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A STUDY OF CURRICULUM CUSTOMIZATION IN THE ERA OF STANDARDIZATION
OF EDUCATION

By

SYLVIA A. DIXON MCINERNEY

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education
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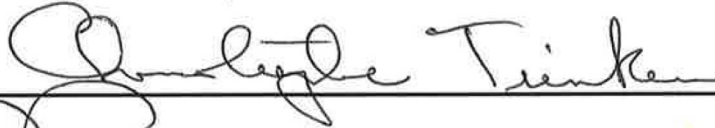#### (please sign and date beside your name)

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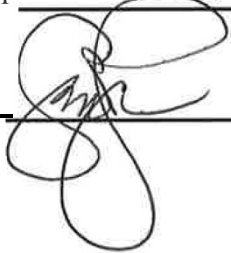
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Abstract

The turn of the 19th Century in the United States was a period of immense economic, social and political growth. The Progressive Era was born out of this rapid change and led to a shift in educational theory creating a debate over curriculum. Curriculum has been a fervent point of discussion among educational theorists and practitioners with politicians and businessmen having all had something to add to the fray. The current movement in curriculum content has been at the forefront since 2010 where education has been besieged by a strong impetus toward standardization. This has taken the form of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core or CCSS). Until the advent of the Common Core the individual States in the United States each had their own curriculum standards that were meant to be guidelines for local curriculum writers. John Dewey, the philosopher and educational theorist wrote that curriculum should be local. In the United States, the movement toward a national curriculum and with this movement is the need for an assessment test(s).   A scripted curriculum, however, does not lead to conceptual change nor does it foster intellectual curiosity. This study focused on whether or not teachers rigidly follow the adopted curriculum and if the teacher's had the power to customize that curriculum in their daily classroom practice. Finally, if the teachers engaged in active curriculum making, what if any, were the measurable or perceived effects in terms of teacher efficacy and in terms empowerment?

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my thanks to my mentor Dr. Michael Kuchar who provided me with a tremendous amount of insight throughout this entire process. When I was in the mire Dr. Kuchar helped me find the way through.

My committee members I would also like to thank for their time, knowledge and support. Dr. Christopher H. Tienken for his generous time in the feedback process and knowledge about the current state of curriculum. Dr. Scott Taylor, who, as an adjunct professor, inspired me to continue my study of curriculum.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful husband Shawn. You have given generously of your love and support in encouraging me to finish this process. To my children Connor and Kelsey who led me to education as a professional vocation. Watching both of you grow and acquire knowledge brought me to this point. Thank you all for your understanding and love.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey (1916) viewed public education as having three essential functions:
economic, socio-civic and avocational. These components were to be complementary with the
goal of educating the whole person. Over time, formal education has come to be viewed as
preparation for the future (Kliebard, 1995). An extension of this premise involves defining a
prescribed course of study that students will follow in order to be prepared for economic
contributions to society. Public education has taken on some of the characteristics of Dewey's
vision, however, in recent years, the focus has narrowed to the economic function of schooling.
The viability of the United States as an economic powerhouse has been tied to the
competitiveness on international benchmark tests such as *Programme for International Student
Assessment* (PISA) and the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS).

The prescribed course of study is known as curriculum. Curriculum has an underlying
central premise: what do students have entitlement to learn (Young, 2013) and this premise
remains central to the delivery of education in the United States. There are contradictory schools
of thought surrounding the topic of curriculum. The issue of essential curriculum for students in
public schools, however, remains fluid and contentious. The question of essential curriculum
should be the underlying supposition for curriculum theorists and practitioners. Tyler (2013)
addressed the issue writing "the educational philosophies recognize that there are base values in
life, largely transmitted from one generation to another by means of education" (p. 5). The
responsibility to transfer the cannon of information assembled by one generation to another is
one responsibility for educators (Young, 2013). Helping students to attain the skills and

knowledge necessary to create new knowledge is another responsibility. Transmitting past knowledge and helping students make new knowledge presents a challenge for the curricularist.

Rousseau (2015) was a romantic naturalist and thought formal curriculum got in the way of a child's learning. Rousseau's view contrasted with that of Dewey (1938) who saw a formal curriculum as necessary. Both men advanced the concept of the making new knowledge when the learner was free from the shackles of inherited learning. The answer to the essential question, what should be taught, has evaded the focus of curricular theorists and has largely been unanswerable. Many theorists have written on different approaches to teaching content. McNeil (2009), for instance, views the purpose of curriculum as a means to closing gaps in thinking. Even Null (2017) notes the use of the term curriculum as "unavoidable" (p. 1) and still poses the question "what is curriculum for". Conceptions of curriculum, historically, fit into four schools of thought: systemic, humanistic, social reconstruction and academic (McNeil, 2009). Each of these schools of thought have different (1) characteristics and purposes, (2) define the roles of the teacher and student differently, and (3) address psychological and developmental benchmarks of the learner. For instance, in a systemic curriculum, content standards are stressed and developed by grade and subject. No Child Left Behind mandated that states develop a standardized curriculum. The result of this mandate is an example of systemic curriculum. A new standardized curriculum needs an assessment method to determine whether this curriculum approach is functioning as designed. Federal education laws have required states to institute standardized assessments to measure the achievement of students. This type of curriculum monitoring approach has historical roots in a Jesuit education that hoped to prescribe what was essential for a young man to know (McNeil, 2009). Null (2017) writes that curriculum is about people. The teachers and students and their interactions and cannot be separated from learning.

Using a systemic curriculum to import learning paradigms and demand that those choices be taught as is fall short of the essence of curriculum. As Null writes, "[c]urriculum is about human beings as much as it is about systems" (Null, 2017, p. 68). The Coalition for Essential Schools has encouraged that the systemic curriculum be returned to local control encouraging the local education authorities to develop their own approach to curriculum.

Curriculum that is imposed from outside the school removes the course of study from the social life of the community (Dewey, 1916). Juxtaposing the regimented systemic curriculum against the humanistic curriculum where the learner is placed in charge of their own learning with the emphasis being on how to learn instead of specific skill sets. Humanists draw on the ancient Greek philosophers incorporating the Socratic Method into their curriculum. Dewey (1916) argued that the problems should be genuine and originating from the student and not from the teacher or a textbook. Modern day education theorists, who prescribe to putting learners in charge of their own learning experience, include Greene (1986) and Kohn (1999). To these thinkers learning is a personal journey where the teachers are facilitators. In the classroom, the relationship between teacher and student is reciprocal with the teacher being a learner and the students are teachers (Dewey, 1916). Learning is subjective (Null, 2016) in this tradition as opposed to objective in the systemic school of thought.

Humanistic theorists relied on an authentic learning experience whereas social reconstruction curriculum focused on changing the societal impacts of inequity through education. The social reconstruction/radical approach to curriculum making views curriculum as a political tool through which society is remade. Freire (2000) believed that citizens in developing countries need to be taught so as to free them from oppression. To Apple (1993), conservative politicians have directed curriculum, which has resulted in the oppression of

minority groups. Addressing the focus of curriculum away from a neo-rightist agenda, the social reconstructionist argue that the good of society is paramount and the individual need subservient (Null, 2017).

Finally, in an academic curriculum, learning is based on subject matter and is the approach that the majority of high schools use today. This curriculum, viewed as a hodgepodge of pedagogical approaches, utilizes performance, theory, experiments and discussions of ideas. Those that promote academic curriculum are inclined to view multiculturalism as a key component (McNeil, 2009) and a means to embrace the strengths of diverse people. Francis W. Parker, a leader in the Progressive education movement (McNeil, 2009) advocated for student choice and a student-centered curriculum. Dewey, (2011) sought a curriculum that was learner centered, self-directed and provided an authentic learning experience. From all the schools of curriculum thought, an academic curriculum is the most relevant to this point in time. Proponents of academic curriculum encourage the development of a "rational mind" (McNeil, 2009, p. 75) but differ on how to achieve this end.

Young (2013) argues that the goal of curriculum should be "access to knowledge" and. " (i)f curricular theorists cannot answer the question then it is more likely that it will be left to the pragmatic and ideological decision of administrators and politicians" (Young, 2013 p. 103). Young's assertion is borne out through the Common Core State Standards. Kliebard (1995) reasoned that the knowledge that schools seek to impart is for some point in the future. Kliebard (1995) also argued that the fundamental problem with schools was to "overestimate" what schools can actually do and a "failure to see the role of the school in relation to other socializing agencies" (p. 198). Finally, Null (2017) maintains that curriculum is about ethics. Public schools in the United States should be concerned with ethical questions in order to promote egalitarian

and democratic principles of this nation. Curriculum should prepare students for lives as "civic participants" (p. 23). Furthermore, Nel Noddings (2006) in her theory of care addressed the current inequities in public schools.

The inability to settle on one national curriculum or one theoretical approach to curriculum is indicative of the uniqueness of spirit and thought in the United States. Until recently, the communities in the United States have developed the curriculum locally. This approach has set the values of the community at the forefront. The greatest impact on learning comes from locally developed curriculum (Tanner & Tanner, 2007; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993; Zhao, 2012). The advent of the Common Core State Standards inches education in the United States closer to a national curriculum. The Common Core State Standards have had a paradoxical effect and may have narrowly constricted teaching and learning. A top down approach cannot achieve measurable outcomes that result in meaningful learning as is evidenced by the failure of the school reform model (Tienken & Orlich, 2013). Currently, the Common Core State Standards and the accompanying high stakes tests utilize the framework of a systemic curriculum in New Jersey. The systemic curriculum tests everyone associated with education: the school, the teacher and the students. "The current education reform environment is populated with performance-guarantee policies and practices that use standardized curriculum expectations and commercially prepared tests to deliver and monitor expected output" (Tienken, 2017a, p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

In the current model of public education in New Jersey, curriculum has been narrowed and constrained by the standardization of learning through a predetermined set of standards. What is to be taught to students is contingent upon a regimented methodology that limits choice

for both the teacher and, more importantly, the students. "The problem with conformity in education is that people are not standardized to begin with." (Robinson & Aronica, p.36)

There is a body of evidence to support the conclusion that proximally or locally developed curriculum (Tyler, 1949; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993; Zhao, 2012,) has a greater impact on student learning and achievement. Recently, Tramaglini and Tienken (2016) argued that the national standards could be used in concert with locally derived and customized curriculum. In a small study (n=117) conducted on high poverty schools in New Jersey, the researchers concluded that the nationalized policy is diametrically opposed to the results of their study. The researchers looked at curriculum as a balancing act between the State's obligation to provide high quality schools and the local education authority's commitment to the values of the community it serves. Consequently, when a curriculum is responsive to the needs and interests of the learner greater acquisition of knowledge occurs.

Conversely, distal curriculum or curriculum that is derived other than locally (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993) has a limited effect on students. Even Tyler (1949) argued for continued "reappraisal" of the lived experience of curriculum and teaching. Ross and Mannion (2012) maintain that learning is related to our place in the world and there is "significance in the diversity of places, materials and persons involved in curriculum making" (p. 304). The United States celebrates diversity. Research reveals that he differences between States and within those States and the needs of the local community add to the tenor of the States. A one-size fits all curriculum does not satisfy the inquiry needs of individual students nor is it culturally responsive.

Consequently, forcing school districts and teachers to adhere to a standardized curriculum bypasses the mission of public education. As a vehicle to achieve social justice, public schools

need to meet the demands of culturally diverse communities. The evidence suggests that the demands and differences in the individual community are not satisfied through the Common Core State Standards alone. Conversely, local education authorities (LEA), in conjunction with their professional faculty should be empowered to adjust and customize adopted curriculum to satisfy the thirst of the students before them. Teachers need to be trusted more in their ability to assess the curriculum and respond to their students thereby increasing the efficacy of the teachers. A shortage of qualitative research that addresses the teachers' level of engagement with the adopted curriculum and the subsequent empowerment to customize the curriculum to the needs of the students they teach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to (1) explore teacher perceptions of curriculum customization. The study also sought to (2) gain insight into teacher perceptions concerning how empowered they feel to make the adjustments/customization to their district's approved curriculum in order to meet the needs of students, (3) how did their perception of empowerment relate to their perception of self-efficacy and (4) what are the teachers perceptions about what it means to customize curriculum. Customized curriculum is defined as one that is proximally developed, at the school level.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive their own decision-making practices or abilities concerning curriculum customization?

2. To what degree do teachers perceive that they are entrusted and empowered to adjust the curriculum?

3. Does curriculum customization have an effect on teachers' perception of self-efficacy?

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4. What are teacher perceptions about what it means to customize curriculum?

Significance of the Study

Standardized curriculum has become rooted in the educational landscape. Coupled with high stakes testing, educators have lost their place of importance in designing lessons that help to promote effective teaching. Some researchers and theorists argue against standardization and employing distal curriculum (Cuban, 2012; Tramaglini & Tienken, 2016; Tienken, 2017; 2017a). These writings have been received as a breath of fresh air in the teaching trenches and to administrators at the local level. Despite these sound empirically based arguments arguing against the trend, standardized curriculum remains viable policy.

Research generally lags behind policy making (Coburn, Hill & Spillane, 2016) however a cogent research plan to study how current policy is impacting classroom experiences is warranted. It should be noted that "[p]olicies tend to shift over time in response to controversies and push-back from constituents." (Coburn, Hill & Spillane, 2016, p. 248) therefore, studies of customizing curriculum will be longitudinal and informative to the curriculum policy debate. When the pendulum shifts away from the CCSS, qualitative research that supports the writings of those who have argued against standardization will provide that data to further bolster the argument away from alignment and standardization.

There is literature to support the benefits of classroom differentiation as Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) write about connecting content to kids through the use of two models: differentiated instruction (DI) and Understanding by Design (UbD). Both approaches to teaching are successful in creating authentic learning experiences to support the acquisition of necessary thinking skills. The current research, however, aims to understand how teachers customize and

change District curriculum. The goal of the research is to add to the body of work that restores the teacher to role of curriculum maker (proximal) and not just curriculum enactor (distal).

The main purpose of my study is to examine how teachers in a high school enact adopted curriculum and if they customize the curriculum to aid the students. If the teachers do interact with the curriculum through customizing how does this affect their perceived efficacy? This study will potentially contribute to the body of literature that influences policy makers at both the State and National levels. Additionally, this study can inform and aid in developing teacher efficacy. Finally, work in curriculum customization can help inform teaching for social justice.

Theoretical Framework

Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky's work in *Mind and Society* (1978) developed the relationship between instruction and supports, theorizing that this relationship contributed to learning outcomes. Vygotsky (1978) disputed three main arguments: (1) learning takes precedence over development, (2) development is a mastery condition and (3) learning depends on development. Vygotsky viewed these theories as "an old pedagogical problem that of formal discipline and the problem of transfer." (p. 81). Vygotsky criticized pedagogical approaches that maintained teaching is a subject that was concerned solely with the mental development and less relevant to a student's daily life as ineffective pedagogy. Development and learning are not separate. Vygotsky viewed formal disciplines of study as problematic. Vygotsky recognized the need for further study but further work did not happen due to his death.

Vygotskian theories were concerned with the development of psychological processes. The Zone of Proximal Development has applicability to the study of curriculum. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) postulated that the closer the curriculum is to the local community the

greater the impact on the learner. Despite the push to a standardized national curriculum, classroom adjusted curriculum provides greater impact on student learning. (Cohen & Ball, 1999). Shawer, Gilmore and Banks-Joseph (2008) examined the impact of teacher curriculum making. In the three models developed by these researchers, constructivist classrooms were central to their theory and held to be in accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development.

Conceptual change model.

Two points from the conceptual change model are significant in framing this study: (a) nature and function of motivation and (b) classroom contextual factors. In the conceptual change model, the paradoxical nature of knowledge influences conceptual change First, prior knowledge can impede conceptual change when the knowledge is not vertical and secondly, prior knowledge sets a framework by which we judge new information. Furthermore, learners have intentions that drive their thinking and they can adapt to the challenges that they face in the classroom. Additionally, four conditions must exist for conceptual change (a) dissatisfaction (b) intelligibility (c) plausibility (d) fruitfulness. Pintrich, Marx and Boyle (1993) used the conceptual change model to inform instruction. They reasoned that the validity of work, which is inherently different for students in a school situation than for scholars in a learning community, should be reassessed to facilitate knowledge transfer. The restructuring of schools and classrooms in order to promote a community of intellectually curious learners would be beneficial. The current iteration of classrooms, schools, and curriculum does not promote the development of scholars. The development of scholars and scholarship is essential to improving intellectual curiosity, which should be the goal of curriculum. There is research that provides anecdotal evidence that schools grounded in bureaucracy (Bohte, 2001; Smith & Larimer, 2004,)

and institutional norms have diminished returns.   Warranted, therefore, is a reversal in traditional approaches to curriculum and instruction that hands authority to the learner and teacher.

Teacher efficacy

In 1978, teacher efficacy was born out of two questions that researchers added to a survey conducted by the RAND Corporation (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Since that time, teacher efficacy has been defined as a type of self-efficacy which grew out of the work of Bandura (1997). Bandura wrote about his four ways to build self-efficacy: mastery experience, social modeling, social persuasion and states of physiology. Bandura (1997) further expounded on how self-efficacy can exert influence: cognitive (self-enhancing), motivational (how obstacles are interpreted), emotional (moods or feelings) and decisional (is there a choice in our experience or situation). The measurement of teacher efficacy is concerned with subject (decisional), context (motivational), self-perception (cognitive) and perceptions teachers have of their students (emotional). Teacher-efficacy is also contingent upon a teacher's perceptions about the ability to make changes and influence learners (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy and Hoy, 1998). There have been a number of measures developed to evaluate the meaning of teacher efficacy (Ashton, Buhr, and Crocker, 1984, Raudenbush, Rowen and Cheong 1992) relying on the Bandura (1997) construct.

Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) developed a concept of *collective teacher efficacy* from Tschannen-Moran, et al. (1998) and incorporates Bandura's (1997) formulation of self-efficacy. The link between teacher-efficacy and student achievement has been documented (Anderson, Greene & Loewen, 1988, Ashton, 1986). The research from Goddard, et al. (2000) developed a theoretical model that suggests that collective teacher efficacy is an extension of

teacher efficacy and determined that "collective teacher efficacy may partially explain the differential effect that schools have on student achievement" (p. 483). Klassen, et al. (2011) concluded that the research is not as strong as previously believed. "Relatively, few studies- 2.8% of total studies from 1998-2009- have been conducted that link teachers; efficacy with student outcomes, with only two studies (0.09% of total studies) examining the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and student outcomes" (p. 40).

In 1998 Tschannen-Moran, et al, argued that teacher-efficacy research was approaching maturity. In a review of teacher efficacy research, Klassen, et al. (2011) noted gains made in the field but also revealed deficiencies in the research. Klassen, et al. (2011) point out insufficient attention to the sources of teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy and also call for more research to advance the field. The limitations of the present research study are confined to teachers' sense of control over what they are teaching. This is only one part of Bandura's model and by no means can be generalized. Klassen (2011) advocates for establishing metrics that would be more suited to the education field and not just incorporating Bandura's model.

Research Design

The study utilized a case study design and qualitative methods for this problem. This study explored teachers' perceptions and understanding of curriculum customization. The lived experience and behaviors of the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2014; Creswell 2014) need to be ascertained to support the exploration of the main basis of this research design. How does the teachers perceptions of curriculum and their comfort level with curriculum customization influences their sense of efficacy? The main data collection involved a set of questions that provided the background for semi-structured interviews where teachers could discuss and

explore their perceptions of the formal curriculum and their classroom experiences with the curriculum.

Limitations

The nature of the questions will be in the design of qualitative research questions and this study will be completed using a small number of participants. Consequently, the findings will not be generalizable to individuals other than the ones involved in the process of this investigation. Although a small sample will be used to complete the research study, the procedures of the study may be repeated on a broader scale to understand the effect of empowering teachers to customize curriculum. The study had a singular focus on curriculum customization and teacher efficacy in isolation of the evaluation process of teacher effectiveness as well as administrative protocol such as lesson planning.

Delimitations

The study will only include tenured teachers because the research questions were intended to explore the experiences of teachers in decision making processes. Achievement of tenure provides security in a position within a school district. Achieving tenure can be viewed a milestone in the professional life of a teacher. Generally, teachers with tenure are more confident in their teaching capabilities.

The high school sampled will not include private schools, magnet schools, vocational schools or specialty high schools.

Definition of Terms

This section defines the key terms for this study. For the purposes of this study:

Curriculum: Curriculum is the body of knowledge deemed important for learners to know and to be taught (Tanner & Tanner, 1980).

Curriculum customization: Curriculum customization is defined as a modification to the adopted curriculum in real time by the educational professionals in the classroom (Tanner & Tanner, 1980).

Distal variable: A variable policy or strategy (national, state, district) that is one step removed from influencing changes in student and school level performance. (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993).

Proximal variable: A variable that directly influences changes in a student and school level performance. This variable is an institutional policy or strategy (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993).

Scripted curriculum: Scripted curriculum is a systematic instruction by way of a script the teacher is required to follow. (Zhao 2012)

Teacher efficacy: A teacher's belief that they are able to influence student achievement and motivation. (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy 2000).

Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study and the research questions put forth by the study. Chapter 2 describes the review of the literature relative to the theory of curriculum and the theoretical foundations of the study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed in the study including a description of the participants, data collection methods and the analyses of that data. Limitations and delimitations are also addressed. Chapter 4 summarizes the data collected through qualitative measures. Chapter 5 analyzes the data collected and provides recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a historical context for the emergence of curriculum in the United States of America. The influence of socio-economic factors on public education is also addressed in order to frame the context for the current curriculum debate. The review also provides some data as to the effect of high stakes testing on the overall learning of students as measured through two international tests and whether or not those tests provide meaningful indicators for standardizing curriculum.

Literature Search Procedures

The research for this study involved the use of predominantly the following databases: EBSCO, JSTOR, ERIC, CINAHL and PROQUEST Dissertation repository. On occasion, the research conducted in Google Scholar proved beneficial but the majority of the search conducted in subscription databases yielded the greatest results. The search terms utilized were place-based curriculum, curriculum customization, curriculum history, curriculum coherence, secondary schools, teacher knowledge, teacher professional authority and teacher development.
Reading John Dewey's books to gain an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of Dewey's progressive model. Books from other theorists contributed to this study: Phenix (1964), Bruner (2003), Piaget (1996), and Vygotsky (1978). The research of Noddings (2015) and Freire (2002), with regard to the culture of care and social justice, informed the discussion. All searches were refined for peer review, year of publication (> 2000), database likelihood as outlined above and journals relating to education and curriculum. The review relies on articles in English but all countries were included in the search.

Historical Perspective of Curriculum

In the earliest days of the United States, the Pilgrims used the Bible as the curriculum (Hodges-Edgar, 2009) and the model for living. In or about 1635, the Pilgrims established a formal Latin school, to educate the leaders of the churches and the government; of course, this was a predominantly-male endeavor. Schools largely continued in this way until the rise of the urban centers at the beginning of the 20th century. With the advent of the industrial factory model of production, employers needed workers to fill factory jobs that spurred the demand for a more skilled workforce. The demand for skilled workers determined the need for more practical instruction in schools to fill these positions. Tied to the economic stability of the country (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2003, Harmon, Oosterbeek, and Walker, 2003) is the success of the schools. This call for more practical knowledge infiltrated American schools (Hodges-Edgar, 2009) and shifted instruction from a model centered on the subject matter   to one that had increasing emphasis on the learner. Nineteen eighteen marked the beginning of curriculum as a field of study (Kliebard, 1995) with a proliferation of writings from educational theorists. In Chicago, John Dewey's progressive theories concerned the role of the school in the life of the child. Dewey, wrote, that the school was a keystone in democracy and framed the conversation about what should be taught (Dewey, 1916). Dewey was a prolific writer who understood the challenges of providing quality education. Dewey saw the need to separate schools from the driving force of national economics.

Among Dewey's concerns was curriculum. Dewey wrote that curriculum was "always getting loaded down with purely inherited...subjects which represented mainly the energy of some influential person or group" (Dewey, 1916, p. 241). A present-day curriculum maker

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knows that this observation remains valid. Nationwide, the prevailing winds have shifted toward

standardized national curriculum and this movement presents a challenge to local autonomy. The

challenge to locally derived curriculum derives from the Federal level and the perceived answers

to the problems most recently isolated in the report entitled *A Nation at Risk (*United States

Commission 1983*).* No Child Left Behind (2001), Race to the Top (2009), the Common Core

State Standards (2010) assessment are iterations of the move toward a national curriculum. The

election of each new President and administration will lead to changes in the United States

Department of Education. The direction of the focus of education are subject to the political

landscape and that direction is linked to the changing winds: ready to change at a moment's

notice. The move at the Federal level is still toward a dual system of public schools: one for the

less well to do and a separate system of charter schools, private schools, and faith-based

institutions for the wealthy. The voices that are the loudest make the most change but the change

is not always beneficial.

Dewey was not the only philosopher to theorize about education but his legacy is relevant

to the discussion around curriculum and teacher role in the dim light of the Common Core

Standards. Dewey (1916) wrote that using standards to judge new experiences for the young

"overlook(s) the danger that standards so taught will be *merely* symbolic; that is largely

conventional and verbal.' (emphasis in the original) (p. 234). Mann (1970) wrote that curriculum

workers must exercise political power. Curriculum is not a research-based decision but one that

is a negotiation of "a complex interaction of forces representing different values, beliefs, and

knowledge systems." (Mann, 1970, p. 23). Teachers are curriculum workers in that they must

work with the curriculum in order to adapt it to aid the learning of all of the students in their

classes. As such, teachers must be able to manipulate the curriculum so that the learner has a

local experience. The learner must also be part of this negotiation. Ross and Mannion (2012) used the conceptual theory of dwelling in places to frame their discussion of curriculum making through the coming "together of teachers, learners, questions, interests and places" (p. 312). Chesler (1970) advocated for shared power with students in many areas of school life. For Chesler (1970), curriculum is one area that is immediately transferable to students for decision-making. Children cannot be separated from learning and content cannot be separated from experience (Dewey, 2011). Yet this is what has happened in education. Learning derives from local lived experiences (Freire, 2002; Rousseau, 2015; Tyler, 1949) and not from the theoretical concepts of learning in isolation in a classroom. Standards and learning expectations, foisted upon teachers and learners, should not be shouldered blindly. Teachers must become active curriculum makers and customizers to increase student outcomes.

Philosophical Theory of Curriculum

The works of Jerome Bruner (2003) John Dewey (1938), Maria Montessori (1988), Jean Piaget (1996), and Lev Vygotsky (1978) contributed to the framing of this study in terms of understanding how learning takes place within the process of education . These philosophers and theorists furnished to the body of work background knowledge concerning how the mind operates and the effect education has on developing thought. Bruner's philosophy (1979) concentrated on learning as an active process with knowledge constructed based on previous experiences. Dewey (1916, 1938) believed it was the child's experience that created an ideal learning environment. Piaget wrote extensively on the thinking processes of a child and how do we know (Singer & Revenson, 1996). Maria Montessori (1938) believed in child directed work and uninterrupted time on task as an essential component to learning. Vygotsky's work on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), while not fully developed by Vygotsky due to his early

death, identified   a relationship between instruction and learning.   All together, these theorists laid important groundwork in the development of curriculum.

In the United States, Frederick Taylor's work on the scientific curriculum overshadowed child centered theorists. Frederick Taylor and his scientific model (Taylor, 1911) was used by many businesses. Taylor broke work down into the smallest parts influencing the organization of the school. This model is significant because we have operated schools created in the Taylor industrial model for over a century. Education continues to utilize Taylor's vision and paradigm for organization of the learning environment despite robust scholarship on the ideal learning environment. Franklin Bobbitt (1918, 1924) borrowed Taylor's scientific model to develop curriculum as a life activity analysis, which resulted in the subject matter curriculum (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) the biggest problem with the Bobbitt approach revolved around the activity. The analysis of the activity, however, is the adult's activity and not that of the learner.

 Greene (1972), Kohn (1999), and William Pinar (1992) maintain an existentialist approach to curriculum making where the student is empowered to make choices about curriculum. Curriculum was "re-conceptualized" by Pinar in his 1975 paper *The Method of Currere*. Believed by many to be the (Null, 2017) father of personalized curriculum, Pinar focused on the needs of the learner and the construction of knowledge that the learner experiences. Pinar (1992) wrote that knowledge and curriculum should be free from the industrialized curriculum utilized in schools today. Pinar re-conceptualized Dewey's model.

Standardization of Curriculum

Franklin Bobbitt believed that standards were necessary to improve education (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) and educators were pushed out of the discussion. Educators were only required to focus on the how to teach but the content of what they are charged with teaching is removed

from their control. Dewey considered that education mirrored larger social movements. At the turn of the century, all major institutions (the home, business, medicine) were efficiency driven and education was no different. Bobbitt fostered the belief that curriculum was to prepare the learner for specific activities or jobs that they would be required to fulfill (Tanner & Tanner, 1980). This was in contrast to what Dewey wrote about In *Experience and Education* (1938), John Dewey succinctly defined education as an interaction between the learner and what is learned. Furthermore, according to Bobbitt (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) adults decide curriculum for students based on what would be useful in the future; there is no connection to the present life of the student. Learning becomes an abstraction for the students.

The current curriculum paradigm for the organization of public-school dates back to 1893 when the *Committee of Ten* drove the vision of what was essential for high schools to teach: English, science, mathematics, history and foreign language. The *Committee of Ten* were elite university men who sought to standardize the curriculum and reduce choice and electives for students. Rather than choice, there should be a narrow academic curriculum. When reading the report from the *Committee of Ten* (Mackenzie, 1894) it is clear that the authors were concerned with boys who were predominantly educated in boarding schools. Education, largely, has not moved from this attention to male dominated cultural focus. At the collegiate level, the offering of women's studies classes and other culture-based courses appear however, during primary and secondary education, little reference made to the role of women, African-Americans or other cultural groups and their contribution to the collective knowledge. The *Committee of Ten* (Mackenzie, 1894) report makes some timely recommendations, that when viewed through the lens of history are still not entirely palatable. The *Committee* pushed for more years of secondary school and blamed the boys' mothers for the term of learning reduced to four years. It

is noteworthy that at the beginning of the report, the authors write "[i]n any scheme of educational work regard must be paid to local conditions and to historic antecedents" (p. 148).

Education has regarded the historical antecedents mentioned in this report but not the local conditions. The standardized curriculum (Common Core State Standards, 2017) proposed through the disciplinary course of study and emphasizing benchmarks removes local control. Furthermore, the *Committee of Ten* report (Mackenzie, 1894) recommended inquiry and discovery which are absent from current manifestations of curriculum and instruction. Subject matter molded into a disciplinary model isolates the subject and does not lead to holistic learning (Rogers, 1997). The curricular pattern followed by most secondary schools does not allow students to construct their own meaning. Essentially, school leadership, for over one hundred years of teaching (Vare & Miller, 2000) have followed the same course sequence. The operation of public school is dictated by the State of NJ. The number of days, the amount of instructional time, and the scope of curriculum (i.e. health, character and anti-bullying education) are all dictated from outside the walls of an individual school. For the most part, discovery is not encouraged but rote memorization of small amounts of facts is the norm (Freire, 2000).

Within twenty years of the reforms of the 1890s, the common academic curriculum deemed to be no longer a valid approach to learning and tracking had begun. In the United States, tracking schoolchildren of the same age and ability levels (college preparatory, general and those that would enter the job market right after high school) began and this model continued into the 1970's (Cuban, 2012). The report that comes after the *Committee of Ten* (Mackenzie, 1894) report was the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (NEA, 1918). The *Cardinal Principles* were a set of goals espoused for secondary education students. Kliebard (1995) argued that goals are something we arrive at not something that we set in advance. "A good

curriculum is one that purveys knowledge and understanding to enrich children's lives and that allows them to act effectively in the time and place they now occupy" (p. 197). The *Cardinal Principles*, aligned with perceived future occupations, guided the course of study in high school. The courses available to the students were limited to the perceived role on the social ladder, often dictated by economic class or IQ. As such, the *Cardinal Principles* (1918) worked to modify the purely academic curriculum that the *Committee of Ten had* espoused. Amid the standardization of curriculum emerged the eight-year study, which sought to prove that curriculum developed at the local level could increase student achievement (Aiken, 1942). The study, started in 1932, followed students for four years of high school and four years of college. The study paired students in the control group with students from standard high schools. The study found that the students from high schools with locally derived curriculums had increased student achievement. Despite these findings, Tyler, the lead evaluator of the Eight Year Study, wrote the *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949), to share a framework for educational purposes with the schools. In this seminal treatise, Tyler focused on the learner's life outside of school. Although Tyler's has be harshly criticized (Hlebowitsh, 1995) because of a perceived formulaic approach to curriculum, Tyler (1949) made no attempt to universally answer the questions about curriculum and instruction recognizing that it would vary from one school to another . "The purpose of the rationale is to give a view of the elements that are involved in a program of instruction and their necessary attacks" (Tyler, 1949, p, 128). For Connelly (2013) setting standards is not curriculum and it may be nothing more than the mere exercise of structure and control.

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s are historically eras of unrest both domestically and internationally. Student protest in the 1960 was set against the cultural norms of post-World War

II and the expectations of an individual's role in society forced change within the United States. Curricular choice was one of those changes and led to high schools adding in flexible choice leading to student empowerment (Chesler, 1970, Lee & Ready, 2009, Mann, 1970). A curriculum differentiated, courses became vertically aligned (i.e. regular, honors. AP) as well as horizontally aligned gave students greater curricular choice. Some schools offered more course choices that were relevant to their students' lives (Lee & Ready, 2009).

In the preface to *The Process of Education* (1977), Jerome Bruner wrote that curriculum is more for the teacher and less for the student. The movement toward curricular choice and student customization continued for roughly twenty years until another committee issued a report: *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The most fervent movement away from Dewey and Bruner's writings came about from this report. Through the acceptance of this report as gospel, schools became the scapegoats for the problems of the nation. The report, released during the recession, did not address issues that were facing the United States in 1983: economic tension caused by the recession, shifting demographics, or a failure in foreign policy. Rather the report-blamed public schools for the failure of American competitiveness. *A Nation at Risk* (1983), again, redirected the focus of the role of schooling from education to economics. Connelly (2014) argues that the reform movement that ensued from *A Nation at Risk* was more about authority than it was about curriculum. Education tied to the economy emerged as the prevailing theory. Improving education affected and` improved the economic outlook of the state (Mehta, 2015) and in some manner; this dichotomy tied itself to school reform.

Published in April 1983, the *Nation at Risk* report asserted that external testing could measure performance and, in turn, paved the way for the standards movement (Mehta, 2015). The report also favored less electives and more emphasis on the "core courses": math, language

arts, science and social studies. Since 2002, four major reform initiatives: No Child Left Behind (2003), Race to the Top (2009), Common Core Content Standards (2009) and Partnership for Assessment for Readiness for College and Careers (2017) inundated education. The movements are ways to manage schools and intended to improve student outcomes. In 1993 a report from Sandia Laboratories contradicted *A Nation at Risk.* The Sandia report remained largely overlooked until the *Journal of Education Research* in 1994 printed the report (Ansary, 2007) Schools were not failing but had actually showed modest gains (Stedman, 1994) As Mehta (2015) points out "history has also shown that top-down technocratic approaches have limited power in generating school improvement." (Mehta, 2015 p. 26). Additionally, research by Schmidt and Prawatt (2006) revealed that national control of curriculum does not necessarily lead to greater outcomes.

The advent of competency-based teacher education (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) reduced the role of teachers as professionals to teachers as technicians. Proper professional development afforded to teachers will enable meaningful and local curriculum development. Added to this diminishing role of teachers as curriculum makers, the Governors of the individual states as well as business leaders developed the Common Core State Standards as a way to "teacher proof" (Kohn, 1994, p 94) curriculum. Present day reformers seek to remove from the equation the delivery of efficient and meaningful education by the people who are integral to that equation: teachers. "Fundamental reform of American education depends in part on a serious rethinking of the very heart of teaching and learning - the curriculum" (Rogers, 1997, p. 683). Rather than homing in on the delivery of education as a reform mandate, a better question would be why we teach what we do (Dewey, 2011).

The reform efforts of the early 1980s has primarily focused on school restructuring and increasing graduation requirements (Lee & Ready, 2009) but missed the variables of teaching and learning. Perhaps the reason these reform efforts remain palatable is that they required little substantive change. Without including the two variables of teaching and learning in the standards movement the equations for increased student outcomes remains unsolvable. The reform of *A Nation at Risk* again morphed and while the standards movement remained strong, a more narrowed approach began to emerge in the 1990s. Morton Adler wrote his *Paideia Proposal* (1998) and promoted the concept that education for all children would be the same and, in part, was based on the subjects taught to an economically privileged class. The flawed premise behind *The Paideia Proposal* is evident because achieving equality in education does not occur by forcing all students (Noddings, 2013) into the same course of study. A version of the curriculum reforms efforts of *The Paideia Proposal* have taken hold in some high schools. In 1997 Chicago, for example, enacted a curriculum based on "College Prep for All" (Lee & Ready 2009). The curriculum policy of college preparation for all includes expanded AP offerings at the upper levels; however, this policy does not take into account the level of preparation the student receives before entering high school. A recent trend in AP scores indicates that students are not scoring at the pass level and may be due to lack of preparation for AP level work at the younger grades (Judson & Hobson, 2013;Iatarola, Conger & Long, 2011; Rauh, 2013;Sadler, 2010.)

The most comprehensive and rigorous exposure to learning may seem egalitarian. The question remains what is essential for a student to know. Do all students need to be on a college track or is it better for a student to be an informed citizen of the world? "An education worthy of its name will help its students to develop as persons, to be thoughtful citizens, competent parents,

faithful friends, capable workers, generous neighbors and lifelong learners" (Noddings, 2006).
The focus of education should be to expand the mind despite the shift in "motivation of learners
from *internal ends*-often expressed as "learning for its own sake:' and dismissed as elitist, but
crucial to the intellectual development of all students-to the external ends such as employability"
(Young, 2013, p 106 emphasis in original).

The realities of teaching, inherent in public schools today, involve extrinsic forces that
influence a student's cognitive development. Hunger tied to food insecurity, absenteeism, and
failure to complete homework due to de facto parenting responsibilities coupled with a lack of
engagement with subject matter content taught due to relevance to a child's actual lived world
contribute to learning. Unconsidered in standardized curriculum at any level are social factors

Curriculum Customization

Curriculum thought and practice, mired in the status quo established by a post-World
War II economy, constrains learning. "Schools still tend to be modeled after the assembly-line
factory" (Pinar, 2004 p. 230). The workplace no longer represents an assembly line as society
and economic forces have evolved from an industrial model to a corporate model of
management. Corporate management has different tiers of structure. Depending upon the size of
the organization different approaches will work best (Yukl, 2013). The functional structure
approach works for small businesses where each department can support its own mission and
relies on the knowledge of its workers. This type of management inhibits communication and
collaboration and is applicable to school districts. School leadership falls within the functional
structure approach but it does not mirror the managerial style of being consultative or democratic
which, in all likelihood, stems from top down mandates from the State Department of Education.
In an article in the Harvard Business Review, the problem of managing urban school districts is

addressed extensively. The article points out that there has been no solution to achieving excellence on a large scale. There are pockets of improvement and even charter school, which were supposed to be the panacea of reform models only succeed at a 20% rate. (Childress, Elmore & Grossman, 2006) Further, the article concedes that schools are not businesses and cannot be operated as such due to the variety of stakeholder.

The manner in which to operate a school is contentious which begs the question what chance does curriculum have? Curriculum thought has not changed because that would present challenges to preconceived conceptions on what is the correct and prescribed course of learning (Lachat, 2001). State mandated curriculum content and assessment policies influence the content of local curriculum and how that content is taught. In some cases, curriculum documents remain static writings (Ross & Mannion, 2012) and do not address how students are to interact with the world. "Curricular documents tend to encourage the view of the learner as an 'exhabitant' rather than an 'inhabitant'" of Earth (See Ignold cited in Ross & Mannion, 2012, p. 308). To Ross and Mannion (2012) a curriculum is to be lived and not just a representation of the world.

Grounded in the industrial model of schooling that may have been suitable for the 20th Century the Common Core State Standards do not meet the needs of modern learners. At the Common Core website, the standards touted as "Based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills" (Common Core Website, 2016). A review and comparison of the Common Core State Standards to the older New Jersey Core Content Standards (Sfarzo, Tienken & Kim 2016) found them to be less challenging. Darling-Hammond (2000) calls for a more robust curriculum. Young (2013) advocates for a defining moment in curriculum theory moving away from standards and indicators to a knowledge-based approach to curriculum. In Young's (2013) model, students are encouraged to think of learning as a means

and to move the emphasis from career preparation as the sole motivating factor to where does this knowledge lead me.

Until the advent of the Common Core initiative, individual States in the United States each had their own curriculum standards that were guidelines for local curriculum writers. Although, the writers of the Common Core standards claimed that curriculum would still be local or state driven, Tienken and Orlich (2013) argue that it is merely an illusion. Those authors are in good company. John Dewey, the philosopher and educational theorist, wrote in his work *Experience and Education* (1938) that curriculum should be local. Further, Dewey believed "that the educator cannot start with knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in doses." (p. 82). Dewey railed against a prescriptive curriculum based solely upon adult conceptions. Despite Dewey and the research that has followed him, governments around the world are betting on a thin course of study (Zhao, 2012) and this wager has narrowed curriculum.

In *The Child and the Curriculum*, Dewey (2011) wrote about the experiences a child has with school and curriculum. Dewey insisted that education "[a]bandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience...see it as something fluid (p.16). The debate continues around what should be taught in public schools and how it should be taught. This has been a fervent point of discussion among educational theorists and educational practitioners. Historically, politicians and businesspersons have all had something to add to the fray. The current movement in curriculum content has been at the forefront since 2010. Cyclical changes in the social and political landscape continue to add to the firestorm. Businesses, like *Achieve, Inc.*, have nuanced their way into the debate about failing schools and illiterate citizens. Resultantly, schools are constantly barraged by opinions that are not grounded in data and offer little to no empirical research to balance their claims (Tramaglini

& Tienken, 2016). Decisions about curriculum should result from deliberative action that is reflective (McNeil, 2009) and derived from local control rather than a top down approach.

Curriculum customization is the cyclical process of curriculum development. Tanner and Tanner (1980) wrote about levels of curriculum development. Recognizing that teachers are presented with packaged curriculum and the mandate to deliver it as presented, they classified schools to be at one of three levels. Level 1 schools are imitative-maintenance; Level 2 Meditative and Level 3 Generative-creative. The principle resources for level 1 and 2 are: textbooks, subject by subject teaching, adaption of packaged curriculum and the principal or some other administrator becoming the authority. At Level 3, the resources are expanded with teaching across subjects and grade levels encouraged. Pupils, teachers and colleagues in fact the entire education community are involved in curriculum development. Tanner and Tanner (1980) recognized that most teachers are at Level 1, not necessarily because they choose to be but because "teachers have been and continue to be treated as technicians" (p. 639). Dewey (1904) thought teacher evaluation should aid in developing a reflective practioneer, where teachers are expected to use professional judgement to improve instruction. Instead, in New Jersey, teacher evaluation models (e.g.: Danielson, Marzano) have become the lens through which to evaluate teacher performance.

In the United States, the movement in the 21·st Century is toward a national curriculum. Subsequently, the movement to a national curriculum has propagated the need for assessment test(s). These tests, which claim to be rigorous and to test what is essential for the real world in the 21st Century, are not without controversy (Tienken & Orlich, 2013). The claim is that these assessments will be able to assist in the preparation of students and serve as the salvation for public schooling. Tienken and Orlich (2013) argue that the body of conclusions

reached by the advocates of the charter and voucher movements are non-research based. These authors also conclude that the findings reached by these proponents are detrimental to the foundation of democratic institutions: especially to public education. Despite evidence the Common Core standards still maintain prominence in the curriculum landscape. The report *A Nation at Risk,* (1983) and the ensuing programs to "fix" education in the United States (NCLB, 2003, RTTP, 2009) have not resulted in improvements in test scores. The test scores from NAEP, PISA, TIMSS as well as the PARCC results, evidence this outcome. These tests show no improvement in student achievement even after the reform movement treatment is applied. That is Simpson's Paradox at work. When disaggregated by poverty levels, US students score at the top of the world and all subgroups have experienced growth on NAEP (Tienken, 2017a).

The results, from National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP 2011) represent a larger picture of the impact of standardized learning on the lives of students. Research conclusions concerning the implementation of the Common Cores State Standards (Tienken & Orlich, 2013) and test results have not demonstrated appreciable difference in the measurements of learning

Trend in NAEP Reading and Mathematics Scores for 17-year old. These are all aggregate data and generally useless because they do not show the underlying changes in demographics and socio-economics over time.

Table 1.

NAEP Average Scale Scores
- Average scale scores for grade 12 Mathematics, by all students [TOTAL] and jurisdiction: 2015, 2013, 2009, and 2005

Year	Jurisdiction	Average scale score
2015	National	152
2013	National	153
2009	National	153
2005	National	150

- Average scale scores for grade 12 English, by all students [TOTAL] and jurisdiction: 2015, 2013, 2009, and 2005

Year	Jurisdiction	Average scale score
2015	National	287
2013	National	288
2009	National	288
2005	National	286

The same report reveals that the mathematics scores are not significantly different from 2005 when a new framework was established. These results, from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2011), represent the larger picture of the impact of standardized learning on the lives of students.

The impetus toward the Common Core originated in concern about the comparison of the United States students to international students (Loveless, 2017). A report from the Brown Center (Loveless, 2017) looked at results from two international assessments: Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The results of these tests have been relatively unexceptional. On PISA, the trend since 2000 when PISA began, demonstrated a weak correlational relationship (Loveless, 2017). TIMSS results are slightly more promising and have been since 1995. Loveless (2017) argues that comparing the United States students with students from other counties "must be done with caution" (p.11).

Table 2 U.S.

PISA Education Data 15-year-old (2000-2015)

	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015
Reading	504	495	–	500	498	497
Math		483	474	487	481	470
Science			489	502	497	496

(Kastberg; Chan & Murray, 2016)

Scripted curriculum coupled with time spent on teaching to the test (Zhao, 2012) has resulted in a funneling of the curricular objectives. "A narrowly scripted curriculum does not lead to conceptual change nor does it foster intellectual curiosity or lifelong learning (p.10) Dover (2013) calls for further research to explore how teaching for social justice will allow students to exceed the narrowly drawn parameters of an "achievement". Tienken (2017) argues that the PISA scores evaluation was misleading. Tienken (2017) further deconstructs the erroneous conclusions reached relative to the interpretation of the PISA scores. The international test, for example, compares the United States to single cities (Shanghai, Macao, & Hong Kong) where the poverty level is not comparable to the United States. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) the United States has the highest level of childhood poverty among industrialized nations. Poverty has a negative effect on standardized test scores (Gorski 2012; Tienken, 2017). Additionally, the school experience has less to do with the achievement gap and more to do with economic disparity (Berliner, 2013).

Theoretical Frameworks

Vygotsky characterized the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) as a relation between instruction and supports in order to achieve optimal learning outcomes. ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The relationship between ZPD and curriculum is a *design experiment* in which the child actively creates curriculum (Zuckerman, 2003, p. 177). Vygotsky's writings led the way for the theory of scaffolding and sequencing of activities to create meaningful learning environments. Jerome

Bruner furthered the concept of scaffolding and expanded the concept through his spiral curriculum. Bruner thought that the spiral curriculum and discovery learning would allow students to become active participants (Bruner, 1979). Learning tied to the culture in which the student lives has power to motivate the student. To Bruner, formal curriculum was less important than the role of the teacher to mediate learning activities. "The means for aiding and abetting a learner is sometimes called a 'curriculum' and what we have learned is that there is no such thing as the curriculum. For in effect, a curriculum is like an animated conversation on a topic that can never be fully defined, although one can set limits upon it" (Bruner, 1996 p. 115-116).

Proximal is defined as nearer to the center of the body. Used in the present argument concerning curriculum proximal equates to curriculum derived locally. According to Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1993), Federal and State policies are distal variables and have less direct impact on student learning. "Simply instituting new policies, whether state, district, or school level, will not necessarily enhance student learning." (Wang, Haertel, Walberg, 1993, p. 24). The meta-analysis performed by Wang, Haertel, Walberg (1993) leads to the finding that proximal variables have the strongest influence on school learning. There were two major findings from the meta-analysis: the actions of "students, teachers and parents matter most to student learning" (p. 27). Removing curriculum from local control creates a dissonance between engagement and learning (Tienken & Orlich, 2013). The policies enacted at district, state or federal levels have limited effect on learning and that effect only occurs when those distal policies influence the proximal variables. (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1994). Ironically, state, district, and school policies that have received the most attention in the last decade of educational reform appear least influential on learning. "Changing some remote policies, even if they are well intentioned and well-funded must focus on proximal variables in order to result in improved practices in

classrooms and homes, where learning actually takes place" (Wang, Haertel & Walberg 1993, p. 28).

Ultimately, the adoption of the Common Core has removed curriculum from the local community, which has had the most impact on the acquisition of knowledge and placed in on the national stage. While curriculum can be derived outside of the school "at some point come in contact with the reality of a specific school and classroom context." (Null, 2017, p.31). Advocates for local curriculum development (Zhao, 2012) urge teachers and administrators to take back control on curriculum. Tienken (2017) writes that curriculum should be unstandardized in order to serve the actual needs of the students. Both Tanner and Tanner (2007) and Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1993) have demonstrated the need for local control. Teachers as real time curriculum makers control the learning environment. Ausabel (1968) claims that it is the learner's' current knowledge that has the most profound impact. Figuring out what the learner already knows is well within the purview of the classroom teacher.

Although the reformers seek to remove control of curriculum from local forces, there is one area that national reformers do not have a lock on and that is the effect of teacher- student interaction in the learning paradigm. In a culture of caring, (Noddings, 2005) educators can have the most profound impact on student learning.

The closest variable to student engagement and learning is the interaction with their classroom teacher. A caring informed teacher has the ability to customize the taught curriculum to value the student and stay true to their motivations for entering the profession. Noddings asks where the curriculum maker should begin (Thornton, 2001). In teaching, there is a pre-active view, which allows for planning of materials for instruction and is how most teachers practice their craft today. As early as 1976 Noddings was writing about the notion of curriculum referring

to pre-planned activities. Noddings wrote that curriculum should be interactive but is "at odds with common usage; materials labeled as 'curriculum' must be labelled 'potential curriculum'" (Noddings, 1976, p.34). This application of curriculum to learning fails to create a meaningful connection (Hunter, 2004) to the students. Noddings advocates an interactive engagement so that all the forces that exist in a classroom work in harmony. "The natural flexibility of the teacher in his relationship with individual students is lost as both labor under the press of prescribed materials." (Noddings 1976, p. 39). Rather than the attainment of all students learning and achieving X, what did each individual student learn (Thornton, 2001). Teachers must move their role from the sage on the stage to one of a facilitator who can establish learning environments that increase student engagement. Noddings and others (e.g. Charney, 2002; Kohn, 2000; O'Brien, Weissberg & Shriver, 2009; Watson, 2004) argue as to the necessity for all high school students to follow the sequence of courses established for college entrance exams and to incorporate more social emotional learning into the curriculum. Teachers must look to the students they are actively teaching, assess their motivations and interest and customize the curriculum and learning environment to activate interest and establish competence.

Contrary to the philosophy behind the standards movement, the goal of education is not to produce the same for everyone (Noddings, 2006). Educators succeed when the learner has achieved a holistic understanding. To further this understanding, the needs of a student should also be meet. Students educated in a caring environment are more inclined to take risks with their learning. Conversely, disciplinary problems can be better managed in a culture of caring. (Noddings, 2007). Darling-Hammond (1997) conducted a large study in suburban districts in California. and found that teachers needed flexibility in their approach to teaching. Teachers also

felt formal policies more often than not hindered them. The relationships the teachers built with the students and the culture of caring and served to motivate students.

Teacher self-knowledge dictates their understanding of autonomy as a professional marker (Gerrard & Farrell, 2014; McNeil, 2009). The collective teacher efficacy of a school (Goddard, Woolfolk- Hoy & Hoy, 2000) had its foundational basis in Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. Bandura's theory rests on the collective belief in a teacher's ability to affect student achievement. . Teachers may have an understanding of subject matter, pedagogy and curriculum but their understanding of themselves as professionals can be limited. A portion of the teaching corps views themselves as an industrial 9-5 worker without autonomy. That may be a function of the structure of the school day and the working on a defined schedule. However, teachers versed in curriculum development (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) become the professionals needed to develop and implement local curriculum. The professional judgement of a teacher, often second-guessed by policy makers, may be due in part to the general experience of attending school. This lack of perceived autonomy (Gerrard & Farrell, 2014) has affected both teacher efficacy and self-knowledge. The access to resources for teachers (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) will lead to improved curriculum and learning outcomes. Additionally, customizing curriculum in real time can provide meaningful improvements to teacher efficacy.

Institutionally, when teachers perceive themselves to be as constrained as students (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000) there is limited effect on student achievement. Teachers that do not feel empowered to make changes to curriculum or school policy because of top down management and control mechanism in place at individual schools have a decreased feeling of control. In an early study Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy and Hoy (1998) focused on the beliefs of teachers and not the cultural factors. When teachers feel that they have a great deal of

autonomy and influence on school-based decision it has been shown to be a substantial influence on student outcomes and achievements as well as student motivation (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk- Hoy, 2000). The perceived lack of the ability or authority   to make changes to the curriculum and interpret and interact with the curriculum on the fly creates a culture of paralysis. Paulo Freire (2000) writings rest on the assumption that autonomy is necessarily ethical. Teachers cannot assume the role of the bank and force deposits on students of information. "Unfortunately, however...leaders often fall for the banking line of planning program content from the top down" (Freire, 2000, p.77). There must exist an active making of knowledge and critical awareness. The empowerment of teachers to assume the role of active curriculum makers is at the heart of this study.

Using the conceptual change theory (Posner, Strike, Hewson & Gertzog, 1982), as a metaphor, Feldman (2000) developed a practical conceptual change model to articulate how teachers can make decisions that would "support, equity, social justice and human rights" (Feldman, 2000, p. 606). The study was limited and produced inconsistent results but did find that teacher communities that supported conversations without supervisory presence provided a means to encourage modifications of beliefs. To fulfill the democratic mission of public schools, curriculum must remain fluid and interactive; a static curriculum cannot achieve equity in education. "The foundations of curriculum instruction and assessment ought to be keenly linked to pluralism and democratic principles" (Suleiman, 2004, p. 5).

Noddings (2005) model for using the ethic of care to enhance learning in schools is an extension of the cold conceptual change model. Noddings (2005) model has four components: modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. Modeling involves caring for our students even if they are too young to understand the concept of care teachers must show them how to care for

others. Part of that modeling involves adjusting curriculum to meet the needs of learners. Modeling can equate to the goal orientation that Pintrich, Marx and Boyle (1993) argue for in their model of conceptual change. Classroom factors have been shown to be more influential (Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992) in determining student's goals. The current classroom structures do not allow for students to internalize material but find a basis in measuring student achievement based on grades alone (Kohn, 1992).

Secondly, Noddings (2007) urges dialogue that is complete and not just one sided. Learning to listen to each other is as Noddings argues a moral imperative because it helps to create connections with each other and binds us together. Noddings advocated for truly listening and arriving at understanding. Student's understanding of the amount of control they have over their own learning, their self-efficacy (Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993) may have impact on their learning. Utilizing, Noddings (2005) dialogue factor to address student's perceptions of control presents an opportunity to create the conceptual change that Pintrich, Marx and Boyle, (1993) advanced in their theory of cold conceptual change.

Thirdly, practice in caring is essential for this model to work. Schools have developed community service requirements, Noddings cautions against creating these requirements without developing an understanding of the practice of caring. Goals, values and beliefs are essential to conceptual change (Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993). Students given the opportunity to practice their caring will be able to establish a culture of caring. Student understanding of self-efficacy correlates to their understanding of being able to complete an assignment. When students feel that they have control over their learning and course of study they begin to make self-directed lifelong learning a focus. Finally, confirmation of the good in every student is encouraged. It is not formulaic, or a one size fits all approach, but an individual trait recognized by a caring and

compassionate community of learners. Teachers are not only recognizing the positive attributes of each student, but all members of the community learn it. These beliefs relate to the process of conceptual change. Students who believe they have control are likely to perform better academically (Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993).

Additionally, devising and teaching for social justice can inform curriculum customization. In a construct that enables social justice knowledge, only a locally derived curriculum can reach the needs of achieving a socially just learning environment (Dover, 2013). In order to enhance equity in teaching and learning, the content must "reflect community and student concerns and interests" (p. 8). Curriculum must accommodate the students in the classroom and requires teacher modification to address pedagogical practices. Teachers must be empowered by administrators who trust their knowledge and pedagogical skill in order to become active educational participants. Socially just curriculum requires teachers to critically self-reflect (Kegan, 2000) and adjust their conceptions. There can be no one defined curriculum that adequately teaches social justice but is teacher dependent (Johnson, Oppenheim & Suh, 2009). Teaching for social justice can support the need for teacher generated curriculum customization.

Pintrich, Marx, and Boyle (1993) argue that perceptions of control over learning might help explain learning. This conceptual change model could also be of value in understanding teachers' roles in customizing curriculum to meet the needs of the learners before them. Conceptual changes will result if the teachers are dissatisfied with the current system. Teachers may have reached critical mass in their level of frustration of teaching to the test. A caring leader allows teachers some autonomy in curriculum decisions in individual classrooms (Noddings, 2006). Differentiation in instruction is a widely accepted pedagogical model but the same

approach to curriculum is not as widely received. Theoretical models frame conversations and studies but the implementation of those models requires a nuanced approach.

Public education in the United States is a social institution linked to the process of living a well-rounded life in a participative democracy, not preparation for employment. Rousseau (2005) in *Emile* argued for teaching compassion to enhance the social order and as a means to the ends of freedom.   Teachers, with the backing of educational leaders, should be encouraged to take curriculum customization into their own hands. Curriculum must derive locally with teachers as facilitators. (Dewey, 2013; Pinar, 1992) Research has shown (Tanner & Tanner, 2007; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993) through the development of a proximal curriculum coupled with a cadre of caring teachers (Noddings, 2006) students can use the curriculum to make sense of the world and positively affecting student achievement.

Conclusion

Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003) argue for a "renaissance" in curriculum theory in the United States. The field of curriculum has been bifurcated and "[t]he US curriculum field in general, and re-conceptualist theory in particular, need to confront frankly the relationship between theory and practice " (p. 433.) Measuring the curriculum field against Schwab's (1969) signs of crisis, the authors concluded that curriculum theory in the United States is in crisis. More than a decade later, curriculum remains in crisis mode. Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003) proffered a need to define the field of curriculum that should be constrained to "the life and programme of the school" (p. 430).   Teachers in classrooms should re-shape the curriculum (Powell 2011) to the social forces students are experiencing. The biggest contributor to student success remains the classroom teacher. In an article from UNESCO, the debate over curriculum, addressed from an international perspective, advocates for social justice as well as local control

over curriculum. A curriculum that merely lists standards, learning objectives, and indicators is not "helping renew our vision of the education system as a facilitator of learning opportunities (Tedesco, Opertiti & Amadio, 2014, p. 542). Restoring the teacher to a role in curriculum making and as a professional in the classroom will have the greatest impact on student achievement (Powell, 2011). The ultimate proximal value to student learning.

The world outside of education demands an incredible amount from the stakeholders within the public education sphere. The attempt to meet all of the standards, objectives and disciplinary core indicators have obfuscated the core mission of education. Rather than trying to prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created nurturing and empowering learners should be the goal of education. The 21st Century skills (P21, 2017) along with American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Standards for the 21st Century Learner (2009) are transferable to all discipline areas and across all grade levels. Both of these "standards" stress dispositions that aid creativity, collaboration and critical thinking. These guidelines modified and developed into locally derived curriculum that value the community from where they arise. Both of these writings enable students to develop holistically and enable them to mature into productive members of society. Education should take back its role in the social order and define that role as a social one and not concentrated on economics. Education, as Dewey (1938) said, should be preparation for living.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe how high school teachers (1) explore teacher perceptions of curriculum customization. The study also sought to (2) gain insight into teacher perceptions concerning how empowered they feel to make the adjustments/customization to their district's approved curriculum in order to meet the needs of students, (3) how did their perception of empowerment relate to their perception of self-efficacy and (4) what are the teachers perceptions about what it means to customize curriculum. Customized curriculum is defined as one that is proximally developed, at the school level.

Researchers Role

Education is a second career for me. I had spent 15 years in the legal field and knew I could not make that the focus of my life. I realized the only place I was truly content was in the library doing research. I decided I was going to go to library school but around the same time I had two children within 14 months of each other. Watching my children, I became really interested in the manner in which knowledge is acquired. This interest coupled with my desire to be a librarian placed me in the school media tract at library school.

I first began my career in 2008 as a School Media Specialist. Every core subject was taught in isolation, only within their departments. The subjects were never meant to interact with another area of inquiry. When I could engage a teacher in conversation about collaboration on projects or areas where I saw the respective curriculums intersecting, there was no room in their schedules. The teachers mainly attributed the lack of time to the pressures associated with the getting through the curriculum. This was counter to what I had been taught in library school because from the position in the library, I could see where learning intersected. I was also not as

myopic as the teachers because I did not have the pressure associated with curriculum content and standardized tests.

Since that time, the curriculum has increasingly narrowed through various federal and state initiatives (i.e. Common Core Content Standards (CCSS), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race To The Top (RTTT), Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)) to name a few. Teachers in subject areas were required to read more informational texts, which caused an uproar with the Language Arts teachers because they assumed they could not teach the canon of literature. It seemed that every year there was a new set of requirements thrown upon the school administrators, the teachers and most importantly the students. Throughout all of this I continued to press on in my role as the librarian. I ordered books, databases, streaming videos but still I was meet with, "don't have time" or "too much curriculum to get through." To further compound this problem, teaching periods were not aligned between grades or subjects. Although education had been profoundly impacted by technology, (i.e. flipped learning, Google Apps for Education) there was still not enough time because teachers were still constrained by an external curriculum.

The CCSS and standardized testing that piqued my curiosity. I knew that leading students to become informed, academically engaged and interested in learning was at the heart of a solid library/literacy curriculum but still teachers would not take the leap from the pressure they felt due to the curriculum that they had no input into developing. I was curious about what happens when teachers are allowed to develop curriculum that is relevant to the students before them in the classroom. Is there an improvement in teacher efficacy and self-worth? In New Jersey, over the past decade, schools and teachers have been maligned and marginalized at every turn. "Today's media portrays educators as laborers unable to make creative and content dependent decisions within their own classrooms" (Garcia, 2014, p. 7). Dewey (1938) wrote that

experience is educative when it continues to promote growth. As a school leader, it was incumbent upon me to try to improve my understanding of the role state and national standards were having on the efficacy of teachers. The CCSS are wordy and confusing and I wondered how anyone could use the standards effectively. How do teachers interact with the standards to teach and how do they perceive the usefulness of the standards? Those questions led to identifying the need to know more about the CCSS.

Prensky (2001), offered that students are learning in different ways and require and demand different learning experiences. To Zhao (2012) following the child was more important than the prescribed curriculum. Students have changed and have demanded more from education to be relevant to their lives. Millennials demand to be challenged, to learn in an open-ended paradigm, to be given freedom and responsibility over their learning (Garcia, 2014). The adage that 'We are preparing students for jobs that have not been created" is thinking from the turn of the century, you choose the century. Education is in a new century where thinking and curriculum must be adaptable. "Educators must push to integrate the socially and culturally meaningful contexts of youth's lives with the academic expectations of today's classrooms." (Garcia, 2014, p. 39). Schools and curriculum are still operating through an industrial mindset vis-a-vis the adherence to a standardized curriculum. "Policy makers and researchers collectively need to take a hard look at what we are expecting teachers to do and how we are supporting them" (Garcia, 2014, p.7). The concept of academic learning must be allowed to be dependent on the needs of the student (Garcia, 2014; Zhao, 2012). Academic learning must be purposeful and authentic. Standards in the form of the CCCS reduce teacher's propensity to take risks to advance learning.

Design and Methods

Descriptive in design, a qualitative approach relies on closely examining the experiences of the inhabitants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2014) and their world in order to understand their perceptions of the world. In the course of this study, I gathered data about how high school teachers mediate curriculum in the classroom.

The work of Willard Waller influenced the study of the interactions of teachers. The foundation of Waller's The *Sociology of Teaching* (1962) explored the interaction between teachers and students. "The teacher represents the formal curriculum...pupils are much more interested in their life, in their own world than in the desiccated bits of adult life …which teachers have to offer" (p. 195-196). Waller wrote that teachers and students are not two distinct entities but tied together. Understanding this bond would enable teachers to develop insight into their practices. In order to negotiate the meaning of schooling, researchers would need to look at the dance these two participants engaged (Waller, 1962). Waller's extensive research in the sociology of teaching can be thought to establish the framework for qualitative research and is especially pertinent to this study. The use of the inductive criteria will be the foundation of this study. Therefore, the participants in this study needed to be relaxed during the interview process which dictated the need for a semi-structured approach. At the end of the conversations about curriculum, some of the teachers indicated that they were initially apprehensive about the interview. After the interview they believed that the session was helpful to them because it gave them a chance to reflect on their practice.

Qualitative research also needs to be fluid with the focus on the context of the study. The researcher should not be rigid in adhering to the perceived design (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and as such the research and researcher evolve as the study is instituted.

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between

researcher and participants, over time in a place or series of places and in social

Interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the

same spirit concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and

retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives both individual and

social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 p. 20)

Qualitative research are more puzzles than questions and at the heart is "a sense of search and re-search and searching again" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 p. 124).

For this study, an oral history was best suited to gather the stories of teachers and how they engage with curriculum customization. The approach helps make meaning for these teachers from a standardized curriculum and the effect changing this curriculum has on a teacher's sense of self-worth and confidence. I interviewed 10 teachers from a single high school in a school where teachers had implied consent from the administration to modify their curriculum.

Profile of the Site

The setting for this study is a public high school in a rural part of New Jersey. According to the New Jersey School Report Card (2018), the population of the school is 475 full time students. The school is 87.4% white and the next highest population is Hispanic at 7%. The primary language spoken at home is English in 97.5% of the homes. At this school, 18% of the population is classified as economically disadvantaged and 14% of the students are classified as disabled. Additionally, the school has a 95% graduation rate but the SAT (average rate 545

verbal and 538 math) and AP (students scoring 3 or more 15.4 %) scores are consistently on the low side of scoring metric.

The student to teacher ratio is 10:1. Class size can fluctuate from 25 in a College Preparatory Course to 6 students in an AP course. There are 38 faculty members in the high school (19 male and 19 female) with 37 members of the faculty being White and 1 member is Hispanic. The staff mirrors the homogeneity of the student population. The teachers have an average of 13.8 years teaching, the State average is 11.8. There is an average age in district of 11.3 years compared to 10.5 State average. The number of teachers in District for four or more years is 84% compared to a state average of 74%. The faculty remains stable however the administrative team, until recently, had seen a high turnover rate.

For the purpose of this study the school will be referred to as Western High School. Western High School was selected because of the size of the school and because the school has not received any awards and seemed to be a typical school within the State of New Jersey. This school also is a general education high school because it offers courses for students who are headed to trade schools or the military as well as to college. The school offers Special Education classes such as Wilson Reading for dyslexic students along with adaptive physical education. Additionally, College Prep and Honors/AP classes are offered. The school tries to meet the needs of all of the students that come through the doors.

All of the teachers interviewed believed that standardized tests were necessary in order to develop some common metric for evaluating students. The participants did not believe that standardized tests were reflective of the learning that was taking place in the classroom. The general consensus was that they had adequately prepared students for life beyond high school. Interviews were conducted with at least one teacher in all subject areas except math. There was

an interview conducted with a member of the history department but they did not return the

Informed Consent document so they have been excluded from the study

Participants

The request to participate in the study was presented at a general faculty meeting. Immediately I was contacted by eight teachers via email of their desire to participate. Out of those eight teachers three were from the English department, two science teachers, one History teacher, a Family & Consumer Science teacher and a Physical Education/Health teacher. Pequest School has a small faculty and I realized I only needed two additional English teachers to be able to interview the entire faculty of the English department. I reached out to the two remaining teachers and convinced them to help with the study. I also sought one of the World Language teachers to round out my interviews and have input from a variety of disciplines. Three out of the ten participants in the study were purposefully sampled. Ultimately, I ended up with no participants from the History or Math Departments. To protect the participants, I changed the name of the school and also the participants.

Furthermore, there is a wide range of years of teaching experience from seven to 33 years and the average age in teaching is 13.8 years thereby allowing for divergent approaches to teaching based on changes made in teacher preparation programs. All of the teachers that were interviewed are tenured which allowed them to freely speak about their practices in the classroom. I also queried why they decided to become an educator to help understand the participants and create a profile that informs their perceptions. I recorded perceptions during the interview process to aid in the assessment of my biases. I created profiles of the participants and included some researcher comments within these profiles. The interviews were more of a conversation with almost all of the teachers indicating that the questions posed were good or

difficult or hard. Everyone indicated at the end of the interview process that the experience was satisfying and made them think about their teaching

Ms. Lessing

At the time of the study, Ms. Lessing had been a Language Arts teacher for eight years. Ms. Lessing is also a graduate of Western High School and returned to teach after completing college. Ms. Lessing married one of the faculty members after she meet him at WHS, they have a child and she is expecting her second child. Ms. Lessing and her husband bought a house in the community and at one time she coached softball. She is committed to the community as her extended family continues to make their homes in the community.

Ms. Lessing relayed that she was more of a science and math person in high school but when she got to college she realized how "good" she was at English. Teaching has been her only profession. When asked why she choose teaching she relayed a story about an influential book from middle school and a personality test that indicated she should be a reading teacher. Those events influenced her to become a teacher. Ms. Lessing also indicated that her brother is a teacher and indicated that he is getting "burnt out" because the District he teaches at is too focused on standards and procedures and has taken the "joy" out of teaching.

> RC: While we were talking in her classroom during her lunch time, two students came in to take quizzes. Ms. Lessing was very welcoming to the students and continued the interview while they were taking the quiz. She spoke freely and professionally about her role in developing her curriculum. I believed her to be confident and comfortable with her role in the school community.

Ms. Lessing currently teaches ninth grade English, all levels (i.e.: general, college prep and honors) and likes her curriculum because she was the developer of the curriculum. Lessing indicated when she was developing the curriculum she left it open ended so that she can adapt the curriculum when she needed to. Ms. Lessing also indicated that she does not open the

curriculum document and make formal changes but the changes that she makes are reflected in her lesson plans.

Mr. Lamb

At the time of the study, Mr. Lamb had been teaching at WHS for 12 years. It is the only school that he ever taught at coming right from college to WHS. Teaching is his first and only career. Asked how he arrived at the decision to be a teacher he relayed a story about his time in high school. Mr. Lamb was the student that everyone came to before the test for help with questions they did not understand. Mr. Lamb would explain the answer and as he stated, often those classmates did better on the test than he did so he thought apparently I am good at explaining things, I love English, so why not become a teacher. This decision was made at the cusp of entering college.

Mr. Lamb has taught all grades and all levels of English at WHS. The teaching assignment has also included college writing for credit in conjunction with the local community college, the AP Language course, and the portfolio class for students who did not pass the graduation requirements set by the State Department of Education. Mr. Lamb has had experience with all levels within the grade i.e.: general, college prep (CP) and honors. Six years prior he started teaching only seniors. Mr. Lamb is very professional with the students and staff. He creates a clearly defined line for appropriate level of contact with the students. Mr. Lamb is viewed by the students as a hard teacher.

> RC: Mr. Lamb likes being considered a demanding teacher taking pride in that reputation. As a teacher he always makes time for his students but demands a high level of seriousness from them. Mr. Lamb also credited his high school teacher for contributing to his background knowledge and help in developing his curriculum.

Mr. Lamb also developed his curriculum for all levels and left it open ended so that he could adapt the curriculum to the needs of the students. Through the initiative of the English

department, the curriculum was rewritten so that is mirrored the requirements of the local

community college but also kept in the background the general structure that the State of New

Jersey for high school curriculum.

Mrs. Lu

At the time of the study, Mrs. Lu had taught at WHS for 14 years. Teaching is her first

career and she told me that she knew she wanted to teach high school English while she was in

middle school.

> RC: Mrs. Lu is the teacher with the most tenure in the English Department yet she gets moved around among grade and the levels within the grade. She is not well respected in the building because of her classroom management skills. Even this year while she is teaching Grade 10 she does not have the Honors students. They were given to the English certified Media Specialist.

She was also responsible for writing a grade level curriculum and does like that she is

able to adopt the curriculum to the needs of the students.

Ms. Lee

At the time of the study, Ms. Lee had taught at WHS for six years. Ms. Lee is in her 10th

year of teaching and had taught at two other districts one in Pennsylvania and one in New Jersey.

Teaching was her first career choice. Her interest was piqued in high school when she could see

a means to connect content to life. She received a Bachelor of Arts in English. Two years prior,

to the study she received her master's degree in education. Ms. Lee demonstrates a good grasp

on theory, practice and pedagogy. Ms. Lee has an affinity for curriculum. When the English

Department was re-writing the curriculum, she was a leading force in the process despite only

having been at the school for one year.

> RC: Ms. Lee is a fairly intense person and has a desire to leave public school and go to the College level to teach other students how to be effective teachers. Of all the teachers I interviewed for this study she was the most fervent in her opinions about teaching. She

has also done some very creative things with her students allowing them to create a curriculum in the classroom. Ms. Lee can be difficult to approach and her intensity causes many of her fellow teachers to not fully embrace her passion for teaching.

Ms. Lovecraft

At the time of this study, Ms. Lovecraft had been teaching for eight years. Six of those years were at WHS where she was awarded WHS *Teacher of the Year* before achieving tenure. Since that time, she has received tenure. Ms. Lovecraft came to teaching because she engaged in a lot of pretend play growing up. Her mother is a school nurse who also taught LPN classes. Ms. Lovecraft would take her old gradebooks and pretend to teach to her brother. She indicated that it was not one pivotal event that caused her to teach.

In college she was a Theatre Arts major and then switched to Education her sophomore year. She is a lifelong county resident and although she did not attend WHS she attended another high school in the County. Ms. Lovecraft is vested in the school community because she serves as the drama advisor, the musical advisor and works with the marching band. She reflected throughout the course of the interview on how her teaching has gotten better over the course of eight years.

> RC: This teacher this well respected among her peers and has utilized technology effectively in her classroom. She is funny, a bit sarcastic but clearly dedicated to her students and their learning. Additionally, she understands the demographic of the county having been a life-long resident.

I would also add that the English department had written their own curriculum based upon two factors (1) that it would give the students who passed sophomore and junior years the opportunity to apply for and receive college credit from the local community college. The teachers in the English department felt that the modeling of curriculum on the community college standards would insure that the students were prepared for college and (2) it would give

the teachers latitude so that they could add in books or reading that would appeal to the students, address real world problems and respect teacher professional competencies.

Ms. Shakespeare

While the study was being conducted Ms. Shakespeare was the newest member of the Science Department. Ms. Shakespeare had taught at other Districts one of which was an urban school before beginning her employment at WHS. Ms. Shakespeare is young, energetic but has had enough time in teaching to have developed excellent classroom management skills and a generally good relationship with even the most under motivated students.

Ms. Shakespeare has always known that she wanted to be a teacher but paradoxically she did not love school. During college, in her sophomore year she believed that she wanted to be an environmental policy major and switched out of the teaching track but returned to teacher education within one year. Ms. Shakespeare is certified in Life Sciences and teaches all levels of Biology and Environmental Science including Advance Placement as well as Forensics.

> **RC:** This interviewee seemed nervous throughout the interview. At the end of the interview, on the way to the parking lot, she revealed that it was not as bad as she thought it would be. That revealed why some teachers were hesitant about being interviewed. It never dawned on me that they would be nervous and I adjusted my style and allowed the teachers to offer what they wanted and worried less about making sure I asked all my script questions allowing the interview to flow more naturally.

Ms. Shaw

Ms. Shaw had taught at one other District before coming to WHS. She arrived at WHS 33 years ago and still spoke fondly of the first mentor she had in the district as a new teacher. Ms. Shaw had the longest tenure at WHS of all the teachers that I spoke to and accordingly had a lot of power to influence decisions in the building. Ms. Shaw had the kind of authority that comes

from experience and the professional air that she exuded during the interview as well as during observations of her demeanor in the District.

Ms. Shaw indicated that when she first went to college that teachers were not in high demand so she majored in medical technology and worked in that field when she first graduated. Ms. Shaw went back to school to become certified as a teacher which took a couple of years because she attended night school. She was deemed to be highly qualified in Physical Science because of the course load she had taken in college. She was certified to teach under the NTE's (National Teacher Exam) which was a pre-cursor to the Praxis. Currently she teaches Chemistry at all levels including College Level Chemistry in conjunction with the County College and Physics all levels but not the Advanced Placement course.

> RC: A veteran teacher who is well respected by both other teachers and the administration. Students claim she is the harder chemistry teacher but she does not see it that way. This teacher is adamant that the students are prepared for life after high school should they choose to major in the science field.

Ms. Park

At the time of the study, Ms. Park was a veteran teacher with 17 years of experience at WHS and it is the only school district where she has worked. She has taught not only in the high school but when she first started her career at the WHS district she taught seventh and eighth grade health. When she first started at college she majored in Psychology but switched during her junior year to teacher education. She offered that if she had to do it all over she would become a State Trooper. The interview focused mainly on the Health Curriculum at her direction. Ms. Park felt that Physical Education has limited areas where the teacher could interpret the curriculum but Health was a whole different field.

Ms. Park has also coached many of the girl's teams in both soccer and basketball. She demands respect and accountability from her teams to the school and to themselves.

Ms. Park was responsible for writing the Junior Health curriculum and had a lot to say about how important this curriculum was in the lives of the students. She explained that the four Physical education teachers each took a grade level and wrote the curriculum. She was very proud of the document that she had produced.

> RC: This teacher conveyed that she was nervous about being interviewed she did not feel like she had much to offer in terms of addressing curriculum. I found her to be very thoughtful in her responses and also had a very good perspective on the Junior Health Curriculum.

Mrs. Farmer

While this study was being conducted, Mrs. Farmer was in her 16th year of teaching. This teacher majored in Family and Consumer Science and after graduation had worked at a number of different careers including an interior design position and owned her own wine business. Mrs. Farmer did not initially want to teach but as her children were growing she began substituting. While substitute teaching she realized that she could do what was being done in the classrooms she was in better. She returned to school and has passed the Praxis in six different subject areas.

Initially she worked in three different elementary schools teaching Language Arts and when the long-time Home Economics teacher was retiring at WHS she applied for the position. Despite her 16 years of experience she was slotted in at Step 7 on the Union guide. Mrs. Farmer loves her job and the students at WHS. She also advises the Student Government and gives a lot of her own time to improve the lives of the students. Currently she teaches and Introduction to Food Preparation, a Culinary Class, an Introduction to Pastry class and an Interior Design Class. She also wrote all of her curriculum for each of the classes that she teaches. The Introduction to

Pastry class curriculum also aligns with the local community college class so that students can earn college credits while in high school.

> **RC:** This teacher believes she should be utilized more in the District than she currently is being utilized. For instance, she is able to teach the Personal Finance class required by the State of New Jersey for graduation but faults administration for not all owing this to happen. She is knowledgeable about the National Food and Consumer Science Curriculum and utilizes that more than the Core Curriculum Standards. Mrs. Farmer believes that administration should be more cognizant of the different skills that teachers possess in the building.

Mrs. Walker

Ms. Walker did not set out to teach Spanish but she does have a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. Originally, her major as unfocused as she spent one year in music education and one year in international business while working on her Bachelor of Arts. Mrs. Walker took a position teaching Spanish at an elementary school while she worked on her teaching certification through the alternate route. Mrs. Walker had studied in Spain and is very knowledgeable about the Spanish culture and language. While out on maternity leave with her second child she completed her graduate work in Education. Currently, she teaches the upper level Spanish courses including Levels 3, 4 and 5 College Prep and Honors along with the AP Spanish Language course.

> **RC:** This teacher appeared to be very unsure of her role in the District. Although she is the senior World Language teacher in the department she does not seem to see herself that way. From our conversation it appears that she isn't particularly versed at self-promotion. She is doing great things in her classroom but does not make the administration aware of her contribution. Although, the district has a Spanish speaking administrator now and the classroom evaluations are contributing to her improvement as a Spanish teacher.

Table 3

Summary of Participants view toward Common Core Standards.

Department	Participant	Used more than one set of standards	Use of Standards in planning	View toward standards	Wrote own curriculum
Language Arts	Ms. Lessing 10th year Only District	+	-	I would not change them because I don't care that much about them.	+
Language Arts	Mr. Lamb 12th year Only District	+	-	The State has half a clue for a change and is doing what teachers do naturally.	+
Language Arts	Mrs. Lu 14th year Only District	+	-	I think the standards are guidance. I use them more to plan activities than to plan a unit.	-
Language Arts	Ms. Lee 10th year Other Districts	+	+	I do understand the reason for standards and they do guide you but it is not the be all and end all of what happens in the classroom.	+
Language Arts	Ms. Lovecraft 8th year Other Districts	+	-	With doing my lesson plans this year, I am really more aware of trying to cover more standards.	+
World Language	Ms. Walker 13th year Other Districts	+	+	I come up with ideas first and then I look at the standards and link them in.	+

Department	Participant	Used more than one set of standards	Use of Standards in planning	View toward standards	Wrote own curriculum
Family & Consumer Science	Mrs. Farmer 16th year Other Districts	+	-	I spend a lot of time researching to give good notes to the students. I don't know if the CCSS are perfect anyway. I agree that everybody should know certain things.	+
Physical Education/ Health	Ms. Park 17th year. Only District	+	+	I do follow them there is kind of not a choice with health and phys. ed.	+
Science	Mrs. Shaw 33rd year Another District	+	+	Some of the Next Gen standards are up here and they don't tell you how to get the kids to achieve them.	+
Science	Ms. Shakespeare 8th year Another District	+	-	I like the Next Gen standards but I did not love the Common Core.	-

Data Collection

I employed a semi-structured interview process to gather information. As noted above, the narrative research mode is not linear but more akin to a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces come into focus as the whole picture emerges. There is a co-construction of the narrative (Wells, 2011) and although this occurs it does not mean that the interviewer and interviewee share the same perspective. Interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes. The questions in the interview were open ended in order to generate data.

The faculty at Western High School was addressed for a few minutes at one of the regularly scheduled faculty meetings after receiving IRB approval. An overview of the study was presented and copies of the solicitation request was distributed to the faculty for their consideration. Potential participants were asked to contact me via email. Potential participants contacted me via email indicating their desire to participate in the study. One of those participants did not returned the informed consent form so they were excluded from the study. When I completed the first round of interviews I realized that only two more English teachers would have to be interviewed so as to have a complete picture from the English Department. Consequently, I purposefully sampled the two remaining department members and they consented to meet with me. In total I ended up with ten participants for the study.

All interviews, observations, and document review remained anonymous. Prior to the interview beginning I told the participants about my desire to protect their anonymity and the steps that I would take to ensure the protection of their identities. After the interviews were completed I transcribed the recordings and emailed the transcript to the participant. I gave the participants the opportunity to correct any item in the transcript. I received an approval from the participant as to the veracity of the transcript and after I had coded the transcript I deleted the

audio recording. There were only ten participants in the study and I choose to hand code the information and organize the themes. This gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the date which was a luxury for a researcher that was primarily due to the size of the study. I gave the participants last names that corresponded with the name of their subject area.

Interview themes

The interview questions were derived from issues that emerged in the literature on curriculum customization. The questions emerged from the following themes.

Zone of Proximal Development. Studies have found that teachers who have control over the development of curriculum the greater the impact on the learner. Despite the impetus for standardized national curriculum classroom teacher adjusted curriculum can have a larger impact on student learning. During each interview I attempted to discover that comfort level the teachers had with curriculum making in their classroom.

Conceptual Change Model. Currently, classrooms, schools and curriculum do not promote the nurturing of scholars. The goal of curriculum should be to improve and foster intellectual curiosity. The approach to curriculum and instruction that delivers authority to the learner and to the teacher should be fostered. I used this model to structure my questions about the teacher's perceptions on decisions concerning curriculum making in the classroom. I also queried the input that teachers sought from the students that they teach in developing curriculum.

Teacher efficacy. This concept was developed out of other work by Bandura (1997) in social science. Teacher efficacy was further defined in 1998 (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy) and concerned itself with the ability to make changes and influence learners. Do teachers that have leeway in their use of the adopted curriculum have a heightened sense of efficacy?

I began the interview process on October 18, 2018. Interviews were conducted and finalized by December 14, 2018. Participants reviewed their transcripts and a few minor changes, mostly involving word choices were indicated and made to the transcript by two of the participants. The participants were only interviewed once but there were follow-up emails exchanged between the researcher and the interviewee.

The following are examples of five questions that were asked in each interview. I made the interview conversational to breakdown some of the formal structure of the encounter. I began each interview asking why the participant chose teaching and what they liked/loved about the profession. The interviewees used this question to reminiscence about what led them to the classroom and also relaxed the participants because of the demonstrated interest in their story.

Teacher interview questions

1. Do the standards guide your lesson planning?

2. Do you feel that you are successful in incorporating the CCSS into your teaching?

3. Do you feel that you have the ability in this District to customize the curriculum?

4. Do you feel like you are treated as a professional in this District?

5. Do you feel like you are effective in your classroom?

Analysis

Analytical approaches to the research study are the search for general statements made by the participants. The researcher must bring order to the material gathered and then try to draw conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). After every interview I transcribed and analyzed the data into themes. This constant analysis gave me the chance to reflect on and consider what the teachers were actually saying. The themes became patterns and this helped to organize the teacher's observations. Saldana (2016) writes that "coding is a cyclical process that requires you

to recode not just once but twice (and sometimes even more). Virtually no one gets it right the first time" (p. 38).

Using a thematic analysis approach helped to generate an initial set of codes. I developed a start list to mirror the research questions posed by this study. The following are a few items on my start list that helped me along the way.

- Distal.

- Proximal.

- Scripted curriculum.

- Curriculum customization.

- Teacher efficacy.

- Teacher trust.

- Teacher professionalism.

After I created a start list, I began to construct a codebook. Although codebooks can be confusing, I choose to include the following three components: name/label, a full definition that included inclusion and exclusion criteria and an example. Table 4 outlines one of the codes that I used and the associated criteria.

Table 4

Code Book Example

Label	Role
Definition	The active making of curriculum within the organization.
General Description	The perception of the teachers with regard to their ability to change the curriculum.
Description of Inclusion and exclusion	Inclusion-data will qualify for this code when the participant recognizes that they are an active curriculum maker. Exclusion-data will be excluded from this code if the participant does not view themselves as an active curriculum maker.
Examples (Inclusion and Exclusion)	Inclusion- "I absolutely love that I have the ability to change the curriculum. If I need to change something on the fly, I will."

	Exclusion- "Not currently, we are in good place as far as curriculum."

There are two major levels of coding-open coding and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When I first started coding I broke the data down into large chunks of data. This allowed me to explore the ideas and the beliefs that the participants embodied. Once those blocks were established, I broke the data down and utilized axial coding to create connections between the data.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity and reliability are used in a quantitative studies to indicate to what extent the results of the study would be consistent over time. The use of the reliability tool also addresses whether the   results of the study could be reproduced when a similar methodology is employed. Secondly, with regard to validity, are the measurement devices actually measuring what they were intended to measure (Golafshani, 2003). In a quantitative study the researcher is disassociated as much as possible from the study and uses the results to create a generalizable result and create a prediction. Since qualitative is a newcomer to the research paradigm, researchers have tried to apply reliability and validity to the results of these studies. Golafshani (2003) argues that that is not entirely plausible.

The nature of qualitative research is inherently different from quantitative. To start with, qualitative researchers do not use instruments to measure or establish metrics. Qualitative researchers are interested in the lived experience so measurements are not central to their work. There must be a means to verify the findings of the researcher. The term trustworthiness replaces validity and reliability (Golafshani, 2003) in evaluating qualitative research. Trustworthiness is defined by the following four components: a) credible - how does the researcher have confidence in the truth of the research; b) transferable -the research has thick descriptive

narratives to show that the findings are applicable; c) confirmability the findings are based on participants responses and d) dependability or the extent to which the study can be repeated. In qualitative research, the researcher embraces involvement with the research and is an instrument to gain data and make sense of that data.

The trustworthiness of this study is borne out by the following examples:

- Credibility is exhibited by like comments from the participants which allows me to conclude that the experiences at this site in regard to curriculum customization are authentic. Triangulation, in a qualitative study, is used to ensure that the account rendered by the research findings is detail rich.

- Transferability is demonstrated in this study because the research and interview questions can be used to replicate the inquiry in other schools and will produce findings that confirm the use of proximal curriculum as an effective tool for both the teachers and the learners.

- Confirmability is based on participants' response is demonstrated by the detail of the comments from the participants.

- Dependability is demonstrated through the inclusion of the full set of interview questions in the Appendix which would allow another researcher to conduct this study.

In qualitative studies exceptions are used to modify the theories of the study and are a method of improving the study to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena.

Teacher Selection

One of my initial questions was did I interview enough teachers? My sample size was limited to 10 participants. Should I have pursued more teachers, especially from the two areas

that were not represented in the study (math and history)? Should I have included Special

Education teachers in the interviews because the school uses in class support model for some

special education. The participants were unevenly split gender wise, I only interviewed one male

although the school has an even distribution of male to female teachers. I only interviewed

Caucasian teachers but that is in line with the ethnic make-up of the teaching staff.

Site Selection

Should I have used a bigger location to provide data that could be used in another study?

I was nervous with the undertaking because it was my first qualitative study. The school utilizes

a rotating drop block scheduling method, would another school that works on an eight-period

class day yield different results. The school utilizes a general curriculum and offers classes for

special education students, trade bound students, and college preparatory students. Although the

school is not exceptional in awards it is not a failing school. These factors may prove useful to a

similar study to administrators looking to address curriculum change.

Reliability of Participants

The comments in the interviews were similar on some occasions that led me to believe

that the teachers were truthful in their responses. I did not question the reliability of the

participants. The teachers did not seem like they had anything to hold back on and were equally

as complimentary and constructively critical in their responses. This was in spite of it being a

contract year for the teachers and a prolonged contract negotiation for the teachers. All of the

interviews were conducted in an eight-week time span during the second marking period of the

year.

Ethical Issues

During some of the interviews, teachers observed that the questions that I posed were difficult and made them think about their role in curriculum making. Could these queries cause harm to the teachers? Ethical issues are always present in any research study, although small, it is still necessary to mention.

Chapter IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this Chapter, I present the themes and patterns that emerged through my analysis of the interviews with the ten participants in the study. The purpose of the study was to (1) explore teacher perceptions of curriculum customization. The study also sought to (2) gain insight into teacher perceptions concerning how empowered they feel to make the adjustments/customization to their district's approved curriculum in order to meet the needs of students, (3) how did their perception of empowerment relate to their perception of self-efficacy and (4) what are the teachers perceptions about what it means to customize curriculum. Customized curriculum is defined as one that is proximally developed, at the school level I used semi-structured interviews to explore teacher's perspectives concerning the adopted curriculum, the use of standards in lesson planning and whether or not that shaped their sense of efficacy in their classrooms. The study focused on high school teacher and no discipline/subject teachers were excluded from participation. The use of pseudonyms was employed to protect the identity of the participants.

Some influential themes that emerged from the interviews were:

a. The curriculum was developed proximally.

b. Teachers feel they have implied authority to change the curriculum.

c. Teachers customized the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

d. Teachers had a sense of self-efficacy.

After reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, it became clear that there was a need to discuss the English/Language Arts Department separate from the other interviews. The English Department has five teachers which gives rise to the opportunity to work closely to allow the shared common goal to succeed. There are also two in-class support Special Education teachers

assigned to work with the regular education teachers who work with the non-college preparatory or regular education students. One of these teachers   also teaches a Wilson Reading class of mixed grade levels. The role of the Special Education teachers is not part of this discussion.

The Science Teacher participants: one Life Science teacher and one Physical Science teacher will be grouped together for discussion. The remaining participants are all stand-alone teachers and will be grouped together also. As I was reviewing the transcripts and began the discussion of the findings, the treatment of the participants as individual groups became useful to make sense out of the interviews

At the high school level, the variety of disciplines creates a lack of interaction among the departments. Each subject has its own curriculum concerns and expectations. As a result, there is little collaboration between the departments. There was a unified vision within the English Department. This in out of necessity because the teachers are building upon instruction from year to year. Sciences are often stand- alone even within the overarching discipline. Biology, chemistry and physics have little to do with each other but provide the core of science curriculum in high school. This was evident from the interviews. Going forward, including all of the teachers in a subject area would provide a more holistic understanding of their perceived role as active curriculum makers.

Proximal Curriculum Development

During the interviews, participants discussed their knowledge of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and their perception of the usefulness of the standards. The usefulness of the standards was acknowledged by the participants; however, they were also cognizant of the limitations of the Common Core which were freely discussed. Additionally, the majority of the teachers (eight out of ten participants) had written their own curriculum and believed what they

taught was important and more valuable than the benchmarks in the standards. Only two teachers

used the phrases distal or proximal in their interviews. The majority of teachers   indicated that

they believed that they had implied authority to change the curriculum. Two of the teachers

discussed a curriculum coordinator or a curriculum committee but for the most part the teachers

felt empowered to adjust and customize the curriculum as they believed was necessary to meet

the needs of the students. For the most part, the curriculum at this school was developed

proximally and the teachers were able to modify and adapt at the classroom level.

This study revealed that the purpose, the development and the use of a proximal

curriculum was to aid the needs of the students. The goal of student development was always at

the forefront of the motivation of the teachers that participated in this study. Mrs. Walker, the

World Language teacher had the changing needs of the students in mind when was teaching. "I

feel like when the student's needs change I change the curriculum and change the way I teach

but I always make sure I cover what I need to." Mrs. Farmer believed "Every kid is not a

traditional learner so every kid won't be able to answer traditional questions. So, if you give

them those skills every kid will be able to figure out what they need."

Ms. Lee (one of the English teachers) noted "I think improvement is where you show

growth in a given area and doesn't have to be designated by a number." Ms. Lee further added

that when students have control over the curriculum "The engagement level is so much higher.

Because they want to do it, they don't want to let you down because they want to take the time to

improve and be better."

Other participants within the English Department offered similar comments. Mr. Lamb

found that

> Every class is a different dynamic from period to period from year to year. I've had kids
> give insightful response in Period 1 and have incorporated that into my teaching. It's

rewarding to see the light bulbs going off because you are using student ideas which gets them involved but you're tweaking what you do to get them involved to buy into the course.

Mrs. Lessing noted that

I think (that curriculum) is too broad to address the needs of the students. I think the curriculum just kinda works as kinda of a plan of what we need to do but I actually do change it depending on the needs of the kids. And that's not in the curriculum at all and I don't know how it could be because every class needs something different.

Ms. Lovecraft noted

I like to think that my curriculum is more relevant…I try to make them see that this is not just about doing well in senior year or in college but it is a way of thinking what are the gender roles across the media. Same thing we do a lot about how social class and social powers and how society affects our choices in things. So, I feel like they take this further and think about this or at least it stays in the back of their mind.
This was not just confined to the experience in the English Department. Mrs.

Shakespeare offered "So they are reasoning and if it hits (the curriculum) it does, but if it doesn't if they are interested and learning, getting something out of it that's more important that everyone learning the same thing." For Mrs. Shaw "I think that so one more thing we're always looking for different ways…that will help them get here and I love when they come back and understand and can apply it to something else." Finally, Ms. Parker offered "I think in Health you have so many teachable moments. It is not necessarily what I bring up, it could be what a kid brings up and you just have to go with that moment….It not so much that you follow the curriculum if a kid opens the door there is a reason for it."

Knowledge of Curriculum Standards

At one time or another throughout their careers the participants had all used a different set of curriculum standards. The participants from the English Department remembered the New Jersey specific standards but now used the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). Teachers who were not Language Arts or Mathematics deferred to their subject standards in their lesson planning. Mrs. Walker, a World Language teacher, explained that the "lesson plans were based on the standards" however those standards are the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). One of the participants, Mrs. Farmer, used the subject specific standards the National Family and Consumer Science Standards (NFCSS) but also incorporates Math, Science, and Health. Mrs. Farmer indicated that "I do a lot of Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) and I also do a ton of Health. Those are the main things I try to incorporate with NFCSS."

 The veteran science teacher that was interviewed remembered the Science Standards and tried to use them in conjunction with the CCCS. The Science teachers now utilized the Next Generation Science Standards (Next Gen). Mrs. Shakespeare, one of the Science participants, believed that, in regard to the CCCS, was focused on

> the details about a process .. and… as I taught I realized that they know all the steps in cellular respiration but when I asked them why they were so caught up in the steps they could not tell me what the whole process was for, so now with the new standards they are a lot better. It is still a bit arbitrary. Like sometimes I wish I could pick what's important.

The English Department was impacted by decision made seven years prior to the interviews, the curriculum coordinator, worked with the County College to develop a new curriculum that would align with the County College. The intended goal was to offer the

opportunity to students to earn college credit. Up until that point, Western High School offered a single course for Grade 12 titled "College Level Writing." The requirements for taking the course were often prohibitive. Additionally, at this point in time (approximately 2010) Western High School offered no Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

In the late 2000s there were also a number of teachers approaching retirement age who had spent their careers in this District. These teachers were reluctant to embrace change and were content with continuing their teaching practices. The push back from these teachers had dictated the curriculum. The retirement of this cadre of teachers paved the way for new curriculum offerings. In 2009, a new Principal was hired coupled with impetus from the Board of Education to begin offering AP as the demographics of the educational demands on the District began to change. It was at this time that the population of the County increased and more white-collar workers began to take up residence. The rural nature of the county would continue to prevail but it now co-existed with college educated residents.

Teachers remained in the District for an extended period of time however there was a high turnover in administrators. As an example, in a four-year period from 2006-2010 there were five different principals in the high school. In 2012, the Curriculum Coordinator moved on to an Assistant Principal Position at another District. This person had worked under the direction of the new Superintendent, who was previously the Principal of the High School. The Superintendent did not want to lose traction in terms of curriculum change so he charged the English Department with continuing the work that had been started and develop a curriculum that would align with the County College.

The English Department, along with using the CCCS created a curriculum for dual enrollment opportunities for 10th and 11th grade with the local County College. Alignment with

the County College and meeting the expectations of the College became more pressing than adhering to the CCCS. The English teachers believed that their own decision-making abilities around curriculum making were more important than adhering to the standards. Ms. Lessing states "…the standards are written in a way that we should, hopefully, be naturally doing those things to begin with." While Ms. Lessing she had knowledge of the standards and used them she indicated that she really "didn't care that much about them…." Another English teacher, Ms. Lee, who had worked in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey, indicated that the standards guide her lesson preparation because you "it is that necessary evil, you need to have some level, some bar…so I do understand the reason for the standards and they do guide how I conduct lesson but is not the end all and be all of what happens in the classroom." For the most part, lesson planning and curricular decisions arise from the teachers' knowledge of the subject, the students and the community.

Use of Standards

A second theme that emerged involved how the participants used the standards in their lesson planning. Most of the participants (9 out of 10) recognized the value of the standards but they were not the basis of the classroom curriculum or the lesson planning. These were all veteran teachers who start with an end in mind – where to I want the students to end up, build a lesson and then add in the standards. Ms. Lee stated "I think the standards are guidance I tend to use them more in planning the activities than in planning the unit. Another English teacher, Mrs. Lu, indicated "I create the lessons and then I look to see which standards fit them."

The English teachers were unanimous in designing the lessons and then looking to the standards to fit in: "There are always ones that you will hit with everything but there are ones you hit less frequently like listening" stated Mrs. Lu who added "the idea of what I should teach

is at the forefront because our curricular documents are fluid and it is easy to get changes approved." Mr. Lamb indicated that he chooses to incorporate the Common Core because he thought they were useful. Mr. Lamb was the only participant to indicated that he believed there "has been little or no emphasis on whether those "standards are meet or actually incorporated."

As previously stated, within the past three to five years, the English department had re-written their curriculum to align with the County College. The freshman curriculum mirrored the remedial English curriculum to ensure that the students were ready for college. Grade 10 became Freshmen Composition I and Grade 11 Freshmen Composition II. Students who earn a grade of B or better will be able to earn college credit. This is especially beneficial for this school because a many of the students attend County College as a pathway to a four-year school. The attendance at County is a way to help defray the cost of college. Ms. Lovecraft, offered during her interview that she was a county person, observing "growing up at a time when county college was not fashionable and there was no way someone who was at the top of her class would go to county college. I wish someone would have suggested it so I didn't have so much debt."

Mrs. Lu remembered when they re-wrote the curriculum to align with the CCCS "we made sure we hit every standard for that grade during that year…it was more of a standards-based curriculum than a needs-based curriculum." During the re-write, in order to align with the County, the teachers wrote a broad curriculum with issues that are relevant to the student's i.e. social taboos. Mrs. Lessing stated "I wrote my curriculum so I worded it so I had the freedom to change it. The curriculum that I had previously was so scripted I was probably not following it because it was so specific and I didn't want to do that stuff." Mrs. Lee reflected that a lot of the "curriculum development that I was part of allowed a lot more choice. It sounds simple give kids' choice but other Districts that I taught in were very scripted." The English department had

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collaborated and wrote a curriculum that gave the students and the teacher's choice and were really proud of their efforts and their teaching of that curriculum

Throughout the interviews, the participants indicated that they all use their professional knowledge to set out a path of what the students should know for mastery of the subject. One of the science teachers, Mrs. Shaw, indicated that one of the other Chemistry teachers was chemistry major in college and the department built the curriculum around what a chemist needs to know as the driving force. Mrs. Shaw also observed "that some of Next Gen standards are up here (motioning above her head) in application but they don't necessarily tell you what you need to do or how the students should be capable of reaching them." The other science (Biology) teacher indicated that when I am designing a unit now, I try to think what I have to conceptually hit, what a biologist needs to know and where that matches the standards."

Mrs. Farmer agreed that everyone should know certain things but did not know if the CCCS "are perfect anyway." Mrs. Farmer felt that the standards were not practical, and she just picks and chooses because "there are so many other standards that I can use that I kind of adapt around them." Mrs. Walker, the World Language teacher, indicated that she works from where she wants the students to be and "that I just know the standards so well that I just pop them in at the end."

Other participants were equally as satisfied with their curricular endeavors. Family and Consumer Science (FCS) also had some classes aligned with the County College to give the students college credit. The World Language department currently only offers Spanish but is in the process of re-writing the Spanish II curriculum. Spanish I was re-written over the summer because "it was too ambitious for the students based on their prior learning". The teachers observed that the students were not equally prepared because there was no alignment in the

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curriculums from the sending districts. The teachers took it upon themselves to address the curriculum to create a more seamless integration of students into high school world language.

There are four Physical Education/ Health teachers. Each teacher has one grade level. I interviewed one of those teachers who was charged with the re-write of the Junior (Grade 11) Health curriculum. Ms. Park indicated that she felt topics in health changed more frequently than the formal re-write of the curriculum. Ms. Park also believed that the re-writing should be led by the students. "So, you can follow (the curriculum) but the kids bring out so much more. It's not so much that you follow the curriculum but if a kid opens up about something, opens a door, there is a reason for it." This sentiment was in line with other experiences from the participants in their day to day teaching. Specifically, Ms. Lee with her sophomore English class.

Ms. Lee, while working on her Masters' in Teaching, sought and received permission from the then Assistant Principal to make changes to the Sophomore Honors English curriculum. The class had eight students enrolled and they were what the interviewee termed the "theatre kids." As Ms. Lee explained

> They wrote a parody of *The Crucible*. That was the only class that I was able to
> do that with. So, writing it was the midterm and the final exam was casting, acting
> in it, and directing it. I had a student director who took everyone under his wing
> and said this is what we are going to do. I could not have done that with and other
> class or if I had a unified curriculum.

Implied Authority

Teachers need to have a defined role in the classroom and that is granted through authority. Authority "involves the rights, perceptions, obligations and duties associated with

particular positions in an organization of social system" (Yukl, 2013 p. 186). Teacher authority

can be classified (Esmaeli, Mohamadrezai, & Mohamadre, 2015) into five separate areas:

- a) legal – or legislative authority which grants power to the teacher to make decisions about activities in the classroom.

- b) specialty –higher level knowledge and ability to transfer the knowledge to learners.

- c) reference -showing respect and affection to their students.

- d) reward – using grades and special responsibilities to encourage learning and behavioral expectations, and

- e) punishment- probably the most recognizable authority teachers exert.

At this location there was absence of a formal organizational structure, other than a principal

and assistant principal that created a void for the teachers in their exercise of authority as it

relates to curriculum customization in this school.

The teachers expressed the belief they had a fair amount of authority and autonomy. The

general belief was that the teachers had the power to change the curriculum when it was needed.

Although the authority had not been formally given to the teachers, they believed that it was

implied and acted accordingly. The English Department had authored the curriculum to allow for

student choice. Mrs. Lessing stated "[t]here is less of an emphasis on strict adherence to the

curriculum in this district." Additionally, Mrs. Lessing believed that "[t]he curriculum that I had

(previously) was so specific that I was probably not following it because it was so specific." Mr.

Lamb offered that the "administration has been *laissez-faire* on a lot of things" and "there has not

been much administrative follow-up on curriculum." Only one of the English teachers mentioned

a curriculum committee at the District level that needed to approve a book choice also indicating

that "here we have the ability to and are encouraged to use our autonomy." "The curriculums are

approved in such a manner that includes a list of all the books for that unit" stated Ms. Lovecraft that the ability to customize is not given formally but it is understood.

Teachers in other departments felt similarly to the English Teachers. Ms. Park liked the autonomy for some classes but not for all. The "curriculum needs to be a living document. Maybe not in all subject areas, it depends on what you are teaching." Mrs. Farmer further confirmed that the ability to customize was not formally given but "absolutely loved that have the ability to change the curriculum." Mrs. Walker reiterated that they "have been told that the curriculum is a working documents and that they can modify it as they see fit." However, Mrs. Walker, mentioned the role of the curriculum coordinator has in approving changes. Mrs. Walker was the second participant to mention the curriculum coordinator and a formal curriculum structure. Mrs. Shaw, who receives a stipend for her role as the curriculum coordinator, indicated that in regard to curriculum "there is never any push back or anything like that." Mrs. Shakespeare indicated that she "liked…the autonomy better in this district…because not everything is by the book." Additionally, she believed that there was no expectation or prohibition from modifying because "I don't think that they even check. I don't think they are even making sure what we teach."

Curriculum Customization

One of the goals in education should be to increase student involvement in learning and to create intellectually curious learners. One method to achieve that goal would be to remove teaching from the bureaucrats and businessmen and deliver authority to the classroom teacher and the students. Teacher authority in the classroom, coupled with knowledge of curriculum customization at proximal level emerged as a theme in the findings. Further, knowledge of the use of pre-packaged scripted curriculum in other districts was well known by the participants.

Conversely, although the teachers liked the freedom to exercise authority over the curriculum, they were mixed in their approaches and beliefs about student choice in the setting of classroom curriculum. The participants still needed to exercise control over the students so it was that part of change that the teachers grappled with the most.

Teacher Authority

The approach to customizing the curriculum was heavily dependent on the role the teacher played in authoring the curriculum. The English teachers wrote their own curriculum as a group. The teachers mapped out what they wanted to accomplish each year, presented it to the Superintendent, who approved the approach. Again, the curriculum was decided by the County College. Mrs. Lee believed that the freedom she was given "as part of the reason that I can give my kids freedom." Further adding "it is good that (the administration) trust me…I can have freedom to customize and adapt without someone saying you need to do this because this is exactly what the curriculum says." Mrs. Lovecraft believed that were free to customize because they had "a lot of freedom in shaping it so we would enjoy teaching it."

The experience with the science curriculum was different mainly due to manner in which the curriculum was written and used. Mrs. Shakespeare indicated that "if you run out of time or I see we are never going to finish everything, "I have to pick, to pick something that I am going to teach." Mrs. Shakespeare further stated, "I'd love to do it all... figuring out where I can spend more time or less time to achieve it all, if I can't, I can't and I have to decide what is more important." This decision is based on a time element and she spoke about choices she had to make when she worked at another district in New Jersey

> I never got ecology done, so I would just do a packet at the end of the year to hit the
> standards and make sure they knew it for the end of course test. I have been teaching

Biology for a number of years now and I just know the topics and the units. I've looked

at the curriculum here but I don't have to follow it verbatim because I know instinctively

what has to be taught. I like it better in that sense. Everything is not by the book where

every lesson had to be justified.

Mrs. Shaw indicated that she "never had push back" from administration on changes she

made to the curriculum. Mrs. Walker indicated that the "number one reason why she stays "in

this District is because she has the ability to modify the curriculum.

Teachers stay with this District mainly because of the students and the level of care

exhibited by fellow faculty... As Ms. Park noted "(w)e have kids here who are different. I think

it's because they have to have jobs, they have to pay for insurance. They are working on farms; I

like to say that they have that old school mentality. They are workers, they are grounded. And I

love the staff."

There are not a lot of funds for extras, it is a barebones district. Teachers here make do

with less in supplies, spend their own money on supplies for direct student benefit. The lack of

resources has an impact on student outcomes. The lack of resources is due in part to funding in

the town that is the host community in the sending-receiving relationship. The Town is a county

seat where 25% of the properties are not ratable due to the presence of the County government in

the Town. The lack of resources also plays into budgeting decisions at the school board level. It

is also a contract year and morale schoolwide was low.

Mrs. Lessing reiterated that

I can't imagine working at other schools. One of the specific reasons that I like working

here is because no one is on my tail about the lesson plans and the curriculum because if

they were I would probably be way more stressed in following specific plans and I think

that would take away from teaching.

Student Choice

The issue of student choice and student directed learning was understood by some of the

participants. For the English Department, because of the nature of how they authored the

curriculum, choice was emphasized. Ms. Lee had genuine enthusiasm about re-writing the

curriculum because "it gave my student a lot of choice. Students were able to choose books and

plays that they were willing and wanting to read versus I only have one book to teach so it gave a

lot options so it was nice to have more to work with." Ms. Lovecraft observed "we did try to

open up this curriculum" while Ms. Lu believed

> It's not that we just choose but we can ascertain which novels a class needs, to see what a
>
> class needs, to see what their interests are…so I could have two classes working on the
>
> same theme but using two different novels. One could be doing *To Kill a Mockingbird*
>
> and one could be doing *Huck Finn*. It's the same unit – racism and society but we are
>
> doing it from two different angels.

This element of student choice was extended to other departments in the school. Mrs.

Farmer explained that "you want to an offer choice of career education because every child,

every person is not set to go to college. But they need to work and be a contributing member of

society." At the beginning of a lesson Mrs. Shakespeare starts with "a discussion generally about

what we are going to do…but I don't think that I do enough where I get their insight.

In 2008, the longtime French teacher retired. The school hired a replacement French

teacher who was not offered tenure. In 2012, the school offered German, that teacher was not

offered tenure either. Mrs. Walker observed "having one language is difficult too because

students don't have a choice. They are being forced into taking two years of Spanish because it is a requirement." Even though teachers could offer choice, the administration limits choice through curricula offerings.

Knowledge of Customization

Mrs. Lessing believed that curriculum customization involved "(c)hanging the curriculum to fit the needs of the students rather than the other way around" Ms. Lee believed that "a lot of teaching is realizing and gauging how effective am I being." the implied authority to skip pieces of the curriculum and focus on parts of curriculum that provided a direct benefit the students was readily utilized. . Mr. Lamb observed

> Okay cool, so obviously part of what a school has to do is to teach students based on various background and cultures and sub-cultures. A teaching style and curricula that works in a small rural community…may not work that great in a giant district like Camden or Newark. I think that too much control negates flexibility and the ability of the teacher to interact with the students and give them what they need.

Mr. Lamb further noted that

> Eleven plus years of teaching and working with students, externally enforced curriculum based upon lack of knowledge about the class makeup, student makeup, culture of the actual district itself…would be extremely ineffective in helping the students get to where we need them to get the skill, capabilities, self-confidence and so on to be effective leaders and citizens after they graduate.

The English Department was very vocal about how they approached customization because as Ms. Lovecraft indicated "here we are very free to customize, especially within the English Department." Mrs. Lu indicated that "It has been stated by the administration and

specifically by the Superintendent that we are encouraged to determine what a class needs." Mr. Lamb stated, "I think the distal (curriculum) gives a very general framework and the proximal curriculum the freedom to develop those elements that are most effective with the students."

Mrs. Shakespeare's curricular decisions are based on what is important to the students. "[W]hat do I think they would benefit from knowing more, you know what they can take with them going forward. Or what understanding of the world and life are they going to need. There are topics and when they can pick something they want to do." Mrs. Walker believed that she was an expert at developing curriculum at the classroom level indicating that she has to stop and "change things all the time. Lesson plans stress me out because I write something and I set out goals and I realize the students are lacking the prior knowledge for something." With the recent realization that "levels one and two had to be re-written because we found out that the curriculum, the way was written it was too ambitious."

Mrs. Farmer indicated that "they have never formally said that you can customize but I would think that we have a good enough relationship that they trust me to do the right thing." Mr. Lamb indicated that "I can definitely say that I have been given free reign essentially to teach how and what I choose to teach." Ms. Park indicated that "No one comes in here and says this is what you have to do." She also believed that the "curriculum needs to be a living document." but she added "maybe not in all subject areas, it depends on what you are teaching." Mrs. Shaw indicated that "I think if you are a good teacher you should be looking at the curriculum" and asking, "does it need to be modified, what standards do I need to meet because they are going to be tested on them at some point."

Teacher Efficacy

Some teachers will work in more than one District through the course of their professional lives. Teachers know the practices of other Districts and draw upon their professional encounters to help formulate practices. The environment is no different at WHS in helping teachers to evaluate curriculum and to determine the roles they play in the district.

Mrs. Farmer indicated that "things are micromanaged at other districts." She followed that statement with a story of her experience at another district.

> I worked at a school were one of the Special Education teachers taught root words. It helped the students break down words. I adopted that for my classroom. The principal came in for an observation and I got marked down because he didn't want me to teach root words. Didn't think they were appropriate. My kids were 15% higher than the other kids on the NJASK.

Mrs. Shaw stated, "When I was going for my supervisory work there were teachers, teachers in elementary schools and that was it, they needed to be on that page by that time." She added that her experience at WHS had been positive.

> When I am meeting with parents I feel confident with what I am saying and have been backed by the administration and have more self-confidence. I try to keep my expectations high and I think if everyone does that it makes it easier for me.

Ms. Lee observed about "in other Districts that I taught in it was you have to teach this and this is what we are going to see when we come in here." Ms. Lee also worked in another where she was given the test for 10th grade English and told to go copy it. For the most part she had a strong sense of self-efficacy. Part of her Masters' thesis was self-efficacy in the review process acknowledging "I do fail a lot. But I think that is what keeps my self-efficacy in check.

I'm not just glossing over everything. I am truly able to sit and reflect and say I did not do this well how can I do better."

> Mrs. Lessing, who had graduated from WHS, acknowledged that
>
> every period I have to do things differently depending on what the kids need from me.
> So, if I had to follow a strict lesson plan I think that would take away from my ability to
> teach. And so that is why I like working here because I can't imagine working at other
> schools like my brother is a teacher too and he talks about the way that they do things and
> I'm like I would not want to work there…because they are so much stricter and limiting.

Mrs. Lessing is from a family of teachers. Based on conversations with one of her brothers she shared that her "brother hates teaching ...he's tried to change Districts… because he feels there are way too many demands and it is taking away from teaching." Mr. Lamb "I have heard significant horror stories from my friends and family members who are teachers...I am grateful that I don't have that level of micromanagement."

Administrative Trust

One of the research questions focused on the degree that teachers feel entrusted to adjust the curriculum. Trust relationships require a certain amount of vulnerability from one party in the dynamic. The administrative team has worked on fostering trust at WHS. That was evident because one theme that was prevalent in the discussions was that of administrative trust. Nine out of the ten participants believed that they were trusted to act professionally and to teach in the manner they believed had the greatest benefit to the students. For Mrs. Farmer, relationship building with the administration was an important component of her work life.

> I would like to think that we have a good enough relationship that they trust me to do the
> right thing. That I will show them in a good light, I think that is really important and that

I am following what I am supposed to be doing in a professional way. I think that they support us, like if you have an idea, they are okay figure it out and it's not just in the classroom."

Mrs. Farmer had an especially good insight into her principal indicating that he was an "idea guy but not an inception guy. Our principal is very supportive and allows us complete control."

For Ms. Park, because she had been assigned the adaptive physical education class, stated. "I feel that they trust me and feel safe with me with these kids." Ms. Parks attributed her feeling of trust was due to the leadership in the building. "No one is down your throat here. They kind of let you do what you want to do and I mean in your classroom." The feeling from the administration is we trust you to do it, it's laid back and they trust to do the right thing every day."

Mrs. Shaw had been with the District for the longest period of time and experienced different types of leadership. "I came through at a time when there was more administrative input. I do agree when you don't have that you are more adrift so I think I am more self-directed." She further observed "But I don't get a lot of push back and no one has ever asked 'How come you are doing that or how come you didn't do that'" For Ms. Shakespeare

My previous experience was that we are going to monitor you all the time because we don't trust what you are doing. I feel like, here...the trust I'm given is based on them knowing that I am doing things I want to and it allows me to do more things because if that doesn't work they know that I am trying and I will eventually get it right. I feel like I have freedom here and they trust that I will do it and that feels nice.

The experience was similar for the English teachers who believed that the level of trust was high. The belief that the administration understood what was needed from the teachers to

help the students was resounding. As Ms. Lovecraft offered "If they are checking my lesson plans they know what is going on here. But other than that, there is a lot of trust placed in us sticking to the curriculum and doing what is on there and doing what is best for the kids." This thought was echoed by Ms. Lee "...our administration here trusts me enough to do what best for the kids in the classroom". "It is good that they trust me...I can have the freedom to customize and adapt without someone saying you need to this because it is exactly what is in the curriculum." The ability to teach as they wanted without adherence to an external curriculum created a feeling that permitted the teachers to experience a heightened sense of self-efficacy. Mr. Lamb "Really I haven't seen any type of micromanaging from our administration which is useful. They showed that they trust us to choose and teach and cover what is necessary" The belief in their self-efficacy stems largely from the feeling of Administrative trust that was widely experienced.

Professionalism

When an organization has developed trust relationships professionalism follows. Due to the level of trust endowed to the teachers with regard to curriculum the overall belief among the participants was that they were treated as professional. Professionalism is a key attribute for most white-collar careers. Professionals have a college degree and/or hold a license. Whether you're a lawyer, an accountant or a teacher you are in most cases governed by a set of standards or expectations that serve as a career guide. Often, professionalism goes hand in hand with trust to increase teacher efficacy. (Tschannen-Moran, 2009) That was not strictly the finding in this study. Although, Mrs. Farmer felt a high degree of teacher trust she "never really thought about it." When she was asked if she was treated like a professional, she stated, "I feel like they appreciate what I for them but they don't realize that I am a pretty smart person… I passed five

Praxis' and have a master's degree. They don't treat me as a professional based on my credentials but they don't treat me badly either."

Mrs. Walker, another teacher with a master's degree, was wistful as she thought about her professional life. "No, they don't care what I have to say." Administration does not ask for her professional input and believed that "I am just kind of asked to come here, get through the day and push the kids through." Adding "sometimes I feel like we are just here. I mean if you go and ask a   question it is respectful but we are just kind of here doing what we do, I don't know."

Mrs. Shaw "sometimes" feels like she's treated as a professional "but often

when you do share an opinion and it doesn't seem like they are listening. It has happened

in committees too. I am glad they are listening but it is on deaf ears and nothing changes

or happens." She further explained that "it is frustrating because I have been here a while

so they know that I am not going to come down and complain about something just like

with your own children, when you do share an opinion and it doesn't even seem like they

are listening.

Mrs. Shakespeare, who is relatively newer teacher to the District had a slightly different view of how she was treated stating "One thing I loved about when I came here, there was less paperwork and less stress over how the lesson plans were written. Who cares as long as I have it down what difference does it make what format it is in? Can't I just work in figuring out what I need to work on with the kids? Let me spend my time figuring out how to reach them instead of unnecessary paperwork."

In the English Department there were a variety of opinions. Ms. Lee felt both ways about professionalism. She had gotten good reviews "You can find a happy medium in keeping your old ways and also adapting to students." However, she added "In this professional environment, I

don't think that the administration uses the resources properly or it isn't communicated effectively what they are trying to do or why…."

Mrs. Lu didn't feel like she was treated as a professional. "Not at all. From my co-teachers and peers but not from the administration and the Board. We are looked down upon and treated like we are no further above the students." Whereas, Ms. Lovecraft believed she was treated as a professional. This may be due, in part to being named Teacher of the Year in her second year in the District before she had achieved tenure. Mr. Lamb, who has a lot of institutional power, is the second most senior teacher in the department. In his response he was hesitant to provide a clear response instead was cagy in his response answering "So, to some degree the answer to the previous question is yes because they are hands off and they are not micromanaging your teaching." . Mr. Lamb believed that his professional capabilities were best judged by the influence he exerts in his department.

Leadership Opportunities

The perception of the teachers, concerning their own decision-making abilities, were not absolute. Despite their autonomy within their classrooms, their implied authority to customize curriculum and the level of administrative trust these participants seemed to be yearning for something from the administrators.

Within the English Department, one out of five members believed that they were getting some meaningful guidance from the administration. Mr. Lamb relayed that he had meaningful interactions with previous administrators who were trying to give suggestions to improve teaching. "I had both formal and informal talks …about what is effective teaching"

The remaining members of the English department shared similar thoughts as Ms. Lovecraft who "believed that "there is not enough oversight going on here...it is a fine line" Ms.

Lee offered "at some point if would be nice to have that exterior force saying did you ever try to do this method?" and added further that "I don't have any challenge here, the only challenge I have is from myself. So, I create things and I try because I don't want to be bored and hopefully the students won't be bored either." Ms. Lee's statements were echoed by Mrs. Lu who said, "I don't ever see the administration to interact with them as far as curriculum goes." Adding "Yeah, I don't feel a push either...you have to be self-motivated to get to your goals or if there is nobody pushing you to get to that goal you know."

The feedback about administrative oversight extended to other teachers. Mrs. Walker "Some of the observations that I receive are just a pick and choose what I am going to put in the box." "There is no real feedback, I would appreciate real feedback once in a while." Conversely, Mrs. Farmer asserted that some of the feedback that she had received, especially as it related to one critique about her use of Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) was unfounded. To her, the administration did not have a holistic view of what STEM was and only viewed it as how do teachers incorporate computers. "We have an Engineering Teacher here who just completed her Masters in STEM. She makes kids think in her classroom and she is not an easy grader. Almost everything I teach is STEM and a chef is the number one STEM career under food scientist."

In the Science Department, Ms. Shakespeare liked the lack of oversight. She relished the opportunity to hone her craft, make mistakes and try again because "we are professionals and we are trying to get the kids to the point of what they need to learn." Mrs. Shaw thought that "if we had a curriculum person who was on task the whole time in the department it might be different. It might be someone is looking at and fine tuning the curriculum."

Chapter V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, the research questions, theoretical framework and methodology. I will focus on a discussion of the findings and implications for practice. I will also discuss the recommendations for future research. Finally, I will identify gaps in the literature that can be addressed from the findings of this study.

Overview of the Study

American educators find themselves presented with scripted curriculum and standards that are intended to create uniformity in teaching and lesson planning. Teachers are often stifled in their creative experiences in the classroom. It can be argued that creativity is a definite asset that teachers hold in their toolbox (Eisenbach, 2012). The use of standards and scripted curriculum stifle teachers in practicing their art.

This study focused on how teachers perceive their own decision-making abilities with regard to the adopted curriculum. I examined if teachers had familiarity with the concept of curriculum customization at the classroom level. I queried if teachers felt empowered to make changes and if they did what was the impact on their sense of self-efficacy. The goal was to collect qualitative data that K-12 administrators could use to inform and enhance their leadership abilities at a local level. The use of proximal curriculum has been supported by the research (Valencia, 2006; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993; Aiken, 1942) I structured this study around the following research questions.

- How do teachers perceive their own decision-making practices or abilities concerning curriculum making?

- To what degree do teachers perceive that they are entrusted to adjust curriculum?

- What effect does curriculum customization have on teacher's perception of self-efficacy?

- What are the teacher's perceptions about what it means to customize curriculum?

This study revealed several results that were consistent with the research literature and previous small studies to confirm the (a) value of curriculum developed proximally, (b) the contribution from teachers and students to customize the curriculum and change the ownership of learning and (c) the level of teacher efficacy characterized by factors such as professionalism and administrative trust. I used conceptual frameworks to examine these questions that was based on my literature review. I used semi-structured interviews to obtain a rich narrative of the day to day adjustments to the adopted curriculum in the classroom.

Discussion of the Findings

The following sections discuss how the study's findings extend the current literature on the use of proximally developed and teacher customization of literature impacts teacher efficacy and possibly student engagement.

Proximal Curriculum Development

At Western High School the teachers' have limited use for test scores on any high stakes test. Their attitude is consistent with other studies wherein teachers "report that they rarely use students' standardized test scores to evaluate their performance." (Firestone & Pennell, 1993 p. 504). As one of the Language Arts teachers observed that while the use of the tests "does give a benchmark for student achievement. I do think that the overemphasis on it is somewhat detrimental to both student development to actually covering materials that they will actually need in the real world…" At this site, teacher contribution is viewed as more influential to learning than standardized testing.

The same belief held true for curriculum standards. "I think teacher knowledge trumps the use of the curriculum standards in my opinion." The participants in this study believed in the subject knowledge that they had accumulated and that they would convey it through the proximally derived curriculum. This was more important than meeting the distally imposed standards. The participants used concepts to teach and those concepts may or may not align with the standards. This finding is in line with the research reported in Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1993, p.27) that "(d)istal policies are likely to make a major difference in learning only when they affect proximal practices." One of the participants observed that "I think it is attempting to quantify things that cannot be quantified and I look forward to when we can do it better."

Additionally, these teachers understood what knowledge was required to think like, for example, a chemist and used that knowledge to develop curriculum that could help students achieve the necessary subject knowledge. Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1993) isolate three proximal variables that influence student learning: psychological, instructional and home environment. The instructional variables are significant on school learning but not as strong as the psychological. Since teachers' have the most direct impact on instructional environments they play a prominent role in this study. Academic engagement and questioning are prevalent at this site.

Another instructional variable involves classroom management and attention to administrative functions and the efficiencies needed in attending to these tasks. One of the Science teachers noted that she liked the lack of attention to insignificant (i.e. what form her lesson plans took) details so that she could focus on her students and teaching. The participants in this study were all tenured and had years of experience with classroom management. It should be noted that for the most part, discipline is not an issue at Western High School. Data obtained

from the NJ State Report Card reveals that for the 2017-2018 reporting year there were 1.98 per 100 unique incidents reported. 2.2% of the population received out of school suspension. The participants were generally able to diffuse and redirect student issues that would impact learning. For the most part the participants "loved" the curriculum that they had written and thought it was beneficial to student learning.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The idea that curriculum is designed by the teachers and customized as needed, along with being sanctioned by the administrators may provide for further avenues of inquiry. At Western High School, although the teachers had been granted some decision-making ability with regard to curriculum the students, however, students still did not have power to make choices about what they want to learn. Curricular decisional power can be given to students but only by those with the courage to involve students in active learning.

The participants in this study were asked if they gave the students the opportunity to choose what they want to learn. The English department responded affirmatively; students were given a choice of the book they wanted to read but not about anything else. The patterns were set in stone and there was no room for change. Therefore, this evidences a need for further research on establishing more opportunities for student choice. Curricular theorists (Dewey, 1938, Null, et al.) have written about curriculum as being something that happens to students. With the exception of one participant, students are not considered to be active curriculum makers.

Chesler (1970) wrote about shared power that would allow student decision making and give students real power. For Chesler, the role of student involvement in school decision making

would require the power to be real. One of the areas Chesler believed was immediately attainable was in the area of curriculum.

> The content of the curriculum, the organization of classes, the choice of classroom methods, the paths of curriculum sequencing, and the criteria of success and fulfillment of high school education all must be subject of review, guidance, and management by students. (p. 10)

Chesler also observed that students already felt strongly about this issue and showed their opinion by "dropping out, sleeping in class or avoiding certain courses…. (p. 10).

Kohn (1993) continued this discussion about student choice a quarter of a century later. Kohn outlines the numerous barriers to student choice but even in the pre-standards era time is a factor that teachers claim precludes student choice. Teachers have a sense of either chaos or control in the classroom. Most choose control because it allows them keep reigns on what could potentially happen. As Kohn observes "There is nothing surprising about the fact that teachers resist being told what they can teach and how they must manage their classroom. The astonishing fact is that so many of these teachers treat their students in exactly the way they themselves find so offensive." (p 16).

Further, for the teachers, there is a lack of a clearly defined role in the curriculum process. This absence creates ambiguity and conflict for the teachers. The Superintendent and the principal had a hands-off approach to curriculum and did not have a clearly articulated vision. The fact that there are no department supervisors or a Curriculum Director does not allow a means to communicate a vision the teachers. Practice should inform policy although that often does not happen; often it is the reverse. If administrators and teachers alike do not want to be dictated to them should extend choice to students. Fullan (2008) writes of a we-we solution. For

the changes that have been partially implemented at Western High School to continue, the leaders must align the interests of all the parties to school success.

Curriculum Leadership and Authority

At this research location, proximally developed curriculum led to curriculum customization. The customization had an impact on student learning but also upon teacher's sense of self-efficacy. Pre-packaged curriculum had not been a focus at Western High School throughout the history of the school. Even when the nationwide craze of No Child Left Behind took hold, the school never purchased textbooks that aligned with the standards. This decision was based primarily on economics. The District had experienced a period of financial mismanagement in the early 2000's wherein the numbers certified as payable tuition from the sending districts was overstated and the receiving district ended up owing two of the sending districts a significant amount of money. As a result, teaching materials were teacher created and the use of workbooks was not employed. Even today, the Superintendent is not a proponent of textbooks and will not approve the purchase of the books.

Valencia (2006) et al. in a longitudinal study found that new teachers who worked with a scripted curriculum were more procedural and less conceptual in their teaching. During this study, the teachers referenced the fact that they taught concepts that they believed were necessary to succeed in a given subject area. The participants also believed that the hands-off approach extended by the administration was suitable for veteran teachers but not conducive to supporting teachers new to the profession.

Proximal, as defined previously, and in the curriculum context requires that curriculum should be developed locally (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993). Curriculum that is developed

locally has been shown to be more effective (Aiken, 1942) in contributing to student achievement.

At Western High School, the participants in the subject areas examined had implied authority over the curriculum they taught. The participants had written their curriculum and felt empowered to make decisions about the curriculum they were teaching but did not consider themselves to be curriculum makers. In fact, all ten participants did not consider themselves to be curriculum makers.

Everyone has a role in an organization, and an associated set of expectations (Yukl, 2013). Teaching in a K-12 organization places numerous hats upon the members of the organization. At Western High School, the teachers had taken on the role of curriculum authors but they also experienced role ambiguity with regard to curriculum.

In this study, I looked at the roles that teachers took on in developing curriculum in their classrooms. Teacher roles continue to undergo changes in the era of standardization. The results of this study both confirmed the research on locally derived curriculum but also pointed to some contradictions on the effectiveness in Western High School of locally derived curriculum. Participants did not understand their role as active curriculum makers but did understand the role of curriculum writers. This contradiction could be considered to be "role ambiguity". There was role uncertainty with respect to the input teachers had with the curriculum. They did not perceive that they had formal authority to interact with curriculum so it created confusion for the teachers. The roles the teachers took on needed to be clarified for them (Yukl, 2013)

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Conley (1991) offered that teachers' make managerial decisions in the classroom but not in the context of the school. Perhaps that is because teachers are not viewed as professionals

capable of higher leadership responsibilities. This hypothesis may be drawn from the reality of two distinct operating systems in a school – the school as an organization and the classroom. Teachers want that autonomy in their classroom and that is borne out by the results of this study. The participants in this study liked the "hands off" approach offered by the administrators in this school. The participants believed that they were granted the ability to teach and not to be hung up on inconsequential administrative tasks. . The participants also believed that they were given some decision-making authority but still did not see their role in the bigger picture of the school.

Policy makers would be advised to review the results from this qualitative study. The effects of proximal curriculum customization on teachers sense of self-efficacy as direct evidence of the importance of returning curricular control to the local education authority. Furthermore, DeTuro, (2015), in a quantitative study using grade three test scores, found a direct correlation between proximal curriculum and test scores advancing that "creating policy that allows the members of leadership at the local level to work together to create a strong curriculums is the most supported research-based approach to effectuate change" (p. 87). Both of these studies evidence that there is a need to change the approach to curriculum development.

Further research could be undertaken to ascertain if there is a link between social emotional learning and curriculum customization. Social emotional learning has been around for two decades (CASEL, 2019) and concerns itself with giving students the ability to manage themselves. Students being able to manage how they learn and interact with information, how the curriculum is customized to their needs may prove to be a beneficial for policy makers.

Leadership Opportunities

To correct the inconsistency and ambiguity within the organization the school leaders needs to re-frame from only the symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2013) view of organizational

structure and incorporate more contributions from the human resource frame. Within the human resource frame, it is important to provide both information and support. Yukl (2013) offers guidelines for clarifying roles and responsibilities. This clarification must come from the leader of the organization. At Western High School it seems that the Superintendent wanted to allow the teachers freedom to author the curriculum they would teach but there was not a lot of clarity in explaining the reason for the trust that was being placed with the teachers. From the findings, the school leadership at this site has an opportunity to (10 continue the conversation about customization, and (2) formally approve (okay) the process thereby eliminating the role ambiguity the teachers are experiencing.

In terms of the results of this study informing practice there must be a consistent professional development from the leaders of schools and for the in order to effectuate meaningful and long-lasting change to educational structures. All of the administrators should have a consensus concerning the role that teachers should play in interactions with day to day curriculum. Even though there are leadership deficits at this site with respect to teacher authority vis-a-vis curriculum there is still promise from this study that can inform the use of proximal curriculum as a policy.

Prior to the implementation of standardized curriculum as it exists today, schools had choice about what they would teach in the form of their curriculum Aiken (1942). The advent of the Common Core initiative is predicated upon what to teach not how to teach paradigm. Gerrard and Farrell (2014) examined national curriculum in Australia (the AC) and the effect that it had on the professional teacher. These researchers concluded that the National policy enacted in Australia "the AC was understood as a valuable opportunity through which to intervene into teachers' practices." (p. 652). The authors further concluded that a national curriculum is limiting

a teachers' professional authority by constraining teaching. Their research can inform policy decisions in the United States as more States move away from the Common Core initiative.

Perceptions of Teacher Efficacy

In this study, the evidence of teacher ability to customize their curriculum lead to a greater sense of teacher efficacy. Much has been written on the subject of teacher efficacy. Originally defined as the teachers' beliefs in their own capabilities (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998) the causal connections between efficacy and other areas have been broadly studied. There have been countless studies and instruments developed to assess teacher efficacy and it is still studied into the 21st century. The sources of teacher self-efficacy as it relates to professional development and new teaching strategies related to the efforts teachers invest (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009) reveal the extent to which teacher efficacy is affected or can affect teachers.

This study revealed a link between teacher choice and authority over curriculum and teacher efficacy. Each teacher believed that they were effective in their teaching and the authority over the taught curriculum contributed to this sense of efficacy. Although eight out of ten had written their own curriculum five of the participants did not believe that they were active curriculum makers. They did not view writing the curriculum as being the same as modifying the curriculum at the classroom level. This contributed to the role ambiguity.

Table 5

Efficacy belief tied to curriculum making

Participant	Efficacy Belief	Active Curriculum Maker	Wrote own curriculum
Lamb	+	-	+
Lu	+	-	+
Lessing	+	+	+
Lee	+	+	+
Lovecraft	+	+	+
Park	+	+	+
Farmer	+	+	+
Walker	+	-	+
Shaw	+	-	-
Shakespeare	+	-	-

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Administrators need to re-define or clarify the roles of the teachers with regard to curriculum. As evidenced by the findings reflected in Table 5, while eight out of ten of the teachers had written their own curriculum only five out of those eight believed themselves to be active curriculum makers. While I was coding for this information, I discovered a role ambiguity that led to confusion in the organization. In the larger world of education, curriculum has been removed from teachers' purview by external forces that believe a standardized approach to learning is more beneficial. The school administration is trying to return the role of active curriculum making/writing to the teachers. Re-framing the role of teachers (Bolman & Deal, 2013) in the curriculum process to provide clarity will benefit this school community. The administrators at Western School have initiated the return of the curriculum to the teachers

because they realize that they cannot do everything. They have empowered others in the decision-making process but did not build relationships or ask for feedback (Bolman and Deal, 2010). They are teetering on re-framing the school organizational structure but just need to follow through and enact the model suggested by Bolman and Deal, (2013) in the human resource frame.

The limited results from this qualitative study furthers the research initiated by Tramaglini and Tienken (2016)in their quantitative study about proximally developing curriculum. The development of curriculum by the participants in their area of expertise reveals a departure from standardized curriculum. This study proposes extending the use of proximally developed curriculum. The return of curriculum to the classroom teacher along with the authority to customize the curriculum was shown in this study to heighten the sense of teacher efficacy. Both this study and the previous of study are small but show potential for applicability on a larger scale. This study focused on a rural high school with a small population contrasted with Tramaglini and Tienken (2016) who studied high poverty schools (n=329) in an urban area.

Summary of Interconnected Themes

The conclusions presented in this study are not mutually exclusive but support each other. In this study, it was determined that teacher subject knowledge was used to support the development of locally derived proximal curriculum. The teacher subject knowledge also supports conceptual curriculums. The use of conceptual teaching leads to increased student learning. Additionally, the teachers in this study had the ability and the implied authority from the administration to customize the adopted curriculum to meet the needs of the students in a given classroom. The teachers took advantage of this trust to modify their curriculum on an as needed basis. The participants in this study noticed increased   student engagement. This in turn

had an impact on teacher efficacy. At Western High School the teacher efficacy had a perceived

positive impact on student learning.

Figure 1.

Summary of interconnected themes.
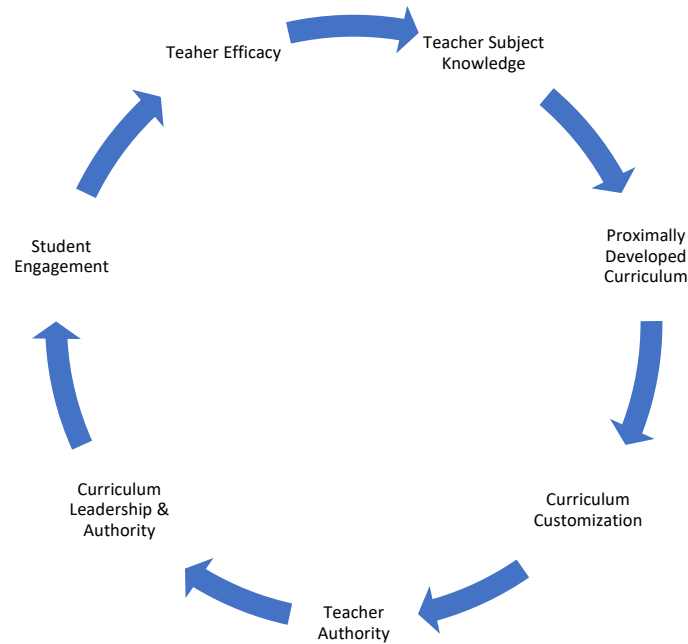
Theory versus Practice

The theory supports locally developed curriculum as a means to effectuate change for

both the teaching staff and the students. In this instance theory can support the practice of

customizing curriculum. In this study, the administrators are close to adopting a customized

approach to curriculum but are required to convey their intentions to the faculty. The faculty

seems amenable and empowered by the authority that they have been granted they just need to

have their roles clearly defined.

Future Research

Further research involving adolescent psychology would be needed in order to demonstrate whether there is a link between adolescent autonomy, curricular choices and engagement. The research may show a causal connection to the zone of proximal development. Research of this type would be an extension of the research of Chesler (1976) and Kohn (1998) and markedly change the way we think about curriculum. Additionally, modern day applicability would take into account the rise of digital natives (Prensky, 2001) and the changes in learning to include the virtual environment. Further study is needed as to the level of engagement of students and the applicability of proximally developed customized curriculum to student engagement.

Through the rise of social media and the spread of cloud-based computing, the delivery platforms for learning have changed. Learning and schooling may no longer be teacher dependent but, rather, teacher facilitated. This new paradigm for learning creates a gap in the literature concerning curriculum. Currently, learners are more in control of the directions of their knowledge acquisition. Indeed, this a curriculum route that creates a detour from standards-based learning.

Further, the research questions pertaining to teacher efficacy were self-reported and no instruments to asses (1) teacher locus of control or (2) responsibility for student achievement were administered (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy 1998). A survey instrument could be developed or one of the many instruments that have been developed as outlined in (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy 1998) should be utilized to assess deeper understanding of the role teacher's play in control over curriculum.

This study proposed extending the research on proximally developed curriculum to include curriculum customization. Curriculum is a vehicle for learning but even site-based curriculum may not be enough. Student based learning and individualized lesson plans require further study. Special education students have benefited from the individualized education plan (IEP) perhaps it is time to apply that practice to all students. The feasibility and benefits of this approach would warrant further research. The field of curriculum is not to be narrowed or constrained by the adults in the equation but leaving it open to student choice would create infinite opportunities for learning.

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APPENDIX A

Solicitation Letter

Thank you for your consideration of participating in this study.

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Sylvia A. Dixon-McInerney, a doctoral student, at Seton Hall University, Department of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy**.**

The purpose of the study is to explore how teachers interact with standardized curriculum and any changes that they may make to the adopted school curriculum.

Your participation will take approximately an hour of your time.

The participation will involve a semi-structured interview at your school at a time that is convenient for you. There will be no experimental procedures involved with this research.

Participation is completely voluntary. By contacting this researcher at sylvia.dixonomcinerney@student.shu.edu or sadixon930@gmail.com you are giving your consent to participate in this study.

 Data will be coded to maintain confidentiality; thus, no data will be personally identified with you. Your name will not appear in any presentation or publication coming from this research. If you agree to participate, you may choose not to answer any given questions, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time. There are no known risks beyond the inconvenience of time.

The audio recordings will be transcribed and you will have the opportunity to review the transcript and the recording. The transcription of the interview will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's place of employment. This interview will also be stored digitally on a USB drive. All audio recordings will be deleted once the transcribed copy is verified by your review of the transcript

.

If you have questions or concerns about the treatment of participants in this study, you may call or write:

| Professor Mary F. Ruziicka, Ph.D.

Seton Hall University

400 South Orange Avenue

South Orange, NJ 07079

(973) 313-6314

(973) 275-2361 (fax)

irb@shu.edu | Sylvia A. Dixon-McInerney

Seton Hall University

Department of Education Leadership & Policy

400 South Orange Avenue

South, Orange, NJ 07079

sylvia.dixonomcinerney@student.shu.edu or sadixon930@gmail.com |

Sincerely,

Sylvia A. Dixon-McInerney

Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

SETON HALL ∭ UNIVERSITY.
1 8 5 6

September 26, 2018

Sylvia A. Dixon-McInerney
202 DePue Street
Belvidere, NJ 07823

Dear Ms. Dixon-McInerney,

This letter is a formal statement that your study, "A Study of Curriculum Customization in the Era of Standardization of Education" does not fall under the purview of the IRB. This is because, as you describe it in your application of Sept 12, 2018, the study is a non-generalizable case study on tenured faculty at Belvidere High School only on their perceptions of their curriculum.

Please remove the reference to the IRB office and myself in the letter of solicitation and in the Informed Consent document before you give them to the participants.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Michael D. Kuchar

APPENDIX C

APPROVAL FOR DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
Promoting Professional Practice

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL FOR DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Candidate, _Sylvia A. Dixon- McTwerns_ has successfully completed all requisite requirements. This candidate's proposal has been reviewed and the candidate may proceed to collect data according to the approved proposal for dissertation under the direction of the mentor and the candidate's dissertation committee.

If there are substantive differences between what has been approved and the actual study, the final dissertation should indicate, on separate pages in the Appendix, the approval of the committee for those changes.

Title of Proposed Dissertation:

A Study of Curriculum Customization In The Era Of Standardization Of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Michael D Kuchar	_[signature]_ 5/25/18
Mentor (Print Name)	Signature/Date
Christopher Tienken	_Christophe Tienken_ 5-23-18
Committee Member (Print Name)	Signature/Date
Scott Taylor	_[signature]_ 5-23-18
Committee Member (Print Name)	Signature/Date
Committee Member (Print Name)	Signature/Date
Committee Member (Print Name)	Signature/Date

APPENDIX D

SITE APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

May 30, 2018

Seton Hall University
Office of the Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall – 3rd Floor
400 South Orange Avenue
South Orange, NJ 07079

Dear Sir or Madam:

Please be advised that the researcher, Sylvia A. Dixon-McInerney has the permission of Western
High School to engage in research at this site, The purpose of the research is to interview the
teachers, who are employed with Western High School, concerning their experiences with the
Common Core Curriculum.

Further, it is our understanding that the interviews will begin in September 2018 and conclude by
February 2019. If you have any questions relative to this matter please do not hesitate to contact
me at the above number.

Sincerely,

Principal

APPENDIX E

Sample Interview Protocol

Background of Participant

1. Have you been teaching for 5 or more years?

2. Is this the only District you have taught at?

3. How did you come to teaching as a profession? Is this a second career?

Knowledge of Curriculum Standards

4. In your time teaching, have you used more than one set of curriculum standards?

5. In your time teaching, how often has your curriculum been re-written?

6. What is the frequency of your lesson plans? Do you plan by day, week or unit?

7. How do you incorporate the CCSS into your lesson plans?

8. Do you feel you are successful in incorporating the CCSS? Why or Why Not?

9. Does your school ask for participation in test preparation?

10. What is your perception of the importance of standardized test scores (PSAT, SAT, AP, PARCC) in your District?

11. Do the standards guide your lesson preparation? How so?

12. How relevant is the adopted curriculum to the needs of your students?

What are teacher perceptions about what it means to customize curriculum?

13. In using the term "curriculum customization" how familiar are you with that term?

14. What do you think the term means?

15. Do you think about the adopted curriculum and try to find ways to modify the curriculum?

16. What have been your opportunities with customizing the curriculum?

17. How often do you revise your lesson plan in "real time"?

18. How do you perceive the impact of these standards on learning?

19. How much reliance is placed on textbooks?

20. Describe the opportunities that you have had to customize the curriculum?

21. Describe how those opportunities were initiated?

How do teachers perceive their own decision-making practices or abilities concerning curriculum making?

22. How much knowledge do teachers have of other teachers work?

23. How much time do teachers have for collaboration?

24. Have you ever collaborated with another teacher?

25. Was the collaboration in the same subject area?

26. How did you feel that went when you collaborated?

27. Are their links in your teaching made to the needs of the community? If so what are they?

    Are they effective?

28. Do you feel you are expected to act on your own to modify the curriculum?

29. Do you feel you are prohibited from acting on your own to modify the curriculum?

What effect does curriculum customization have on teachers' perception of self-efficacy?

30. Are you familiar with the concept of self-efficacy?

31. What does that term mean to you?

32. Do you feel like you are treated as a professional in your district?

33. Does your district expect you to be a curriculum maker?

34. Do you feel you can draw on your professional knowledge to contribute actively to your

    district?