the power to control the content and the scope of the interview" (Mears, 2009, p.18).

Proponents of active interviewing broaden the perspective concerning the possibilities of this methodology,

Narrative complexity requires an interview format that accommodates contextual shifts and reflexivity...The respondent is...heard to speak of life in relation to diverse substantive and perspectival contingencies. Respondents' reflexive comments are endogenous guides to their narrative identities (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 55).

To facilitate an atmosphere of respect for the narrator's voice when reporting, this researcher utilized excerpts from the actual transcripts in the body of the text by way of 'excerpted poetic' narrative. Three narrators were interviewed to provide multiple and/or

common perspectives of the phenomena of curriculum narrowing and increasing accountability. These perspectives were analyzed for global themes and supported by minor themes that are shared in the narrative of the study.

There are many ways for researchers to pay respect in their texts. One is the multivocal story, recommended by many anthropologists (see, e.g., Marcus 1992). In the multivocal story there are many narratives...and the researcher does not have to take a stand on which is 'right' or 'wrong' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 743).

Although the results of this methodology cannot be generalized, they do add to the body of evidence on the effects of increasing accountability, curriculum narrowing in elementary classrooms, and teachers' experiences and feelings resulting from these practices.

It is safe to say that the results of interview research may not be widely generalizable, at least in the standard use of the term. Yet...interview research provides a perspective that can inform others about the effects of actions and decisions on the lives of individuals within the context being studied (Mears, 2009, p. 29).

The Gateway Approach to in-depth interviewing has been adapted to best fit the study within interview methodology. A prepared set of guiding questions were followed to yield structure and consistency across interviews, with flexibility to allow for new lines of inquiry, based on what was important to the narrator. Employing a methodology of phenomenology using in-depth interviewing has aptly facilitated the research on current pressures in education, teacher beliefs about curriculum narrowing, and their impact on teachers from their own perspective.

Subjectivity

The researcher has no prior experience with the participating district. There is no professional relationship with the schools or teachers involved in the study. Prior knowledge of education and the issues currently faced by educators and districts could provide a foundation for bias; however, care was taken to guard against agreement or disagreement with narrators' viewpoints throughout the interviews and in interpreting the data through reflection and bracketing practices.

The researcher's bias extends to a belief in the importance of the following for students: social studies to provide background knowledge and vocabulary, higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills and to preserve democratic ideals; science that provides essential background and content knowledge for students; the arts and physical education to provide essential knowledge and experiences that contribute to the education of a whole human being. As an educator in diverse settings and a strong proponent of the arts, e.g. Hawaii and Denver, the researcher was led to study the current state of curriculum narrowing, the environment of accountability, and their impact on teachers to obtain information on teacher beliefs about their role and sense of responsibility as educators. In order to overcome prior subjectivity, the researcher has chosen a form of narrative that uses the words of the interviewee to preserve accuracy. The researcher followed the advice of Mears (2009),

...rather than starting out to find expressions or examples to prove a preconceived idea or to advance a theory, your task is to connect directly with the experience described by your narrator. Your prior knowledge should inform you not precondition your interpretation (Mears, 2009, pp. 122-123).

An adaptation of the Gateway Approach (Mears, 2009) provided the basis and structure for the interview process. Three 90-minute interviews of each teacher provided an in-depth look at curriculum narrowing, an environment of increasing accountability, and their impact on teachers. Processes used in the Gateway Approach include: preparation; interviewing; interpretive display; narrator check; data analysis; and reporting. These processes are fully described below and in Table 1 (Appendix B).

Preparation.

Preparation required clarifying the purpose of the research and the primary research questions. Recommended were two broad, general questions such as: What have you experienced of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced your experiences of the phenomenon? (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) Such open ended questions led to an understanding of the common experiences of the participants. In addition, this researcher recognized and identified the broad philosophical assumptions of the phenomena. Preparations to 'bracket out' personal experiences regarding the phenomenon must be made (Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

According to Mears (2009), it is essential to build requisite knowledge and appreciation of the qualities of the experience so it is possible to research from an informed perspective. To successfully conduct in-depth interview research, this researcher has depth of knowledge and experience with rich contextual learning and current practices in the current public school environment regarding the marginalization of non-tested subjects. The researcher has had extensive training in various settings with

accountability, high-stakes testing and raising student achievement, given nearly thirty years in education.

Adept researchers capitalize on their prior knowledge and experience, turning what might have been a drawback into an asset. They also check for meaning and confirm that they are correctly interpreting what their narrator is saying without prejudging based upon prior knowledge (Mears, 2009, p. 28).

The researcher's experience in common with the narrators established trust, as rapport was built with each participant. "This heightened attention to detail cannot come, however, at the expense of rapport, for fundamental to a successful interview is the building of trust that connects researcher and narrator so that there is safety in disclosure" (Mears, 2009, p. 20).

According to Gubrium and Holstein (2002), "An important issue is the researcher's relationship to member knowledge and lived experience" (p. 107). They go on to say,

Veterans with actual lived experience may already possess member knowledge, but they may also take that knowledge for granted. Additionally, their current or former status as members may constitute when they interview others. It is important that researchers recognize these nuances in advance, so that they can undertake the planning of in-depth interviewing in a manner that will help them to assess these influences on the accounts and reflections collected during the interviewing process (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 108).

According to Gubrium and Holstein (2002), "Lived experience and member status are no longer stigmatized among social scientists, and some even extol their relative merits..." (p. 107).

Whether the researcher is a neophyte or a returning veteran, in-depth interviewing involves an interactive process in which both interviewer and informant draw upon and use their commonsense knowledge to create some intelligible sense of the questions posed and the ensuing discussions about them (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 108).

This researcher created an environment of trust and open communication of narrator perspectives. “Monitoring personal reactions throughout the investigation can help a researcher become conscious of any subjective lens that is being activated...such as avid agreement or disagreement...” (Mears, 2009, p. 28).

According to Mears (2009), “...oral history thrives through voice and expression” (p. 54). Therefore, to maintain integrity and accuracy, this researcher used excerpts from the actual transcripts to share the voice of the narrators in the text.

At the absolute minimum, researchers have a responsibility to dutifully and accurately represent those stories and to appropriately acknowledge the contributions that the narrators have made to the research. One safeguard to ensure accurate representation is “to provide [interviewees] with the right to look over their interviews, edit them, and examine the final manuscript before publication (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 10) (Mears, 2009, p. 44).

Prior to the beginning of the interviews, additions and corrections to the research methodology and interview questions were solicited from two qualitative research specialists, called key informants. Following revisions to interview questions based on this input, this researcher conducted a pilot interview with an elementary teacher to test the tool to make sure it met goals intended for the instrument and to clarify anything deemed confusing. Following these preparations, the researcher followed the process prescribed by the district to gain approval to conduct the study, contacted school principals and participating teachers, and made arrangements for interviews to take place.

Site and Participants

District and school sites.

The large school district selected for the study rendered a wide selection of schools from which to choose the three teachers for the study. With approximately 42,000 students, this urban district had nearly 55 schools, a few charters and two alternative schools. Specific school selections were made based on the willingness of principals and teachers to participate in the study.

Districts nationwide have been forced to make essential budget reductions this year due to cuts in federal and state funding, because the economy has been suffering. Efforts were made by this district to gather values data from the community that helped to determine where necessary budget cuts would occur. Elementary schools were less impacted than feared, although further cuts in the coming years are quite possible.

This district has a wide range of demographics, including schools that have mostly White middle to upper class student bodies, to those with nearly all Hispanic students from low income homes. In this way, it closely resembles other urban districts. The district's strategic plan and reform initiatives guide the focus of district requirements for raising student achievement in its schools. Concerns exist about their goal of increasing teacher accountability, including evaluation of every teacher every year, with fewer resources.

Teachers.

In-depth interviews were done with three public school teachers who were currently teaching at the upper elementary level. Teachers with upper elementary

teaching experience were selected since they have had experience with high-stakes testing and No Child Left Behind in its current environment. Each had ten or more years of teaching experience at the elementary level in the public schools. The years in public education allowed the researcher to receive information on the effects of curriculum narrowing and accountability over time, based on years of experience in public school teaching before and after the institution of NCLB.

The three teachers were determined to be master teachers by their principals to contribute deeper insight into the perception of excellence in education, their calling and beliefs about their role as teachers, the task of educating students over time, and knowledge and experience of what works to raise student achievement. The identification of ‘master’ teachers was the personal viewpoint of each principal. Principals were allowed to independently define the concept of master teacher after being given a description of the teacher interview topics. Principals generally evaluate teachers based on criteria including: quality of instruction; professionalism; ability to collaborate with other teachers to raise student achievement; and teacher relationships with students.

The three teachers, all of whom were women, made themselves available to the researcher to share their experiences and stories of teaching over time. In the world of public education, administrators make many decisions that affect teaching in the classroom. This researcher used the actual voice of the teachers who are on the front lines, teaching our children every day for years on end. The teachers interviewed have seen and learned a lot. It seemed important to use teacher voice to share about the

experience of teaching and the issues affecting their world. They were asked to recall the experience of curriculum narrowing and how teaching has changed over time.

It is interesting to note each teacher was working in a different situation and demographic. One teacher was teaching in a “Low” performing school in her own community and worked with many low income Latino students. Another worked in a “High” performing school with a large percentage of middle and higher income families, although she referred to changing demographics and more balance with the addition of low income families, as well. The third worked in a school that used to be comprised of middle and high income students. The high income students at this school had primarily been replaced by students from low socio-economic homes, but there are still many from middle income families. This school was rated “Average” by the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) and other performance criteria selected by the State.

All teachers were highly educated—two with Masters Degrees in education and another with over 90 hours plus her Bachelors in Education. Although this qualified for a higher degree, her passion for learning led to a wide body of knowledge without concern for the degree. All three teachers loved their work and were passionate about teaching children. The rewards outweighed the challenges to date, and they continued to go above and beyond what was asked to provide the best education possible in the current environment. Each teacher was involved in extra duties at the building level, especially focused on teacher leadership to mentor other teachers, work as grade level chairs or bringing their wisdom to literacy, technology, gifted and talented work, and after school programs to enhance students’ educational opportunities.

Each of these teachers was committed to and valued the teaching of standards. Each took their responsibility to follow district and building guidelines very seriously. All were highly valued by their principals, professional and hard-working—wanting first and foremost to make a difference in the lives of their students.

Through teachers' eyes, the reader gains insight into the world of teaching as it relates to changes in curriculum, teaching, expectations, and their effects on teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding their role and responsibilities as educators. Such experienced, master educators' voices are heard within this work and will shed light upon our understanding of curriculum narrowing, the current environment of increasing accountability, and their impact on teachers.

Informed consent.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The consent letter (Appendix A) assured participants of confidentiality. Participation was voluntary. Pseudonyms were used for the interviewees. A full description of the study was provided to the District. Participating teachers received a quick overview of the purpose of the study prior to the first interview—informing them of the researcher's interest in learning about the perceptions of teachers who have experienced teaching at the elementary level over the past decade.

Prior to the first interview, participants were informed that their interviews would be recorded. The Informed Consent Form was presented and signed prior to the first interview. A copy was provided for each teacher at the time of signing.

Data Collection

Interviewing.

The interview format was adapted from a protocol based on the work of Carolyn Mears' Gateway Approach and included probing questions, allowing for open-ended discovery of insights and themes concerning teacher perceptions of curriculum narrowing, accountability, and their impact on teachers. Interviewing involved a series of three modified oral history interviews to disclose meaning and significance that the narrator took from the phenomena being investigated (Mears, 2009).

This researcher conducted three 90-minute interviews with each of the three public school teachers. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewees yet with the intent to sustain continuity of ideas and time to thoughtfully identify areas for probing and in-depth understanding at the next interview. Open-ended interview questions provided flexibility to allow teachers to reflect on their experiences through stories and feelings associated with curriculum narrowing, their perceptions of their role as educators relative to district expectations, the environment of accountability, and their impact on teachers. These in-depth interviews furnished meaningful, knowable, and explicit information that assisted in answering the research questions. Interviews included questions to determine:

- *Teacher perceptions of curriculum narrowing*
- *Teacher beliefs about their role as educators and their beliefs about their responsibilities as teachers*
- How expectations of teachers have changed over time

- Teacher perceptions of *how instruction may have altered* during their years as a teacher
- Teacher perceptions of how these changes are *impacting teachers*

Stories from teachers' experiences with teaching were gathered to provide a rich tapestry from which to describe these phenomena and their impact on teachers.

Narrator check.

Narrator check achieved a consensus that the excerpted narrative accurately presents the narrator's data and intended meaning, and that both the researcher and the narrator have come to a shared understanding of the experience and its significance for the narrator (Mears, 2009). Member/narrator checking was employed in this study. "Member checking is both formal and informal practice as well as an ongoing means to check the dependability of the data and the researcher's understanding thereof" (Mears, 2009, p. 64). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the process of *member checking* as the most critical technique for establishing credibility of the research because this is the step in which data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are reviewed and confirmed with study participants and stakeholders (Mears, 2009, p. 63).

The in-depth interviews were conducted using an Interview Guide (Appendix C) that includes extensive probing and open-ended questions. Each teacher was interviewed by the researcher for three 90 minute sessions with sufficient time between to allow the researcher time to transcribe notes from the previous interview and develop probing questions in case a new line of questioning would prove informative. When probing

questions were posed to one interviewee, the researcher made every effort to pose the same question to the other interviewees.

The Interview Guide was informed by a conceptual framework for understanding teacher perceptions of curriculum narrowing, the environment of increasing accountability, and their impact on teachers. As background, the researcher studied the literature on the effects of curriculum narrowing, including the degree to which curriculum narrowing is occurring in elementary schools. Background for excellence in teaching is informed by a framework of best practices for today's classrooms (Marzano et al., 2001; Howard, 2003; Hill & Flynn, 2006; Tomlinson, 2001 & 2005; NCSS, 2008), as well as what works for diverse populations of students. Carolyn Mears book entitled *Interviewing for Education and Social Science Research: A Gateway Approach* was used as a resource for appropriate techniques and instruments used for interviewing.

In addition to recordings, notes from the interviews were taken on instruments designed by the interviewer (Appendix D) with room for ample expansion notes, including quotes that were taken with each question. However, this researcher depended upon the recordings for details on quotes and much of the data, allowing the researcher to be fully present to support the narrator. Themes and patterns were found within the data and documented on Appendix E, the Data Analysis Organizer. The themes identified in the organizer were anticipated from the original interview questions, and were revised based on the contents of the interviews and where narrator's wished to go in the interviews.

Data Analysis and Interpretive Display

Data analysis entails the search for themes and understandings across all narrators, utilizing techniques adapted from educational criticism (Mears, 2009).

Creswell (2007) refers to this search for themes as clusters of meaning. Moustakas (1994) calls this step horizontalization.

Building on the data from the first and second research question, data analysts go through the data (e.g., interview transcriptions) and highlight ‘significant statements,’ sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

The researcher has incorporated narrator voice into the conclusions as a means of preserving accuracy. Interpretive analysis was used to make comparisons, allowing for cross-case analysis. “Interpretive display of the narrator’s story requires the discernment of salient information to answer the research questions(s) so that an excerpted narrative can be created to disclose the data in an accessible and evocative manner,” (Mears, 2009, p. 71).

Bracketing was done to identify and separate out personal perspectives of the researcher. According to Daniels (2005),

Bracketing is suspending or setting aside our biases, everyday understandings, theories, beliefs, habitual modes of thought, and judgments... Since bias is an inevitable part of the study of human beings, phenomenologists deal with it by putting it completely in the situation, by attempting to become aware of their preconceptions and biases before beginning the study and while the study is occurring, and then ‘bracketing’ or suspending them so as to be as open as possible to what the subject wants to share” (Daniels, 2005, B. The Methods, Bracketing).

Display of the interpretation is represented through poetic narrative from excerpts within the interviews. To accomplish this goal, the researcher analyzed interview

transcripts for developing themes. From a review of the literature, themes were anticipated to include: how instruction has changed over time; beliefs about the importance of non-tested subjects; beliefs about the role and responsibilities of teachers in educating their students; strategies used for teaching content rich subjects; time spent on non-tested subjects; integration of other basic skills into non-tested content rich subjects; perceptions of the impact of curriculum narrowing on students; impact of curriculum narrowing on teachers. However, flexibility has allowed for new themes to emerge based on the interviews.

Themes were identified when teachers repeated thoughts or feelings multiple times, either individually or in cross-case analysis of multiple teachers. Many of the themes came up throughout the interviews because one or more teachers were deeply affected by them. The analysis for themes allowed the researcher to identify what was important to the narrators through analysis of the actual words spoken and transcribed from the transcripts.

According to Gilgun (1999), interviewers will, "...find and name meanings; they clump meanings together, creating categories and codes" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 879). Poetic representation allowed the researcher to use the voice of narrators to represent their human experience regarding the interview questions, giving the reader a feeling for teachers' experience and perspective. Descriptive data was facilitated through the use of poetic narrative.

Tedlock (1983), an oral historian, refers to the use of poetry, "...when people talk...their speech is closer to poetry than it is to prose...everybody speaks using a poetic

device, the pause” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 878-879). Use of poetic narrative to display interpretations of interviews allowed the researcher to represent emotions and feelings experienced by teachers, as well as facts. It provides a voice that can speak to policy makers and educators to inform their thinking regarding policy-making that affects teachers and education of the young.

Unlike conventional social science writing, poetry is welcome in diverse settings and can bring theoretic understandings to life for audiences as diverse as those found in poetry bars...policy-making settings...and the mass media (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 879).

Since the challenge was to distill to the essence, poetic narrative has facilitated this process—allowing for selection of words and phrases most meaningful to the interpretation. Mears refers to Eisner’s educational criticism during analysis as the essential value factor of educational practice (Eisner, 2002, *The Educational Imagination*).

Making judgments regarding the contributory quality of what is seen or heard requires that criteria for judgment be employed. Evaluative thinking from diverse perspectives on the complexities of the educational experience contributes to deeper discussion relative to the benefits and potential drawbacks of policy, practice, programs, and systems (Mears, 2009, p. 53).

According to Mears’ method, “...larger patterns and themes can be discerned by considering all of the narratives in relation to each other” (Mears, 2009, p. 135). The researcher has employed educational criticism and evaluative thinking from diverse perspectives to interpret the study. Themes were identified, and similarities and differences coded in different colors to facilitate comparisons.

The next step was to “...deepen perceptivity for subsequent cross-case analysis” (Mears, 2009, p. 123). Reducing and distilling the data “...so the heart of the interview

can be communicated” (Mears, 2009, p. 123)... are conscious steps in the process of analyzing and making meaning of the data. Following the steps for reducing the narrative poetically, the researcher came to conclusions grounded in the words of the narrators.

“A well-crafted narrative provides a richly tapestried account that enables a sort of vicarious participation so that appreciation for the circumstances becomes possible” (Mears, 2009, p. 123). According to Gubrium and Holstein (2002), “Narrative analysis allows for the systematic study of personal experience and meaning... Personal narratives provide windows into lives that confront the constraints of circumstances” (pp. 706-707).

Creswell (2007) agrees:

From the structural and textural description, the researcher then writes a composite description that presents the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon, called the *essential, invariant structure (or essence)*. Primarily this passage focuses on the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 62).

Global themes were identified and supported by minor themes. Each minor theme was followed by poetic narrative of each teacher, allowing their actual voices, feelings, and beliefs to permeate the work.

Reporting.

Reporting is that essential, final step in which results of the inquiry, namely the conclusions that answer the research questions, are shared in ways that achieve the intended purpose for the research while preserving each narrator’s voice (Mears, 2009, p. 71). Reporting was facilitated in poetic narrative style through excerpts using the voice of the narrator after discovery of themes obtained through analysis of transcripts. Poetic narrative was the means of communicating text. According to Mears (2009), “...the purpose of an excerpted data display is not to cut and paste intriguing quotes, but to

preserve the meaning and reflect the personhood of the speaker” (p. 122). Poetic narrative preserves accuracy through the voice of the narrator.

DESCRIBE, DESCRIBE, DESCRIBE is the key part of the phenomenological orientation. The people tell their own story, in their own terms. So ‘fidelity to the phenomenon as it is lived’ means apprehending and understanding it in the lived context of the person living through the situation (Daniels, 2005, *The Methods*, para. 3).

Description that shares the feelings, beliefs and convictions of the narrators in regards to their experiences of the phenomena was the focus of reporting the findings.

Poetic narrative was organized in themes to provide a comparison of common experiences. Major, global themes emerged and were supported by minor themes. Repeated elements or significantly different elements are identified across narrators’ stories. Steps for data analyses are adapted from Mears (2009, pp. 124-125):

1. Review transcripts for each narrator
2. Mark areas pertinent to the research questions. Set aside stories that do not fulfill the purpose
3. Highlight passages that are of value and necessary to provide context
4. Examine for themes
5. Sequence data meaningfully
6. Highlight words and phrases that are descriptive or moving
7. Reflect and consider broader themes
8. Reassess words and phrases for meaning and arrange these fragments in a poetic narrative
9. Review again to attain simplest form
10. Cut, delete, purge
11. Change verb forms to smooth rendering

12. Play with placement of individual passages for ultimate effect without changing meaning
13. Check through original transcripts one more time for anything that might have been left out
14. Repeat process for each narrator
15. Consider each excerpted narrative to discern common themes, patterns, understandings, or differences that emerge across your study population

The analysis organized the description so that it was manageable. An Interview Summary Form (Appendix D) was used to align global and minor themes and questions. Data was coded and organized into themes in alignment with the literature review (See Appendix E: Data Analysis Organizer). Additional categories of themes were created based on results of the interviews. Flexibility of the design allowed for the discovery of additional data that could be included in the study. Findings were supported by way of poetic narrative.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is only upper elementary school teachers were studied. Although the teacher participants met the qualifications outlined in this study, selection of schools and teachers was limited by perspectives of site-based leaders, as well as willingness of principals and teachers to participate. The study is limited to one school district, three schools, and only three teachers. Therefore the result is not generalizable to other schools, teachers, students or districts.

Summary

This research study focused on the phenomenon of curriculum narrowing in an urban district. It compared teacher perceptions of how curriculum narrowing was

impacting teachers. Interviews provided comparable data on curriculum narrowing from the perspective of three teachers who had experienced this phenomenon over time in elementary education. In-depth, one-on-one interviews rendered a deeper look at teacher perceptions and beliefs about current practices surrounding curriculum narrowing for non-tested subjects and its impact on teachers. As the study commenced, it became apparent the environment of high-stakes accountability impacted teachers' experiences to a large degree and therefore was included in the findings.

The in-depth interview design yielded qualitative data for the study. Discussion and interpretation of the results furnished information on the significance of the analysis and were conveyed through poetic narrative to facilitate a sharing of the stories and perspectives of teachers concerning curriculum narrowing and the environment of increasing accountability in their classrooms.

Chapter Four: Three Teachers and Their Experiences.

The data for this study was gathered from three teachers, all of whom met the criteria of having taught elementary children for ten or more years; were teaching in 4th or 5th grade in an urban/suburban public school; and were considered by their principals to be master teachers. The names of the teachers were changed and some details generalized to protect their identity.

Three 90 minute interviews were conducted with each teacher, generally after school in their classrooms where this researcher was able to observe their teaching environment. A comfortable milieu was set up with coffee or tea, as well as something to eat, wherein a positive rapport was established between the teacher and researcher.

Themes emerged from the data and are reported based on teacher responses to the research questions. During these in-depth interviews, this researcher allowed time for teachers to explore their beliefs and put them into words. Many things came up for the narrators that surprised them. The interview process allowed them precious time for reflection on their practices and profession leading to interesting personal discoveries of their beliefs about their role as teachers. These are noted throughout this work, and provide the depth desired in a phenomenology. As the researcher probed for deeper understanding of their responses, teachers came to articulate what drives them and what sustains them to do the work they do.

The data was analyzed and the results organized into themes that give insight into the minds and hearts of these teachers. Evidence of narrator responses is provided in their own words for each of the research questions and provides a powerful understanding of the conflicts and underlying impulses that impact teachers.

Introducing the Teachers

The experiences and viewpoints in this chapter will allow you to get to know the teachers whose stories provide insight into what is happening today compared to ten or more years ago in education. First meet Charlotte.

Charlotte

Charlotte's path to teaching began when she was a child. She comes from a long line of teachers and often accompanied her grandfather to do science experiments. She loves teaching science to this day. "The seeds were planted through my ancestry," she says. "I've always wanted to be a teacher since I was a child...I started in kindergarten playing school...My passion and my love has always been science because my grandfather—we were always doing experiments and math."

Charlotte has a family, but she found her dedication to teaching led to long hours used for preparation and creativity in planning lessons. She said, "I was young and didn't know how to go home...Having everything prepared is what makes you successful." Once, the police came to her classroom, escorted by the Principal. It was midnight and she was still preparing for instruction. "I just loved what I was doing and each subject area. And I was just putting everything together so I could go and have my weekend...Hands-on takes a lot of preparation."

Charlotte admits a better balance in her life now and shares, “Since I’ve moved to Colorado, my Principal came in and told me to get a life. If you stay past 6:00, you’re staying too long...They also don’t give you keys now, and so we can’t come in on weekends like we used to. You don’t have those flex hours now.”

Charlotte thinks the main goal of education is to, “...create lifelong learners who can become citizens that make a difference in this world. They give back! They give back and help others...Knowledge is power.” She relates a poem she recites with her class,

Knowledge is Power, I know what I know.
The more you learn, the further you go.
When you get an education, you’ll be taking a stand.
Because knowledge is power—grab it while you can!

“When you need answers to anything, it is seeking—it is making a choice. Choice is, to me, one of the most important gifts a child can ever have...To me, that’s the first step.”

When asked about the roles she plays as a teacher, Charlotte responded, “I love this picture by James Christenson, *The Scholar*—with a very old elderly man on a stool with many hats on his head, which means the roles we play as teachers are many. The roles we play are not clearly defined...Sometimes it is the nurturer, the caretaker, the disciplinarian, the peacemaker, the mathematician, the scientist...the reader, the writer, the author, the mediator, the copy editor...constantly going and going. I’m thinking the psychologist. You have to be! You learn so many things about life.”

Gayle

Gayle has been teaching for almost twenty years and is deeply involved in teacher leadership in her school. When she was young, her Grandfather allowed her to teach him. She used her teachers as role models. Before she began teaching, she said, “I was scared

to teach in the beginning. I subbed all over Colorado. Finally, I interviewed and the principal marked my resume with a red pen. I left, sure teaching was not for me...I'm a late bloomer...I struggled at the beginning...when you don't know what you want to do. I understand when these little kids struggle with something. The passion's not there."

When asked why she went into teaching, Gayle said, "I like really making a difference in a child's life somehow...If I look back, there were three or four teachers who made a huge impact on me...I really enjoy what I do. I worry where we are going in education. Are we so focused on assessments that we're losing the love of learning? That is the main thing I don't like seeing happen in the schools...But I love what I do!"

Like the other two teachers interviewed, Gayle works long hours. "I could stay here twenty-four hours and there would still be something for me to do...I come in two weeks before school starts to be ready on the first day...to set up my classroom...not paid time. I do give time up in the summer...I know there is still a lot more I can do to be a better teacher. I'm not doing that. Am I jilting my kids? I have to have the forces I need to be able to do another year." Summers with her family rejuvenate her.

The main goal of education, Gayle thinks is, "...preparing citizens for our future and for our world. Preparing them academically and emotionally—being able to get along with one another, you know, that's a challenge in our world...Preparing them for life—for them to feel successful and needed. If you feel needed, you feel like you're part of something. If they feel they can contribute to the world or whatever they choose to do for work, they will be a part of what society needs."

Gayle sees her role as a teacher being, “A lot...parent roles; guidance counselors—guiding them to make good choices; a cheerleader; doctoring. We’re a family for a year.” To understand Gayle, you must know she understands change is hard for her. Although this is the case, she pushes herself to take the latest technology classes and challenges herself to pilot new models she believes are coming in education. She says, “My philosophy is—it’s going to happen, so I might as well get in on the ground level. It’s coming, and I can’t wait for it! Change is hard for me, but I do it.”

Gayle describes herself as a ‘rule follower’ with a strong sense of duty. If she is told to teach Rigby with fidelity, she does that, even if she feels in her heart we are losing something special in education. When asked how she feels about continuing to teach in the next few years, Gayle states, “I worry sometimes if I’ll be able to keep up if it stays the same...you’re so tense right now...I worry about my health. I know stress affects the immune system and all of that. My goal is to do it...I’ve been on the outside, and teaching is meaningful work...I feel very fortunate I’m in a job that I love. It makes me smile...It makes me cry, too.”

Liz

Like Gayle, teaching is a second career for Liz. Having worked in business, she appreciates the rewards teaching offers in terms of her work with children. She is a mother and was always involved in her children’s education through volunteer work. Liz eventually enrolled in school to become a teacher which led to a Masters’ Degree. Her tenacity as a young woman is demonstrated by her ability to be noticed by employers among stacks of resumes—to her passion for educating young people and her love of

learning. She is always taking classes to increase her knowledge of latest best practices for the children she teaches. Liz is also involved in teacher leadership within her building.

Once Liz began teaching, for many years she said, “I don’t think I can do this...I think I should quit.” As a new teacher, she was given some of the most challenging children, enough so she thought many times about leaving the profession. After more experience and reflection she says, “I’m stable in their lives. Now I stand at the door and say good morning, and I’ll know right away how their day is...They’ve come in and said some of the most astounding things. But I’m glad they’re confident enough to share with me, and we can get them the help they need. They have that trust. Some have challenging family lives, and they just need someone to talk to. These kids are my life!”

Liz is clearly an advocate for children. When asked to describe the goal of education, Liz is thoughtful. “To educate the children so that they can then go out into the world and have access to all those opportunities that are out there...If we don’t educate them to get there, then they’ve lost so many things.”

Liz sees her role as teacher to be, “Following the curriculum and to know where these students are and how to get them to the next level.” She has many levels in her classroom, as each of the teachers expressed. There are children with severe and profound disabilities, as well as students who are above grade level—identified Gifted and Talented. She has English Language Learners and children who require a paraprofessional. Liz plans instruction for each of these students every day.

When asked how she does it all, she responds, “I do a lot of that at night. I don’t have time to grade their work at school. I can do that at home or on weekends. What I do

need to do is plan for the next day: what they need; what I'm going to re-teach. That's what I do at the end of the day... It can be overwhelming." Liz goes on, "My responsibility is to teach them to the best of my ability. It takes a lot of planning and self reflection...I'm responsible for giving them an enjoyable school experience—a rewarding school experience...When they come to school and they don't like school, they're going to drop out at 16...I care a lot about these kids...I believe any student can learn. You just have to know how to teach them...All kids are good at something."

Answering the Research Questions

This chapter reports the findings from the research, first by listing the research questions, and following with a description of three global themes that emerged from the interviews. Under each of these major themes, minor themes are described. To support each minor theme, excerpts are shared from each teacher in a poetic narrative format, using the voice of the teachers to provide clarity around the themes.

Research Questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers relative to district expectations?
3. How have changes in accountability expectations impacted teachers?

Global and Minor Themes

Global Theme One: High-stakes Accountability.

- a. Focus on Tested Subjects—Reading, Writing and Math
- b. Marginalization of Non-tested Subjects

- c. Stress from Less Freedom and Trust
- d. Young Promising Teachers Leaving the Profession

Global Theme Two: Locus of Control.

- e. The Move to Scripted Programs: From Teacher to Facilitator
- f. Conflicts between Teacher Beliefs and District Directives
- g. Not Enough Time to Teach Everything

Global Theme Three: Best Practices for Today's Classrooms.

- h. Standards as Professional Duty
- i. Changing Social/Family Structure: A Need to Build Character
- j. Desire for Integrated Approach to Learning with More Hands-on Activities
- k. More Collaboration among Teachers

Global Theme One: High-stakes Accountability

Teacher perceptions of high-stakes accountability ran as a thread throughout the interviews. Such pressures to perform with fewer resources and ever more increasing student needs affected how teachers saw their work in the classroom and how they experienced teaching today compared to in the past. Such results included: a shift to focusing on tested subjects; marginalization or curriculum narrowing in some non-tested subjects, primarily social studies, science and P.E.; stress related to district directives and pressures from above; and the fact that young teachers new to the profession are likely to leave it based on the concerns of one teacher. The following minor themes support the findings.

Focus is on tested subjects: reading, writing and math.

All teachers were clear instruction was focused on reading, writing and math, or otherwise tested subjects. Due to the current environment of high-stakes accountability in these subjects, the district prescribed the number of minutes and hours dedicated to reading, writing and math. According to Gayle, “We are constantly working on literacy.” The district also provided scripted curriculum in reading and math and made it clear teachers must teach the program word for word with fidelity. Charlotte said, “The math and reading programs are scripted. They (district administrators) are adamant about staying with the script.”

Teachers’ perceptions of the focus on tested subjects affected how they looked at their days, planned lessons and followed the scripts. Teachers said they were extremely careful not to go over their time limits in any one subject for fear of being chastised by their superiors. “It’s the stress of bell to bell teaching,” Gayle expressed concerning being on target with time dictates by the district. Dedication to these dictates did not always meet the needs of their diverse students, according to the teachers interviewed. “Not everybody needs the same thing,” stated Charlotte. “Scripted is not good for (gifted) kids... That’s the reality of it.”

Poetic narrative: focus is on tested subjects—reading, writing and math.

Charlotte

We need to be through this amount of curriculum
In this amount of time
District guidelines

We’re doing much better with the writing piece
I just love it!

But it impacts science and social studies
Something had to go

Gayle

We're so focused on reading, writing and math
Not able to bring in something fun
You can write for a purpose
Bring in some other types of passions for other types of skills
That would help

We are constantly working on literacy
I think they (students) love science
That hands-on thing
I wish I could do that in every subject

I don't think they get enough practice
Yes, I taught the lesson
But what can I do in a more fun way to make sure they got it?
I just need more time with my students!

We have to focus on reading, writing and math

Liz

Writing is not used for AYP
So reading and math are our focus
We are looking at a 3 hour literacy block for next year
Then math for 90 minutes

This much time for reading
This much time for math
This much time for writing
Because it's all assessed

(We teach) Test Taking as a Genre
You're going to think I teach to the test
But I really don't
I need to do some things so my kids have some experience with this

CSAP (asks for) summaries
They didn't know the word 'summarize'
We realized we needed to give them this vocabulary

I'm familiarizing them with the format
Vocabulary and sustainability
They have to be able to sit and read and answer questions for an hour
They usually do this for 15 minutes, then they're up and around

We teach CSAP genre
I think we're focusing a lot of energy on tests
Because it's where we get our money
I wish they would test social studies because then we could teach it

That's why we teach science now
Because it is tested
We vertical teamed to determine what kids needed to know
Here's what we know is tested, and here's the vocabulary

They (students) try to hide what they don't know
I say to kids, "If I don't know what you don't know
Then I can't teach you
I believe any student can learn
You just have to know how to teach them

All kids are good at something
They all have something they're good at
They all have something they're tricky at
That's why I move them where I move them
Why I have eyes in the back of my head

You have to believe they can get there
You have to teach them to believe in themselves
I can make a huge difference
You just can't throw kids away

With a struggling learner
When they make progress
Even if it's not up to grade level
I rejoice in that!

Marginalization of non-tested subjects.

Although all three teachers valued non-tested subjects like social studies, they all felt if something was cut from the schedule due to lack of time and resources, it was social studies. "We do social studies and science alternately. If something needs to go,

it's social studies that has to go," said Liz. According to Gayle, "I think social studies are important, but if we're going to cut something in our day, it tends to be this." Liz reflected, "We teach history... There is so much to do. I'm frustrated... I want to do more things, but it's not tested."

Science is now tested in 5th grade and the district provided excellent resources for instruction, e.g. Full Option Science System FOSS kits. According to Liz, "I think we're focusing a lot of energy on tests... That's why we teach science now, because it's tested." Therefore, teachers say science is taught with more fidelity, while social studies continue to receive less emphasis. Charlotte said, "Our district has done a beautiful job putting together science resources... (There is) no such curriculum support for social studies." Gayle stated, "Social studies are not as important as they once were. We have to focus on reading, writing and math."

There is no curriculum support for social studies. According to Liz, "With the new (social studies) standards, we are to teach it, but we only really have a text book. The book is from 1998, revised from the 1977 edition." Upon review, the book contains questions about content and no higher-level thinking activities for students. Teachers gather their own resources to enhance the teaching of social studies when they can. "I've pulled all kinds of stuff I piece together from resources. I've pulled from an old trailer full of stuff. We are adopting a new social studies program (next year)," said Liz.

Liz reminisced about how geography is taught, "I taught geography from this little book. They aren't giving you a geography curriculum. They do give you what they (students) need to know. Civics and economics—we don't give grades for that."

Teachers noted social studies lend themselves to higher level thinking and strategies that support learning for all students, especially Second Language Learners, like visuals and developing increased vocabulary and background knowledge. Teachers expressed social studies are not as important as they once were with the stress of raising student achievement in tested subjects.

According to all three teachers, specials such as P.E., art, music, library and computer are taught alternately for one week. That means students have P.E. for one week every five weeks. Teachers expressed concern about the need for students to get more exercise but, with P.E. one week in five, student health was not supported by this approach. Liz said, “P.E. used to be every day. Now it’s P.E. one week, art the next and music the next. I have some big kids who really need physical fitness.”

Teachers stated art increased while all other specials have decreased over time. One teacher remembers when art was taught by the class teacher. According to Gayle, “Art increased because we used to have to teach it. We have decreased P.E. and music.” With the need for schools to provide teachers with planning time, art instruction was added to the list of specials, she said.

Poetic narrative: marginalization of non-tested subjects.

Charlotte

Social Studies is cut in lots of schools
I’ve heard this from other schools in the district
We have a strong building because social studies are really important to us
Our district has done a beautiful job putting together science resources
No such curriculum support for social studies

We have 1 week of Health
1 week Art

1 week music
1 week P.E.

Social studies and science units alternate
They are taught 4 days per week for 55 minutes
Yes, I'm like, what have we given up?
We've extended reading and math so something had to go

My situation is a little different than a lot of people
Science and social studies—I've always valued and tried to teach it!
There is no set curriculum to build good citizens
That's where the word teacher comes in and what it's really about
It's putting all the pieces together

By cutting social studies
You've taken community building out of the classroom
They're getting more isolated
That's not good for society

Oh man!
They just cut that program...at Century Middle School—Outdoor Ed
We're just starting to see the change
There are a lot of people who will be missing out

Look at budget cuts
Do our kids have P.E. every day? No!
They have P.E. every 5 weeks
We used to have P.E. every day—then music, library, and computers
Art was once a week

I'll be honest with you
One of the things that is really difficult for me
Is when I have a child who will not say the Pledge of Allegiance
Because I love history

And, when we know all the men and women
Who have died to make this country what it is
It breaks my heart!

Gayle

Social studies is not as important as it once was
We have to focus on reading, writing and math
We have 3 different units in science each year
We try to bring in social studies

If our numbers were up, we'd have more specials
It is difficult to schedule
They have P.E., art, music, computer
All for a week

I have to do EDM and Rigby every day
It takes away from them reading a good book and my freedom as a teacher
To enjoy learning
I worry we are going to lose some kids—they feel the stress too

I think social studies are important
But if we're going to cut something in our day, it tends to be this
We're not supposed to cut anything
We need more time with our kids

I try to get an hour of social studies in 4 days a week
Social studies and science alternating units
Art has increased because we used to have to teach it
We have decreased P.E. and music

(How do you teach citizenship?)
(Long pause) I don't know if we really teach it
We role model it
We set our expectations
We say the pledge every day
We talk about the American Revolution

Liz

I love teaching social studies and science
Social studies and science are new to kids
They lend themselves to video streaming to give them background knowledge
So, when we do the teaching, they have something to build on

We did science today
It is hands-on
They get really motivated
It is engaging and new

We teach history—mostly out of the book
I have to bring in all my own stuff to enrich it
There is so much to do
I'm frustrated—there's not time!

I want to do more things, but it's not tested
Years ago, we taught social studies every day for 45 minutes
That's also when we didn't have so many Second Language Learners

We do social studies and science alternately
If something needs to go, it's social studies that has to go
(How has teaching social studies changed over time?)
It's changed in that nobody seems to put an emphasis on it

Where do you ever assess social studies?
It seems you teach social studies in isolation
If something goes, it's social studies
I'm so disappointed in it

In school, we teach respect and kindness
As far as citizenship, we are not
These kids didn't even know the Presidents
I wanted them to know that this is history
I wanted them to know that you have a say

I feel the arts are extremely important for these kids
If we take them away, these kids may never get the opportunity
You're more apt to try things in elementary
You have to get planning time and that's how our art stays

P.E. used to be every day
Now it's P.E. one week, art the next and music the next
I have some big kids who really need physical fitness
We used to have 5th grade band, but that got cut

I taught geography from this little book
They aren't giving you a geography curriculum
They do give you what they need to know
Civics and economics—we don't give grades for that

I have these resources
You can't copy this because of copyright laws
I can put them under the document camera and use it that way
And I'm supposed to get the time to do this where?

We are pushed to pass the test (CSAP)
If something goes
The school doesn't say this
It's social studies

I'm so disappointed in it
I had 2 students who loved history
When we stopped
They were so upset

I wanted them to know that you have a say
Voting is a privilege
As far as (teaching) citizenship
We are not

With the new (social studies) standards
We are to teach them
But we only really have a text book
The book is 1998, revised from the 1977 edition

In social studies, I have a history book
I've pulled all kinds of stuff I piece together from resources
I've pulled from an old trailer full of stuff
We are adopting a new social studies program next year

You only have so much time in a day
And there goes social studies
We have a curriculum and standards for social studies
But where do you find the time to teach that?

It's always going to be either or
I don't see both social studies and science
You'll have to compress them both and teach them alternately
It's really impossible!

Stress of less freedom and trust.

Stress was a theme throughout when teachers spoke about curriculum narrowing and accountability. District directives included prescribed curriculum, time allotted to tested subjects and high-stakes testing. Stress related to district requirements was shared by all teachers. Additional stress seemed to be caused by the fact district directives often did not coincide with teacher beliefs about their role as teachers, yet they followed them respectfully. Charlotte spoke of the requirement to be loyal to the script in reading and

math, “You don’t deviate from the curriculum...And no, you’re not going to bring in something extra. There’s not as much freedom.”

Gayle remarked about district expectations, “(We need) reasonable expectations. I’m so worried about getting everything in. Got to do this! Got to do that! Maybe they find we cannot be trusted.” She goes on, “It would be nice to not have the pressure (of scripted curriculum), knowing we are getting reading in (with the project, so) I shouldn’t feel so bad.”

Then there is the stress of state high-stakes testing. Last year, Charlotte’s class did well. “This year, I’m scared to death! My goodness! I had several run out of time.” She said having many reading groups was tough. “I believe (kindergarten teachers) are so stressed out because they have to get these children to a certain level in reading. Developmentally, we know better...They keep asking us to do this. It’s been a struggle for years. We now have the pressure of high-stakes testing.”

All three teachers have challenging classes, some more than others. Charlotte refers to the stress of being evaluated by the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP), “When you have those tough kids from difficult backgrounds, shouldn’t that be something in the equation? It’s like the dentist analogy. It’s about the dentist who was not considered a good dentist because his patient had so many cavities. Just because some of our scholars don’t excel as we think they should, there may be something in the way. It’s connecting with that human soul we have, and helping them move forward when they’re stuck.”

Gayle talked about the challenges she faced with her class, “This class is really challenging—a lot of different levels in behavior and learning. It’s a lot more stressful. The power of constantly being lectured about CSAP, and your scores have to be up. That’s scary—those threats, you know. It’s taking away some of the freedom and we’re losing the passion and the enjoyment of learning.”

All three teachers have multiple levels within their classroom. Gayle spoke about her class, “I have six kids on Individual Education Plans (IEPs), a couple at 1st grade level and a couple at the 7th grade level. Honestly! It’s a lot more stressful than it used to be.” Liz had challenges too, “I have 30 kids. When you have more than 25 students, it’s policing. There’s no way you can meet all their needs.” Her classroom had a large set of diverse needs, “I have a child who is SSN who doesn’t have language. I have another who doesn’t comprehend a thing. One is autistic. Four with special needs. Twelve on LAPs or ILPs. Six on grade level. One who is identified as Gifted and Talented... It can be a tad overwhelming.”

Teachers also worried about going outside the script, even though they felt it was best for their students. Gayle expressed her concern in this area, “There is also the stress of bell to bell teaching. I worry that we are going to lose some kids. They feel the stress, too.” She worried where we were going in education. “Are we so focused on assessments that we’re losing the love of learning?”

Gayle also spoke about her worries about getting caught if she diverged from the prescribed curriculum to do a project she deemed an excellent learning opportunity for her students. She also worried about the fact she taught her students math facts, “I don’t

like to do things wrong. I don't like to be in trouble. I'm still doing it though (the math facts). I woke up at 3:30 in the morning because I was feeling guilty. I had done a workshop that said we shouldn't be doing timed math fact tests. (My students) need to know them!...The district is saying this (I can't focus instruction time on learning math facts), then I'm being judged on CSAP because they can't do their math problems except on their fingers."

Liz felt the stress of CSAP, "There is district pressure to get our literacy and math scores up to 95% proficiency by 2014...I can move them but I cannot move them five grade levels." Gayle said stress for her manifested in no sleep. "Not just around CSAP. It's all year. You're being compared but it's not apples to apples," she said. Gayle also shared, "It doesn't help with all these budget cuts either. It's condensing our resources and putting a lot of stress on everybody."

Poetic narrative: stress of less freedom and trust.

Charlotte

You don't deviate from the curriculum
This is the book
And no—you're not going to bring in something extra
There's not as much freedom

It is important to tap into their background knowledge
Connect that to help them gain understanding—to comprehend things
We all have standards and things we must do
Some (administrators) want you on the same page as the other teachers

I still do enrichment
I don't want my teaching to suffer
I don't want to go to lower standards
Because I'm told I can only do this (scripted curriculum)

You need resources
I have three reading groups now
That's tough!
There's more of a balance and consistency than there was in the past
There's good and bad in that

I've always felt the pressure (to perform)
It's really important to have your kids know the material
I've always had expectations for my students
The secret of being a great teacher?
See where they have weaknesses
Pull them out and walk them through the steps

(Kindergarten teachers)
I believe they're so stressed out
Because they have to get these children to a certain level of reading
Developmentally, we know better

I'm not saying go back and make kindergarten all fun and free time
I'm saying, do more lessons on vocabulary
Quit worrying about how many words they can read
Quit worrying about pushing all the phonics

They keep asking us to do this
It's been a struggle for years
We now have the pressure of high stakes testing

That's the hardest part about the testing
Sometimes students don't always do their best—or try!
People have to realize this is what happens sometimes

I've had many years of high achievement (on CSAP)
This year, I'm scared to death
My goodness!
I had several run out of time

One teacher opened the (CSAP) booklet
She saw one of her gifted students only wrote one sentence
She was so upset
She states, "They're going to think I'm a rotten teacher... What was he thinking?
And, I couldn't interrupt him anyway."

We're evaluated by how our students perform on the testing instrument
They should be looking at the big picture

I've been told you should never depend on the parents
I said, "Excuse me?"

When you have those tough kids from difficult backgrounds...
Shouldn't that be something in the equation?
It's like the "Dentist Analogy"
It's about the dentist who was not considered a good dentist
Because his patient had so many cavities

Just because some of our scholars don't excel as we think they should
There may be something in the way
It's connecting to that human soul we have
And helping them to move forward when they're stuck

I told you about my (Lissa)
She was below grade level
But her mother had died
And she wasn't able to concentrate

(Lissa) is on honor roll this year
We helped her deal with that loss
Helped her deal with her grief

(High stakes testing impacts students)
Children read people
They have a sense when the teacher is stressed
It creates negative energy

Something's got to give once in a while
We have to be realistic and not let it torment us
It is difficult to see them have 25 students in kindergarten with no para
That makes me cringe

You have 3 to 5 behavior problems a day and you're all by yourself
I'm hoping we can protect them (kindergarten teachers)
We're going to just have to look at our days
And do the best we can

Gayle

(We need) reasonable expectations
I'm so worried about getting everything in
"Got to do this—got to do that"
Maybe they find we cannot be trusted

I was doing a research project
It would have been nice to not have the pressure (of Rigby)
Knowing we are getting reading in (with the project)
(So) I shouldn't feel so bad

Do we have to do page by page?
Let me make that choice
I like the idea of using the program
To supplement my teaching

Give us a little bit of choice!
I don't mind doing the work of planning units
That's fun!
Not to get marked down because I'm not on a certain lesson at a certain time

This class is really challenging
A lot of different levels in behavior and learning
It's a lot more stressful
The power of constantly being lectured about CSAP

And your scores have to be up
That's scary—those threats, you know
It's taking away some of the freedom
And we're losing the passion and the enjoyment of learning

There is also the stress of bell to bell teaching
I worry that we are going to lose some kids
They feel the stress, too
I feel I have to push the paper

I'm a rule follower so I probably worry about it
There have been teachers who were not teaching the curriculum
It's like the cafeteria
One kid does something and the whole class gets punished

It's like we're all going to be teaching the same thing
When someone comes into your room
We will be required to be on the same page at the same time
I think it's coming!
These 25 individuals are not the same 25 individuals that are in that classroom

I worry where we are going in education
Are we so focused on assessments that we're losing the love of learning?

This is the main thing I don't like seeing in schools
But I love what I do

I think technology speaks to them (students)
If we could have technology for every student
That would be more interesting to them

You have to get those negative thoughts out of their heads
To want to try
Are we letting them fail repeatedly?
I think it is a lack of will

If we don't feel the passion
Then there is no way students will feel passionate about the learning
This is where you think your words don't really matter
We need to do fun things to get the sparks flying

We have 3 different units in science this year
We try to bring in social studies
In 5th grade they are tested in science for the first time
It drives me nuts that they are being tested in something they learned in 1st grade

I'd like to see an adult who doesn't need a refresher
For something they learned five years ago
If they are testing on something we are teaching
Then it would make sense

I've been suffering through the math facts
I woke up at 3:30 in the morning because I was feeling guilty
I had done a workshop that said we shouldn't be doing timed math fact tests
5th graders need to know them

Do I want them to be able to get through them (math problems) in a couple of
minutes or a couple of hours?
The district is saying this (can't focus instruction time on learning math facts)
Then, I'm being judged on CSAP
Because they can't do their math problems except on their fingers

I have to be prepared in case someone walks in here and asks, "What are you
doing?"
I'm worried about it
Am I going to get caught?
I don't like to do things wrong
I don't like to be in trouble

I'm still doing it though
The students need to know them (the math facts)
I will tell them, "Look your way is not doing it!"
I need to see if it works!

I'm teaching things they should have learned already
Not having the tools takes away from (their success)
There is a lot of discipline I have to do
It becomes more challenging every year

I work hard to manage them well
It wears me out
I go home exhausted
You breathe a lot—can't get frustrated

I know stress affects the immune system
My goal is to do it (continue teaching)
I can't imagine doing something else
It is meaningful work!

I want to be known as a good person
As a good teacher
Everyone is so busy
I don't know if they have time to show appreciation

We have midyear district assessments
They are good because we get them back right away
When CSAP is done, it's done
We lose 2 months of their learning (on CSAP)

We get it (CSAP results) back the following year
So, it's not useful
They are given in March
And they still have 2 more months of growing to do

I have 6 (students) on IEPs who are so needy
I want them to work at higher levels
(So) I read (higher level content and assessments) to them
But then they need reading groups at their level

A couple at 1st grade level (in reading)
Another started at pre-primer
A couple at the 7th grade level
2 are considered gifted

I had one girl who could not concentrate
She has grown and can now work in a group
That is huge for her
The number one stress is CSAP

Stress manifests in no sleep
Not just around CSAP
It's all year
You're being compared, but it's not apples to apples

Those yearly results are not the same students
Our scores are really going to drop this year
Because we have so many low kids
If there is a way to show growth
We'd do well

12 hours of CSAP testing
That 3rd week they are so done
We are lucky if they give their best efforts
They really don't care about the purpose
It's just too long

I have a feeling class size will really go up
I can't even keep up with 25 to 1
I think it's a huge class
It's stressful because you just don't know

If they really want scores to go up
Then get class sizes down!

Honestly! It's a lot more stressful (than it used to be)
It doesn't help with all these budget cuts either.
It's condensing our resources and putting a lot of stress on everybody
It's taking the freedom away and we're losing the passion

Liz

(My first year of teaching) I was asking, "What does CSAP look like?
What should I be teaching?"

No one told me
So I did content knowledge all year
I had really low kids

But when they took the CSAP
My kids really bombed
I felt like I had failed
No one had told me what to do

I gave them the test
They broke their pencils
They fell back in their chairs
They cried, because they couldn't do it

The other teacher had given her kids practice tests
They went sailing
No one helped me
I said I will never do this to another teacher

Little things matter
The district said, "Let the student teacher do the CSAP."
Well *no!*
It doesn't matter for her
It matters for me!

I'm scored by the state and in the newspaper
I can't say they failed because there was a student teacher in here
She didn't have enough experience (before) coming here
I'm not saying it's the university

Our district had adopted Marzano's strategies 10 years ago
My frustration is we started doing this again
Then they told us we all needed to be teaching the same thing
To be paced—within one lesson of each other
And our McREL strategies went away

They gave us a new literacy program
It lasted 2 years
They gave us another new program...
You have to teach this reading program with fidelity, so we're doing that
We're teaching the stuff the district said we are locked into

I'm a person who follows direction, who follows the rules
People complain, but I stand back

I'd like to have more flexibility
I have to stand up there and talk for 20 minutes (when I teach Rigby with fidelity)
I'm not sure they (students) are getting it

There is district pressure to get our literacy and math scores up to 95%
proficiency by 2014
I'm an advocate for these students
It is about what is best for them

The district has a 95% growth model
Mine is always red because they're below grade level
Come into a classroom that has a range of students
I can move them
But I cannot move them 5 grade levels
I'm doing it to the best of my ability

I have 30 kids
When you have more than 25 students
It's policing
There's no way you can meet all their needs

What if you have high kids?
They also have to get higher
They need time to meet with the teacher
I haven't done a lot of independent work for them

With budget cuts
It affects text books and resources
The overall morale of teachers could be affected
There are resentments

We used to have more autonomy
Now, you need to get this done at this time
We could fit it all in
(Now) district and state pressures

(Having a student teacher who is not well prepared)
That is my stress piece!

Young promising teachers leaving the profession.

In this time of high-stakes testing and increased accountability, these teachers
commented on the fact bright young teachers are difficult to retain in the profession.

Although these teachers enjoyed the process of creating their own lessons to meet their students' needs, they believed the move to scripted curriculum was in part due to the need to provide more support to new teachers. Charlotte stated, "I have seen a few teachers come and go. Oh, man! She was incredible—hard working and great with kids. After the second year, she said, 'I just don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to work this hard—14 hours a day. I'm really intelligent! I want a 9—5 job and get paid for it.'...They leave us and I'm like, we just lost this talented young person."

Although Charlotte has seen many promising teachers, Liz has experienced student teachers who are ill-prepared for the classroom. "It's difficult to teach her everything she needs to know. She didn't have enough experience coming in here. She teaches like they (the students) are in college." Charlotte refers to her teaching preparation as extraordinary. "I see many of my colleagues who had very limited experiences in student teaching. They struggled. Learning labs were very important to my teaching. (Good preparation) gives you that love of children and exposes you to the school system a little bit at a time." She goes on, "I felt really prepared for teaching. I had strategies and techniques. It was very intense. Many quit our program because it was so demanding."

Liz experienced being overwhelmed and under prepared, "The first year I taught...the students were just, 'Oh my goodness!'...By Labor Day, I said, 'I think I should quit.'... Two years down the road, I had five (challenging kids). Again I said, 'I think I should quit.'...I'd say to myself, 'They're only 10 years old,' and that helped... (Now) these kids are my life."

Poetic narrative—young promising teachers leaving the profession.

Charlotte

I have seen a few teachers come and go
Oh man! She was incredible—hard working and great with kids
After the 2nd year, she said, “I just don’t want to do this anymore.
I don’t want to work this hard—14 hours a day.
I’m really intelligent! I want a 9-5 job and get paid for it.”

I’ve seen a lot of them struggling
They leave us and I’m like, we just lost this talented young person
My preparation was so different
I really felt prepared for teaching

I see many of my colleagues who had very limited experiences in student teaching
They struggled
Learning labs were very important to my teaching
(Good preparation) gives you that love of children
And exposes you to the school system a little bit at a time

That’s my background
I taught Great Books to GT students
A fabulous way to be exposed to children
You learn a lot of special questioning techniques
How to achieve higher level thinking skills
It made you so aware to...look for thoughtfulness when teaching

I felt free to do what I wanted—to teach
I used a hands-on approach in my centers
We need to be experts in each of those fields to really make a difference
With knowledge and experience that helps connect things to real life

I felt really prepared for teaching
I had strategies and techniques
It was very intense
Many quit our program because it was so demanding

We got to see how schools started
And during the year, how they wrapped up
So when you begin to teach
You have all this background

My preparation was so different
Than people who are thrown in for 6—8 weeks
Then they go right into a classroom
I see a lot of them struggling
(Many just) don't want to do this

They just don't want to work 2-3 hours a night and weekends
We have to be realistic about this

Gayle

Nothing was stated in this regard

Liz

When approached to take this student teacher
My Principal said it was my professional development piece
It's difficult to teach her everything she needs to know
She didn't have enough experience coming in here
She teaches like they (the students) are in college

Global Theme Two: Locus of Control

The perceptions of the teachers interviewed demonstrated a thread throughout about a loss of control over what they teach and how they spend their days with students. Compared to teaching in the past, there has been a shift to less freedom and trust of teachers to plan and implement curriculum based on their professional judgment. This they perceived to be a result of pressure to raise student achievement since No Child Left Behind legislation took effect in 2002.

This loss of personal control over their teaching is shared in the following minor themes that rose as concerns of these teachers, including: a move to scripted programs wherein teachers were expected to teach the programs in reading and math with complete fidelity, as well as prescribed times for tested subjects every day; conflicts that emerged between what teachers believe is best for their students and what the district is requiring

them to do; and some anxiety around the fact they simply do not have enough time with students to teach everything they are being required to teach.

The move to scripted programs: from teacher to facilitator.

According to all three teachers, the district required teachers to teach scripted programs for reading and math. *Literacy by Design, Rigby program*, had been stipulated for reading, and *EveryDay Math (EDM)* for math. Both were to be taught with fidelity, which all teachers said means teachers must teach word for word what is in the teacher's guides. According to Charlotte, "The math and reading programs are scripted. They (district administrators) are adamant about staying with the script." Liz referred to scripted curriculum, "They told us we all needed to be teaching the same thing...to be paced within one lesson of each other. You have to teach this reading program with fidelity, so we're doing that." After teaching these with fidelity, the district said expectations will change allowing more flexibility with the teaching of these subjects. To change the script, teachers will be required to provide evidence their changes teach to the same standard, according to Charlotte.

Teachers expressed disappointment with the scripted programs and for master teachers who feel such a prescribed program is demeaning and demonstrates a lack of trust for teachers on the part of the district. Charlotte shared how scripted curriculum makes her feel, "That (scripted curriculum) was hard because some of it is so simplistic for my students and me. (As if) you couldn't think. It was so demeaning that I didn't have enough sense to figure this out. It is very regimented. I had a hard time going word for word."

Teachers agreed such scripted programs provided consistency across the district for students who move from one school to another, and required less planning time on the part of teachers. Less demand on new teachers was thought to be good since many have turned away from teaching for higher paying, less demanding jobs. “I get that with new teachers coming in,” said Charlotte. “They don’t want to go home for two hours in the evening and put lessons together. I think it (scripted curriculum) is effective for young teachers. Some of them need that.”

All three teachers loved the work of designing their own lessons based on the needs of their students. Scripted curriculum takes away some of the joy these teachers felt for teaching. According to Gayle, “I don’t mind doing the work of planning units—It’s fun! Perhaps there are teachers who don’t want to put in that kind of work in to create units. Let them have those (scripted) programs.” Charlotte reflected, “I think the role of the teacher is going to turn into more of a facilitator than an instructor and that saddens me in many ways because I love doing the research and the digging to get my lessons to where I’d like them to be.”

Teachers shared although they have taught Rigby with fidelity, the results are not good for raising student achievement. Liz shared her experience of Rigby, “For kids who can read, they do very well. For those who can’t, it is difficult.” Gayle found Rigby didn’t provide the practice necessary for students to master the skills. Charlotte made her own vocabulary cards because Rigby didn’t provide sufficient vocabulary support.

Some teachers wondered why the district provided such requirements if they don’t work, and why they don’t test them first. Gayle shared, “They (district leadership)

are making decisions, but they don't know what it's like. Still putting more on our plate—not taking anything off. And...they haven't tested it...We need to focus more on what is going to be best for students.”

Some teachers expressed concern scripted curriculum was lowering the standards they had for their students. Gayle said, “I wonder if we have lowered our standards. We accept junk. In 5th grade, we shouldn't have to be working on this. Maybe it's because I have such a low group this year...I say to myself, ‘I know you should know this!’” Charlotte concurred, “ I don't want to lower standards because I'm told I can only do this (the script). You don't deviate from the curriculum. There is more regimen, and not as much freedom.”

All teachers expressed some concern over a loss of passion for teaching when required to use scripted curriculum with fidelity. This concern flowed over to students who were having to focus on skills in reading, writing and math, without sufficient excitement that comes with learning something new like social studies and science. Gayle shared her feelings about this, “If teachers begin to lose the passion, then there is no way students will feel passionate about learning.”

Poetic narrative: the move to scripted programs—from teacher to facilitator.

Charlotte

The math and reading programs are scripted
They are adamant about staying with the script
That was hard because...
Some of it is so simplistic

For my students and me
(As if) you couldn't think
It was so demeaning
That I didn't have enough sense to figure this out

It is very basic and regimented
I had a hard time going word for word
What if they (students) have difficulties with this?
You sometimes have to stop and clarify

You don't take valuable learning time with something they've mastered
But...if it's scripted, is assessment really driving the lesson?
Not okay! Not okay!

I think the role of the teacher
Is going to turn into more of a facilitator than an instructor
That saddens me in many ways
Because I love doing the research
And digging to get my lessons
To where I'd like them to be

A teacher needs to use their background knowledge
To skip where their students have mastered the ideas
Aren't we told to differentiate learning within the classroom?
If we had more time, we could get this all in

Not everybody needs the same thing
Scripted is not good for (gifted) kids
If you're doing scripted teacher guide, you can't really do that
That's the reality of it!

They (the district) want you to teach the standards how they are
Not enrich it quite so much like I used to
They want us more on the same page with our colleagues
I'm not doing the extra things I used to do—like field trips

I don't want to go to lower standards
Because I'm told I can only do this
You don't deviate from the curriculum
There is more regimen, and not as much freedom

Everyday Math is scripted
There are more constraints than there were
Even if you are a Master teacher
You don't get to integrate like you used to

They want us to be more consistent
So when they (students) transfer and move from one place to another
There's consistency with the teaching

I get that with new teachers coming in
They don't want to go home for 2 hours in the evening
And put lessons together
I think it (scripted programming) is effective for young teachers
Some of them need that

Results are so poor
That's why they are doing this scripted thing
The new teachers were not cutting it
They were overwhelmed and just couldn't juggle it

Through this scripted program
There's more of a balance (not so much work for planning)
And consistency than there was in the past
It helps with accountability

With kids who are lower in vocabulary
More practice and supplementation are needed
Rigby doesn't seem to be working
Then, I need to create something

I have to budget my time carefully!
I get so passionate I want to wrap it up in a more thoughtful way
But you just have to move on
I have to forgive myself and say, we'll get back to that tomorrow

There are bits some children can't master
Rigby did not give them enough support
There is diversity in how children learn
There wasn't enough practice for them to master it

We have to be through this amount of curriculum in this amount of time
District Guidelines
I'm like, what have we given up?

Because results are so poor
Now they're doing this scripted thing
There wasn't enough planning being done
Newbies coming in needed more clarity of what was to be taught

Instructor... was how we used to do it
Putting it all together yourself
Facilitator is using scripted
I'm spending less time now because I don't have to reinvent the wheel

Gayle

Do we have to do page by page?
Every page in Rigby?
I like the idea of using the program
To supplement my teaching

I don't mind doing the work of planning units—it's fun!
Perhaps there are teachers
Who don't want to put that kind of work in—to create units
Let them have those (scripted) programs

Give us a little bit of choice!
It's okay for me to take a few lessons off
To focus on something else for a little while
But not to get marked down
Because I'm not on a certain lesson at a certain time

Liz

They told us we all needed to be teaching the same thing
To be paced within one lesson of each other
You have to teach this reading program with fidelity
So we're doing that

I'd like to have more flexibility
I'm teaching
I have to stand and talk for 20 minutes
I'm not sure they (the students) are getting it

Literacy by Design by Rigby
Do I love it?
I like the stories
I like the themes
I like the objectives

Within each (unit) is a theme objective
8 comprehension strategies

Comprehension is huge for these students
Vocabulary is big, too, for ELLs

For kids who can read
They do very well
For those who can't
It is difficult

I studied Marzano
A piece jumped out
Students need immediate feedback
Those kinds of things help them feel success

Scan-trons (assessments in Rigby)
They get their papers back the same day
The kids are so excited to show the Principal what they can do
I think overall the program is good

It's not a basal program
Drawback is that I do a lot of shared reading with them
A lot is teacher directed

I like the program in that it has a variety of genre
It has a scope and sequence
It's building on things
It keeps me focused as a teacher

My job is to follow the curriculum
Teach all those canned things they're going to tell you
My job...is to know where these students are
How to get them to the next level

I do like the math and reading programs
They are more explicit... That piece I like
When you are putting it all together
You wonder if you are missing something

Conflict between teacher beliefs and district directives.

Teachers expressed a need to be able to differentiate and deviate from the script to effectively meet the needs of their students. Charlotte shared her feelings on the subject, "Aren't we told to differentiate learning within your classroom? Not everybody needs the

same thing. If you're doing scripted teacher guide, you can't really do that. That's the reality of it!" Gayle agreed, "It is what works—differentiation. This class is really challenging—a lot of different levels in behavior and learning." Liz expressed her feelings, "There are just so many hours in a day. When they say differentiate, the challenge is to find the time."

The scripted Rigby Program provides a lot of teacher-directed reading according to teachers, rather than student reading. Some expressed sadness over the loss of the classics and higher expectations for their students in respect to reading, including literature circles and book talks. Gayle said, "It's sad to lose that passion for the classics. I like to do a lot of book groups, but it is harder to get them in." Liz stated, "I'd like to have more flexibility...I have to stand and talk for twenty minutes. I'm not sure they (the students) are getting it...A lot is teacher directed."

The district made it clear teachers should provide assessment-driven instruction, according to these teachers. Charlotte stated, "You don't take valuable learning time with something they've mastered. But...if it's scripted, is assessment really driving the lesson? Not okay! Not okay!"

As reading results remain low even though they have remained true to the scripted Rigby program, teachers felt conflicted when such programs failed to meet the needs of their students. These teachers expressed a desire for a more integrated approach that would make more sense to improve student learning in the time they have with students. All three teachers missed the themed approach that allowed for integration of literacy and math into rich content areas such as the social studies and science. They felt this approach

would do more to support differentiation and building of vocabulary and background knowledge for ELLs and all students.

Understanding of the need to go to more scripted programs due to low scores was commonly stated by all teachers. Teachers agreed scripted curriculum provided support to new teachers in hopes of retaining them in the profession. Charlotte said, “Newbies coming in needed more clarity of what was to be taught...I’ve seen a few teachers come and go. I’ve seen a lot of them struggling. They leave us and I’m like, we just lost this talented young person. They just don’t want to work two to three hours a night and weekends. We have to be realistic about this.”

A conflict between what research says about developmentally appropriate reading instruction for young children and what the district required exists. One teacher with experience in primary teaching expressed concern for kindergarten teachers who have to teach reading to students when developmentally they may not be ready for these particular strategies. “We know developmentally a lot of kids don’t hear all the sounds until the end of second grade. But what do we do in America? We teach them to read in kindergarten,” said Charlotte. This goes against the research, she says, and against her beliefs about good teaching for young students. She continued, “We know better. We should be doing better.”

Poetic narrative: conflicts between teacher beliefs and district directives.

Charlotte

We know developmentally a lot of kids don’t hear all the sounds
Until the end of 2nd grade
But what do we do in America?
We teach them to read in kindergarten

Sometimes, I just want to scream!
I really wish we could just focus on developing vocabulary
Read them beautiful picture books
Do hands-on activities that stimulate word choice
Instead of breaking down phonics in kindergarten

We know better—we should be doing better!
What do we know about vocabulary development?
We know students with higher vocabularies do better
What else do we know?
By the end of third grade, it all balances out

They've done many studies
When they spent more time learning more vocabulary and background knowledge
What happened in third grade?
They could read better than those who had started reading in kindergarten

Are we doing an injustice to our children?
Yes, I think so
Research shows us
But they keep asking us to do this (teach reading in kindergarten)

Aren't we told to differentiate learning within our classrooms?
Not everybody needs the same thing
If you're doing scripted teacher guide
You can't really do that
That's the reality of it!

Gayle

I've found that kids over the years are more antsy
They have a hard time focusing
I have boys who need to stand and cannot sit
If they learn when they are standing, I let them stand

It is what works
Differentiation
This class is really challenging
A lot of different levels, in behavior and learning

I love EDM, but I don't really like Rigby
I've backed away from so much reading
And 5th graders can read a lot

Sad to lose that passion for the classics!
Reading did not really go up with Rigby

What worries me is if we are all going to be robots
If teachers begin to lose the passion
Then there is no way students will feel passionate about learning

I wonder if we have lowered our standards
We accept junk
In 5th grade, we shouldn't have to be working on this
Maybe it's because I have such a low group this year
I feel they should have learned this in 2nd grade
I say to myself, "I know you should know this!"

(Central Office) needs to be teaching lessons
Then I could hear them better
They're making decisions, but they don't know what it's like
Still putting more on our plate
Not taking anything off
And...they haven't tested it

The district is so in debt
I wonder if money is wasted
Like our old history book
I feel that was a waste of money
Could (wasted spending) pay for another teacher?

(We need to) focus more on what is going to be best for students
If we want to get test scores up
We need to get our class sizes down
What are they creating for our future world?
We need to be sure we're doing what we're supposed to be doing

They say this is what you have to do
But that doesn't mean it's going to work with our kids

Liz

It is not as simple as it used to be
There are just so many hours in a day
When they say differentiate
The challenge is to find the time

I have a child who is SSN who doesn't have language
I have another who doesn't comprehend a thing

One is autistic
4 with special needs
12 on LAP or ILPs
6 on grade level in everything
One who is identified Gifted and Talented

I find it a tad overwhelming
When I'm doing 12 LAP plans
Translating into Spanish
It can be overwhelming

When you have kids who are still learning phonics
You have to plan for that
I do a lot of that at night
The first year I taught—the students were, Oh my goodness!

I'm responsible to get them to grade level
That looks good on paper
But in the real world
Some of my students just won't get there
But, I'll move them up

Some kids can decode and read at 98% (proficiency)
But miss all the questions
They just don't comprehend
If they don't comprehend, we just push these kids along

I just wish there was more time for social studies
School is not all about reading, writing and math
Social studies is now in isolation and not themed
Not as important

Not enough time to teach everything.

A common theme that permeated these interviews was the desire for more time with students to meet all of the standards and requirements dictated by the district.

Although teachers wanted to follow all the dictates, they continually pointed out there was simply not enough time in the school day/year. "It's very hard to work everything in... We cannot slow down because we are on a pacing chart," stated Charlotte. With all

of the requirements of the scripted math and reading programs, as well as time for English Language Acquisition pull-out and specials, teachers expressed frustration with their inability to teach everything required in the amount of student contact time provided in a school year. Liz shared the following, “There is so much to do. I’m frustrated—there’s not time!”

The fact that time was continually being cut back due to budget deficits and increases in time allotted for reading, writing and math, teachers worried about getting everything done when it comes to instruction. Teachers felt lack of sufficient student-contact time was tied to teachers’ inability to keep America’s children on top academically. Charlotte thought student contact time should increase, “(It would be) nice if we could increase the school day. That would help educators get everything in. We continue cutting time and they wonder why we’re not on top anymore.” The other two teachers similarly referred to a need for more instructional time.

Teachers expressed a desire to bring more fun into their teaching, but there was not enough time to extend learning beyond what was required. “We talk about doing fun things to get the sparks flying—something fun once in awhile. They say we can do other things, but we don’t have time to add it—to make it more exciting,” said Gayle. This lack of time, teachers said, leads to choices that narrow curriculum for social studies because it is an untested subject. According to Liz, “On report cards, it only asks you to assess these (specific things). So, I’m not going to teach anything outside these standards—not expand what kids learn because there is not enough time.”

These teachers felt deeply responsible for student-learning, yet acknowledged district expectations were unreasonable given the multitude of challenges teachers faced within their classrooms. These challenges included lack of parent support, increased numbers of behavior problems and academic levels in their classrooms, demanding district directives, and lack of time and resources. Teachers noted special education laws required inclusion of students with severe and profound needs within the main-stream classroom. Such diverse needs required additional planning, daily management and increased demands upon teachers' limited time with students. "We're seeing a lot more children with behavior problems and higher needs," said Charlotte.

According to these teachers, time was limited and made it difficult to teach everything that was required. Their elementary schools had 6.75 hours of student contact time per day. Early Release Days provided a half day per month of non-student contact time for teacher professional development. Time for subjects was prescribed as follows: three-hour literacy block; 90-minute math block; social studies or science—30 to 45 minutes a day; specials once a day at 45 minutes; pull-out for ELA, Special Education and Intervention services (some students); lunch—45 minutes. These total six hours of planned instruction time and left 45 minutes for transitions and other class-teacher directed learning. Liz reflected, "I think social studies are important, but if we're going to cut something in our day, it tends to be this."

Poetic narrative—not enough time to teach everything.

Charlotte

Scheduling is difficult
Nice if we could increase our school day

That would help educators get everything in
We continue cutting time and they wonder why we're not on top anymore

There are no easy answers
Need to look at extending the school day or the school year
Why are these other countries passing us?
They go longer

It's very hard to work everything in
I'm on my time limits
I'm really careful not to go over
That keeps me focused and I'm not deviating

Sometimes that's what throws you off
Someone asks a question and you're discussing it for 5 minutes
Then someone else asks a question and BOOM!
It throws you right off
So I put on a PowerPoint for math and zoom zoom!
There you go!

Sometimes I go over two minutes
I have time constraints with Rigby
And everything else that's going on
I really have to budget my time carefully!

I teach writing for 1 hour every day.
That's where we lost the time, too.
It impacts science and social studies
That's where I lost that time.

We cannot slow down because we are on a pacing chart
It used to be all theme based
It would be really nice if we could increase our school day
That would help

Gayle

I could go another hour each school day
Not that I really want to work another hour
But I feel we need another hour to get as much done as possible

I'm so worried about getting everything in
Need reasonable expectations
Maybe they find we cannot be trusted
There is a little guilt—like I may be behind

You have to get those negative thoughts out of their (students') heads
Find what motivates them
We talk about doing fun things to get the sparks flying
Something fun once in awhile
They say we can do other things, but we don't have time to add it
To make it more exciting

With my lower groups, I don't think they get enough practice
I just need time with students
We have Early Release days
Does that in-service pay off?
Not really

It's often a waste
I need that time with my kids
I guess if it is (teacher) collaborative time
That is our best growth

I don't think they (students) get enough practice
Yes, I taught the lesson
But what can I do in a more fun way to make sure they got it?
I just need more time with my students

Liz

We squeeze in science
What can you do in 30 minutes?
Put social studies in every day for 30 minutes?
What can you do in 30 minutes?

Again, we can do all of this, we think
Then we remember
We don't have time to do this!
I really don't have time to do these things!

These students—that's my reason for getting out of bed in the morning
It's frustrating to me (not having enough time)
Look at all this, and we just don't have time to do it
When we did the other (themed) approach, we had these great units

There is so much to do and I'm frustrated!
And there is not time!
Years ago it was 45 minutes every day for Social Studies
That's also when we didn't have so many Second Language Learners

All our LEPs and NEPs are serviced by ESL teachers
That takes 45 minutes out of the day
They're in here for 15 minutes for guided reading
Then go to ESL (which is taken out of center time)

100 minutes for reading
90 minutes for math
45 minutes for writing
Because all of that is assessed
All of this is prescribed by the district

On report cards
It only asks you to assess these (specific things)
So, I'm not going to teach anything outside these standards
Not expand what kids learn because there is just not enough time

(Greatest challenge when comparing teaching past and present?)
Time!
Making sure we get through each subject area
There's so much to teach!
There is so much for them to learn
And I'm supposed to get the time to do this where?

When they (district) say differentiate, there are 27 ways to do that
The challenge is to find the time
There are just so many hours in a day
I want to do more, but it's just getting that time.

There's not enough time for everything they want you to teach
If you could integrate it
You could fit it all in

Global Theme Three: Best Practices for Today's Classrooms

Out of the reflective process found in these in-depth interviews, the teachers shared best practices that work to raise achievement, based on their knowledge and years of experience teaching students. Many of the practices shared in this section are supported by research in the literature review. There is a sense if master teachers had the freedom and trust of their district, they could meet the academic goals their district hoped

to achieve. Such practices include: teaching the standards which these teachers felt was their duty as professionals; the desire to return to teaching in thematic units that would allow them to teach more of the standards in the time they have with students; more professional collaboration among teachers seen as their most valuable source of professional development; and the need to devote time to building social skills and character due to the increasing number of student behavior problems needing attention compared to in the past.

Standards as professional duty.

Each of the three teachers voiced respect for the standards. Standards were seen as guides to what students need to know and be able to do. All thought teaching to the standards made you a good teacher. "Standards—that's my job," said Charlotte. "I respect that. That's what makes you a good teacher. You follow the rules." According to Gayle, "It's important to have the standards so teachers know what they have to do." These three teachers saw their job as following the curriculum, knowing where their students were academically, and how to get them to the next level.

Although all three teachers had many academic levels in their classrooms, each one realized some students would be unable to be brought up to grade level in the one year they had to work with them. Liz shared, "I'm responsible to get them to grade level. That looks good on paper, but in the real world, some of my students just won't get there...I can move them, but I cannot move them five grade levels."

When students arrived in their classes at a pre-primer level or were still learning phonics in fourth grade, teachers thought it was unrealistic to expect them to bring those

students up to grade level in one year. An interesting thread that was uncovered among all three teachers was each is a person who follows the rules and has a strong sense of duty to teach what the district required of them. All desired to please their principals and feared getting in trouble for deviating from the set curriculum. "I'm a person who follows direction—who follows the rules," said Liz. Gayle agreed, "I'm a rule follower so I probably worry about it. There have been teachers who were not teaching the standards. (In reference to the lack of trust by district officials and hence the move to scripted programs,) it's like in the cafeteria, one kid does something and the whole class gets punished."

Poetic narrative: standards as professional duty.

Charlotte

Standards—that's my job
I respect that!
That's what makes you a good teacher
You follow the rules

Following state standards
Being cognizant of that
When you do that
Your administrators respect you

Some teachers say, "I don't like that!"
But I think we all need to be accountable for one another
(Standards) give you the essential-learning
You know where you're heading

Gayle

(What influences your decisions about what you teach?)
The curriculum—the standards
It's important to have the standards
So teachers know what they have to do

Liz

Yes, I have teacher guides
I look ahead
So I know what to base my teaching on
It is my responsibility

Desire for integrated approach to learning with more hands-on activities.

In response to both the curriculum narrowing question and the one concerning teachers' perceptions of their role and responsibilities as teachers relative to district expectations, teachers reminisced about the time when they were allowed to teach in themes, integrating content knowledge with literacy and math. All said this approach made more sense for students and facilitated the connection between what students were learning and their own lives. According to Charlotte, "If you are teaching in themes, everything connects and relates...that way, there is so much more substance and cohesion to everything... We need to be experts...to really make a difference—to answer questions with thoughtfulness, with knowledge and experience that helps us connect things to real life."

These three teachers loved to plan lessons, giving thought and creativity to the content in response to students' needs. Each voiced remorse at having to teach all subjects in isolation and having to focus most of their instruction on skill building in literacy. Liz shared her experience with themed units, "When we did the other (themed) approach, we had these great units and we integrated everything. It all made sense." According to Liz however, "The problem with the themed approach where you design your own lessons is that you wonder if you are missing something."

Strategies for teaching writing improved according to these teachers, even though there was no set curriculum for writing. According to Charlotte, “We’re doing much better with the writing piece. I just love it! But it impacts science and social studies.” More time was spent on teaching students writing skills than in the past.

The teacher with primary experience was concerned too much focus on phonics instruction in kindergarten was not developmentally appropriate and did not lead to increased achievement in reading. She felt enriching vocabulary and background knowledge in kindergarten would lead to better results. Charlotte shared her perspective, “What do we know about vocabulary development? We know students with higher vocabularies do better. What else do we know? By the end of third grade, it all balances out.” Building background knowledge and doing hands-on activities that stimulate word choice she says are more effective than pushing reading in kindergarten, according to the research.

Teachers expressed a desire to teach using a more hands-on approach because they felt this approach was more engaging and motivating to students. Gayle supported this, “I think they (students) love science—that hands-on thing. It goes back to what I wish I could do in every subject.” All three teachers voiced the perspective they would prefer to teach every subject using a hands-on approach. Liz shared her experience, “In science, we have FOSS kits. They’re engaging. They’re hands-on. They (the students) really get involved in the experience.”

All acknowledged the role of background knowledge in providing students something to build on as they are learning. Charlotte said, “It is background knowledge

that is so important. It's good to connect what we're learning to their lives and community life."

The three teachers agreed learning needed to be fun sometimes, and social studies and science were subjects that provided new knowledge and experiences about the world. Liz stated, "There's not enough time for everything they want you to teach. If you could integrate it, then you could fit it all in...When do kids get the opportunity to explore the world? They have to go to that higher level thinking. When you're into social studies and science, you wonder and you think."

Poetic narrative: desire for integrated approach to learning with more hands-on activities.

Charlotte

If you are teaching themes, everything connects and relates
I (used to) try to make it all connect together
That way, there was so much more substance and cohesion to everything
If it's all integrated

It makes so much more sense than starting and stopping
(Publishing) Companies do not come out with that (integration)
That's the hardest part for me—(giving up) putting together lessons
Because I love that part!

I did integrate my language and mathematics
I tried to make it all connect together

(Do you have the freedom to teach in themes?)
No, you have to do the EDM and Rigby programs
We just got a memo
If you're going to deviate from the scripted program
You have to prove the other materials follow those same standards

I think it's important to keep learning
I take technology and keep up with today's practices
We need to be experts...to really make a difference

To answer questions with thoughtfulness
With knowledge and experience that helps us connect things to real life

It is background knowledge that is so important
It's good to connect what we're learning
To their lives and community life

I've done a lot of reading about brain research
I have seen more auditory learners lately
I try to do a combination of everything (learning styles) for my students
It's a lot of work...I think it's kind of fun!

(The classroom is highly organized and user friendly for students)
My classroom is a little brain research and a little fenshui
The classroom doesn't belong to me
It is our classroom—we work as a team together
It's empowering for them—for ownership and understanding

Gayle

The (science) units have literature involved
I think they love science
That hands-on thing
It goes back to what I wish I could do in every subject

It used to be thematic
We did our reading, writing and our math around a unit
I think there were holes in that
I just wish there was a way to do both
I don't know why we got away from it!

Liz

When we did the other approach (themed approach)
We had these great units
And we integrated everything
It all made sense!

In science, we have FOSS kits
It's engaging
It's hands-on
They really get involved in the experience

There are great units that you could do
There's not enough time for everything they want you to teach

If you could integrate it
Then you could fit it all in

We used to teach in themes
But now we have to follow these programs with fidelity
Their learning is fractured
You didn't have the outside pressures—district and state

We integrated everything, and it all made sense
But how much can you do in 30 minutes?
Social studies is now in isolation and not themed
Not as important

We can use all this technology—Classroom Response Systems
We do it in social studies because it lends itself to that
It's called CVS
The feedback's immediate
They're all engaged and they're all motivated

I love social studies
I love to see growth in reading, but it's reading
Literacy is literacy
It's just skills in reading and writing

In social studies, it's different
They are pieces that are new to kids
It lends itself to a lot of video streaming—that whole visual piece
It works really well for Second Language Learners

It gives them something to build on
I show them all pictures
They get really involved in the experience
It's not literacy and math
They like it because it is something new

In science, the inquiry is new
It's engaging!
It's hands-on!
I want to do more, but it's just getting that time

History is the study of the past
We build on that
We are where we are today because of what was done yesterday
If kids don't know that, then what kind of future are we building?

Geography

It's that whole piece of why we are here

I get asked, "Why are you educating these students?"

I say because the Constitution says they have a right to be educated

Again, that's history

Where do the kids get the opportunity to explore the world?

They have to go to that higher-level thinking

When you're into social studies and science

You wonder and you think

I think back to what I used to do

We would plan in the summer

We would teach a more integrated approach

We pulled in math and reading and writing

We spent days and days planning

Changing social/family structure: a need to build character.

Across the board, teachers expressed a concern over changes in student behavior due to less family structure and support from home. "We're seeing a lot more children with behavior problems and higher needs. They lack social skills," said Charlotte. Some students have poor attendance and need more support from teachers in order to succeed in school. According to Gayle, "Parents used to be really involved. (Students) don't get the support at home. That's been harder...Families are changing. They're trying to survive...I think everybody is so stressed, so supporting their kids at home is difficult."

By cutting social studies, teachers shared concerns about taking community building out of the classroom, as well as their ability to help create good citizens for our society, one of the main goals of education as stated by two of these teachers. Gayle said, "I used to do a lot of team builders. Now I only do one per week."

Teachers reflected on what they were seeing in the classroom, including more behavior problems and higher needs. All three felt students' lack of social skills and manners required attention and support throughout the day. They recognized changes exist in how families work and function with students from blended families to those who change where they spend the night each day or week. Gayle said, "I get real tired. It's frustrating to know that I'm doing a job that a parent could be doing...I know we're responsible...but I cannot do it all!"

Because there is such a need to build social skills, teachers regretted not having time for meaningful social studies. According to Charlotte, "We don't spend as much time with citizenship like we used to because of the social studies. We've had to condense it."

Some students refuse to say the Pledge of Allegiance and others didn't know the Presidents of the United States. This lack of knowledge of history and patriotism was disturbing to teachers, including students' lack of knowledge about their rights as citizens. Charlotte said, "I'll be honest with you. One of the things that is really difficult for me is when I have a child who will not say the Pledge of Allegiance, because I love history. And, when we know all the men and women who have died to make this country what it is. It breaks my heart!" Liz expressed, "In school, we teach respect and kindness. As far as citizenship, we are not. These kids didn't even know the Presidents...We are pushed to pass the test (CSAP). If something goes...it's social studies...I wanted them (students) to know that you have a say. Voting is a privilege."

Poetic narrative: changing social/family structure—a need to build

character.

Charlotte

We're seeing a lot more children with behavior problems
And higher needs
They lack social skills
More children that don't know how to socialize

The dynamic of family life is changing
If we had more time, we could teach kids how to be good citizens of the U.S.
We could teach manners.
Life is very different

Our social system has really changed
How families work and function is very different
I think those things are connected
It's worth investigating

Some parents are too tired when they get home
To read a book with their children
We're seeing more problems with kids coming into kindergarten
They're not practicing their letters and numbers

They lack social skills
They're having more extreme difficulties
Things we took for granted long ago, like apologizing
They don't know how to apologize

We don't spend as much time with citizenship
Like we used to
Because of the social studies
We've had to condense it

We have advanced curriculum-wise
But the social skills
Are deteriorating
Boundaries, children don't have them

You have 3 to 5 behavior problems a day and you're all by yourself
I'm hoping we can protect them (kindergarten teachers)
We're going to just have to look at our days
And do the best we can

Our neighborhoods have changed
They've built low income housing in this area
We have more of a balanced population now

In the past, parents made time
Very educated people
We had dynamic individuals that made a huge difference
And now—not so much!
It has really impacted our school

The dynamics of the classroom are so different
A few children are being raised by grand parents
Blended families
Some spend every other week with each parent
Or...one night here and one night there
Those are the challenges

Colleagues in preschools are seeing many more children with behavior problems
And higher needs
They lack social skills
They're having more extreme difficulties

Gayle

I'm a firm believer in the need to build character
I used to do a lot of team builders
Now I only do 1 per week...that break when we can laugh
I worry someone might walk in the door and I'll get caught

Parents used to be really involved
They (students) don't get the support at home
That's been harder
I feel more sad for those kids...you know...who struggle
Who don't get the support at home or the resources to be successful

I get real tired
It's frustrating to know that I'm doing a job that a parent could be doing
(I get) frustrated when it starts to take away from my family time
I know we're responsible...but I cannot do it all!

Families are changing
They're trying to survive and work at night
I think everybody is so stressed
So supporting their kids at home is difficult

Liz

It's not like these parents have time
To work with their children at home
Many are working two jobs

More collaboration among teachers.

The recent era of high-stakes accountability has resulted in greater teacher collaboration, said two of these teachers who spoke of their experience working with colleagues to meet the needs of all students. Liz is a great proponent of teacher collaboration, “In the beginning, we worked in isolation. Now (it’s) a collaborative sharing. I believe all kids do better when we (teachers) plan together. It is more rewarding.”

All three teachers value their time with students above all, since there is so much they need to accomplish with students. Gayle felt professional development was a waste of precious time but preferred working with other teachers rather than learning from experts. She said, “I guess if it is collaborative time—that is our best growth.” Charlotte refers to the need for teachers to keep each other accountable.

Poetic narrative: more collaboration among teachers.

Charlotte

I think we have to keep each other accountable
Collaboration is power and strength
In this changing teaching environment

Gayle

(Although there is a need for more time with students,
Professional development is not seen as valuable time)
I guess if it is collaborative time
That is our best growth

Liz

I try as grade level chair
To help them (new teachers) know everything we are doing
When they (my students) take the CSAP and they pass
I know I'm making a difference

In the beginning, we worked in isolation
Now a collaborative sharing
I believe all kids do better when we (teachers) plan together
It is more rewarding

Summary of findings.

Regarding district expectations and teachers' role and responsibilities, all three teachers referred to the stress they are under today compared to ten or more years ago. Scripted curriculum and the pressure of high-stakes testing have left them feeling somewhat disenfranchized and not trusted with the education of their students. All work long hours, but not as long as they used to. Concern over the future of education was expressed as they worried about the changing role from teacher to a facilitator who reads the script that guides student learning.

All expressed frustration with teaching today, although each would not choose to leave the profession. They saw teaching as their calling and felt blessed to be doing work they loved. With district expectations deemed unreasonable, these teachers worried about getting everything taught that the district says must be taught, given the strict guidelines of programs and time allotments prescribed for literacy and math. Some worried about their health, as "...stress is known to take its toll eventually," one said. Some wonder if they can keep up with the stress of high-stakes testing, behavior problems and the pressure to raise student achievement in situations that are less than promising. Teachers

found they must stretch themselves to provide support parents once provided, in addition to having so many students coming into their classes below grade level and with so many needs.

With budget cuts across the state, teachers felt additional stress, from job insecurity to condensing of resources for teaching. All worried about having higher class sizes when there were already so many diverse needs in their classrooms. They all felt that over 25 students per class was unreasonable, given the expectations for raising student achievement by the district. The teacher with the highest number of needs had thirty students in her classroom.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The following discussion ties the results of the study back to the frameworks in the literature review. A greater focus on tested subjects has resulted from increasing pressures to raise student achievement in those subjects. One of the consequences of this focus is curriculum narrowing. This chapter begins with background of the study, gives an overview of the major and minor themes, moving on to discussion of the frameworks in light of the research.

The first framework, effective curriculum and instruction, discusses best practices in education today. Such practices address the various needs of students in our ever more diverse society. Considered within this study are culturally responsive teaching, meeting the needs of 21st century learners, and finally, the case for integrated studies in direct opposition to the current practice of required scripted programming.

The following section reviews the study in light of the current environment of increasing accountability and standards-based education that drives district decisions regarding teaching in classrooms. It includes the impact of this environment on teachers. Finally, the discussion leads to curriculum narrowing, the question of equity, and whether these practices will ultimately meet the needs of students.

Background

The teachers' voices have been shared. Hopefully, we heard them. The wisdom of years of dedication, obtained from their passion for educating children, is shared in these

pages. Themes have been presented as they made themselves clear in the interviews. Many of the themes literally jumped out as these master teachers shared their similar feelings and experiences of teaching past and present.

The purpose of this dissertation was to answer research questions regarding teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing, extending to their beliefs about teaching and the changes in accountability created by No Child Left Behind and the ensuing environment of high-stakes testing. The questions asked by this researcher were open ended, leaving room for the narrators to share their experiences openly and honestly.

Narrator checks were done to ensure the words shared in this dissertation preserved the teachers' intent. What is reported was approved by these master teachers in hopes their voices will be heard by those who can make changes that will lead to higher achievement and a more positive environment for students and teachers. It took courage to share what they believe to be common experiences of public school master teachers today.

At the end of the third interview with each teacher, they said such things as, "It was kind of nice that you actually cared about my feelings...and the changes over time. It was really nice to be heard." Another shared, "It's been an honor to think back. It's also scary to think about the future. We spend a lot more time with the children than their parents sometimes. And...what we've been given is sacred and precious!" The third said, "I think this interview was great, and I just want to say thank you for the questions and giving me the opportunity to think about what I do. This has really opened me up to my philosophy about the kids and what's best for them. This is good! I'm not always willing

to be truthful, because I don't know if it will come back on me...because that's happened in the past. This has just been so good to be able to say what I want to say and reflect on why I do what I do.”

When asked to give a metaphor that describes their experience of these interviews, one likened it to a “walk on the beach...relaxing and reflective.” Another said, “I guess I could say I'm like an old dandelion, because I've been able to open up, and when the wind blows, I'm hopefully being able to spread the news for other teachers.” The third teacher said, “It's like a child's smile. It's made me think of the beauty of teaching...Because to me, it's a gift to have gone through this interview because it's made me realize how precious education is.”

The in-depth interviews were done to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers relative to district expectations?
3. How have changes in accountability expectations impacted teachers?

The significance of this study lies in the teacher voices, those who are on the front lines in today's classrooms, facing the challenges of increasing student achievement in an environment of budget cuts, reduced resources and increasing student needs. Let us look back at the literature to see how this study relates to the frameworks explored there. This discussion provides a perspective that could lead to a more hopeful future for public education and a return to America's great schools and brilliant future.

Overview of Themes

One thing in particular struck this researcher. Each of these master teachers believes it is important to follow the rules, to follow district directives. Each believes teaching to the standards is their job and is part of what makes them good teachers.

The themes that presented themselves include conflicts between teacher beliefs about their role and responsibilities and directives required of them by their district. These include: the requirement of ‘fidelity’ to scripted curricula in reading and math; the lack of time to teach all of the standards due to required time allotments for tested subjects like reading, writing and math; the gap between what is required and what they deem best for their students.

Teachers shared common themes: experiencing more stress resulting from high-stakes testing; not feeling trusted to meet the needs of students; and sadness over the shift from being teachers who design and plan lessons to meet the needs of students, to a facilitator who teaches by the script. All teachers worried about where we are going in public education as a result of scripted curricula and high-stakes testing. Some referred to fear of losing their passion for teaching that would result in students losing their love of learning.

Teachers are not seeing the increases in student achievement with the required scripted curricula in reading, yet they must teach it with fidelity. Research supports the fact results of scripted curricula are not as good as teacher prepared lessons (Ede, 2006; Montgomery, 2001). One teacher voiced concern over district directives being given

before they've been tested. She pointed out the perception, "... more and more is being added to teachers' plates without taking anything off."

Differentiation was touted as a requirement by their district while teachers were also being asked to teach the scripted reading program word for word. Teachers found this directive to be in opposition to their ability to differentiate. Some teachers found the scripted curriculum in reading to be demeaning to their intelligence and expertise as a teacher. They all found scripted curriculum did not meet the needs of all of their students. [There seems to be confusion on the part of districts between the use of standards and standardization.]

Each teacher believed strongly in the need for social studies to meet their perception of the real goal of education, to educate children who could become good citizens. Yet, they experienced a decrease in importance and a narrowing of time spent on social studies to make room for increases in time required for tested subjects like reading, writing and math.

The desire for permission to integrate curricula was expressed in hopes they could teach all of the standards. Each said such a themed approach made sense, not only to facilitate teaching of all the standards in the limited time they have, but also because it was more comprehensive and allowed students to make connections and learn essential background knowledge. They spoke about social studies as a means to teach higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills, all of which are articulated as requirements for 21st Century learners.

[It struck this researcher, if master teachers who are still teaching in the classroom were asked to solve today's crisis of failing student achievement, they could do so. From the interviews, this researcher saw the wisdom from years of teaching that could lead fellow teachers to best practices for raising student achievement in schools. Great teachers intuitively understand the needs of their students.] They value collaborating with other teachers above any other form of professional development. All three said they learned more to improve their craft when they worked together with each other. These teachers demonstrated knowledge of connecting learning to students' lives, in other words, culturally responsive teaching.

[One can see teachers continuing their love for designing their own lessons, content rich with integrated literacy and math skills that provide meaningful activities to reinforce those skills within the context of the social studies and science. Great teachers, if given the chance, would be free to do what is right for their students, now that they have learned so much about best practices, and thereby return to less stress and more joy in teaching.]

There remains, however, the problem of retaining new teachers to the profession. Concern was expressed, predominantly by one teacher, about the need to provide new teachers with more support. It may be this younger generation of teachers might not want to put in the hours of work required to produce good lessons, as master teachers with years of experience love to do, according to these teachers. Hence, they felt all teachers are being asked to teach scripted programs, whether they are new or master teachers.

[Giving master teachers the freedom they long for to meet the needs of their students while still providing curricula that reduces teacher preparation time for new teachers may be possible in a more trusting environment. Teachers are told to differentiate for their students. Districts can differentiate for their teachers based on their skill and experience. Restoring teachers' sense of pride in their profession and trust for their district leaders seems imperative to the health of public education.]

Effective Curriculum and Instruction

The research within the literature review shows results from scripted curriculum are lower than curriculum designed by teachers to meet student needs (Ede, 2006). The experiences of three teachers were shared in this study. They related pressure from the district and state to raise student achievement has led to required scripted curricula in reading and math. All three teachers were concerned scripted curriculum was particularly ineffective in raising student achievement in reading. It is important to question the trend toward using scripted curricula.

According to the teachers interviewed, they felt less trusted by their district than they did in earlier years of their career. This is demonstrated in their loss of freedom to plan their own days and lessons to best meet the needs of students. The result is a growing sense of dissatisfaction with teaching and a loss of passion and self-efficacy on the part of teachers. [This researcher sees this trend as ultimately damaging to our public schools system, leading to a potential loss of master teachers whose experience and insight would be a great loss to students and education in the U.S.] Practices such as prescribed times for tested subjects and scripted curriculum allows for less professional

judgment implemented by teachers and consequently minimizing vigor of instruction and attendance to child-centered needs. Not being trusted to insert professional judgment leaves teachers feeling compromised between following district directives and leaving the script to do what they feel is right for their students.

[If research indicates differentiation for the learner is effective, then it is also effective for adults. We need to consider this when working with teachers' learning and teaching needs. As demonstrated in these interviews, there may be a growing lack of trust of teachers whose health and happiness in their jobs are essential to a successful school system.]

There is a current trend to more teacher collaboration that supports student learning, and this was seen by the teachers as a precious change from the isolation experienced in the past. Such collaboration is seen in district-scheduled early release and late start days set aside for teacher collaboration on data teams and other work focused on raising student achievement. However, professional development by 'experts' from outside the building was seen as wasted time for the most part, taking teachers away from valuable time needed with students, given the lack of enough time noted by these teachers.

According to research by Eaker, DuFour (2002) and others, collaboration lends significant positive results in student achievement and teacher satisfaction. The teacher dialogue about student work becomes viable and rigorous professional development, limiting the need for external experts to present 'sit and get' learning that may or may not apply to specific school needs.

Joyce & Showers (2002), provide insight into meaningful professional development for teachers. They found that encouraging instructional innovation reaps good rewards. Many researchers point to the benefits of teacher collaboration in creating a culture of change and reflection. Such changes can have a profound effect on student achievement. This strategy is essential when changing beliefs regarding students from diverse backgrounds (Lindsey et al., 2003).

[Many teachers who have been in the profession some time now have sufficient background-knowledge to sustain improvements within their buildings, as long as we don't lose those master teachers with years of experience and knowledge to share.] Micro-managing from above seems to lead to a loss of passion for teaching and is compromising teacher beliefs about what is best for students, according to the master teachers interviewed. [This conflict between required practice and teacher beliefs is festering under the surface and may lead to a loss of master teachers in public education or to rising discontent among teachers.]

[Let us not forget, it is the teachers who are on the front lines, serving the needs and goals of the district, to raise student achievement. Should master teachers become totally fed up, public education would be in dire trouble. Differentiating between master teachers and those new to the profession may be an essential step to sustain a satisfied work force of teachers.]

Referring to the literature review, the following frameworks are deemed best practice for instruction. A discussion of the frameworks and participant input follows:

Culturally responsive classrooms.

The task of teaching today means teachers must meet the needs of a great variety of learners and students from diverse backgrounds. According to Tomlinson (2006),

...teachers find it increasingly difficult to ignore the diversity of learners who populate their classrooms. Culture, race, language, economics, gender, experience, motivation to achieve, disability, advanced ability, personal interests, learning preferences, and presence or absence of an adult support system are just some of the factors that students bring to school with them in almost stunning variety (Tomlinson, 2006, p. 1).

Teachers are called upon to understand and plan for multiple needs in one classroom, including students who have different backgrounds than they do. Interviewed teachers have witnessed increasing student needs compared to the past, both behaviorally and academically. There are more Second Language Learners and students from low income homes, and greater ethnic diversity. Teachers must understand how best to connect learning to students from a broad range of backgrounds.

Culturally relevant instruction is found in the research to be effective for meeting diverse needs. This approach connects learning to what students already know and allows knowledge to build upon knowledge, essential for higher achievement (Willingham, 2006; Hirsch, 1996). These interviewed teachers had anywhere from three to seven different instructional levels within one classroom. All said it was a challenge to meet everyone's needs in the time they have with students.

Not only are there many different academic levels, there are also cultural differences that influence effective teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is negated by scripted curriculum (Montgomery, 2001), a requirement found to be prevalent in this district, as well as many others. [Scripted curriculum is a one-size-fits-all formula and

does not meet the standard of effective differentiated learning and instruction, according to this researcher] and research from the literature review (McCaw, 2008). [Such packaged programming certainly does not allow the teacher to individualize instruction so it is culturally responsive to diverse learners, albeit such programs often have a small box with suggested differentiation strategies. Publishers of scripted programs tout the inclusion of differentiated learning, but simply cannot know the needs found in each individual classroom.]

Teachers expressed the need to connect learning to students' lives in order to fully engage and motivate them to learn. Although these teachers were unaware of the term culturally relevant or responsive teaching, they intuitively felt this was necessary for their students, and their words expressed this. A desire to plan lessons designed to meet the needs of their students was a yearning they all had. They objected to the move to scripted programs, tying their hands, making differentiation to meet individual needs difficult. They didn't mind the extra work of planning their own lessons. Instead, they wished they could do it.

Meeting the needs of 21st century students.

Effective curriculum and instruction must take into consideration the needs of 21st century learners. It is education's duty to prepare students for jobs and skills essential for life today. According to the literature, 21st century workers must know how to think critically and problem-solve, work collaboratively in teams, be flexible and adaptable. They must be creative and imaginative, with the ability for entrepreneurialism. Today's students need initiative to be able to find their way to becoming productive citizens who

can solve the most pressing issues we face in the 21st century. Strong oral and written communication skills are also touted as necessary for those who will live and work in the world today (Wagner, 2008; McCaw, 2008). According to McCaw (2008), “Research increasingly supports the development of a well-rounded student” (para. 11).

One has to ask if micro-managing teachers and requiring fidelity to scripted curricula will lead to the results we want. Research says it won’t (Ede. 2006), and from the study, scripted curriculum does not support the research on preparing students for 21st century work and life. [District, state and federal education officials could benefit from taking a big step back and evaluating the goals of education and how best to prepare students to meet those goals.]

Let us step back and ask ourselves the question, “What do we believe is the purpose of education?” The response might be similar to the interviewed teachers—to prepare students to become good citizens. If so, such reflection might change our sole focus from skills teaching in reading, writing and math to a more holistic approach. [Focusing only on the skills of reading, writing and math is a very narrow way to view education (Kamhi, 2009) and may produce uninspired adults who are not prepared to solve problems in their world.]

The teacher from the low performing school felt compelled to teach a test-taking unit to her students in order to give them background information on the format and vocabulary used in state tests. This is an example of the inequity of state testing for diverse students (Noddings, 2007; McGuire, 2009; Howard, 2003).

Good comprehension skills are necessary to do well on tests such as the CSAP.

According to Willhelm (2006),

Comprehension depends on making correct inferences... People with more general knowledge have richer associations among the concepts in memory; and when associations are strong, they become available to the reading process automatically... This means the person with rich general knowledge rarely has to interrupt reading in order to consciously search for connections (para. 4).

Researchers such as Kamil (2004), Willingham (2006), and Hirsch (1999) believe strongly in the value of reading comprehension in context to build essential background knowledge and vocabulary. Learning to read within the content areas provides a better understanding so students can more easily access what they read.

These interviewed teachers expressed a desire to teach using a more integrated, themed approach, because they felt social studies and science provide opportunities to teach students higher-level thinking and essential background knowledge important for comprehension. [A well-rounded approach to teaching children may facilitate higher-level thinking and hence higher scores on high-stakes tests. Students who know how to comprehend well, are better able to figure out new test formats, understand instructions and make necessary inferences while reading.]

A case for integrated studies.

All three teachers expressed a desire to return to a more integrated, themed approach to teaching. They felt it would then be possible to teach all of the standards, some of which have been marginalized and made more insignificant by the pressure of high-stakes testing in reading, writing and math. Science has newly been added to the list of tested subjects and is first tested in 5th grade in Colorado, leading to more time and

resources spent on science in elementary schools. Social studies were demonstrated to have lost importance because they are not tested.

In order to meet the needs of 21st century learners, we may re-think the need to educate well-rounded students who are prepared for living in their time. [Bringing math and literacy skills into rich content learning, such as those found in the social studies and science, can lead to meaningful learning while building background knowledge essential to reading comprehension and relevance to students' lives.] Knowledge builds upon knowledge (Willingham, 2006; Hirsch, 2006). We also know student engagement is essential to learning, and rich content units are found to be more motivating to students than skills classes, according to the teachers interviewed.

Teachers in the study shared student engagement increased when social studies and science were taught versus scripted reading and math. According to these teachers, scripted programs did not meet the needs of advanced learners. All teachers shared the scripted reading program did not meet the needs of non-reading students.

A piecemeal approach to social studies programming can result in a disconnected conglomeration of activities and teaching methods that lack focus, coherence, and comprehensiveness...Social studies teaching is integrative by nature. Powerful social studies teaching crosses disciplinary boundaries to address topics in ways that promote social understanding and civic efficacy (NCSS, 2008, para. 11-12).

[The integrative nature of social studies facilitates the acquisition of essential knowledge that works to empower students to become good citizens while building skills in tested subjects.]

Planning meaningful themed lessons that teach essential background knowledge, integrate literacy and math skills, and differentiate for diverse learners takes time and

skill (CEP, 2007, pg 9). According to some teachers in the study, there are many bright young teachers who do not want to spend the time to plan their own lessons. Although the master teachers interviewed loved this aspect of teaching and mourned the loss of it, they feared it was too much work for new teachers and might lead to a loss in retention of young teachers. Hence, they felt this to be one of the main reasons their district introduced scripted programs. Such programs save time teachers traditionally spent planning lessons. All teachers said scripted programs have substantially lessened the time they spend preparing each day for instruction. Yet, all preferred to plan their own lessons to better meet the needs of their students.

The teachers in this study asserted scripted curriculum and required daily time allotments for reading, writing and math did not meet the standards now set for effective teaching, including differentiation to meet the diverse needs of students and assessment-driven instruction. Teachers interviewed in the higher performing schools stated scripted programs are demeaning to both students and teachers, and do not take into consideration individual mastery and needs. Based on the experience of these teachers and research on the results of scripted programs on learning (Ede, 2006), an integrated themed approach provides more consistency, builds background knowledge and vocabulary, allows learning to go deeper rather than remaining as surface-skills instruction, and allows for culturally responsive strategies that connect students to what they are learning.

The effects of vocabulary instruction are even more powerful when the words selected are those that students most likely will encounter when they learn new content (Marzano et al, 2001, p. 127).

Procedural knowledge is the study and acquisition of skills such as those needed to learn math and reading. For students to become proficient in procedural knowledge, the average student needs to practice the steps over and over, from 20—24 times, in order to master them with 80% accuracy (McREL Presentation, 2008). Since it takes fewer repetitions to learn declarative knowledge, integrating procedural knowledge into the vast declarative knowledge found in social studies is an efficient way to facilitate the learning of both (CEP, 2007; Willingham, 2009; McGuire, 2009). Social studies, science and the arts provide rich opportunities to teach both declarative and procedural knowledge.

An integrated themed approach was voiced by these teachers as better able to facilitate best practice of assessment-driven instruction. Assessing student mastery prior to instruction allows teachers to better meet the needs of students as they plan their lessons. [Perhaps higher achievement would be facilitated by more support to help teachers plan excellent lessons that differentiate and incorporate strategies that will prepare students for successful life and work in the 21st century.] Such skills include creativity, initiative, collaboration, problem-solving skills and flexibility (Wagner, 2008; Gay & Howard, 2000; McCaw, 2008). [Scripted programs seem to be the antithesis of this approach.]

Social studies and science lend themselves to use of technology in the classroom, according to the teachers interviewed. Therefore, an integration of technology standards is also possible using an integrated approach to learning. Such integration could build essential background knowledge and technology skills to enhance students' comprehension of complex subjects.

The teacher in the high and lowest performing schools had sufficient technology in their classrooms, including digital document cameras that projected pictures onto a screen. This was said to be wonderful for Second Language Learners and children who lack background knowledge in content areas within the social studies and science. They reported use of video clips and video streaming to provide needed visual support for these students. [Providing all teachers with sufficient technology including visuals and video clips to facilitate learning might be a wise use of educational funding.]

The teachers interviewed felt the inquiry involved in science was highly engaging and motivating for students. Classroom Response Systems were thought to be useful in checking for understanding and giving immediate feedback to students about their learning, a strategy found to raise student achievement by McREL (Marzano, et.al, 2001). All in all, a more integrated approach would provide time for teachers to address all the standards, including technology standards.

The literature review revealed the need for students to learn comprehension skills in context of the subject matter. In reference to the approach that is now being used whereby children are taught to comprehend text by learning and practicing a small set of rules or strategies in isolation, Kamhi (2009) says,

These strategies are often taught in reading comprehension units that are separate from the subject matter units (e.g., science, social studies) that form the content of the reading material. Such an approach is not likely to succeed because it underestimates the complexity of comprehension.

[A more integrated approach would give students actual reading material in history or science and would help them build the background knowledge essential to higher levels of comprehension as they grow and learn. Districts could focus on how to

support teachers on this journey toward effective teaching, not through scripted programs but through meaningful teacher collaboration, seen by teachers as their most valuable professional development.]

[This researcher sees an integrated themed approach as more practical, a meaningful way to address the needs of education today. With teachers' increased knowledge of how to teach literacy and mathematical thinking, they are better equipped to teach in a comprehensive way, using a more integrated approach.]

Accountability and Standards-based Education

Standards provide the basis for what teachers must teach. They are the guidelines for what students must know and be able to do. Each of the interviewed teachers saw the standards as their roadmap for teaching and each took this responsibility very seriously. In this environment of high-stakes testing and teacher accountability, a much higher level of stress is experienced by teachers today compared to ten years ago, according to the teachers interviewed.

There is a certain lack of joy compared to when these master teachers began teaching over ten years ago. Some were concerned about losing their passion for teaching due to the current environment of stress and lack of trust by the district. Scripted curriculum requirements have taken away some of the passion they had for teaching and they are not seeing good results. Because they are evaluated on how well their students do on state tests (CSAP), they wish they had the freedom to do what they think is best for their students.

[From this researcher's point of view, it is a shame teachers are experiencing district directives that are not in alignment with their beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers.] Although they all felt social studies were extremely important to achieving the main goal of education, they felt they just didn't have time or resources to teach it well. Each felt history, democracy, and the social studies were important to teach students as part of their duty to produce good citizens who would contribute to the common good. Although social studies standards are considered core curriculum, all teachers realized standards of tested subjects are more important than non-tested standards.

Stress related to high-stakes testing of standards in reading, writing, math, and now science was seen as negatively impacting teachers today. [It is possible good teachers will leave the profession for more rewarding work as a result. In generations past, teaching was a very rewarding profession. Today, considering the increasing needs of students, less support from parents, the punitive nature of NCLB, and continual budget cuts affecting resources available for students, teaching is not the compelling profession it used to be. When teachers' hands are tied by district requirements that do not fulfill the needs of their students, teacher self-efficacy goes down. Loving one's work is essential to personal happiness in the work place.]

There is simply not enough time in thirteen years of schooling to teach all of the standards (Schmoker and Marzano, 2003). These teachers expressed over and over again the frustration they have trying to teach all that is required in the one year they have their students. Each had students who came to them below grade level, some multiple grade

levels below. Each had multiple needs in their classrooms, both behavioral and academic—some more than others, but all found it challenging to meet so many needs in the time available. Each teacher felt they must be true to the district directives requiring more time be spent on tested subjects of reading, writing and math, at the expense of social studies in particular.

First, it seems important for districts and the state to review the standards with an eye for reasonable expectations. It is difficult to imagine what can reasonably be taught in one year at each grade level. There is a disconnect between what districts are asking teachers to do and what is reasonable in the time they have with students, given the fact they are also told how much time to spend on each of the tested subjects, whether students have mastered the skills or not. Lack of flexibility to adjust time to meet student needs leads to frustration on the part of teachers, and because they are rule followers, leads to inner conflicts between what teachers believe is best for their students and district directives they feel they must follow.

Second, it may be possible to teach more of the standards if teachers were allowed to integrate the learning into themed units. Each of the three teachers expressed a desire to return to themed units because they make more sense for student learning, may allow them to teach all of the standards, and were more engaging and motivating for students.

Teachers' concern over lack of time was centered on the number of minutes in the day prescribed for tested subjects. District directives forced teachers to put more emphasis on these subjects at the expense of science and especially social studies.

Prescribed time limits were taken very seriously by all three teachers. Continual reference to staying within the time limits was expressed, including fear of ‘being caught’ going over time limits or not doing what was required at that time if an administrator were to walk in the classroom. Another compromise of personal beliefs was shared when one teacher spoke about wanting to make a thoughtful closure to the lesson, but not having time and having to forgive herself. “I have my time limits,” she said.

[This kind of stress is not good for teachers. Feeling guilty because they need more time to provide meaningful closure to a lesson is not healthy for teachers. The teachers’ statements beg the question, if administrators are fully cognizant of what teachers feel about their changing profession. Also, it may be district directives which generate stress, have the unintended consequences of becoming part of the problem that has led to failure of public education to adequately educate children.]

[It is possible district leadership is part of the problem. Many education dollars are spent on salaries for district leaders. We need to get the resources into classrooms to help students learn. It might be important to assess district leadership’s value in raising student achievement. Teachers and principals are evaluated based on student results. It is not reasonable to ask teachers to raise student achievement for all students when class size is increased and resources cut from the classroom.] Fear was expressed about rising class size and loss of intervention support for struggling students, given the high expectations of teacher performance and higher needs of students.

[A history of requiring one thing after another, changing programs every two years, does not seem to work for inspiring trust between the district and teachers

regarding district dictates for instruction.] The district made it clear teachers should provide assessment-driven instruction, according to these teachers. The disconnect between these directives and the requirement of fidelity to scripted curriculum leaves teachers feeling unsure if the district knows what is best for their students.

A conflict between what research says about developmentally appropriate reading instruction for young children and what the district requires exists, leaving teachers stressed and unsure about the district's wisdom concerning what is best for their students. Although it was extremely enjoyable hearing the stories of master teachers, it became clear teaching was very stressful for them today, compared to teaching in the past. Two felt they were not trusted by the district to do what was best for their students, even though they were all highly trained and were continually attending classes to improve their teaching. They were saddened by the move from trusted teacher to facilitator of scripted programs.

The conflict between their beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers and district expectations caused further stress. These teachers feared being caught not doing what was expected throughout the day and didn't feel they could do team building activities when they felt students needed these important social skills. One of these interviewed teachers feared teaching math facts and getting in trouble for not being on pace with scripted curricula.

Support for teaching social skills is provided by Principles of the Responsive Classroom put out by the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC) in meeting the needs of diverse students.

- 1) The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum; 2) how children learn is as important as what they learn; 3) the greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction; 4) know the children we teach; and, 5) to be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (NEFC, Guiding Principles, para.1).

Conflicts arose for these teachers because they were both evaluated based on how well they followed district guidelines and how students did on state exams. They worried about test results and whether their students did their best. One had difficulty sleeping all year long. All said CSAP was very stressful for them, knowing how these scores were used.

The scripted program in reading, interviewed teachers declared, was not good for gifted students, or for those who could not read. One teacher pointed out she should not be asked to spend precious time on skills her students had already mastered. [Since time was a huge issue for teachers, this seemed reasonable.] They all shared frustration when they wanted to spend more time on a skill but had to move on. One referred to it as 'keeping within her time limits'. All suggested Rigby did not provide adequate practice for students to master many of the skills in reading.

Regarding EveryDay Math, teachers felt conflicted when they encouraged their students to learn their math facts. One expressed a sleepless night she spent worrying about pushing her students to learn math facts, even though she knew they would benefit greatly if they knew them with automaticity. A workshop she attended said teachers must not give students timed math fact sheets. She reflected upon her decision to do what she thought was best for her students. They no longer solved math problems on their fingers and during CSAP were able to solve problems successfully.

One of the main conflicts teachers felt was being judged and evaluated on how their students performed on state tests, yet they were not trusted to get their students to proficiency by whatever means they deemed necessary. When the results of ‘following the script’ were not good, they wondered why they were being asked to do what does not work. [Such disconnects leave teachers feeling disenfranchised and mistrustful of their district.] Still, they follow what the district tells them to do, because they do not want to get in trouble.

All teachers felt their students had more needs than those in the past, both academically and behaviorally. Since parent support was much less than in the past, they felt they needed to help students by doing what parents used to do, including homework support and teaching basic social skills. With budget cuts, they worried about meeting the increasing needs of their students with fewer resources in this age of increasing accountability. Lack of time to do what needs to be done was a major stressor for all three teachers.

This seemed relevant to the discussion because teachers are being asked to solve more problems with less support than in the past. They are under more pressure to raise student achievement than was true in the past for all students, while student needs, both academic and behavioral, have increased. Teachers are evaluated by how well their students do on state exams, even though many of their students come to them one or more grade levels below where they should be. “Something’s got to give,” as one teacher put it. With district budget cuts, teachers worried about fewer resources to meet their higher-needs students.

[For discussion, one wonders at the fairness of what teachers are being asked to do.] With fewer resources to meet the growing demands of the job, teachers are experiencing a great deal of job-related stress. [One wonders further, how this stress impacts higher student achievement. Although these teachers would not want to do anything else, this researcher thinks perhaps the teaching profession is in trouble. The challenges may outweigh the rewards for teachers. If they do, we could lose the very professionals we need to raise students achievement—our master teachers.]

Curriculum Narrowing, Equity and Student Needs

As a result of high-stakes testing and district directives that focus on tested subjects at the expense of non-tested subjects, curriculum narrowing is occurring in P.E. and social studies, according to the teachers interviewed. The greatest negative impact is on the social studies which receive the fewest resources—in all cases clearly outdated texts—and little professional development outside of new teacher orientation. Teachers interviewed realized and felt bad about the loss of importance of social studies for students. The goal of education was stated by two teachers as having to do with educating students who could then become good citizens of our society. [Clearly, if social studies are not taught, except marginally, we are losing sight of the real goal of education in order to have students pass tests of reading, writing, math, and more recently science.]

[This researcher is quite concerned over the unintended consequences of lack of social studies content knowledge by students throughout the U.S. as a result of the focus on tested subjects taught in isolation.] As the early founders of American education envisioned, mandatory education for U.S. youth was established to provide a strong

citizenry who could provide for the common good. [Without meaningful social studies, our disenfranchised populations will continue to be isolated from what it means to be American with all the rights and responsibilities that go with this privilege.]

[For students who are growing up in poverty or low SES homes, the lack of background knowledge and vocabulary equal to their middle and upper class peers is cause for concern.] Contributing to the risk to background knowledge, McGuire (2009) addresses the problem of curriculum narrowing for low SES students as fundamental to the development of moral and civic virtues,

Such education becomes even more important for children in poverty if they are to participate in and embrace the ideals of American democracy...Research suggests that students start to develop social responsibility and interest in politics before the age of nine...elementary school matters a great deal for their civic development (McGuire, 2009, para. 3).

According to Hirsch (1996), “In short, an early inequity in the distribution of intellectual capital may be the single most important source of avoidable injustice in a free society” (p20). He goes on to say, “Psychological research has shown that the ability to learn something new depends on an ability to accommodate the new thing to the already known” (p23). Social studies and science instruction can promote the acquisition of rich background knowledge and vocabulary, giving students the intellectual capital upon which to build new knowledge (Hirsch, 1996; Willingham, 2006; AFT, 2006).

Once children enter school far behind the main stream, it is almost impossible to catch up without extreme interventions (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005; Craig, 2006).Such interventions require resources that may be cut from district budgets. [A concern for equity for our nations’ poor children is nothing to take lightly. Education is the road out

of poverty, and we could be providing rich background knowledge and vocabulary for students to prepare them to access higher-level classes, deemed a strategy for closing the achievement gap (Williams, et.al, 2005).]

[Perhaps equity among citizens will be possible when there are common understandings about democracy and cultural differences. Dialogue about current issues might lead to development of 21st century skills of problem-solving, collaborating, creative and critical thinking and adaptability.] All of these can be facilitated by rich integrated social studies instruction and were seen by the teachers interviewed as possible within a more themed approach.

Research from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) (2009) and the Center for Education Policy (2006) (CEP) has found curriculum narrowing in social studies to be true. These three teachers seemed surprised when they discovered this in their reflections, having focused so much attention on following district directives regarding the teaching of tested subjects of reading, writing and math.

The more they reflected, the more they realized how marginalized social studies had become and the more they realized this conflicted with their beliefs about their role as teachers. All teachers desired a return to themed units where they could integrate literacy and math skills into meaningful content. They felt this might help them be able to teach more of the required standards in the limited time they have with students.

Interesting to note, the teacher in the high performing school felt she had more freedom to give social studies more time and focus. Teachers from the lower performing schools felt highly compromised between their beliefs about the importance of teaching

social studies and the diminished place they now hold. They voiced over and over if something needed to go, social studies was the one to go.

Science is now tested in 5th grade. Teachers stated resources for science were excellent—FOSS kits. Social studies, however, did not have such resources. An old text book dated 1998, revised from 1977, was not up to date, nor did it have any higher-level thinking activities for students. The district was promising a new social studies program for next year, but teachers have heard nothing more about this since the announcement of budget cuts.

Teachers said citizenship is not taught in their schools. They taught respect and kindness, according to one teacher, but not citizenship as social studies content. Teachers were left to find their own resources for social studies. Because it was taught in isolation, teachers felt social studies did not receive the time and effort they deserve. When asked what teachers thought the goal of education was, two stated educating students to become good citizens. The other reported educating students so they could access all the opportunities that are out there. This teacher found her students did not know the Presidents of the United States, nor did they understand their rights as citizens. That concerned her deeply, and she desired time and resources to teach geography, economics, civics, and history, so her students would understand the world and their place in it.

The thing that struck this researcher was teachers' desire to educate their students through meaningful social studies so they would appreciate and understand their country and place, as contributing members of our society. They all felt compromised by high-

stakes testing and district directives to focus on what is tested at the expense of social studies.

Teachers referred to the fact if enrollment was up, they might have more specials: art, music or PE. Due to budget cuts however, there were already areas where the district was planning cuts for the next school year. One was lunch recess, where teachers offered to take a ten minute cut in their lunch break to provide student supervision so students can have their full forty minute lunch break. Teachers felt students needed this amount of time to eat and play at recess in order to be more focused in the classroom.

According to teachers, time allotted to PE had decreased over time due to budget cuts. They explained students have PE for one week every five weeks. All teachers felt this was not enough to provide needed physical fitness for their students.

The non-tested subjects of social studies and PE were marginalized. [Both could have unintended consequences for our public school children.] Marginalization of the social studies narrows students' access to background knowledge and vocabulary essential for good reading comprehension, according to Hirsch (2006), and Willingham (2006).

Concern was expressed by the interviewed teachers about the need to motivate and engage students in the learning. They felt scripted curricula did not provide opportunities for higher-level thinking and problem-solving, or meet the diverse needs of their students. These teachers also wanted their students to learn essential background knowledge found in content rich social studies and science.

[By spending less time building background knowledge and vocabulary found in social studies and science for our nation's students, we may be eliminating rich sources of knowledge that can connect students to what they are reading and allow them access to all the social studies have to offer. We may lose an opportunity for students to connect content to their world so they understand their place in it.] These three teachers were very concerned about students' lack of understanding of history, citizenship and rights. They worried about where education is going. [Truly, if knowledge builds upon knowledge (Hirsch, 1996), then we are losing a valuable opportunity to give students better comprehension skills as they grow and learn.]

According to these teachers, they are faced with too many needs in one classroom and too little time to meet those needs. [Districts might consider making more resources into the classroom a priority, rather than making cuts to classroom support. If scripted programs are not working to meet the needs of the diverse students in classrooms, then perhaps we should look at more effective ways to spend educational dollars.]

The teaching of social studies provides many opportunities for filling the gaps in student understanding and perception about the world. According to the NCSS (2008),

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence... Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics and natural science (p. 211).

With a calling to teach, some teachers shared the perspective scripted programs and the punitive nature of high-stakes testing were causing them to lose their passion for teaching. They feared this might result in a lack of passion for learning on the part of

their students. All felt an integrated approach would be more exciting to students because they would be learning new things about the world, not just skills. [It is possible districts are confusing standards with the use of standardization demonstrated by prescribing scripted programs. Future research on these differences is needed.]

Such imbalances as lack of background knowledge and vocabulary between low SES students and their higher SES peers have been found to be a root cause of the achievement gap. Decreasing time in social studies and science decreases opportunities to build this knowledge. Focusing on tested subjects at the expense of rich content learning is a missed opportunity for low SES students (Willingham, 2006; AFT, 2006; Hirsch, 1996 and 2006).

John Dewey said, “Education and education alone, spans the gap...Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common...What they must have in common are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding” (Dewey, 1916, p. 3-4). [Social studies accommodates a platform upon which common understanding can be achieved. The integrative nature of social studies facilitates the acquisition of essential knowledge that works to empower students to become good citizens while building skills in tested subjects.]

No Child Left Behind’s concern for raising student achievement in reading can be addressed by teaching students content knowledge along with the logistics and mechanics of reading (Hirsch, 1996 & 2006; Willingham, 2006; American Federation of Teachers (AFT), 2006). Skill in reading comprehension is facilitated by building background knowledge so essential for making connections and inferences when reading.

“Comprehension demands background knowledge because language is full of semantic breaks in which knowledge is assumed and, therefore, comprehension depends on making correct inferences” (Willingham, 2006, p. 2).

According to Willingham (2006), background knowledge speeds and strengthens reading comprehension, learning and thinking. In his article, *How Knowledge Helps*, Willingham acknowledges the need to provide students with something to think about—subject content—when teaching students to think critically.

[Narrowing time spent in social studies and science to teach reading comprehension in isolation eliminates precious time to teach these skills in context while building essential knowledge and vocabulary upon which students can add to their understanding.] According to D. Jerald Craig and the CCSRI (2006),

Denying students the opportunity to build social studies vocabulary and background knowledge can lead to lower literacy levels and, ironically, increases the achievement gap. (p. 2) ...once children fall behind in acquiring background knowledge, it becomes harder and harder for them to catch up. (p. 4)

Such thinking applies to both social studies and science. Classes that build content background knowledge and vocabulary promote greater access to curriculum.

There are many factors influencing the achievement of low socio-economic students. The degree and type of content background knowledge, vocabulary and early childhood learning experiences are very different for children from low, middle and high SES homes (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Examination of the findings from studies on the relationship between social status and school readiness largely conclude children who grow up in poverty more often than their wealthier peers arrive at school with

disadvantages and are unlikely to catch up without intense educational interventions (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005).

The literature review and the interviews with three master teachers help support the view curriculum narrowing is not helping students prepare for the 21st century. Narrowing the social studies for all students may have serious consequences for the future of our nation and students' lives. Rich content learning connects students to their world and allows them to find their place in it. Based on the research, a return to a themed approach could support diverse learning, and integrate skills within the meaningful context of social studies and science, so students may benefit from both.

The guidelines for social studies teaching and learning support the development of thinking and the building of content knowledge as important for learning.

The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 2008, p. 211).

[As we re-envision how to meet the many needs of our diverse student population, we might step back and re-evaluate the mission of public education, as seen through the eyes of our nation's founders. From this macrocosmic view, let us remember to educate a citizenry who will provide for the public good.]

Recommendations for Future Research

Much comes to mind that could provide meaningful research for further study including:

- The affects of curriculum narrowing on students. More research could be done to gain a better understanding of curriculum narrowing, not only on teachers, but its effects on students over time.

- A theme that kept coming up was the shift to scripted programming as a strategy to raise student achievement in reading and math. Although this researcher found some research on the subject, more needs to be done comparing the results of scripted programs to teacher-designed lessons for raising student achievement.
- This study has begged the question concerning districts who feel compelled to micro-manage even their best teachers in hopes of solving the problem of low student achievement in some schools. Teachers are asked to teach scripted curricula with fidelity. Research examining the consequences of this practice is needed.
- The perception of the interviewed teachers that scripted curriculum is needed to support new teachers, leads this researcher to think more research could be done to evaluate the perceptions of new teachers regarding their willingness to plan their own lessons as opposed to scripted curriculum to meet students' needs. Both of the above suggestions for research could have important implications for the future of education.
- What compels districts to require scripted curricula and is it working to reach the goals intended?
- Find out who is designing scripted programs and if they are actually able to provide culturally responsive education. Are the designers from dominant White culture or from culturally diverse populations?
- Research could be done to determine if teachers are actually able to teach all of the standards in the amount of time they have, considering increasing student needs and class size. Are districts, states and the federal government asking too much of our teachers?
- More study of teacher preferences for professional development might be done to determine if teacher collaboration provides better student results than time taken outside the classroom for teachers to learn from experts.
- Explore ways teachers feel they can impact change in their schools and districts.
- Further research on the effects of hierarchical decision-making versus distributive leadership on teacher perception of locus of control.
- Research on the lack of importance of the social studies in public schools, and the unintended consequences of this trend is needed. Further study might be done to determine actual time spent on social studies and the quality of that instruction for meeting the needs of 21st century students.

- Another study might be done in regards to the narrowing of Physical Education and student obesity.
- Further research should be done concerning the effectiveness of top-down decisions affecting instruction given by district leadership and the effect of those decisions on student achievement. According to Owens (2001) & Owens & Valesky (2007),

Efforts to improve school performance by seeking to implement and orchestrate change from the school district central office, or from the state education department, or even from the federal agency have historically failed notoriously to improve the achievement of students at the individual school level, even when compliance is closely monitored and audited (Owens, 2001, p. 385).

Conclusion

Curriculum narrowing is standard practice in our nation's public schools, as a result of high-stakes testing and an environment of more accountability for teachers. The most highly impacted subjects are social studies and physical education, according to the teachers in this study. Teachers interviewed experienced conflicts between their beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers and requirements handed down from the district. One area of conflict was not having enough time to teach everything they were supposed to teach in the limited time they have with students. There are just too many standards to teach if they must also remain obedient to the time allotments and scripted programs they are prescribed by their district.

Even these master teachers did not feel trusted by their district, as they were made to teach scripted curriculum 'with fidelity'. This loss of freedom to create their own lessons based on the needs of their students has resulted in a loss of passion, feelings of empowerment, and satisfaction with their profession. [Teachers and principals cannot be alone in bearing the brunt of accountability when districts are telling teachers what to teach.]

Differentiating for teachers based on their ability and experience could allow master-teachers the freedom they desire to determine how best to meet the needs of their students. Re-establishing this trust could lead to greater satisfaction in their profession and perhaps to higher student achievement since they would design lessons with individual needs in mind.

Returning to a more integrated approach to teaching may allow teachers to address all of the standards in the limited time they have with students. Social studies could then return to a place of importance in today's elementary schools. Perhaps then, the original goal of education, to educate young people who can become good citizens working for the good of all, may help us develop greater common understandings of what it means to live in a country dedicated to the ideals of a democratic society.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent form

You have been selected to participate in a study that will investigate teacher perceptions of curriculum narrowing and its impact on teachers. You will be asked to engage in three interviews; 60—90 minutes each, to be conducted in a location of your choice. During the interview you will be asked to share your experiences regarding your beliefs about teaching and curriculum narrowing. Each interview will be recorded, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcripts of your recordings to make corrections. After all three interviews are completed, you will be able to examine the narrative from your interview transcripts and check the accuracy and completeness of the representation of your experience. All data will remain confidential and your responses will not be attributed by name. The study is conducted by Donna Newberg-Long as part of a doctoral research project. Results will be used to compare teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing and its impact on teachers. Donna can be reached at (303) 280-5220 or (303) 518-0273. You may also contact Dr. Linda Brookhart, dissertation committee chair, at (303) 871-2973 or linda.brookhart@du.edu.

Participation in this study should take about 3-5 hours of your time. Participation will involve responding to open-ended interview questions about curriculum narrowing, expectations of teachers and the impacts of these changes on teachers. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort, you may discontinue participation at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. All responses will remain confidential. All responses will be coded with a pseudonym to retain confidentiality and the data will be destroyed after the study is completed. You may withdraw from this investigation with full confidence that any information you have shared will not be included in the study.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

If you agree to these statements and conditions and you agree to participate in this study, please sign below.

Signature

Date

If you agree to audio recordings, please sign here: _____

Thank you so much for your interest in this study.

Appendix B: Table 1 Critical Tasks

Table 1. Study Critical Tasks

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|--|
| 1. Meet with key informants to assess and revise guiding questions based on their expertise in social studies and best practices |
| 2. Request approval from district to conduct the study within the District |
| 3. Perform a pilot interview with an elementary teacher to assess whether the interview questions will give the expected results; to actually provide insightful data that answers the research questions |
| 4. Upon District approval, complete purposeful selection of school sites and teachers based on established criteria to fit the study |
| 5. Meet with principals to introduce the project and gain support—also meet with recommended teachers to introduce the project and set up the first interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each teacher participating in this study will have a minimum of 10 years experience teaching social studies to fourth or fifth grade students • Each teacher will be recommended by their principal as a master teacher |
| 6. Each teacher will participate in three 90-minute interviews to obtain comprehensive descriptions of their perspectives of curriculum narrowing and accountability in elementary schools. Open-ended questions provided the process to encourage the participants to tell their story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview Guides (Appendix C) will be used to guide the interviews. Open-ended questions will frame the discussion in ways that would lead to answering the research questions. • The interview transcripts will be given to the participants for review to confirm for accuracy (narrator/member check). The teachers will have an opportunity to agree or disagree with the transcript. This step is important for confirming accuracy and making necessary changes to the transcripts. |
| 7. Before 1 st interview, informed consent form will be signed and project will be introduced. Interview will be conducted. At conclusion of the interview, a review and check-in will occur by which the narrator will have the opportunity to make adjustments to the narrative and provide more clarity. Ideas for consideration for the 2 nd interview will be discussed. |
| 8. Following each interview, the researcher will transcribe the interviews from the digital recorder to allow for more efficient collection and moving of data into themes. |

| |
|--|
| <p>9. Researcher will read and review the transcripts for developing themes and patterns, coding each theme with a different color highlighter. She will analyze the transcripts for future interview questions that will provide deeper insight into answering the research questions. The data analysis organizer (Appendix F) will be used to identify the broad themes.</p> |
| <p>10. Analysis will begin immediately after each interview to support accuracy and articulation of setting, gestures, etc. The relevant information to answer the research questions will be revealed after reviewing the transcripts of the narrators' stories. Excerpted narratives will then be created from the transcripts to disclose the data in the narrators' own words.</p> |
| <p>11. Each participant will be given the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of each transcription before the next interview. These will be sent via e-mail to each teacher, allowing enough time for them to review them and make additions and corrections.</p> |
| <p>12. An Interview Summary Form (Appendix D) will be used to record the teachers' comments in order to summarize the interviews and prepare for scripting.</p> |
| <p>13. Subsequent interviews will be given following the processes above.</p> |
| <p>14. Following the preparation of the final narrative of the study and before publishing, the narrators will be given an opportunity to review the text for accuracy, an additional step in assuring narrator agreement concerning representation of their stories and perceptions.</p> |

Adapted from Checklist for Gateway Research

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Primary research questions:

- What are teachers' perceptions of curriculum narrowing?
- What are teachers' beliefs about their role and responsibilities as teachers relative to district expectations?
- How have changes in accountability expectations impacted teachers?

First Interview

Setting: Comfortable, quiet, private (where teacher feels comfortable)

Roles:

- Researcher Position: Interested Guest—one who seeks the opportunity to learn. Achieve spirit of naiveté and openness. Nice balance between formal and informal.
- Narrator: Informant/collaborator

Assess: Make sure there is no power differential that will impact the interview.

Decide: What do we call each other? Establish trust.

Introduce the project and tell what to expect

Explain the purpose for the research, what I am attempting to learn, and how research will be used and shared. Tell a little about my interest in the project. Tell how I got their name and why I selected them to participate. Explain the interview process, why it is being recorded, what to expect in each session, etc.

Informed consent

Review in detail the Informed Consent Form and ask them to sign a copy. Give them a copy of the form for their records.

Open questions to help frame discussion to follow

(All questions may not be possible during the first interview and will be used in subsequent interviews if necessary)

Ask:

I'm interested in learning about the perceptions of teachers who have experienced teaching at the elementary level

- *Can you describe your teaching path? What drew you to teaching and how did you get where you are today professionally?*
- *What do you believe your role and responsibilities are as a teacher? Have these changed over time? If so, how?*
- *How do you feel about teaching today compared to when you began? What has changed and how do you feel about the changes?*
- *How have these changes impacted you as a teacher?*
- *How have these changes impacted your students?*
- *What particular memories do you have from your career as a teacher? What has been most meaningful and fulfilling for you? Can you give me examples of these?*

Have you experienced any changes brought about due to high stakes assessment or curriculum narrowing?

At the end of the interview, explain:

Next time you will explore some of these areas more deeply and other questions may be explored. Ask your narrator to make a note of anything that comes up in the time between the interviews that might be of interest.

Second Interview

Give narrator an opportunity to return to what he/she talked about in the first session and explore experience in greater depth.

Ask:

Was there anything that we talked about last time that was particularly meaningful for you?

Encourage additional disclosure and stories by guiding narrator to topics that may have been introduced but not fully considered in first interview.

Return to the key points concerning experiences with curriculum narrowing in non-tested subjects; their perspective of effects of this on students from their demographic (current and future); if there are conflicts between beliefs and expectations, how are they able to reconcile these?; do they feel they are able to prepare students for 21st century life and work? If not, why? If so, how?; explore other effects of NCLB on teachers, etc. for deeper reflection.

Address questions or inconsistencies in transcript from session one. Get clarification, confirm your understanding and ask about topics that weren't covered (See Interview Summary Form). Let narrator know what you might like for him/her to be thinking about for the next interview.

Third Interview

Address any topics on summary form that have not been fully explored. This session also allows for reflection.

Ask: *If you could go back and give yourself advice about curriculum narrowing, its role in education and how it is being implemented, what would you say?*

Ask: *What would you tell teachers and administrators they need to think about when planning for non-tested subjects?*

Ask for metaphors to describe their experience. *What was it like to be interviewed about your perceptions of curriculum narrowing and its impact on teachers?*

Ask: *What did you think I might ask you in these interviews? If you haven't covered that topic, do so now.*

Ask: *Since your interviews have covered a lot of territory, not all of it can be included in my report. What would you be disappointed to see left out?*

Narrator Check Session

Ask narrator to review the narrative you created for accuracy and completeness: *This is how I interpreted what you've shared with me in the previous sessions. Did I get it right? What needs to be fixed? Clarified? Deleted?*

Ask: *Do you see anything in the narrative that surprises you?*

Ask: *Did the narrative I constructed using your words remind you of anything you'd like to add?*

Ask: *How do you feel about being interviewed about experiences concerning curriculum narrowing, your beliefs and expectations of you as a teacher in the environment of NCLB*

Appendix D: Interview Summary Form

Interview Summary Form Analysis of perceptions of social studies in three elementary classrooms

Narrator Reference Code _____

Interview number: _____

Interview date: _____

Today's date: _____

1. Main themes or issues that became apparent during this interview
2. Observations
3. Information that relates to the research questions (note page of transcript)
4. Particularly salient stories on the reverse side of this form.

| Question | Page | Information | Comments |
|--|------|-------------|----------|
| Can you describe your teaching path? What drew you to teaching? | | | |
| How did you get where you are today professionally? | | | |
| What do you believe your role and responsibilities are as a teacher? | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Has your perception of your role and responsibilities changed over time? If so, please explain. How do you feel about that?</p> | | | |
| <p>How do you feel about teaching today compared to when you began?</p> | | | |
| <p>How have these changes impacted you as a teacher?</p> | | | |
| <p>How are these changes impacting your students?</p> | | | |
| <p>What particular memories do you have from your career as a teacher? What has been most meaningful for you? What has been most fulfilling? Can you give me examples of these?</p> | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Have you experienced any changes brought about by high-stakes testing or curriculum narrowing?</p> | | | |
| <p>Secondary Questions:</p> <p>How important do you feel non-tested core subjects like social studies, science and the arts are for your students? Please share your thinking.</p> | | | |
| <p>What impact do you think social studies and science have on students?</p> | | | |
| <p>What impact do you think the arts and P.E. have on students?</p> | | | |
| <p>How do you prepare students for 21st century lives and work?</p> <p>How do you plan for social studies instruction?</p> | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>What strategies do you use to help students learn social studies?</p> | | | |
| <p>Do you integrate basic skills into social studies? If so, can you give me some examples of what you do?</p> | | | |

Appendix E: Data Analysis Organizer

| Narrators Themes or patterns | Narrator 1 | Narrator 2 | Narrator 3 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| Global Theme One: High-stakes Accountability | | | |
| Minor Theme 1a: Focus on Tested Subjects: Reading, Writing & Math | | | |
| Minor Theme 1b: Marginalization of Non-tested Subjects | | | |
| Minor Theme 1c: Stress from Less Freedom and Trust | | | |
| Minor Theme 1d: Young Promising Teachers Leaving the Profession/ | | | |
| Global Theme Two: Locus of Control | | | |
| Minor Theme 2a: The Move to Scripted Programs: From Teacher to Facilitator | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Minor Theme 2b: Conflict between Teacher Beliefs and District Directives | | | |
| Minor Theme 2c: Not Enough Time to Teach Everything | | | |
| Global Theme Three: Best Practices for Today's Classrooms | | | |
| Minor Theme 3a: Standards as Professional Duty | | | |
| Minor Theme 3b: Desire for Integrated Approach to Learning with More Hands-on Activities | | | |
| Minor Theme 3c: More Collaboration among Teachers | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Minor Theme 3d Changing Social/Family Structure: The Need to Build Character | | | |
|---|--|--|--|