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The Science Is in the Dance: The Curricular Intentions of an Innovation School

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THE SCIENCE IS IN THE DANCE: THE CURRICULAR
INTENTIONS OF AN INNOVATION SCHOOL

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Tatum Michele Monaghan

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Teacher Education
Educational Studies

August, 2022

This Dissertation by: Tatum Michele Monaghan

Entitled: *The Science Is In The Dance: The Curricular Intentions of an Innovation School*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Teacher Education, Program of Educational Studies

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ABSTRACT

Monaghan, Tatum Michele. *The science is in the dance: The curricular intentions of an innovation school.* Published Doctor of Education dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2022.

This qualitative study employed educational criticism and connoisseurship to examine the curricular intentions of a school that was pushing to reform traditional standards-based curriculum methods. Improvement of the educational process required that focus be given to schools who had begun to do things differently, schools that had taken a risk to reform. This study examined a public school that holds innovation status. Data collection included interviews with the three founding teachers of the school and document analysis of a planning session transcript that included the school's nine staff members. Additionally, data collection included document analysis of the founding teachers' participation in a focus group that included a photo elicitation activity. Due to its acknowledgement of the robust nature of institutions, the five elements of Elliot Eisner's (1998) ecology of schooling were employed as a framework for investigation of curriculum intentions. The lenses of reform, socio-emotional learning, and community learning pedagogies brought to life the examination of the intentions written into the innovation school's mission statement. Findings of this study indicated a connection between the theory of perceptive teaching with the school's ability to create mission-driven intentional curriculum.

Keywords: educational criticism and connoisseurship, ecology of schooling, reform, socio-emotional learning, community learning

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with genuine pleasure I give thanks to everyone who has supported me on my journey through my doctoral program and the writing of this dissertation. First and foremost, I have to recognize the sacrifices my husband Kevin endured. With love, you made quiet and time appear when I needed it most. You were my personal editor, reading through pages of academic jargon late into the evenings. I recognize the extra work you put in with the boys to help me accomplish this dream. I am forever indebted to you. To my boys, Liam and Tate, you have supported me throughout these past four years with pride and love. I am so thankful to have such caring and understanding tiny humans in my life. Dr. Amy Nelson, having you by my side throughout this journey made life bearable and more importantly enjoyable. I am so fortunate to have gained a friend to experience the ups and downs, the tears, and the laughter that this program provided. My parents, Ken and Jodi Holman, and my sister, Brianne Holman, thank you all for always believing in me and for helping keep my boys busy when I need to stare at a book or a screen for long periods of time. My mother-in-law, Patty Cleary, I can't thank you enough for your encouragement throughout this program and for also entertaining my boys when I needed them out of the house.

I wouldn't have been able to start this journey if it weren't for my Pete Mirich family. Lori Romero, Mike Andrews, Cody Stone, and Melissa Flores-Bowen, you believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. You helped me work through two of the hardest academic years I have ever endured. Finishing this program wouldn't have been possible without my Fred Tjardes family. Your support and acknowledgment of the work I was putting in outside of the

classroom were greatly appreciated. You all push me as a learner and as a human and I am filled with gratitude to be surrounded by you all. Courtney Luce, your wisdom and understanding of what a doctoral program requires inspired me regularly. Patrick Kruchten, I have no words to express how blessed I feel to have you as a mentor and friend. You let me process out loud and helped me think through some of the hardest parts of this dissertation writing process.

The completion of this study could not have been possible without the expertise of Dr. Christy McConnell, my research advisor. I owe you a debt of gratitude as you helped me navigate this project when the forest grew dense and pushed me beyond my own expectations. I would also like to acknowledge the support of my long-time mentor, Dr. Jenni Harding-Middleton. Without you, I would have never found my way to or through this doctoral program and for that, I am forever grateful. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Suzette Youngs and Dr. Connie Stewart for letting my defense be an enjoyable experience, and for all of your thoughtful comments, questions, and suggestions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Critical Prologue

There was no way I could have known the words drifting on a Cheba Hut patio would be so life-changing; the day before the world shut down due to the Covid19 pandemic, my journey as an educator would take an unexpected leap. The atmosphere everywhere we had been that day was quiet and fearful. The computer lab was full of hushed conversations about the university possibly shutting down, the restaurant was empty, and people were fearfully distanced from one another. I had spent the morning on the university campus working through coding with professors for whom I was a graduate research assistant (GRA). Once the coding analysis talk we were having died down, one of the professors excitedly mentioned that the innovation school downtown was hiring: "They have two positions open! I'm even thinking about applying myself!" They rarely had openings; it's not a place that teachers, or students for that matter, wanted to leave. I pounded her with questions, "Where is it listed? What are the positions? You really think I should go for it?" I had not been looking to change schools or jobs but for some reason, on that day when the world was full of unknowns and a pandemic was about to take hold, something shifted when I heard this news. Maybe it was the stillness of the world, perhaps it was that I had begun to feel too still myself; whatever it was, it ignited a fire in me that I had not felt in too long, and I was applying for the positions before I had even arrived home.

A Different Kind of School

Although I had visited the school twice, having taken the teachers I worked with there to observe "different" types of learning settings, I did not know much about their philosophy so I prepared like crazy for my interview. I had not been interviewed myself in 16 years, and I wanted to be ready for anything. I prepared by writing down all of the programs I had learned to use and all of the standardized testing systems I had been responsible for—Infinite Campus, PearsonAccessNext, SRA, CMAS, DIBELS, EngageNY, Orton Gillingham—and I practiced answering questions similar to those we used when interviewing teachers: How do you believe children learn? What is your philosophy on reading? What strategies are best to use in math instruction? What would you do if a child threw a chair in your classroom? To my surprise, those preparations were unnecessary. They asked me how I would create a community within my classroom? What did I know about restorative justice? What could I tell them about white privilege in education? Unknowingly, my interview preparation had been happening in my doctoral program. Suddenly, everything began to coalesce around me as a much clearer vision was being laid out in front of me. I felt a rush of relief for these questions had true meaning as they were about the things that mattered in education. These questions were questions that made me want to teach for all of the right reasons. I finished the interview on a complete high, having peeked into a school doing things differently, doing things the right way. I felt energized in a way I had not felt in years.

Compliancy Gaslight

My entire career in education, 16 years, had been spent in a small public rural district with a goal of improving the academic achievement of students. In my last six years, my role was instructional coach; passing the high-stakes state assessments and keeping the school at an

acceptable state performance level in growth and academic achievement had driven my work. Curriculum and assessment data were my specialty for those six years. I knew the scripted curricula inside and out, partially because I had helped choose them but primarily because of the data-driven instruction movement. I taught data-driven instruction classes within the district, ran daily data meetings with teachers, and constantly scrubbed the data to find connections between curriculum and instruction. Did the test match the lessons? If it did, why wasn't a specific kid passing? If it didn't, what did we need to tweak so that it would? I spent my days in classrooms following along with the scripted lesson as the teacher taught; my charge was to ensure they were teaching with fidelity because our scores were excellent when they did. We achieved some of the district's highest growth and achievement scores and our accomplishments were noticed. The assistant superintendent often visited our school and complimented us regularly on a job well done.

He and I had an excellent relationship. He loved the data and ours looked great. He loved that I could show him precisely what tweaks needed to be made according to test data and curriculum documents. I sat on district accountability committees and helped him teach others to scrub data and analyze the curriculum. One afternoon, I heard he was in the building walking through classrooms with my principal so I went to find them. The hallways were eerily quiet; we had made recent security adjustments and teachers were required to teach with their doors closed. The quiet was antithetical to how a building full of 400 children should sound. He had stopped in front of a third-grade classroom and was standing on his tippy toes, peering through the small rectangular window. Students were seated on the floor in straight rows, marked by tape on the floor, facing forward while their teacher held a printed copy of her scripted curriculum plan in her hand. He turned to me, smiled brightly, and complimented, "Your students are always

so engaged." The world around me suddenly began to spin; this comment shifted something so deep in my soul that it left me feeling nauseous. Looking back, I see that moment as my breaking point. It left me feeling confused—why hadn't this compliment from someone I had always worked so hard to please given me the sense of pride it should? As the smoke began to clear, I was left with a truth that would change me forever. Those students were not engaged; they were compliant. That teacher wasn't engaged; she was compliant. My faith in the education system was disappearing, vanishing as I stood there in that hallway. With the assistant superintendent smiling at me from the hallway, I raised to my tiptoes and peered into that classroom to meet my son's sad gaze. He loathed being compliant and was not the greatest at it. He worked hard to survive this environment. I needed more for my son than mere surviving; all those kids needed something more.

I was left feeling heavy with questions. What was I doing? Forcing teacher-proof curriculum and training students in compliance techniques? And for what? High test scores? Were those kids learning and receiving an exemplary education? They were not becoming problem solvers, let alone problem finders. They were being programmed to pass assessments and I felt terrible about it all at once. After his visit, I sat in my office and tears streamed down my face. At the time, it felt silly but it empowered me. It changed me. I knew I could not continue down this path as it no longer matched my mission.

Don't get me wrong, my principal for the last eight years was a firm believer in educating the whole child and believed that student needs were a top priority. Our school was known for going rogue on occasion. My principal had not completely bought into the idea that test scores were everything, and he challenged us to find a way to put student needs ahead of academics when necessary. That said, our feet were to the fire to keep our scores up and we quickly found

the strategies used by No Excuse Organizations did increase our academic achievement capabilities. We had one of the best elementary school counselors in the business, working her tail off to teach us about trauma-informed practices and socio-emotional learning, but data drove the district itself. Everything we did came down to those hot July days when state test scores were released; I'd start getting texts from teachers that read, "Hey coach, have you seen any numbers yet?" In a district driven by the simple mission statement—"to provide an exemplary and safe education for all," I felt very much in the test passing business.

Perhaps it was studying education reform in my doctoral program; maybe it was seeing my own children make their way through a scores-driven system. Whatever the cause, I knew making a change was necessary to continue my work in education. When the opportunity to work at The Rainbow Innovation School (TRIS) presented itself, I knew it was time to leap.

Introduction

Uhrmacher (1995) declared, "Anyone interested in understanding or improving public schools, one important place to start is with the investigation of other types of school systems" (p. 382). Uhrmacher spent much of his career looking at different types of schools including Waldorf systems. Uhrmacher's work, influenced greatly by Elliot Eisner's work around aesthetics in learning, drove his passion for looking at different versions of classrooms, different techniques of instruction, and an overall more artful educational system. While society evolves and needs change, historical changes in how traditional schools function have been minimal. Schools that take risks to break the conventional mold, move away from a focus on high-stakes assessments, and focus on students' needs and motivations are hard to find. Taking those risks could be a daring game in a system that is managed and evaluated at the state level. For students, properly managed risk-taking might increase cognitive development, creativity, self-motivation,

and interest in the subject matter (Uhrmacher & Bunn, 2011) but for educators, it could lead to unsatisfactory evaluations and closed schools. Students need schools to take this risk and students need opportunities to access educational opportunities that reflect societal evolution.

Understanding the needs and motivations of students should be put back into the forefront of education design. Dewey (1956/1990) said, "Knowledge is no longer an immobile solid; it has been liquefied. It is actively moving in all the currents of society itself" (p. 25). Changing the content to reflect the needs of society is critical as we prepare students to participate as fully engaged citizens. Dewey described this as content that "enlarges his horizon, instead of mere trivialities. He must become acquainted with truths, instead of things that were regarded as such fifty years ago or that are taken as interesting by the understanding of a partially educated teacher" (pp. 78-79).

This chapter begins with an overview of the context driving the study. I identify a problem statement followed by a statement of purpose with accompanying research questions. I identify the research approach, educational criticism, and connoisseurship. Following this is an outline of my perspectives and assumptions. Finally, this chapter provides a discussion of the rationale and significance of this study.

Background and Rationale

The history of education over the past 100 years has been characterized by the lack of change surrounding our educational institutions. In Derek Black's (2020) book *Schoolhouse Burning,* he described the turmoil schools have endured due to their direct connection to political tides. Standardized tests have driven the education system for far too long: "Too many people are not equipped with the education they need to distinguish fact from fiction, good from bad, or even their own self-interest" (Black, 2020, p. 26). Black identified:

The best schools—the ones that really make a difference in children's lives rather than just replicating the advantages or disadvantages they bring with them from home—are those that focus on children's wellness and development, on what they eat, on their cultural awareness, on how they talk to one another, on how the adults talk to them, on their roles as members of a community, on how they see themselves. (p. 28)

The types of schools in Black described above are not the norm. Schools that fit this description, schools that are truly moving toward a more humane education that better serves society, need to be talked about. The stories of schools that do things differently need to be told and heard to move educational systems toward necessary change. My experiences in a school driven by standardized tests and my current situation in a school that appears to resemble what Black described provided me an opportunity to discern, appreciate, and value the differences within these two very different types of systems.

Standardized testing has become a fixture in American education, shaped by a culture of numbers and evaluation (Hutt & Schneider, 2018, p. 12). This testing culture has changed the curriculum intentions, both for teachers and administrators. Teachers are evaluated based on the outcomes of tests and, in most cases, must adhere to teaching subjects and skills that get tested, while those that are not tested frequently are overlooked or simply left out. The hidden agenda behind the assessments signals that some subjects hold more social importance than others (Hutt & Schneider, 2018, p. 16). A curriculum that includes a socio-emotional emphasis, one which embodies socio-emotional learning (Collaborative of Academics for Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022b), has not been found in most school systems that emphasize the passing of standardized tests.

The wellness of our children is not emphasized as it should be. Research has shown that current societal demands require awareness of mental health, social interplay, and conflict resolution skills for students to become well-adjusted adults (Humphrey et al., 2007). Current school structures are simply not meeting these demands. Socio-emotional learning is often offered to students in the form of a half-hour class once a week with a counselor—this arguably inadequate.

Similarly, working in harmony is also not emphasized in current educational systems. Passing tests does not require that students work together but our society does. I believe schools should focus on creating a community of learners rather than the achievement of individuals. The type of democratic curriculum envisioned by Dewey (1956/1990) is no longer within reach for teachers suppressed by the systems and standardization of today's education machine. The growth of the child is no longer of focus: "Not knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal. To possess all the world's knowledge and lose one's own self is as awful a fate in education as religion" (Dewey, 1956/1990, p. 187).

Today's children are subjected to a curriculum of subjects deemed to be essential and it is "divid[ing] and fractioniz[ing] the world for [them]" (Dewey, 1956/1990, p. 184). Diane Ravitch (2010) suggested, "We must make sure that our schools have strong, coherent, explicit curriculum that is grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, with plenty of opportunity for children to engage in activities and projects that make learning lively" (p. 13). Teachers no longer have the power to individualize education for students, can no longer use the child's interests and curiosities to drive the education they receive, and cannot provide opportunities for students to learn as a community (learning communities) or within the community (community based-learning).

Problem Statement

Margolis et al. (2001) argued that one story Western culture teaches us is "curriculum can be hidden by a general social agreement not to see" (p. 2). The curriculum that high stakes testing has required our educational system to bow to results in teachers becoming "mere accessories" to the machine of education (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 14). Apple (1982) similarly described reducing the curriculum to only what could be measured by standardized tests. High-stakes testing has become a force that diminishes the democratic intentions that pull one to the profession of education. They appear to be overwhelmed with a systematic curriculum that possibly gives students only the tools they need to pass standardized assessments. The result is students no longer receive an "education that is development from within" (Dewey, 1938, p.5).

Stories of schools working against the curriculum driven by high-stakes assessments are few and far between. "Making the strange familiar and the familiar strange are two guiding slogans for cultural anthropologists" (Uhrmacher, 1995, p. 382); as a researcher striving to reform current educational systems, I tell the story of a system offering a more humane form of education.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

Understanding how different schools function, specifically how they implement curriculum, is critical to increasing the likelihood that we will see a different version of education in the future. Using educational criticism and connoisseurship as a research method, I explored the following questions:

Q1   What are the intentions of the founding teachers and how are they actualized in curriculum?

Q2   How do the founding teachers' intentions, as written in the mission statement, inform the curriculum planning process?

Q3   What are the implications of the relationship between intention and application for curriculum and school reform?

Research Approach

This paper tells the story of a school that intentionally chose to do things differently. This is the story of The Rainbow School of Innovation (TRIS). The school consists of nine educators and functions using a distributive leadership model in which teachers lead all decisions surrounding curriculum and instruction. I used qualitative research methods employing the research methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship. Educational criticism and connoisseurship are interpretive and designed to explore "meanings and consequences of educational events," which allowed me to discern the differences between traditional education curriculum intentions and those that occurred at TRIS (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 3). Furthermore, the evaluative features in the educational criticism and connoisseurship design helped me to evaluate the educational significance of the findings (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Interviews with the school's founding teachers and curriculum development planning sessions from the collaborators were the primary source of data—additionally, document analysis of the mission statement and planning documents was coded. The founders were asked to provide photo voice journals (Jarldorn, 2019), which provided additional artifacts for analysis. I assumed the role of researcher for the interviews and for the curriculum planning session. Creswell and Poth (2018) described this as "participant as observer, a more salient position than the researcher role" (p. 167). Participant as observer requires participating in the activity at the site while gaining insider views and subjective data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Themes distilled from coding and data analysis were used to provide an understanding of the educational context.

Through the use of thick-rich descriptions in the form of vignettes, I told the story with an evaluative aspect to provide experience and guidance for future reform efforts.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study came from my personal experiences and my desire to uncover ways in which schools could more humanely and more appropriately meet the needs of students and prepare them for a society that is ever evolving. The lack of meaningful change in current school systems has left me disheartened as a teacher and as a parent. As a researcher and a student of educational reform, I felt compelled to investigate and document change as it is happening and make that information available to future reform endeavors.

I believe an increased understanding of reforms that have taken hold and produced positive outcomes helps those working to change education systems. Learning how to modify curriculum in the current high-stakes testing environment is critical if we believe schools should focus on the whole child rather than their ability to produce achievement scores. Understanding how to provide students with an education that would make a difference in their lives and give them meaningful roles in the community is what it all comes down to. Understanding what happens when schools take the risk to change is where we can look for answers.

The Researcher

For the individual interviews and focus group, I took the role of researcher. However, I placed myself as a participant observer while participating in the curricular planning activity and observing from the role of a peer to my colleagues. I am employed as a collaborator at TRIS and work with 8 to 11-year-old students. I participate fully in the development and planning of the curriculum. Having this insider perspective required me to identify my biases and describe what I saw and heard—not what I expected to find.

Eisner (2017) described the importance of antecedent knowledge. Having history in a topic has "bearing on our ability to experience its qualities" (Eisner, 2017, p. 65). The "antecedent factors are relevant for making sense" and as a participant observer, it is important that I provided some context of the hallmark differences between TRIS and traditional school systems (Eisner, 2017, p. 65). Museum night is an event where students at TRIS are given an authentic opportunity to tell and show the community and stakeholders what they have learned over the course of each loop. This event is an opportunity for students to show their learning to the community through the use of artifacts and products in a teaching format. This is different from traditional school systems that use assessments to exhibit student learning. Student portfolios are how the collaborators at TRIS allow students to reflect on the work they have done over the course of each learning loop. Students are given the opportunity to show evidence of growth they have made toward their goals, set new goals, and talk about how they have grown as a learner. These portfolios have been digitized so students have access to them throughout their entire time at TRIS. This is different from traditional grading systems in that it allows students to reflect and show how they are growing academically with evidence.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Collaborator. The Rainbow Innovation School uses this term in place of the traditional term teacher to emphasize the role of a facilitator and a learner rather than one who holds all of the knowledge.

Community-Based Learning. An intentional pedagogical strategy to integrate student learning in academic courses with community engagement. This work is based on reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships among instructors, students, and community groups.

High-Stakes Testing. Examinations in which the outcomes are used to make crucial decisions regarding the student, the teacher, and the school.

Humane Education. A comprehensive and necessary methodology that equips learners with the tools to think critically and identify creative and impactful solutions to interconnected global challenges. Humane education encourages many character values including compassion, respect, empathy, and inclusion. Learners develop sensitivity to other living beings and the abiotic world within which we all survive, and they learn to appreciate the diversity of life on our planet (Humane Education Coalition, 2021). Humane education also provides opportunities for individuals to develop a sense of responsibility, stewardship, and self-esteem through its solutions-oriented approach by empowering learners to make choices that align with their values and take action as confident, capable citizens.

Learning Communities. Provide a space and a structure for people to align around a shared goal. Effective communities are both aspirational and practical. These communities enable participants to share results and learn from each other, thereby improving their ability to achieve rapid, yet significant progress.

Reform. Make changes in typically a social, political, or economic institution or practice to improve it.

Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL). The process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success.

Standardized Testing. Examinations given and scored in a predetermined manner.

Teacher-Proof Curriculum. A curriculum designed in a "cookbook" fashion so everyone who uses it has the same outcomes.

Traditional School. A school divided into grades and governed by local school districts

adhering to state education department requirements including standardized assessments.

Summary

This chapter provided a critical prologue to help frame the origins of my critical

awareness of this topic. The introduction and conceptual framework provided background

information that shaped my thought process in designing this research study. The conceptual

framework drove the problem statement and research questions. An overview of my

methodology, research rationale, and significance helped further give insight into the

development of this study design. Chapter II reviews the literature that provided the lenses for

this educational criticism and connoisseurship design, specifically the areas of reform, social-

emotional learning, learner communities, and community-based learning. These topics originated

from the TRIS's mission statement as further discussed in Chapter II.

Chapter III details the methodology for this study including site and participants, data

collection, and analysis procedures. The interviews, documents, and focus group discussion were

coded in a very traditional and systematic way. I followed Saldaña's (2016) methods for InVivo

for my first round of coding. My second round of coding, looking for themes, was specifically

aligned to phrases found in the RIS's mission statement.

Chapter IV contains a thick and rich description (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of the data

collection process. Educational criticism and connoisseurship describe this process as the ability

to help the reader see and feel what I experienced during the data collection process (Uhrmacher

et al., 2017). Similarly, using my past experiences as an instructional coach and having

experienced and worked with many types of teaching styles, my connoisseurship from this area

allowed a positive critique to naturally evolve in these descriptions.

In Chapter V, the major findings are presented. The biggest finding was the mission statement that drives the TRIS was, in reality, their statement of curriculum. The amount of time the founding teachers and collaborators grounded themselves in the mission statement impacted the curriculum that evolved in their classrooms. Curriculum was developed and curated based on exact phrases from the mission statement and this alignment was significant.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review begins with research that calls for educational research to be done in different types of schooling structures. Theorist Uhrmacher (1995) and historian Cuban (1990) suggested that research on different types of schools could impact future reform efforts. Additionally, this review outlines the concept of curriculum. Curriculum used within schools potentially denotes its mission. While schools often have mission statements that are not connected to their curriculum, in many cases, the curriculum appears to indicate the school's mission. As little research has been done on mission-driven schools, a review of the literature on mission-driven organizations could provide insight into the impact of mission-driven schools.

Additionally, reviewing relevant literature on reform, socio-emotional learning, a community of learners, and community-based learners set the stage for The Rainbow School of Innovation (TRIS) analysis. Their mission statement read:

> Children are naturally curious and creative learners. By connecting students with meaningful questions and real tools, we will foster an atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged, and students are empowered to become problem-finders and problem-solvers. We will nurture each student's character development and inspire a sense of social responsibility by creating local partnerships that allow students to engage with their community.

Statements made within their mission statement set a premise for the school's curriculum intentions. The words "nurture each student's character development" emphasize a socio-emotional learning framework. Community learning pedagogies provide a framework for "inspir[ing] a sense of social responsibility by creating local partnerships that allow students to engage with their community." Analyzing curriculum intentions and whether or not those intentions come to fruition through planning and instruction could provide insight to future reform efforts.

<div align="center">**Different Types of Schools**</div>

When it comes to common standards of education, Eisner (1998) noted, "The aspiration to adopt a common set of standards for all is a failure to recognize differences among the students with whom we work" (p. 180); opportunities for different types of learners must be available. What is suitable for one child might not be particularly good for the next, even within the same household. Sadly, when Robert Maynard Hutchinson, former president of the University of Chicago, touted "the best education for the best, is the best education for all" (as cited Beston, 2017, para. 24), many governmental agencies and private donors grasped onto this idea, pushing for a limited view of what those deemed *the best* would imagine schools should be. The type of education that is valued could become contentious. Different schools offer different educational environments, and studying environments that differ from the norm are essential for improving education systems.

Uhrmacher (1995) often looked at the outliers in education, the small pockets of reform, reminding scholars that if reform is the intention, one must closely examine what is happening. He solicited that "anyone interested in understanding or improving public schools, one important place to start is investigating other types of school systems" (p. 382). Uhrmacher and Bunn's

2011 book *Beyond the One Room School* provided a variety of "pioneering learning environments" that created a vision for current educators into the classrooms of teachers making a change, living a piece of reform. Uhrmacher and Bunn argued that "little attention is being paid to the quality of present experiences in schools and classrooms" (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2018), giving credit to teachers in the field by commending them on the good work they were doing despite the high stakes testing environment.

In their book *Democratic Schools: Lessons in Powerful Education*, Apple and Beane (2007) closely examined reformed schools. They took a deep dive into five schools that did not follow a traditional model; these schools followed a more democratic approach to educating students without following conventional standards and did not use curriculum designed with the sole purpose of training students to pass standardized achievement tests. The schools they featured found practical ways to increase participation from all stakeholders including students, parents, and residents. As Apple and Beane explained, "The curriculum in these schools is based on the belief that knowledge comes to life for students and teachers only when it is connected to something serious" (p. 151). The idea of serious, meaning rigorous intellectual work, showed that when students are given the power to make a difference in the social world in which they live, they bring democracy back to life. Apple and Beane argued, "These schools and classrooms have not broken away from a tradition; they have found their way back to it" (p. 153), noting the traditional reform efforts neglected the tradition of like-minded steps toward democratic education. Apple and Beane showed us that building more socially responsive institutions and creating meaningful purpose in education could be accomplished.

Curiosity

After an elementary student in Illinois questioned what happened to the garbage after it was put in the dumpster, teachers arranged for students to visit a landfill, which led to the organization of a conservation and recycling program in their school (Apple & Beane, 2007). Similarly, in a Wisconsin school, middle school students worked to create their own curriculum pursuing interests in environmental problems and future living environments (Apple & Beane, 2007). Students who were allowed to pursue their own curiosities showed signs of engagement that appeared to be higher than students who followed a predetermined curriculum.

Problem Finding and Solving

Students in Chicago who were frustrated by the sad shape of their physical school building worked to force the hand of city officials to build a new school, a promise that had been made to them previously (Apple & Beane, 2007). The students worked "gathering petitions, writing editorials, releasing a video documentary, contacting officials, and more" (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 3). Similarly, students in Pennsylvania were concerned with the graffiti on their school building; after debating and discussion, students determined that students guilty of defacing school property would spend time working with custodians to restore the damage they had done (Apple & Beane, 2007). Students who found and solved their own problems appeared to create their own curriculum, driving the application of a wide variety of skills.

Community Involvement

Third graders in California spent weeks studying the problems within their own community; research and discussion provided them with the knowledge to prepare and present recommendations for solving problems in their community (Apple & Beane, 2007). High school students in Baltimore went door to door conducting voter registration for minority residents in

their neighborhoods (Apple & Beane, 2007). By allowing students the opportunity to help effect change in their neighborhoods, "engaging in serious work" allowed for "rich and vital learning experiences for all" (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 3).

Each of the schools described above showed a thematic curriculum's impact on students. This type of change, a methodology that appears to keep students more engaged by allowing them to use their knowledge in a way that connects them to real-life circumstances (Apple & Beane, 2007), could have a significant impact on the future of the students it serves as well as the communities they would impact later in life. Applying what is known about schools like the ones described above could allow future school systems to take a risk. It suggests that the education system can change and shows that taking a risk within the classrooms' walls impacts students in positive means.

Curriculum

In the field of curriculum studies, there is no agreement on one specific definition of curriculum. Defining curriculum could have many different outcomes based on which processes and parts of the classroom are being described (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) explained that while curriculum could be described as a course of study, including a series of textbooks and/or topics to be discovered, it could also "become one's life course of action," more specifically "the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow" (p. 1). They stressed "experience and situation" including interactions among students, teachers, and processes that occur within the daily life of a classroom (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 5).

Conceptions and definitions of curriculum could vary from content to learning experiences to behavioral objectives (Lunenberg, 2011). Elliot Eisner (2002) defined curriculum

as "a series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students" (p. 31). In this sense, curriculum has specific intentions, an aim, purpose, goal, or objective and comes to fruition in a series of planned events (Eisner, 2002). For Dewey, curriculum was not materials or plans established before instruction but rather "the material gathered, used, and constructed during instruction and inquiry" (Noddings, 2016, p. 38). This idea of constructing curriculum during the authentic learning process appeared to allow teachers to be more artful in their instruction, suggesting a more individually crafted curriculum for students could be accomplished.

The difference between what is planned and what is constructed during instruction can be defined as the intended and the operationalized curriculum (Eisner, 2002). Eisner (2002) described the intended curriculum as "that which is planned" (p. 32). The intended curriculum is described as "the material that is planned in advance of classroom use, and that is designed to help students learn some content, acquire some skills, develop some belief or have some valued type of experience" (Eisner, 2002, p. 34). The operationalized curriculum, as defined by Eisner is "the unique set of events that transpire within a classroom" (p. 33).

Intended Curriculum

Eisner (2002) described intended curriculum as "the course of study" (p. 32). This plan was created before instruction could be studied, revised, and used in multiple locations. An intended curriculum that is highly structured could "negatively influence the teacher's operational curriculum" (Eisner, 2002, p. 33). Frequently, the intended curriculum of a school district is what standardized assessments are based upon (Eisner, 2002). While the intended curriculum could be evaluated, what transpires in the classroom suggests more readily how students would perform on standardized assessments.

Operationalized Curriculum

What happens in the classroom and the unique way learning unfolds between students and teachers were what Eisner (2002) considered operationalized curriculum. An operational curriculum might or might not resemble what was planned in the intended curriculum. Eisner noted that "to critique or appraise the operationalized curriculum requires one to be in a position to observe what classroom activities actually unfold" (p. 33). Recognizing what happens in the classroom "is of extreme importance for improving the quality of education" (Eisner, 2002, p. 33).

Standards-Based Curriculum

Curriculum intentions vary within and among school systems. Proponents of a standards-based curriculum for all offer the idea that giving everyone access to the same standard of information would somehow level the playing field. This pedagogy assumes not only should teachers teach the same concepts but the delivery of these concepts should be identical as well; using a script to deliver identical materials often accompanies a standards-based curriculum. Researchers like Michael Petrilli (2020) insisted that if we could just get all teachers using suitable curriculum materials, achievement scores would rise. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) described teachers as servants to policymakers and outside developers of the so-called curriculum materials.

Teacher-Proof Design

The idea of creating something that is "teacher-proof" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Eisner, 2002), a program that virtually anyone can provide and improve achievement scores, has overcome today's educational field; by making curriculum and instruction identical across all classrooms, the art of teaching has been taken out of the hands of teachers. Eisner (2002)

compared curriculum that is planned long term to the work of a composer or an architect; the relationship between the plans and the person delivering the plans is similar to the teacher delivering the curriculum: "the performance is executed within the constraints of the design (p. 34)." The assessment for these plans lies within specifications of the plan rather than the interpretation of the plans themselves (Eisner, 2002).

Curriculum Diversity

Diane Ravitch (2010) described that a "well-educated person has a well-furnished mind, shaped by reading and thinking about history, science, literature, the arts, and politics" (p. 16). Ravitch offered the idea that because state departments have settled for bland standards, avoiding battles over what specifically students should learn, and by making testing and accountability the national education strategy, student acquisition of knowledge in history, science, literature, geography, and the arts has been bypassed. Ravitch argued that these topics could become political, polarizing, and were not tested on standardized assessments, deeming certain subjects more critical than others. Her argument did not discount students should be able to read and write and be numerate but she offered students should also be able to think for themselves, solve problems, and enjoy life. With a list of hoped-for outcomes for students as they entered their adult lives, Ravitch offered that "our goals, the current and narrow, utilitarian focus of our national testing regime is not sufficient to reach any of them" (p. 231).

Ravitch (2010) further offered that rather than teaching students to loathe learning and thinking because we have trained them to fill out worksheets and pass tests, we should move toward a vision of a quality curriculum that is not a script but rather a general script guideline. Ravitch used other countries to support her argument, stating that countries like Japan and Finland, who had developed curricula that taught a wide variety of subjects and major fields,

enable students to excel on tests because they have been taught "to use language well and to wrestle with important ideas" (p. 231). Critical thinking and problem-solving drove these versions of the curriculum. This idea that not only should students learn basic skills but also should be provided with a well-versed curriculum including the arts and sciences, and as they progress, give them opportunities to choose other paths of interest, leaves one with the notion of hope in a curriculum that not only meets basic needs but with a set of understandings that allow students to understand the world through a variety of lenses. Standards do not have to be the same in all classrooms, especially for older students, nor does the curriculum need to be the same in every classroom.

Teacher Created Curriculum

The opportunity to create curriculum suggests an opportunity to return an aspect of power to teachers. McConnell et al. (2020) described curriculum as "a lived experience mediated by teachers and explored by students," giving power back to the teachers to create "meaningful, rich, memorable, and rigorous educational experiences" for students (p. 1). Craig (2006) described teachers as "similar to students in that they, too, are learners: They also need to have personal experiences" (p. 275). Teachers as curriculum planners could offer them rich personal experiences. When a group of teachers is allowed to collaboratively create a meaningful curriculum for the students they serve, they have a unique ability to position students and themselves in "the fruitfulness or value of the experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 163).

Experiences Matter. Experiences and connections could indicate a more authentic curriculum for both teachers and students. Dewey (1938) detailed the importance of experiences that are quality and able to influence future learning experiences. Dewey explained:

The teacher's business is to see that the occasion is taken advantage of. Since freedom

resides in the operations of intelligent observation and judgment by which a purpose is

developed, guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils' intelligence is an

aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it. (p. 71)

Teachers who create a real-time curriculum focusing on the whole child often turn to experience-based learning. According to Uhrmacher (2009), aesthetic learning experiences enhance meaning-making, perceptual knowledge, memory retention and creativity, and innovation and increase student satisfaction. Increasing meaning-making experience could allow students to be more engaged in their learning and more satisfied. Girod et al. (2010) also concluded that aesthetic learning experiences allowed students to see the world differently, thereby finding more excitement outside of the school experience. Connecting students to the wider community could suggest the possibility of change in future community leadership. Eisner (1998) argued that schools have a "special responsibility, to provide the tools and to develop the skills through which the child can create his or her own experience" (p. 15), noting that experience was not a simple gift but rather an achievement. Teachers who can craft learning experiences allow students to internalize educational experiences learning the tools necessary to fully inhale the world around them will enable them to live genuinely.

Perceptive Teaching. McConnell et al. (2020) described the personalization of curriculum as the act of teaching to the whole person with intention: "A perceptive teacher personalizes the educational experience by recognizing that there are many ways of knowing and experiencing the world" (p. 19). Giving teachers the ability to personalize curriculum for students allows the invitation of student interests and experiences, leading to student choice in the context of content and expressions of learning. Teachers are similar to students in this

manner if given the opportunity to create and be open to developing a personalized curriculum and experience a more authentic experience when developing a curriculum that rejects packaged materials of a one size fits all fashion. Noddings (2003) supported the idea of using excitement and joy in learning experiences to excite the soul, noting that individual children deserve different forms of curriculum attuned to their interests and talents. Being aware of personal interests and skills allows teachers to create experiences in the curriculum that bring joy and happiness to students individually; this cannot be achieved unless the teacher is planning the curriculum.

Mission-Driven Institutions

The Glossary of Education Reform (2021) defined a school mission statement as "a public declaration that schools or other educational organizations use to describe their founding purpose and major organizational commitments" (para. 1). Most all schools have a mission statement that can be found posted on school buildings, on school websites, and within school documents. Still, little has been studied regarding how a mission statement impacts a school's purpose or the actualization of its commitments. In my searches of education journals using the keywords education, mission statement, mission, K-8, and elementary, I found a lack of research had been done on whether or not a school's mission statement aligned with what happened with regard to curriculum, purpose, or organizational commitments. This indicated a gap in the research surrounding mission statements' impact on educational institutions. Similarly, it could also denote that while schools had missions, little has been studied on their impact because standards-based testing has become their mission.

Research surrounding mission statements in business organizations and universities was more readily available. In their study of mission statements and values in top universities around

the world, Breznik and Law (2019) identified four core dimensions in university mission statements and strategy behind mission statements that attracted attention but did not study the relationship between mission statements and organizational operations. Kenneth and Baetz (2002) examined the relationship between performance and mission statements in Canadian organizations and found evidence that specific characteristics in mission statements were associated with higher levels of academic performance. This implied that mission statements could in fact have implications on how an organization performed.

Reform

School reform is a constant change effort to restructure and renegotiate educational practices in theory and procedure constantly. Working toward improving and investigating the reforms that exist is an essential aspect of improving the system as a whole. Larry Cuban (1990) emphasized,

> We can do better by gathering data on particular reforms and tracing their life history in particular classrooms, schools, districts, and regions. More can be done by studying reforms in governance, school structures, curricula, and instruction over time to determine whether any patterns exist. (p. 12)

In the 1960s, "they believed that because humans had created institutional forms, they could and should change them when they no longer served humane goals" and regarded the old grammar school model as rigid, hierarchical, and based on a negative view of human nature (Tyak & Tobin, 1994, p. 471). The pressure for schools to align with current shifts in public values makes the wheels of reform constantly rotate; demands from political, economic, and social forces accomplish the purpose (Cohen & Mehta, 2017; Cuban, 1990).

The question becomes, what makes a reform successful and, in turn, gives it the power to take hold and stick? Tyak and Tobin (1994) discussed the "grammar" of schooling, addressing the system's cogs and what it took to make our institutions run. They noted that "neither the grammar of schooling nor the grammar of speech needs to be consciously understood to operate smoothly" (Tyak & Tobin, 1994, p. 453). Similarly, Dewey (1902) described that "the manner in which the machinery of instruction bears upon the child, really controls the whole system" (as cited in Tyak & Tobin, 1994, p. 453). Understanding the nuances that run schools is essential to understanding how changing circumstances affect the system and the students.

Cuban (as cited in Heller, 2020) discussed success criteria of reform, noting that one must first define what, whom, and according to what criteria it is judged. Reform success catches on and is one in which students learn by educating the whole human without losing efficiency (Heller, 2020). Cuban also stressed that there is no one best way, no one way in which all reforms should follow. Instead, reform should "change the world" and move to fix flaws in our society by producing literate, civically engaged students who are also prepared for the workplace (Heller, 2020, p. 34).

In their analysis of case study reforms, Tyak and Tobin (1994) reflected on the nature of continuity and change, offering implications for future reforms. Helen Parkhurst, influenced by child-centered progressives and Maria Montessori, developed what was known as the Dalton Plan in which she eliminated self-contained classes, encouraged collaborative learning, and "emphasized individual student's freedom and responsibility, cooperation with other students and adults" but retained the traditional curriculum and textbook-based instruction" (Tyak & Tobin, 1994, p. 464). In their analysis of the John Adams High School in Portland 1970, they

similarly noted flexible organization forms, unstructured settings, and a focus on social problems (Tyak & Tobin, 1994).

A multitude of realities could describe reforms as above lack of success. Cuban (as cited in Heller, 2020) offered that tinkering with a system that required some sort of conformity concerning standardized testing was a contributing factor. Tyak and Tobin (1994) similarly discussed the nature of institutional continuity within policy implications for reform today stunt efforts before they begin. Frequently in reformed systems, failure is attributed to teachers feeling as though they have become a case study and community members start to criticize the use of student time, specifically among low achieving students, once again bringing the necessary conformity of standardized assessments into view (Tyak & Tobin, 1994). Cohen and Mehta (2017) found teachers were often not fully trained on the reform procedures regarding curriculum conformity and were not fully supported in their efforts.

Successful reform must match the values of all stakeholders and must be timed within the organizational life cycle of society and the institutions paying careful attention to the relationship between reform and instruction and the values of educators (Cohen & Mehta, 2017; Heller, 2020). The motivation and infrastructure of stakeholders are equal in value to teachers' training and coordinating efforts in importance. Larry Cuban (as cited in Heller, 2020) reminded us that opening a perfect reformed system is not an easy task and perhaps an unachievable goal. Instead, focusing on "good-enoughism is woefully underrated," taking small and meaningful reforms and making them stick is of utmost importance (Heller, 2020, p. 35).

Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)

The Collaborative of Academics for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2022a) defines social and emotional learning as

an integral part of education and human development… It is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (para. 1)

The CASEL (2022b) created a framework for applying evidence-based strategies in communities. This framework could help cultivate skills within environments that could advance students' learning and development. Deemed the CASEL 5, this framework addressed areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

Self-Awareness

The ability of "knowing and understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts" was what CASEL (2022b, p. 1) referred to as self-awareness. This included knowing one's own biases, the ability to link thoughts to feelings, developing interests, and having a growth mindset. Recognizing strengths and limitations could provide students with a grounded sense of purpose and confidence (CASEL, 2022b).

Self-Management

The CASEL (2022b) defined self-management as "the abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations" (p. 1). Managing stress and the capacity to delay gratification were included in this definition. A person who displays self-management could identify and use stress management strategies, had planning and organizing skills, and showed the courage to take initiative. These types of skills could potentially improve academic achievement in students.

Social Awareness

Having the capacity to feel compassion for others while understanding a broader historical context for social norms and behavior across settings is a large part of CASEL's (2022b) social awareness competency. The CASEL (2022b) defined it as "the ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts" (para. 1). In an ever-expanding diverse world, having the capacity to take the perspective of others could arguably be our greatest need.

The emphasis on socio-emotional learning in school reform is currently high regarding societal needs to emphasize a more humane educational system. Socio-emotional learning focuses on civic skills, ethical dispositions, and cognitive capacities that allow students to participate fully and constructively in society (Cohen, 2014). Humphrey et al. (2007) noted an increasing number of authors had argued that the current demands of society require additional skills in the areas of emotional awareness, decision-making, social interaction, and conflict resolution if children are going to have successful adult lives in conjunction with reducing the risk of mental health problems. For students to successfully access traditional academic materials, the acquisition of socio-emotional skills is a necessary prerequisite (Humphrey et al., 2007).

Effective citizenry and essential dispositions involve learning to listen to others and oneself, critical and reflective thinking abilities, flexible problem solving, collaborative work ethics, and an appreciation to serve others focused on social justice (Cohen, 2014). These types of skills are not naturally acquired and therefore must be a focus in classrooms and school communities alike. Humphrey et al. (2007) suggested, "If emotion cannot be removed from (and is central to) rational thought processes, then the more an individual has developed their

emotional intelligence, the better their decision making should be" (p. 238). This suggests

developing emotional intelligence increases decision-making abilities and leads to the idea that

cultivating socio-emotional learning environments in schools is an essential part of helping foster

these abilities in students. Creating a responsive school climate and collectively allowing

students to develop a skill set and disposition to be emotionally sound and reflective toward

others is a type of reform essential in today's social context.

Relationship Skills

According to CASEL (2022b), relationship skills are "the abilities to establish and

maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse

individuals and groups" (p. 1). Communication, collaboration, and negotiation are key aspects of

relationship skills. The cultural demands and opportunities our students are and would be

presented with should be navigated collectively and constructively. For students, knowing when

to act as a leader and when to seek help are potentially the most sought after skills in classrooms

today.

Responsible Decision-Making

People who have the capacity of responsible decision-making demonstrate curiosity and

open-mindedness (CASEL, 2022b). "The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about

personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations," including consideration of

ethical standards and the ability to evaluate benefits and consequences of an action for personal

and collective well-being (CASEL 2022b, p. 1), are just some of the capacities that make up

CASEL's competency of Responsible Decision-Making. The CASEL (2022b) made a clear

connection between recognizing how personal behavior impacted a community.

Community of Learners

Creating a community of learners allows students to internalize effective citizenry dispositions, specifically in an atmosphere in which students learn to engage productively with others. According to The Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin (2021), "A community of learners can be defined as a group of people who share values and beliefs and who actively engage in learning from one another" (para.1). Students become an interdependent network creating a collective sense of responsibility for learning, sharing resources, and understanding the perspectives of one another. An atmosphere that focuses on the "human environment" and lacks a focus on testing increased student attendance, interest, and motivation according to a study on community-based learning and humanizing education by Shumer (1994, p. 360).

Community-Based Learning

Shumer (1994) also noted that "encouraging more human and personal interaction both on and off-campus" contributed to a higher development of civic consciousness (p. 357). Allowing students to form communities of learners within their school structure and connecting them to the broader community enables students to more fully develop responsibility to themselves and others. Shumer et al. (2012) found "good learning is assured when the nature of the service and character are intertwined, and the knowledge and skills gained connect directly to the actions of the people involved" (p. 430). Students who are given opportunities to connect their academic programs with community contexts gain critical thinking and problem-solving skills and show growth in maturity and self-confidence (Shumer et al., 2012, p. 430). Stanton (1991) noted that using community learning as a pedagogy, teachers intentionally connect service activity with learning outcomes, resulting in academic learning occurring in the

community. High-quality service-learning that results in social change empowers students and, in turn, improves and empowers students' lives (Stanton, 1991). Responsibility and direction on the part of the students are enhanced by contributing to social change and meaningful work in society and, in turn, lift the skills and spirits of those participating (Stanton, 1991).

Shumer (1994) also reported that students felt an increased sense of connectedness and responsibility toward their community: "feeling this 'wasn't a real school,' suggesting that the personal relationships and atmosphere eliminated the adversarial relationships so closely associated with the traditional school" (p. 361). Shumer also found that students who had a choice in what and where they could study valued the options and choice, allowing them to develop further "adult behavior and responsible citizenship "(p. 357). Service-learning enables the student to control the context in which they are learning, serve, and are served by their actions, a power they are not given to students in traditional school systems (Sigmon, 1991).

Disruption

Most schools do not focus on creating an environment where students focus on learning as a community and engage with the larger community. This type of focus could be considered a disruption in current education systems, shifting the focus away from inside the classroom walls. These interactions outside of the school building are not easily categorized into traditional school subjects. The impact this could have on student learning and well-being is a reform movement that should be further investigated.

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Summary

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Reviewing relevant literature on curriculum intentions, reform, socio-emotional learning, a community of learners, and community-based learners sets the stage for the analysis of TRIS. The TRIS mission statement reads:

Children are naturally curious and creative learners. By connecting students with

meaningful questions and real tools, we will foster an atmosphere where risk-taking and

curiosity are encouraged and students are empowered to become problem-finders and

problem-solvers. We will nurture each student's character development and inspire a

sense of social responsibility by creating local partnerships that allow students to engage

with their community.

The curriculum intent of the school's founders and whether or not it comes to fruition in the

operational curriculum through the planning of the collaborators and in their instruction-reform

implications could be analyzed. The statements made within their mission statement set a

premise for their intentions and these could not be actualized without emphasizing socio-

emotional and community learning pedagogies.

Conceptual Framework

Teaching students to seek out the problems that interest them, use their curiosity to drive

research, and then apply innovation to project-based solutions to problems is a form of reform

that deserves investigation. Dewey (1916) described that knowledge as not solid; it is a liquid

that actively moves with the currents of our societies. Our societies are fraught with differences

and our experiences, though different in context and perspective, are bound together whether we

want them to be or not. Friere (1985) reminded us that learning not only requires reading the

word but also the world. Banks (2007) suggested "the school curriculum should reflect the

reality that students must function both in their private cultures and in the public civic

community" (p. 122).

I argue that the curriculum is fluid, interactive, reflective, a passage of time, and a story

being written. Harold Ordway Rugg (as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) described the

curriculum as the life of the school as "an enterprise in guided living, a dynamic stream, that of which we live" (p. 5). Curriculum is not a notebook full of lessons to be taught; it is not a scope and sequence. I would argue it cannot be defined as simply a course of study. It is the course itself, and no two individuals experience the course the same. Lessons and courses of study merely contribute to life experience; perspectives and histories impact those lessons deeply and differently for each soul they encounter. Teachers have an intentional opportunity to influence the path a student walks. Still, the depth and breadth of each individual's past experiences determine the essence of the walk down that path. The intentions of a teacher, each individual's experience of a moment, and the impact that moment has on an individual drive the ever so constant change of human life. The curriculum should not be a tool used to pass an assessment for accountability purposes.

Philosophers like Eisner (2002), Noddings (2005), and Dewey (1956/1990) spoke to curricular intentions in a starkly different way than the driving factors in today's schools. "We need to give up the notion of an ideal of the educated person and replace it with a multiplicity of models designed to accommodate the multiple capacities and interests of students" (Noddings, 2005, p. 173). No two students are alike and while teachers cannot individualize curriculum for every student, they need to have the flexibility to widen the scope of curricular intentions. Eisner (2002) reminded us that no two children experience any curriculum in the same way as "curriculum is discovered when looking backward" (p. 26). These philosophies about the curriculum could drive a change in how our teachers are allowed to deliver the curriculum. While standards could guide the types of topics and ideas surrounding "about" where students should be as they progress through schools, they should not be forcing scripted, clear paths for teachers to follow.

Apple and Beane (2007) described a democratic school as one in which everyone involved in schools, i.e., teachers, and parents, even the young people, could participate in decision making. They have the right to participate in the planning not only of the curriculum but also in the function of the school. Similarly, Dewey's (as cited in Noddings, 2016) ideas surrounding democracy included humans as social creatures with deep needs for communication and communication in constructing values. Noddings' (2005) philosophy acknowledged the fact that "reasonable people can differ on important elements of educational philosophy but that any legitimate philosophy is well-considered, guiding by a justifiable conception of the good, educationally defensible, and compatible with the principles of liberal democracy" (p. xviii). The re-organization of schools in a manner based on communication would be healthier and more practical.

The curriculum a school embraces determines many elements; it could embrace democracy or shadow it completely. Dewey (1956/1990) encouraged the idea that teachers should work to ignite the flames of curiosity; students should engage in work that "keeps them alert and active, instead of passive and receptive" (p. 13), similar to the mission statement of TRIS. Students should be engaged in serious work, "resulting in rich and vital learning experiences for all" (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 3). Educational philosophies empower students to be a source of input for the curriculum, encouraging them to create what Dewey (1916) defined as a mode of associated living, connecting and uniting people in shared interests and actions. Noddings (2005) took Dewey's ideas even further by encouraging interpersonal reasoning and giving students "the capacity to communicate, share decision making, arrive at compromises, and support each other in solving everyday problems" (p. 53). These philosophies showed us the

need for reformed thinking around curriculum and all aspects of schooling. All stakeholders must have input and power, which affects well beyond the years spent in the schoolhouse.

Using Elliot Eisner's (1998) school ecology acknowledging the robust institutions of schools including the curricular, pedagogical, intentional, structural, and evaluative aspects, I employed educational criticism and connoisseurship to analyze the curriculum intentions and outcomes of TRIS. Eisner's (2017) curricular dimension focused on the "quality of the curriculum's content and goals and the activities employed to engage students in it" (p. 75). In order to make judgments about the significance of content, one must have experience in what happens in alternative situations. My experience at a traditional school working with standards-based curriculums offered a perspective of the alternative to the reformed school studied for this research. The pedagogical dimension referred to how the curricula was mediated by the teacher and how the students experienced the curriculum (Eisner, 2017). Educational critics were able to "address the very qualities of teaching that typically elude standardized observation schedules" and consider "the context in which the teaching occurs and aims the teacher embraces (Eisner, 2017, p. 77). The intentional dimension was also of significant importance for my study. The aims and goals that were not only explicitly voiced but also those that manifested in the classroom were evaluated in this study. Eisner (2017) noted that "the difference between intended aims and operationalized aims in a classroom" were of particular importance; as an educational critic, my intention was to discern differences if they occurred. The structural dimension, referring to how the school day was structured also played an important role. The influence of how the curriculum was divided among the day provided a basis for understanding the benefits and costs of the reformed curriculum efforts (Eisner, 2017). Finally, the evaluative dimension with its focus on evaluation practices required the educational critic to "notice the

effects of teaching" and "interpret what they had come to appreciate" (Eisner, 2017, p. 81). Within this study, appreciation of the curricular intentions was scrutinized to determine that it was consistent with the aims of the explicit values of the founding teachers.

The lenses of curriculum, socio-emotional learning, and community learning pedagogies guided the analysis of my findings. The school mission statement provided a starting point in the analysis of curriculum intentions and the aforementioned lenses could be seen throughout the statement itself. My background in traditional school curriculum and function and my current position at TRIS gave me an insider's perspective to tell this reform story. Bringing to the surface reform as it happened was critical in the continuous improvement of our educational systems.

Conclusion

As addressed in Chapter I, this research answered the call to study schools that are different. Looking at the mission statement that implied their curriculum intent, I reviewed the literature of curriculum intentions, socio-emotional learning, and community learning pedagogies. Findings from researchers such as Uhrmacher (1995) and Apple and Beane (2007) allowed us to see what could happen when schools break from the norm and how it could change the educational experiences of students and teachers. Eisner (1998) argued that schools "do not exist for the sake of high levels of performance in the context of schools, but in the context of life outside of the school" (p. 169). The variables in education that contribute to life outside of the school are found within the schools. Determining whether or not these variables happen in schools could help us understand how to best prepare students for life outside the walls of the schoolhouse.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study and includes (a) a discussion of educational criticism and connoisseurship, (b) the rationale for research design, (c) the site and participant selection, (d) data collection methods, (e) data analysis procedures, and (f) trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Educational criticism and connoisseurship as a form of qualitative inquiry originated from Elliot Eisner (2002) based on the idea of art criticism (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). In developing educational criticism and connoisseurship, Eisner sought a research method with an "ability to improve schools and classrooms" by applying perspectives and experiences rather than focusing on objectivity and methodological traditions (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 2). The purpose of this study was to investigate how curriculum was implemented and how it informed the planning process in a school that was not following traditional standards-based instructional methods. Awareness to the consciousness of qualities as seen in the arts, educational criticism, and connoisseurship brings attention and awareness to a deep level. Similar to the wine connoisseur's ability to notice subtle hints and hues of wine, an educational connoisseur notices subtleties in curriculum and classrooms. This research method aligned with my desire to meet Uhrmacher's (1995) and Cuban's (1990) call to investigate and understand different school systems and reforms with the hope of improving public education. My personal connoisseurship developed through my experiences in a traditional education setting as a teacher for nine years

and an instructional coach for six years. My current situation as a player in a reformed environment, employed at The Rainbow School of Innovation (TRIS), has given me a unique opportunity to relate my educational experiences and "exercise judgment" (critic) concerning educational value through descriptions of TRIS (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 2). Eisner (2017) described connoisseurship as the need to "require appropriate application of criteria to the instance" (p. 70). Eisner further communicated that "what constitutes excellence in one is likely to be different from what makes excellence for another" (p. 70). Connoisseurship emphasizes the art of appreciation, the value within what is seen, and criticism is the art of disclosure. As Uhrmacher et al. (2017) described, "Art critics often seek out exemplary works to illustrate artistic achievements" (p. 15); similarly, an educational critic is not working to disclose the negative but rather to illustrate positive achievements.

Uhrmacher et al. (2017) described a function of educational criticism to seek improvement in real-world settings. I aimed to "make explicit" my experiences using a "behind the scenes perspective that others might not be able to experience first-hand to "observe, interpret, and evaluate the complexities" of the practices I observed (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 5). Participants' voices in artfully constructed vignettes allow the reader to become immersed in the interviews, planning sessions, student work samples, photovoice journals, and classroom experiences (Eisner, 2002). Eisner (2002) emphasized that criticism is not a negative appraisal "but rather the illumination of something's qualities so that an appraisal of value can be made" (p. 214). Using a form of criticism similar to that of an art critic seeking to illuminate achievements provided a unique form of inquiry into education.

My research questions guided the research process and intentions of the data collection design. Educational criticism and connoisseurship provided me with a perspective to answer the following questions:

Q1   What are the intentions of the founding teachers and how are they actualized in curriculum?

Q2   How do the founding teachers' intentions, as written in the mission statement, inform the curriculum planning process?

Q3   What are the implications of the relationship between intention and application for curriculum and school reform?

Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship

Elliot Eisner (2002) described educational criticism and connoisseurship as "a species of educational evaluation" that is qualitative (p. 212). Connecting educational evaluation to criticism and connoisseurship as traditionally seen in the arts revealed findings "into a language that will help others perceive the work more deeply" (Eisner, 2002, p. 213). Eisner connected the term evaluation as a species of qualitative educational inquiry and noted that human inquiry is qualitative. It is necessary to analyze the work done by those who do it the most. Educational criticism and connoisseurship overlap with ethnography and case study methods because they employ fieldwork and seek to understand data by attending to what is observed (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). While this study fit much of the criteria for a case study and ethnography with its focus on one particular school setting and a systematic study of the culture within the school, its purpose of understanding curriculum intentions led it more toward the dimensions of educational criticism and connoisseurship. An educational critic employs four major dimensions: descriptive, interpretive, evaluative, and thematic. The descriptive aspect is to portray "in language the relevant qualities of educational life" (Eisner, 2002, p. 226). The emphasis on the interpretative element is to form conceptual maps to understand what the situations mean to those involved.

The evaluative aspect most clearly defines this methodology from other forms of social science by focusing on education, implying a personal and social good, and allowing for the achievements in education to be highlighted (Eisner, 2002). Thematics distill the significant ideas and conclusions derived from the study and those preceding it (Eisner, 2002).

Connoisseurship is the ability to discriminate with perceptions of "complex and subtle qualities" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 9). Past experiences guide a connoisseur's ability to discriminate and guide perceptions. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) described that one could be a connoisseur on various subjects or topics depending on the quality of one's relationship with their area of expertise. The process of learning to see and hear within the full sensory range marks the distinction between experiencing and ways of knowing, describing what Eisner (2017) denoted as epistemic seeing that turns "observations and fieldwork to criticism as a form of research" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 11). Connoisseurship also means the ability to notice and differentiate qualities, looking beyond routine and repetitive actions to understand on a more conscious level what is being seen with an appreciation for what understanding what transpires and being able to find value in what is achieved (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

For the educational critic, criticism is "the disclosure of what we learned through our connoisseurship" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 2). While the term is derived from judgment, it is viewed as an interpretive act for the educational critic, exposing the meanings of educational events (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Eisner (2017) described that "criticism reaches its most sophisticated form in literature and the arts" and is a tradition that has long flourished (p. 121). Critics are the interpreters, not providing specifications, but rather relationships while focusing on the context to enable the reader to situate the ideas into the field, exemplifying the insight (Eisner, 2017). The critic creates a picture that is an essential piece of critical situations to

understand in the field. For example, a wine critic might work with the vintner to help improve the quality of their product, whereas an educational critic works toward the improvement of education.

Rationale for Research Design

A significant distinction between education criticism and connoisseurship and other forms of qualitative inquiry is its objective to "recommend improvements to the educational environment" that is being studied (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 4), which is in alignment with implications for future reforms in education. As Cuban defined reform as a complex and political work oftentimes striving for "good-enoughism," educational criticism is a tool that could shed light on pockets of reform that are catching on and working in schools (Heller, 2020).

Education criticism and connoisseurship allow critics to attain an insider's perspective to "see-with" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). With my current position at TRIS, providing a "behind-the-scenes perspective" made educational criticism an obvious choice. I had been behind the scenes of traditional education and am now in a position at a reformed school. My work with curriculum in traditional schools and my understanding of the curriculum processes at TRIS allowed me to help "make the strange familiar" to my readers by "providing a behind-the-scenes perspective which others may not be able to experience firsthand" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 5).

Eisner (2017) described that what experienced teachers have known "has steeped in the traditions of the social sciences are only recently discovering," educational criticism and connoisseurship are "one of the most promising developments for educational inquiry that has emerged in the 20th century" (p. 248). Familiarity with curriculum design and implementation processes as well as reform intentions allowed me to create a critical account of recognition, and a deep understanding of the nuances and specifics of the curriculum observed within the study.

Educational criticism and connoisseurship allowed me to recognize complex phenomena competently by using my past experiences to notice and acknowledge the undertones and complexities within the system being observed.

Site and Participant Selection

The Rainbow Innovation School (TRIS) is one of five K-8 schools in a school district with just over 22,000 students. The school is also one of five Innovation Status schools in the district. The Rainbow Innovation School has an enrollment of 127 students in grades K-8 with 100% of students in attendance by open enrollment with 40 students on the waiting list for the following year. Academic year 2021-2022 is the fifth year the school has been open. The school strives to mirror the demographics of its community: a 49.6% free and reduced lunch population, 49.6% students of color, 8.6% of the population identified as English language learners or had a primary home language other than English;5.5% of the population on a 504 Plan; 3.9% of the population labeled gifted and talented, and 13.3% receiving special education services.

The school uses a project-based learning model where students engage in hands-on learning through topic-centered loops. The school's mission statement reads,

> Children are naturally curious and creative learners. By connecting students with meaningful questions and real tools, we will foster an atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged, and students are empowered to become problem-finders and problem-solvers. We will nurture each student's character development and inspire a sense of social responsibility by creating local partnerships that allow students to engage with their community.

The Rainbow Innovation School uses a competency-based grading model for core classes and learning behaviors and social-emotional skills rather than using grades; students are evaluated on

their growth within the content. Students have a continuum profile that follows them from kindergarten through eighth grade. It looks at the growth in innovation, collaboration, the core of being, and vigorous learning behaviors; however, during the time of this study, they were in the process of changing how they assess students to more appropriately align to their mission statement.

The Rainbow Innovation School uses a distributive leadership model and the majority of administrative duties are split between the three founding teachers. While none of the founding teachers has an administrator licensure, two have master's degrees, and one has a Ph.D. in educational psychology. The families and the local community are incredibly involved in the school; however, that changed significantly during the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, they could not welcome local volunteers and parents into the building and they stopped using the wider community as a learning space. These activities have begun to return to normal levels as the pandemic subsides. Multiple lenses of reform are apparent through the mere description of the school such as multi-aged level bands, loop learning design, project-based learning, competency-based assessment systems, and the distributive leadership model. These reforms are distinctively different from traditional schools, which made it appropriate for a research study focusing on curriculum intentions through the lens of reform. The mission statement created a base to employ socio-emotional learning and community learning as specific lenses for discovery.

My study participants were the three founding teachers of TRIS and the six collaborators; all nine participants work as collaborators in classrooms; my position as a collaborator at TRIS meant I was included in the numbers of this study. *Collaborator* is a term used that represents what traditional schools label a teacher. This subtle title change breaks down the traditional

belief that teachers are the keepers of knowledge, allowing students to internalize the relationship between lifelong learning and learning in the classroom. Collaborators work with students to construct knowledge, taking part in the learning alongside students. Collaborators are not assigned to grade levels but rather to mixed age level groups called bands. Students typically spend two to three years with a collaborator before moving on. I positioned myself as a researcher for interviews and as a complete participant of the group for curriculum planning sessions. I revealed to the group their participation with full disclosure that I was also a participant. Each of the collaborators was asked to participate in the study and received an email disclosing what their specific role would be in the research. Participation was voluntary and consent forms were distributed and signed prior to the beginning of the research; all nine of the collaborators signed the form (see Appendix A).

The collaborators themselves came from a variety of backgrounds including higher education, counseling, and classroom teacher roles. They had founded schools, taught in traditional schools, and been educated as coaches and professors. Each of them carried a very different story of their own educational journey leading them to be a part of this staff. All collaborators participated fully in the curriculum creation, development, and assessment procedures of TRIS.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended considering ethical issues as they applied to research design phases. Necessary approval was obtained from the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Research Board to conduct the research at TRIS (see Appendix B for approvals). During and throughout the data collection process, I was clear and upfront with participants and refrained from pressuring anyone to sign consent forms. Participants were

assured they could opt out at any time during the research process. While conducting

observations, I respected the sites and minimized any disruptions I instituted. I avoided leading

questions and sensitive information during interviews and during the data analysis process.

While analyzing data, I worked to take note of both emic (insider's perspective) and etic

(external view) perspectives to ensure clarity in my findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p.

431). Data were stored in secure locations and will be held for seven years per current format

standards. Reporting was done honestly without "falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings,

and conclusions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 56). No information was disclosed that would harm

or identify participants.

Data Collection Methods

Educational criticism and connoisseurship require careful consideration of the

interactions among observations, interviews, and artifact collection as each of these processes

"informs and is informed by the others" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 29). The use of observations,

interviews, and artifact collection as data collection methods not only guided and enhanced "the

qualities, priorities, values, and practices" employed by TRIS but also allowed for focus through

the lenses of reform, social-emotional learning, and community learning throughout the data

collection procedures (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 29).

Uhrmacher et al. (2017) explained that observations as a connoisseur require attention

that attends to the events in relation to one's own experiences. Eisner (2017) called for the use of

"enlightened self-consciousness" (p. 183), an acute level of awareness categorizing the

experiences. This type of consciousness highlighted the importance of being aware of the

experience observed and "relating the experience to the qualities in the situation," this type of

awareness is where educational criticism is actualized (Eisner, 2017, p. 183). Observations

"profit from looking for information in unexpected places" and the richest of those environments is within direct observations of the school and classroom life (Eisner, 2017, p. 182). Observing with connoisseurship requires that the researcher is aware of one's own experiences and their relationship to the complex phenomena and social scene being observed (Eisner, 2017). Working with curriculum in a traditional school setting and working with curriculum in this innovative setting gave me a specific lens of experiences with which to observe. Relating these experiences to one another allowed me to discriminate subtleties and evaluate complexities I observed.

Eisner (2017) explained that conducting good interviews is similar to taking part in a good conversation; at times, interviews take place in ordinary places like hallways and teacher's lounges and focus on things the interviewee has done or said. Conversational interviews allow for natural responses with a more focused view through the participant's eyes (Eisner, 2017). While formal interviews "seek concrete examples that lead to detailed descriptions" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 32), this study utilized semi-structured interviews and an informal focus group interview. I found myself taking the role of a listener more than creating a conversation with my interviewees. I felt as though I had to give them the entire floor to tell their own story; giving them the space to do this was the approach I took. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) suggested the interview questions be tied to the researcher's theoretical framework, which in the case of this study was heavily related to issues of reform, socio-emotional learning, and community learning. The mission statement, written by the founding teachers, specifically laid out issues regarding student character development and connection to the community.

The lesson plans and conversations I analyzed shed light on whether or not the writing in the mission statements came to fruition or became altered or left out. Using conceptual memos to help guide the interview questions allowed me to connect what was seen during the planning

process to what was intended for the curriculum by the founding teachers. Throughout all of the interviews and focus groups, the mission statement encompassed their thoughts and beliefs surrounding the curriculum and this was clearly shown through the photo-elicitation process. Artifacts were a revealing data collection method with their ability to prove "an operational definition of what teacher's value" (Eisner, 1998, p. 184). Eisner (1998) further described artifacts as a telling testimony to what "teachers believe is important or feel obliged to emphasize" (p. 185).

I intended to merge all parts of the RIS reform story by interpreting significant sources (see Table 1) related to reform, socio-emotional learning, and community aspects. The context of curriculum intent and its implications in the planning process helped to tell the story of the intentions written into the mission statement by the founding teachers.

The first research question asked:

Q1   What are the intentions of the founding teachers and how are they actualized in curriculum?

For this question, individual interviews occurred on October 20th, November 1st, and November 4th with each of the three founding teachers. The focus of these interviews was to gain insight into each of the founders' understanding of a curriculum definition and how the intention of their curricular vision was written into their school's mission statement. During the initial interviews, I also described the photo-elicitation journaling process to each of the collaborators, explaining that the pictures would contribute to a focus group interview at the conclusion of the reflection week for the middle of year loop study—the week of February 14, 2022.

Table 1

Data Analysis Table

Research Questions	Participants	Primary Data Sources	Data Analysis
1. What are the intentions of the founders and how are they actualized in the curriculum?	Three founding teachers of the school	• Individual Interviews • (Oct 20, Nov 1, and Nov 4, 2021) • School Mission statement • Focus Group discussion of photo-elicitation (Feb 17, 2022) • Transcript of Focus Group • Photo Artifacts	• In Vivo Coding • Coding Aligned to Mission • Conceptual Memos • In Vivo Coding • Coding Aligned to Mission • Conceptual Memos
2. How do the founders' intentions, as written in the school mission statement, inform the curriculum planning process?	Three founding teachers of the school Six Collaborators	• Observation of "Pressure" planning loop day (Oct 12, 2021) • Pressure Loop Plan Document (whole school) • Individual Band Loop Planning Documents (seven individual collaborators)	• In Vivo Coding • Coding Aligned to Mission • Conceptual Memos
3. What are the implications of the relationship between intention and application for curriculum and school reform?	Three founding teachers of the school Six Collaborators	• Individual Interviews • Transcript of Focus Group • Pressure Loop Plan Document (whole school) • Individual Band Loop Planning Documents (seven individual collaborators)	• In Vivo Coding • Coding Aligned to Mission • Conceptual Memos

The photovoice journaling (Jarldorn, 2019) collected the visions of understanding from the three founding teachers, allowing them to use photographs to visually depict their understanding of how their curriculum intentions came to fruition. One of the founders liked this idea so much she took it and used it as part of a social media story, showing stakeholders what she called "Mission Statement Monday." Each Monday for a series of six weeks she highlighted a portion of the mission statement accompanied by photos that showcased what it looked like in action. Photovoice journaling could be explained as journaling with pictures (Jarldorn, 2019). The story told through the perspectives of those producing the photo journal "help[ed] us not only to organize ideas but to understand the broader significance of the research, situating observations and experiences within an organizing framework that later allow us to deploy action based on evidence and theory" (Jarldorn, 2019, p. 27). Allowing them to use photovoice to tell the story of their curriculum intentions not only helped me tell a rich story about its implications and impact but also served as a lens for stakeholders to see the mission statement in action.

I also employed found poetry to help tell the story of the founding teachers' intentions. Poetry.org described found poetry as "the literary equivalent of a collage" ("Found poem," n.d., para. 1). Using the words from the interview transcripts, I created a found poem for each of the founding teachers to encompass the experience and understanding I had. This form of poetry allowed me to reorganize the words from the collaborators and fashion them into an expression of art; each one represented the individual founding teachers' voice, values, and intention in the form of a poem.

Research Question 2 asked:

Q2   How do the founding teachers' intentions, as written in the mission statement, inform the curriculum planning process?

To answer this question, I observed and participated in the staff planning process for the second loop of study on October 12, 2021. The staff convened to plan a 10-week loop of study with the topic of "pressure." Observation notes and a transcript of the planning process were used for analysis. This happened in tiny chairs in a primary elementary classroom; nine adults crowded together around two-foot-high tables that had been pushed together. The staff created an initial loop planning document and then each collaborator, or team of collaborators, created their own loop planning document—all of these documents were analyzed.

The third research question focused on future reform efforts:

Q3   What are the implications of the relationship between intention and
      application for curriculum and school reform?

Throughout the discovery within the first two questions, understanding the intentions and actualizations of their curriculum contributed to describing how this specific school worked to reform the education process. Schools have been subjected to varieties of reform efforts; learning from past and current reform efforts could describe conditions and potentially create a "useful framework for developing a more effective agenda for school reform" (Eisner, 1998, p. 158).

Analysis Procedures

I began conducting individual interviews with the three co-founders in October. In the middle of conducting these interviews, I participated in a planning session for the pressure loop. I began analyzing the planning documents that came out of the session. For each interview, I used semi-structured interview questions found in Appendix A. The interviews all lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The interview questions aligned with my research questions; however, during the interview process, the educational criticism and connoisseurship nature of qualitative inquiry allowed for follow-up questions that followed the line of thinking of the co-founders. In February, I conducted the focus group with all three co-founders using their photo-

elicitation journaling to lead the discussion along with semi-structured questions found in Appendix A. The focus group lasted just under one hour and became a celebratory evaluation of how their curriculum intentions had come to fruition at TRIS.

When conducting interviews, my focus was to keep to the ideas conveyed by the subjects while simultaneously keeping the interview on the topic. Eisner (2017) suggested a good interview is similar to participating in a good conversation "listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings rather than abstract speculations" (p. 183). Interviews were recorded and coded for themes in an attempt to find the intersectionality of themes between what transpires in the planning processes and the answers given by the founding teachers. The interview questions created a space for the founding teachers to reflect on their process of creating not only a mission statement laden with curriculum statements but also an environment in which students and adults alike explore the world around them in a collaborative effort.

Creswell and Poth (2018) described the process of coding as central to any qualitative study. In Vivo coding was used as the initial coding method for analysis of the school mission statement, interviews, planning session transcripts, and analysis of the loop planning documents and focus group. "The root meaning of in vivo is "in that which is alive" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105); this allowed me to prioritize the voice of the collaborators. As Saldaña (106) suggested, I created three column notes including the transcript, the in vivo codes, and conceptual memos, "keeping a wide right hand margin for writing codes and notes" (p. 19). Collaborators were identified as the primary stakeholders of their school and their voices clearly spoke of a holistic curriculum design—one that focuses on the world around each of us. Their intentions became even more clear; as I moved through coding each data source, triangulation naturally occurred. For my

second process of coding, I used the school's mission statement to categorize responses. Within the three column notes I had created, I color coded the mission statement and used those colors to categorize the in vivo codes. Intentions written into their mission statement were clear and concise, giving unclouded distinct topics such as character development, meaningful questions, and social responsibility. At this point, I could see the answers from the interview questions begin to align with the words they had chosen for their mission statement. Similarly, the line between their mission statement and their definitions of curriculum began to blur. Saldaña (2016) described that "formatting choices are a part of the analysis and may reveal or conceal aspects of meaning and intent" (p. 19) and by coding in the format I had used, I was able to see meaning within the in vivo codes. That further allowed me to color categorize in alignment with the mission, resulting in the revealing of themes.

The photovoice journal analysis involved a "holistic, interpretive lens guided by my intuitive inquiry and strategic questions" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 57). I looked through the photo journals before having a focus group in which the participants shared their explanations. The focus group interview went similarly to the individual interviews as I simply gave them an open opportunity to share their story. Asking the founding teachers to describe how they saw curriculum and their mission statement in the photos they had collected gave them a myriad of discussion topics. This became a very fluid discussion surrounding the photos and each of their connections to the mission statement. The photographs were treated as artifacts and carried a variety of perspectives, "values and ideologies, either intended or not" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 231), allowing the true beliefs of curriculum intentions to be preserved through this method of documentation.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the research provided "plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible" strategies of participant feedback, triangulation was used (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 282). Transcript sharing among participants occurred regularly. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), transcript sharing is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) and can help to identify inaccuracies among findings.

Triangulation was a critical piece to the rigor of this study. Using the interviews, observations, and artifacts collected, I cross-checked information and drew conclusions. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) suggested structural corroboration allows for the data being collected to validate within itself by looking for patterns and recurrent behaviors. The use of "direct quotations, dialogue, rich description, and specific details" helps to fully corroborate the story's structure (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 59). This critical examination helped to ensure convergence throughout the sources.

Thick-rich descriptions were used to gain credibility with this work; the strategy from Creswell and Poth (2018) allowed the participant's narrative to remain as intact and original as possible. The aim of this was "stimulation of further reflection, optimizing readers' opportunity to learn (Stake, 1995, p. 42). Vignettes were included throughout and surrounded by observations and findings. My intentions were to detail the story in a way in which the readers could imagine themselves within it or could imagine themselves being willing to take risks as TRIS had done.

Summary

This chapter summarized educational criticism and connoisseurship by highlighting its significant features as they applied to my research questions and design. The site chosen for the

study was outlined in detail to provide a meaningful reference for its choosing. The description of the participants for this study showed their connection to the reform and their involvement in the curriculum process. I outlined the data collection methods relevant to educational criticism and connoisseurship and how they facilitated the process of my study design. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations were detailed and accounted for through various strategies to be employed.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter provides descriptions and interpretations following interviews with the founding teachers, observation of a loop planning session, analysis of planning documents, and the focus group discussion. Table 2 provides the sources used for each research question. Chapter V includes major findings, implications, and suggestions for future research.

To change or improve school systems, Uhrmacher (1995) suggested investigating schools doing things differently. This study was designed to examine a school that was doing things differently. I wanted to investigate their intentions and determine how their intentions informed the planning process and materialized in the curriculum. I chose to investigate a school that appeared to be implementing a curriculum that differed from traditional public schools. The curriculum was not standards driven but student driven. I wanted to investigate their intentions and determine how their intentions informed the planning process and materialized in the curriculum.

Table 2

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Primary Data Sources
1. What are the intentions of the founding teachers and how are they actualized in curriculum?	- Individual Interviews (Oct 20, Nov 1, and Nov 4, 2021) - School Mission statement - Focus Group discussion of photovoice (Feb 17, 2022) - Transcript of Focus Group - Photo Elicitation Journaling - Found Poetry
2. How do the founding teachers' intentions, as written in the mission statement, inform the curriculum planning process?	- Observation of "Pressure" planning loop day (Oct 12, 2021) - Pressure Loop Plan Document (whole school) - Individual Band Loop Planning Documents (seven individual collaborators) - Photo Elicitation Journaling
3. What are the implications of the relationship between intention and application for curriculum and school reform?	- Individual Interviews - Transcript of Focus Group - Pressure Loop Plan Document (whole school) - Individual Band Loop Planning Documents (seven individual collaborators)

Chapters I and II discussed the reality that curriculum in most traditional schools is driven with a mission to increase test scores. I wanted to investigate a school where the curriculum was not laser focused to increase standardized test scores. I wanted to find a school that utilized curriculum in a non-standards-based fashion. For this investigation, I used Eisner's (1998) school ecology as an analysis lens. The school ecology acknowledged the robust institutions of schools, including the curricular, pedagogical, intentional, structural, and

evaluative aspects. These aspects helped analyze the curriculum intentions and outcomes at The Rainbow School of Innovation (TRIS). Eisner noted that "attention to one direction without attention to the others is not likely to lead to change" (p. 169). Eisner's ecology was an important analysis lens for my study because it encompassed all aspects of how TRIS functioned.

Chapter III discussed the qualitative method of educational criticism and connoisseurship that I employed for this study. Observations as a connoisseur require attention that attends to the events in relation to one's own experiences (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Personal experience and interest are important for learning to see and hear; therefore, it was important "that connoisseurs believe that their interests are worthwhile and shared by others who care about the quality of their engagement with these interests (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 11).

Organization of Chapter

I begin with an analysis of data using each of the five aspects of Eisner's (1998) school ecology. The evaluation aspect contains the photo elicitation journaling process and appears as a vignette describing the analysis of the focus group. Next, I provide a second look through data by connecting it to each of the eight aspects of perceptive teaching. Finally, I employ found poetry to encapsulate each of the founding teacher's curricular intentions. The use of educational criticism and connoisseurship allowed me to help readers see and experience what I experienced during my data collection phase of this study (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 37). Interpretation also played a role in these descriptions as the conceptual assumptions and expectations developed during my 17 years in education could not help but overlap with my ability to describe this story.

School Ecology Lens

I first use Eisner's (1998) school ecology as an organizational framework. Eisner explained "that meaningful and educationally significant school reform will require attention to

each of these dimensions" (p. 169). I began with the intentional aspect, referring to what the founding teachers were intending to accomplish by opening TRIS. I interviewed the founding teachers asking them to describe their reasoning for opening TRIS (see Appendix C for interview questions). The curricular aspect came next—looking at what content the founding teachers planned to implement. Their beliefs about the curriculum also came during the interview process. Next, I used the pedagogical aspect—referring to how the curriculum was implemented. How the founding teachers wanted the curriculum to unfold pedagogically at TRIS came out during the interview process as well. The structural aspect followed and looked how TRIS organized curriculum, time, and roles throughout. The structural aspect of the ecology presented itself in the interviews and during the planning session I observed. The planning session and analysis of the documents that came out of that session allowed me to describe how curriculum at TRIS was created to determine how the school and curriculum were structured for students. Finally, I used photovoice journaling that occurred during the focus group for the evaluative aspect. This allowed me to use the founding teachers' discussion as a reflective evaluation of how their intentions for curriculum come to fruition.

Meet the Founding Teachers

Edwin

Edwin oozes a passion for his work in education and, luckily for me, he has impeccable locution. The mop of dark curly hair accompanied by intense dark eyebrows wrapped up in a distinguished-looking cardigan reminds me of Einstein's distinctively rugged image. He teaches with genuine excitement in a fury of passion that I have rarely observed. Expo markers in his pockets, always at the ready, surrounded by whiteboards, is where he feels most comfortable. His need to connect students with authentic understanding surpasses any requirement to cover a

specific scope and sequence required by any education department. Most importantly, Edwin

understands his students' needs as young adults; working with middle school students may be a

challenge for some, but Edwin connects with students in a way I have rarely experienced.

Edwin and I met for his first interview during our lunch break. He was anticipating a

cheesesteak delivery from another one of our co-workers so, as he described, he "had time to

spare." Until this encounter, I had never experienced nervousness from him. He exuded

confidence and, to be honest, I was initially intimidated by this confidence. But today, as we sat

in the tiny room, he fidgeted more than usual, spoke with his hands less, and laughed nervously.

Of course, by the end of our meeting, his ability to talk about pedagogy and curriculum, with an

elegance few possess, was shining as usual.

Natalie

I remember chatting with Natalie about a professor I had had at the University who

constantly raved about TRIS to his classes. His grandson had attended there. She was a little

surprised by this because she remembered an encounter with him in which he questioned her

teaching knowledge, assuming she was a young teacher. When she told him she had been

teaching kindergarten for 12 years, he was pleasantly surprised. Natalie's seemingly ageless

features sometimes made it hard to understand the calculated and concise creature she truly is.

Observing her with students was like watching an architect at work; the plans had been prepared

but the delivery was a naturally unfolding act of art.

Natalie and I met one early morning before school started. We sat in the tiny room—

coats, hats, and gloves on. Honestly, it felt awkward. Most of our conversations happened so

much more naturally; this felt contrived and formal. It was not the environment I was hoping for

but we managed to make it work. Natalie, however, always seemed comfortable; situations did

not appear to rattle her in any way. Her contagious smile and positive attitude were comforting to anyone she encountered. She was not someone who intimidated others but I had seen her shock people with her deep understanding of how students learn and her pedagogical beliefs.

Jordan

A lot of people in education will tell you "there are no bad kids" but Jordan was the only person I had ever encountered that truly believed this. Her experience differed from most people in education as her Ph.D. was in educational psychology, giving her a bag of tools that looked at education through empathy rather than pedagogy. She countered with science and research typical educators did not consider. Can't figure out why a student is struggling? Jordan will hit the research and come back with ideas unbeknownst to most—tiny little adjustment suggestions that will rock any experienced teacher's classroom practice. She is an observer, a deep thinker, an out-of-the-box practitioner like none I ever experienced. Her background in middle school education, her experience as a college professor, and her knowledge about the human psyche gave her an advantage when working with teachers and students to the likes of which I have never seen.

We got an early morning start in the same awkward tiny room as the previous interviews. Jordan, however, sat right next to me. With her white beanie, poofy ball on top; she was all smiles before 7 am. She had done this before—the research, the writing, and everything that went with it. Research drives everything she does, from brain research to trauma research; Jordan turns to what has been studied to formulate how she tackles just about everything in the education world. I always enjoy talking with her, whether it be about the daily WORDLE, a book we have both read, or a technique I am trying in the classroom. She is just a fantastic person to converse with.

Ecological Descriptions

Intentional

Eisner (1998) described the intentional element of school ecology as "both the general aims of schooling and the aims of the particular subject matters being taught" (p. 169). For this study, I specifically asked what each of the founding teachers intended when they decided to open TRIS. While their descriptions varied, all referred to past experiences with traditional education systems and how it affected their movement toward opening a new and different school. This finding is further discussed in Chapter V.

Edwin

When I asked Edwin to explain his intentions for opening TRIS, he was quickly back into his comfort zone. He told me about the traditional school he worked in previously and how in that school, he worked to "create a holistic space" where students could explore in a way that felt more natural to them. His classroom was the only space students were afforded this more natural way of learning, and they struggled. This had not gone as well as he had expected because his classroom was only a tiny part of their day and each time they were in his classroom, he had to help them reset. He began to question why students lacked desire and motivation to be part of their own learning process: "What happens across those six or seven years? What are we doing that takes it away? How can we create a space where students feel motivated and continue to feel that way without losing interest?"

This question intensified for Edwin with the experience of watching his son grow and learn as a small child. He described this learning ability as an authentic experience for younger students. He explained how his son and other young learners enjoyed a pressure-free environment with authentic learning situations. Edwin noticed that younger students did not have

the same levels of disengagement older students had. He wanted to create a space where middle school students had the same levels of engagement and connections to learnings he had seen in younger students.

Natalie

Natalie's intentions also stemmed from her past teaching experience but not how I expected. Her past teaching experiences were something she embraced and talked about fondly. She explained that her first teaching encounters were in a school where they "supported and nurtured a developmental philosophy." When she talked about this experience, her face showed how much she enjoyed those experiences. This was a sharp contrast to how she explained her experiences when she arrived in the district where we currently work. She showed apparent distaste for kindergarten teachers being required to implement direct instruction in reading—not once, but twice a day. Students "criss-cross applesauce with eyes on you" for two hours a day was not how she believed children learned: "My intention was to find something I felt was appropriate for students, how children naturally learn and engage with the world around them."

Jordan

Jordan had a hard time narrowing her answer to my question about her intentions when deciding to open TRIS. She explained that many things converged serendipitously: "One totally selfish reason, my daughter had gone into kindergarten and was floundering. I could just see that traditional school was going to crush that kid. Her teachers were constantly like, she just can't focus. She can't sit still, and I was like, yeah, she's five." In addition to being a catalyst to get things moving, she had just gone from learning a lot about education getting her teaching degree to teaching in a traditional school. In that environment, she felt a whiplash back to teaching how she was taught.

She moved into an instructional coaching position and found herself daydreaming about what education should look like. She reminisced talking with her supervisor about opening a school and how different it should be. Like myself, she found herself daydreaming of "the right kind of school" and simultaneously going into classrooms and telling teachers to do the opposite. When she went into her doctoral program in educational psychology, she intentionally chose the program because she heard of a class where students designed their own school. That was the first class she took and she used it to get out all of her ideas for what was to become TRIS.

Curricular

The curricular aspect of schooling refers to the content provided, the activities employed for students to experience the content, and how the curriculum is organized (Eisner, 1998). For the founding teachers of TRIS, the curriculum was significantly reformed. They worked to provide a teacher-created, student-driven, authentic curriculum that taught the child in a humane way and allowed them to explore topics related to the world around them. My study revealed their mission was unintentionally written as a curriculum statement. Their beliefs surrounding what curriculum was showed their understanding of curriculum was more than just a scope and sequence of standards. They believed curriculum is the experience, that it is individual for each student, and it is a fluid entity.

Edwin

As I moved the conversation toward curriculum, I got my first glimpse of the tight connection between the words of the mission statement and the curricular intentions of the founding teachers. Edwin began by saying the mission statement was the intended curriculum. He described the curriculum as a holistic program where students "develop skills and background knowledge." As he described the curriculum, he called out nearly every statement

written in the mission. He did not have the mission statement in front of him but that was not an issue when I asked him to describe where the curriculum was represented within it:

> It's connecting students with meaningful questions. It's fostering that atmosphere, that safe atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged. It's where students are problem finders and problem solvers. Even the part about character development, like for me, that's part of the curriculum that's embedded in, in the program we try to create every year."

Edwin went on to describe how the mission statement appeared throughout the curriculum design process: "we create our curriculum every year; the mission is the goals within."

During the planning process, Edwin was the conductor. All of the collaborators, from kindergarten through eighth grade, including special education, and the building manager met together for at least one day to hash out the essential understandings, questions, and discuss topic possibilities. Collaborators lead students through a process of "inform, inspire, ignite, innovate." Collaborators spent time at the beginning of a learning loop informing students and giving them topics they had generated but that typically disintegrated as students formed their natural curiosities and drove the learning in those directions. Edwin guided the group through the process as a driver; yet, no one knew which direction he was headed. Nevertheless, Edwin was full of energy during these sessions. They ignited him and his energy was often flying in the form of Expo ink on a whiteboard with excessive arm gesturing.

Edwin pointed out specific things regularly planned that connected directly to the mission. Students participated in weekly school-wide problem-solving sessions; these might be based on problems found in the building itself, the community around us, or even a children's book. Students tackled everything from the homelessness problem in our city to space trash to

bat mommas dropping their young during flight. Edwin also noted that students participated in

exploratories in lieu of traditional school specials such as music, art, and physical education.

Students at TRIS participated in Lego challenge, mural design, entrepreneurship design, cooking,

photography, movement, kung-fu, and ukulele, to name a few. Edwin's favorite exploratory to

lead was cooking. A student favorite, he taught them to make tofu and steamed buns, French

omelets, and chocolate chip cookies. He loved passing along his passion in the kitchen to

students. Collaborators were constantly changing what was offered based on student curiosities

and motivations. The building exploded during the exploratory time—a one hour block at the

end of each day; students were unleashed throughout the facility to learn in transformed spaces

with collaborators based on passion rather than grade level or skills base. It is loud and lovely.

Natalie

When I asked Natalie about curriculum, she answered concisely, "What and why we

teach." She described how curriculum was represented within the TRIS mission statement:

meaningful questions, curiosities about the real world, using real tools to engage with those

questions, with students driving where the curriculum went. She explained that a unique part of

the curriculum allowed students to engage with the broader community: "That's not something

that can be written down or easily replicated." Still, those interactions created authentic

connections for students. It was an opportunity to "learn in action."

She explained that children being curious and creative learners was one of her core

values. A natural buzz begins when children drive their learning. When this happens, it is evident

children are conducting their education: "they're asking questions, they're actively engaged, and

they are also creating everywhere and everything." She loved that students were "able to identify

for themselves those moments of curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving and finding." These

opportunities for students were not an idea on a page in a teacher's manual. At TRIS, they intentionally planned experiences to promote curiosity, resulting in creativity, problem-solving, and finding. Intentionally focusing on planning, these were elements of the mission statement and appeared daily in student learning.

Natalie was happy with the mission statement and how it was written, acknowledging the contention about including the curiosity piece initially, but stated she believed it set the ground that every other piece connected back to it. She said the mission allowed students and collaborators to experience moments of empowerment, moments they could demonstrate skills showing how they had studied topics they were passionate about. These risk-taking opportunities allowed students to feel proud, make connections, and keep everyone engaged in what Natalie described as "flow zones," those moments when students are motivated and productive on their own accord.

Jordan

I was fortunate to have Jordan recall the mission statement writing as one of her favorite memories. She explained, "We knew how important it was, but it was one of those moments, it was so quintessential, we were like, let's get together for like an hour and a half and write a statement." It took them weeks. She said they "perseverated over every word." Jordan said it became one of those "very typical moments we came to have over the years," which a weekend planned thing took significantly longer to accomplish. "It was so much bigger and harder than we had anticipated." They took it intensely serious—it could not just be good enough. They went through numerous iterations; they sat on every single word and had multiple people read through before they felt like it was completed.

Jordan also told me they were thinking about curriculum before writing the mission, that the mission encapsulated their vision and fed into it. She viewed traditional curriculum as something that was laid out, something with scope and sequence, spiraling even. Alternatively, the curriculum at TRIS was designed to be about the world around one including "seeing every space as a space for learning." She laughed as she recalled a picture they drew; unable to remember all of its details, she knew it included the world at its center. She said they asked themselves, "how do we make a school that aligns with our beliefs about education?"

Pedagogical

Eisner (1998) described that "no curriculum teaches itself"; the life of the classroom, its pulse, is determined by how the teacher delivers the curriculum. At TRIS, their beliefs about the ways students learn drove how their classrooms functioned. The founding teachers believed students learned best in authentic engaging experiences that allow them to follow their own curiosities. Providing authentic and meaningful activities for students using non-traditional strategies drove their daily routines. You did not see contrived classroom situations at TRIS; instead, students were venturing into their community, learning on site near a river, and being encouraged to explore and pursue their natural curiosities.

Edwin

For Edwin, an essential thing about TRIS was students and collaborators alike had meaningful experiences. His tone shifted to calm as he described the "reality is that most people get to adulthood and they forget most of the knowledge we give them in school." The building blocks of numeracy and reading skills followed but beyond that, people remembered the experiences that changed them when they looked back: "If I can give kids meaningful

experiences that help them think about the world they exist in, and the problems they are approaching, I think that's the most beneficial thing."

He began glowing as he told me about students who came back over the years and talked to him about projects they did with their experiences, talking to real people during their time at TRIS: "They remember those experiences because they feel real to them. They're not some contrived situation in the classroom." Those emotional experiences driving students to research, create, and tell the world about their work made Edwin full of pride. Experiences and connections bring light into the world, and Edwin strove to create an authentic place for that to happen. He recognized these experiences happened naturally; students were motivated and wanted to tackle problems that were meaningful. This was the engagement he saw in his classroom, and this was the work of a #madscientist.

Jordan

Jordan explained experiences she hoped students and collaborators had at TRIS and authenticity once again became a theme. "The point of school isn't school," she explained, "Most people only spend this small chunk of their life in school." Jordan talked about experiences that transferred outside the walls of the school—messy problems that required perseverance and being able to see a project through from beginning to end. She also noted working with people with different work ethics and working with someone you might not see eye to eye: "Those are the things you have to do no matter what you do, for the most part. Those are the experiences I want them to have." For adults in the building, she wanted them to feel like learners alongside the students, having opportunities to explore. She talked about feeling like part of a team. We're all in this together. She said, "Inventing curriculum every single loop and that's hard" so we must have other people to go through with that.

Jordan

I asked Jordan to talk about how the mission statement drove the curriculum. She chose to tell me through experiences and used this opportunity to compare students at TRIS to students in traditional schools.

> One of the things that is remarkably different between our students and other students at other schools is our students' ability to self-regulate and self-sustain. The other day when we were walking through the building with the district leadership, I was very keenly aware that a hundred percent of our students were on Chromebooks at that time. (Students were involved in a reflection week that happens at the end of each loop. They have digital portfolios where they keep track of their progression over the nine years they spend at TRIS) I was very keenly aware of the possibility that any number of them could have been doing anything else, and we were all just seeing their Chromebooks, and I'm like, this is terrifying because it's really easy to look like you're on task. If you're staring at a piece of paper, whatever, but they were all writing their reflections and putting together their portfolios and upfront, they were doing Zearn, but hundred percent of them, they were all sitting all over the building. A hundred percent of them were doing exactly what they were supposed to be doing at that moment. I was thinking even if you had told them important people that are coming in, like, make sure you look busy, which nobody had done. Even if you tell kids that you're still gonna have kids who are, who are messing around if they have a Chromebook open. But they were all just regulating themselves everywhere throughout the building. And any of the people could walk up to them and be like, what are you working on? They could explain it super in-depth. My husband (who teaches in a traditional school) was telling me he was trying to implement some project-

based learning in his classroom. I told him the first thing you do; is you're going to only

give them five minutes to work on their own because they're not going to be able to

sustain any longer. And he was like, "We didn't even make it five minutes! They were so

lost!" And, you know, our kids, like fourth grade and up, we can give them sometimes

like an hour of work time and they can sustain. It's so significantly different from other

schools. It's just, I'm so removed from that experience that I forget, you know?

Natalie

Natalie described the most significant impact the TRIS curriculum made was in the way

it was created; that fact forced "us to continually reevaluate our practices and student learning."

The cycle of creating curriculum is a constant evaluation; it "means that we aren't also

constantly practicing agility and flexibility, making changes where needed so that it's truly

personalized and student-driven and student-centered." I knew exactly what she was talking

about as I have been participating in this process for the past two years, and it was truly intense.

Processing learning on so many levels took a different type of agility and skill than I had ever

experienced; it was starkly different from learning how to implement the newest boxed

curriculum, which happens in most schools. During the planning sessions, we thought about

topics that were engaging to students and about individual students. Crafting a "very

personalized and intention response" to individual student needs kept "us flexible and agile in a

way we wouldn't otherwise be."

Natalie believed one of the driving factors in the creation of TRIS was no one knew what

the world would be like in 5, or 10, or 20 years. She also noted current events and changes in our

world took precedence when planning occurred; understanding the world around the students

was essential in our planning process. It was important to "focus more on larger skills like

curiosity, creativity, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving. Those skills we know will be necessary no matter what our students face." She recognized the curriculum they created gave students an opportunity for a practical application of these skills, indeed preparing them for learning and living their futures. While she understood these changes were not occurring on a larger scale beyond the TRIS community, she knew other schools were doing similar things. She was hopeful for the future of education.

Structural

Structure in Eisner's (1998) ecology of schooling applied to a few different areas; one was the way in which the subjects were organized and the role each subject played. Traditional school systems typically have scheduled times for each topic and students transition from math to reading to writing to social studies and to science throughout their day. The TRIS employed a reformed organization of subjects, integrating all subjects so they coalesced around a topic of study. Structure also referred to the roles everyone played in a school, traditional systems having roles for adults and roles for students (Eisner, 1998). Eisner explained that working as an educator should not be limited to the roles teachers played: "schools can be structured so that teachers who are interested can devote some years or parts of some years to curriculum development, to the design of better evaluation methods for their school, to serving as mentors to beginning teachers" (p. 171). The TRIS was structured in a way that allowed teachers to devote time to curriculum development as well as classroom instruction. Collaborator contracts are intentionally longer than traditional teacher contracts, allowing them nine days prior to the school year devoted to planning curriculum, and nine days after the school year to reflect on their systems. Traditional schools are structured to "inhibit these roles rather than to encourage their formation" (Eisner, 1998, p. 171). This connection between the teacher and a typical

administrator role was a way in which TRIS had possibly broken the traditional American school roles for adults. With no administrators at TRIS, their collaborators distribute and fill these traditional roles. Additionally, teachers at TRIS were willing to take risks adjusting to topics that students wished to pursue. They were open minded and willing to personalize curriculum for students as the loop of learning unfolded. An example of this personalization of curriculum was when students wanted to pursue social media pressure; Edwin created a pathway for students to do so. These traits could be best described as perceptive teaching and is further explained in Chapter V (McConnell et al., 2020).

Pressure Planning

The staff including collaborators (teachers), myself, and founding teachers specifically met three times a year to plan each loop of learning. My participation in this loop planning process was a participant observation. The loops were topics the staff had agreed upon at the conclusion of the previous year; they were typically one-word topics that supplied a variety of pathways for learning and spanned all subjects. During the year of this study, the topics were renew, pressure, and market. The loop planning session I was a participant observer in was for the topic of pressure. The mood was light as the seven collaborators all sat in tiny primary chairs around small wave-shaped tables. A television on one side of the room projected the document holding the essential understandings, questions, topics, and resources. Edwin controlled the view on the screen. Edwin also led the meeting, starting off with a task to narrow the questions from 11 down to 5. Collaborators all started talking, bantering off of one another back and forth about how to word questions. The process was fast and academically focused.

The discussion intensified as the group began to connect the essential understandings to the list of possible topics (see Table 3). Jordan jumped in with a statement, "Yes, that works for

environmental pressure, atmospheric pressure, and peer pressure from others." The collaborators

worked to make certain essential questions not too leading and left room for discussion covering

the areas of socio-emotional topics, science, and social studies. Every now and then, everyone in

the room burst into laughter and started singing the song, "Under Pressure."

Table 3

Essential Understandings and Questions

Essential Understanding	Essential Questions: Form, function, causation, change, connection, reflection, responsibility
- There are ways to harness and/or make use of pressure. - Pressure exists naturally - Pressure can be positive and negative - Pressure has effects on the human body. - There are ways to release pressure. - Pressure leads to change and can lead to renewal - There are consequences to the management of pressure.	- What is pressure? - What does pressure do? - Where does pressure come from and where does it go? - How do we manage pressure and why? - How does an environment impact pressure?

One of the collaborators noted during the process that she "never knows what the

students are going to be interested in and want to dive into." Everyone agreed. Students often had

different perceptions of topics and in those cases, the collaborators worked to provide them with

pathways to study those perceptions. The goals of the essential understandings and questions

provided a framework that could be used no matter the topic to draw the most student interest.

For this topic of pressure, the staff created a list of possible topics and resources (see Table 4).

Table 4

Topics and Resources

Big Concepts and Topics	Resources
- David Bowie and Queen - Volcanos, rocks, - Ocean pressure - SEL stuff - Weather pressure - Social/Peer - Weather fronts - Peer Pressure - Emotional pressure - Positive pressure - Air pressure - Blood Pressure...human body systems - Barometric Pressure - Atmospheric Pressure - Gravity - Explosions/ implosions/ combustion - Pistons - All instruments - Water pressure - Pumps (air/water) - Pressure in wells - Academic pressures - Math...formula and how pressure is calculated - Animal shedding - Time - Activism--applying pressure to change systems	- Kevin for calculating pressure - Demonstration of explosion that happens when there's too much pressure (tires work when there's enough pressure)...connect to SEL and what happens when "Under Pressure"- Queen and David Bowie - Radiolab on stress - Teach Engineering - Stress and impact on human body - Measuring pressure - Weather and atmosphere UNIT - Flight UNIT (includes air pressure) - Air pressure - Pressure sensor design challenge - Force-Pressure-Area Relationship - Locks and Dams (water pressure) - Pressure cooking - Exploratorium - NOAA data analysis - Release valves - Is there something with chemistry? - Experiment to test impacts of time on feelings of pressure - Wind as pressure...green house...plants have to experience wind to grow strong

A typical day in a classroom at TRIS was structured to accommodate for math and reading time in the mornings where students worked on developmentally appropriate skills that were woven into the above topics. The afternoons were for more in-depth exploration of the topics in which the students were most curious. Collaborators were often unaware where this

would go within each loop and were obliged by learning with the students as they gathered the resources needed for everyone to efficiently quench their curiosities.

Jordan

Jordan saw curriculum everywhere in the mission statement. She described that learning did not happen via the text, "It happens authentically with real objects in real spaces." During her interview, she explained that the planning process was where the mission began. As she talked about the planning process, you could feel her pride swell in the room. The collaborators all sat down and thought about the topics for possible instruction. What were the issues that would allow students to engage with their community? Jordan explained that they tried to generate topics that would "help students to see themselves as individuals in a wider space." Recalling projects from the most recent loop about urban renewal and composting, she beamed, talking about how kids thought about real problems: "They're thinking about renewable energy, almost in conjunction with all the UN leaders at the G 20 summit!" Her excitement about what was happening at TRIS was palpable.

As the collaborators generated topics for the pressure loop, she explained they tried "to think about things that help students see themselves as members of, or change agents in, their world. The topics were generated and then we waited to see students' passions; we supplemented them with things to support them in their passion topic." This, she explained, is our curriculum. 'The need to explore issues more profoundly started with the planning process, the essential questions, and the ideas we generated; then it became what the students wanted it to be. We helped them by providing the people, resources, and spaces they needed to feed their curiosities."

Natalie

When I interviewed Natalie, I asked her to tell me about a time her curriculum vision came to fruition. Her face immediately lit up and you could see her going back in time. She talked about times when all of the subjects coalesced, specifically, a time when her kindergarten students became "little activists, walking around wagging their little fingers," telling the world around them of the dangers of single-use plastics. She explained they went to all of the restaurants downtown and collected data about who was using plastic straws. They charted this information and then the students wanted to go back to the restaurants and provide alternatives. They followed up again and learned some of the restaurants had made changes, leaving the students feeling responsible for making a real difference: "Every single one of them were so passionate about it, we made this little video, like a PSA, and they were super proud of, that was adorable."

Her face was glowing while she told me about this, explaining she threw out the inform stage and had no idea how it would catch on and how much work the students would be willing to put in. Natalie began by informing students to see what inspired them to determine how the curriculum would unfold. This information stage about single-use plastics inspired her kindergarten students and ignited a passion in them that created connections within the community. Her students' risks in talking to local restaurants made them feel empowered enough to innovate change. This learning opportunity allowed her students to see how they could impact change but it was something they held onto and could still talk to adults about it. She finished this story by telling me about a message she received from one of her students' parents around Halloween. The student dropped his candy while trick or treating and seeing it all there on the ground, he began to cry. Assuming it was because he had dropped his candy, his mom was

surprised to learn the crying was because the student was so upset all the candy had been

wrapped in single-use plastics.

Evaluation

Eisner (1998) described evaluation as "an aspect of professional practice that should be

regarded as one of the major means through which educators can secure information they can use

to enhance the quality of their work" (pp. 173-174). Evaluation should be an ongoing process—

not a one-time assessment. Evaluation should contribute to the process of education—not just

assign a score (Eisner, 1998). The TRIS does not use a traditional grading system; instead, they

have students create growth portfolios, a process that follows them through their nine years.

Students are given the opportunity to reflect on their growth as a person and as a learner three

times throughout the year. Collaborators work with students to set goals and then find evidence

of them working toward those goals. Reflection is a valued tool at TRIS, yet another trait of

perspective teaching (McConnell et al., 2020).

Photovoice Journaling Reflection

In the initial interviews, I asked each of the founding teachers to take photos of instances

where they saw curriculum unfolding and photos of their mission statement coming to life. The

focus group celebration describing the outcome of the photovoice-journaling process illuminated

the evaluation aspect of Eisner's (1998) ecology. The founding teachers consistently reflected on

curriculum and student understanding, which led their evaluative process. This focus group

discussion of photovoice journaling unintentionally created a space for reflection and what

appeared to be gratification among the founding teachers. Prior to the individual interviews with

the founding teachers, they openly expressed their dislike of individual interviews and they

wanted to be interviewed as a group. I contemplated if this was because they needed the support

of one another to process their intentions. When I reached the end of the process and we had our focus group, I realized that was far from reality. I realized serendipity brought us together; these three humans formed what I believed to be one of the most collaborative units I ever experienced. They enjoyed one another's company, learned from one another, and, most importantly, enhanced each other's lives. The focus group was indeed a joyous occasion and the vignette below demonstrates the beauty that emerged when these founding teachers were in the same room.

Co-Founder's Focus Group

It was a frigid February morning. Trees were carrying a beautiful frost and the air had a definitive bite. We had decided to gather at 6:30 am before the school day had a chance to start bustling. I stopped and picked up coffee orders and croissants for my participants to thank them for arriving so early. We gathered in a small room normally used for counselors and meetings with social workers. An oversized grey couch took up one side of the room; bookshelves lined the short sides—full of books about teaching, fidgets for students, a fake plant, and a lamp. There was a smaller chair and a tv tray stood on the other wall. A small window into the building was covered with a black shade for privacy's sake.

Everyone left their coats on; the building had not quite warmed up yet. Edwin took a seat in the corner of the couch and Jordan sat next to him. I sat on the chair with my computer on the tv tray and zoomed in Natalie, who was, unfortunately, unable to come to school. Everyone had their phones out and began looking at all of the pictures they had accumulated in the folder. I started the conversation by asking them to identify where they saw curriculum in the photos they had taken.

Jordan started talking about her photos. She had included photos of a roof-top egg drop, Rube Goldberg machines, a heart dissection, a lung display, photos from the outdoor learning center we take students to once a month, photographs from the town history museum, from a mural design exploratory class, and pictures of students from museum night. She described that these photos were chosen because they depicted real hands-on learning, connections with the community, and that the curriculum was a hands-on experience. While I asked them to start with curriculum rather than specifically their mission statement, most of the words used to describe curriculum were referenced from the mission statement. "These also highlight the problem-solving element of the curriculum, that it's about helping students become problem-finders and problem-solvers because it took yellow band 80 tries to get their teacher to the pie in the face," Jordan said while referencing a photograph of Edwin taking a whip cream pie to the face.

Edwin naturally began to talk at this point; he regularly filled in silence with his thoughts when the founding teachers were having a discussion. He had been grappling with the difference between looking at curriculum separately from the mission. He was working hard to stay focused on finding curriculum in the photos but this task visibly challenged him. He laughed as he described a picture of students underneath another collaborator's truck measuring the tires for a math problem they were working on. He explained that he had chosen to add images of science experiments knowing that science experiments happened in many schools. Still, the thing that separated curriculum in our building from others was the student-led piece that was unique to TRIS. As students prepared for their museum night projects, he noted they were following their interests and the curriculum for each was individual. Laughing again, he mentioned a picture of a watch that had been purchased for one of the kindergarten students. It was a tiny watch that monitored the student's heart rate, helping him to recognize when he was becoming

dysregulated, allowing him to practice regulation techniques before spinning out of control. Edwin noted this was the piece of the whole child, similar to that in the mission statement.

As I watched this conversation unfold, I was acutely aware of their difficulty distinguishing between curriculum and the mission statement. At this point, I had analyzed all of the data and recognized their mission statement was a statement of their curriculum beliefs and perhaps why they were so successful at staying mission-driven. This is discussed further in Chapter V. Edwin noted that "our curriculum is not just about academics, but about figuring out how to support a kid so they can function at their best which is going to help them engage with that curriculum." This was why he felt the picture of the tiny watch was such an essential contribution to the photovoice journal.

Edwin said he was finished and everyone sat quietly as though they were anticipating he was not yet finished. This trio of founding teachers knew one another so well they all began laughing when he continued to describe two more pictures. First, he described a photo of a web students created at the beginning of their final loop of study for this year. The students had an opportunity to share their background knowledge before beginning the study and added topics they were initially curious about. The final picture he categorized as curriculum was a list of skills his students had made detailing the skills they developed or improved over their past loop of study. These were not purely academic skills but skills he saw as essential for overall student development and would continue to help students reflect on these areas in the next loop of study.

Natalie took over from there and we all turned to the screen to listen. She showed us the photos from her phone over the zoom call. As she described her first picture—an image of two tiny kindergarten students faces down in the soil planting a seed. She told us that in that moment, she was watching learning happen so naturally as the students were discussing "I wonder what

would happen if" and focusing on the differences between compost and dirt. She described for us how their natural curiosities were guiding their learning, driving the next steps of the curriculum for them, highlighting the student-centered focus of curriculum. The next photo was that of a massive tractor in the school courtyard. It was green and almost as tall as the building itself. She explained that during a loop of study with the theme of harvest, students had reached out to the tractor company, and they had brought the machine in for museum night. Students climbed all over the heavy machinery, tiny bodies standing in the tires with shining smiles. This, she explained, showed a student-led connection to the world around them and how students were allowed to guide this piece of learning. Natalie highlighted, "It's not just learning about a topic and not just doing one experiment, but like figuring out how this connects to the world around them—allowing them to make those connections that make that learning personal and make it stick for them in the long term" while showcasing pictures of students tasting salmon after learning about the salmon cycle and photos of a sheep heart dissection.

Edwin described how vital the collaboration piece was to the creation of curriculum at TRIS:

> I was looking through and again, it overlaps with mission, but I got some pictures of some whiteboard work, and I think that captures the collaborative nature of that curriculum too. I think so often, when we're developing our curriculum for a loop; we're figuring out how kids are going to interact in that space and how they're going to support another in their learning. So I think there's definitely some pictures in there that show that collaborative piece of our curriculum, which I think is vital to what we do as well.

During the session, the three of them did what I often saw them do: finishing one another's thoughts, adding to ideas, and showing genuine curiosity toward the words each was

saying. They laughed, teased, and added ideas. A natural flow began to take over as they reveled in their chosen photos. They began to see this photovoice activity as a celebration of what they had created coming to fruition.

As they specifically described pictures showing the mission statement, Edwin showed a photo of former students who had come back to a museum night, highlighting the community connection. His students came back to enjoy museum night and talk to him about the humans they were becoming as they moved on through high school. He talked about the connection students at TRIS developed with the local nature education center, how they participated in the learning there and how they also gave back, help cleaned the snake cages, and gave the turtles spa days. Jordan began tearing up; her own daughter was an eighth grader and the realization that she would not have the opportunity to learn there monthly after this year sent her emotions she was not expecting.

The rapid-fire of the mission coming to life began. As their natural flow took over, they took turns calling out in photos all of the places where their mission story was told. Natalie stated, "Natural curiosity and creativity in action, student empowerment and that encouragement of risk-taking" while she described a photo of a student at the magic show, nervous and silly to start but then showing her magical talents with pride. Natalie continued, "Socio emotional elements and building confidence in presenting, learning how to interact" while showing a photo of kindergarteners teaching their parents and eighth grade students what they had learned. She showed pictures of students using a ukulele, a beaker, and a drill, stating, "Real tools are highlighted, not just learning theoretically. Not just as a reason to use it, to use a real tool, but because it's actually connected to their learning." Jordan jumped in, saying "Engaging the community, being out in the community with community partners involved. That's a huge risk to

share your learning in such a public way, to people you know or people out in public" while showing pictures of students presenting to one another, working at whiteboards, and during museum night. Jordan continued, "Character development and a sense of social responsibility" while showing a photo of a student writing his own norms on a whiteboard stating to treat others like you wanted to be treated. Edwin added, "Social responsibility is captured in other places, too" while he showed photos of student projects on composting and recycling. "Kindergarteners asking restaurants to stop using straws!" Natalie excitedly added. Then Edwin brought up a picture of students playing in the leaves and it felt as though the room suddenly stopped spinning. Everyone was in silent admiration of this picture. Jordan explained why it was such an important picture and why kids playing in the leaves was such a significant representation of their mission statement:

> That was like one of my favorite moments too at the park. I did a whole photo shoot because it was like orange banders (1st and 2nd grade) through yellow banders (6th and 7th grade) and that little leaf fight, and they were all just so happy. And it really, for me, highlighted that community piece where, you know, I mean, sometimes they can be so grouchy about walking with each other to park, but they were like playing together! Actually *just* playing, having so much fun together.

Edwin connected this beautifully to what they viewed as s critical component of their mission statement:

> I think that's a sign of character development or risk-taking, maybe both of those because so many kids are so worried about how they look to somebody else or how they will be perceived a certain way or there's conflict, or they can't handle something like that. Right. Like, and I think this just sort of shows that development.

Natalie took this moment to begin rounding out this discussion as she typically wrapped up everything very nicely. She talked about how the mission statement described all of the things that students do to learn. These photos showed that but they also included adults, the collaborators. She told how important that was because it showed the collaborators indeed were there beside the students—learning with them, being supportive when needed, and taking an active role and learning themselves. Students took an active role. It was "definitely that kind of flip on the traditional learning model" (Natalie).

As the sun was beginning to peek through the slit at the bottom of the window, I asked them to talk about one final thing. I gave them each a typed-up slip of paper with what they told me was their definition of curriculum from our individual interviews four months prior. I asked if there was anything they wanted to add or change. They remembered when I asked them and Edwin mentioned that earlier when I asked him to talk about the curriculum in the photos, he wondered what he told me about before. I told them they could share their definitions and the excitement in the room began to boil again. They wanted to see who rambled, who was concise and even mentioned stealing ideas from one another. Jordan and Natalie wanted to add and steal from the group's collective thoughts, and Edwin boasted he was pleased with his. Edwin was teased for never being concise but was similarly complimented on his ability to be so articulate. After reading this definition aloud, Jordan commented, "This is why Edwin gets quoted when we get interviewed" and laughter ensued.

> The educational system defines the curriculum as a box. The pathway students will take to reach the standards set up by the state. We think about creating experiences for a pathway that allows students to develop background knowledge and be successful outside of here. Curriculum is more holistic. It's not just about academic standards and includes

socio-emotional skills, thinking skills, and mindset. Our curriculum creates experiences

that are a pathway for students to develop all of that. (Edwin)

As they toyed with things they would add, they agreed that having a student-driven piece

was missing from all of their definitions. They discussed that events most schools would

consider negative distractions, something that pulled them away from the learning, could be a

part of a robust curriculum for a student. They laughed as they noted all of the times students

interrupted the school office administrator for help with things, noting those moments could be

the most meaningful and authentic learning; those moments were what students wanted. Those

moments, those connections with others, and the observations of the world around us are how we

learn as adults. At TRIS, they had the freedom to follow those authentic moments and help them

use them to develop character and a sense of social responsibility. They recalled how the seventh

and eighth graders were unintentionally learning about the court system when a conflict

happened yesterday. They recalled the day a steam locomotive came through and learning in the

classroom ceased so everyone could go out and experience it. These things were not bound to a

scope and sequence; they were chaotic and perfect.

The noises of the school began to erupt. Adults were laughing and children were

squealing. Collaborators and students were entering and settling in for the day. We knew it was

time to wrap things up but they found it difficult to stop talking about the authentic parts of

learning allowed at TRIS. To close things up, I added, "I think to work here, you have to really

embrace teaching as an art, an abstract thing rather than a concrete scope and sequence," and

Jordan added, "Because the science is hidden in the dance."

Perceptive Teaching Lens

I provided a second level of analysis by looking at the connection between perceptive teaching and the work TRIS had done to intentionally create an environment entrenched in "a complex, organic process" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 8). They had created a space in which curriculum rose from all stakeholders and from both students and teachers alike. During my first round of analysis using Eisner's (1998) school ecology, I began to see the eight qualities of perceptive teaching emerge. Making this connection helped me to realize the work the founding teachers were doing at TRIS was "rooted in the notion that intelligence is not solely linked to the cognitive domain, which is the domain upon which standards, school curricula, and most outcomes are based" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 90). McConnell et al. (2020) explained that "those who advocate for SEL argue that there is more than one kind of intelligence, and that along with the cognitive, we must also attend to social and emotional intelligences" (p. 90).

McConnell et al. (2020) described the basic principle of perceptive teaching as "knowing your students and yourself" (p. 9). McConnell et al. drew upon themes from cultural responsive pedagogy, explaining, "To create rich learning spaces, we must attend to the individual students in our classrooms, get to know them as people as well as learners so that we can identify ways to best engage them in the lessons that we teach" (p. 9). Additionally, McConnell et al. drew upon research in educational psychology and its examination of teachers who were most effective at engaging students. McConnell et al. further described perceptive teaching as "the process through which teachers continually reflect upon, learn about, and adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of their students as they engage in an exploration of rigorous and relevant content" (p. 13). This statement aligned directly with the intention of the TRIS founding teachers. To create the authentic learning space the founding teachers intended, they needed to

facilitate an environment in which teachers could "attend to individual students in [their] classrooms" and get to know the students as not only learners but as people to "identify ways to best engage them in the lessons" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 9).

The perceptive teaching framework included eight qualities: open-mindedness, heightened sense of awareness, caring, authenticity, personalizing the education experience, teaching the whole person, teaching with intention, and developing autonomy (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 14). The first four qualities related to the human qualities of the teacher, "traits that make up the core values of the teacher" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 14.) The latter four qualities listed defined "qualities that direct behavior and interactions with and for students" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 14). Each of the founding teachers expressed an intention of including the eight categories of perceptive teaching during their interviews even without familiarity with the theory.

Open-Mindedness

While the founding teachers were not directly talking about the types of teachers they wanted to employ in the school, they expressed ideas that required teachers to take risks, explore new ideas, and be open to providing curriculum in a very non-traditional manner. Edwin talked about allowing students to "learn in a natural way." In describing the space he intended to create, he called it a "holistic space, a whole space where students could feel like they could explore things in a way that made sense to them." Allowing students to explore in a way that made sense to them required a teacher to have open-mindedness.

Natalie specifically commented that teachers needed a different option, a space that "complemented how children naturally learn and engage with the world around them." She discussed how unnatural many school environments were by focusing on direct instruction for

young learners. She also described how when students grabbed hold of an idea, it was the teacher's job to provide them with opportunities to explore that idea. I would argue that being okay with not knowing where the curriculum would take you took a very open mind on the part of the teacher.

Similar to Natalie, Jordan talked about an authentically unfolding curriculum. As collaborators at TRIS, the curriculum planning process began with generating essential questions and ideas but then "allows students to follow their passions." She described, "When they get excited about one topic, it's easy to go, ok, well, what do we need to support this passion? Where do we find resources for them? Who are the people, and where are the spaces they can look at? What are the objects they need to explore this deeper?" An open-minded teacher is willing to put themself in this type of environment and "willing to take risks, to step outside of the known, or what is often referred to as their comfort zone" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 14).

Heightened Sense of Awareness

The founding teachers displayed a heightened sense of awareness during their interviews. When they shared their intentions for the school, they were very reflective of their values, beliefs, and practices they envisioned for TRIS. According to McConnell et al. (2020), "Self-reflective teachers consider ideas like their curriculum intentions, the effectiveness of their lessons, their intentions with students, the results of student assessment data and their role in those outcomes" (p. 17).

When I asked Edwin about his curricular intentions, he immediately began reflecting on what he experienced in other schools. He expressed his choices in the classroom were hard to meet under a standards-based curriculum. The way he wanted to teach was not working because students were so accustomed to traditional classes he was constantly working to help them

"reset." His space was the only space in the school that focused on a more natural learning path. Edwin was also very perceptive of how their engagement with learning faded as students grew in the education system. He expressed the importance of creating a safe space due to the "detrimental impacts of the pressure we put on kids throughout their academic careers."

Natalie was similar in her reflection process. She had the opportunity to work in an environment that nurtured a developmental philosophy for students. Natalie saw how students reacted to that specific type of learning space differently. When she was unable to give that experience to students when her task was to provide what she viewed as an "overly structured environment for students," she had powerful feelings about creating a different option for students and teachers. Her ability to reflect on her past experiences afforded her a vision for exactly what she felt students deserved.

Jordan's reflection covered a wide range of situations she experienced. She talked about her experience with her child entering a traditional standards-based environment at a young age. When she heard from teachers that her daughter was unable to sit in a classroom for long periods and that she was unable to focus, she remembered being confused. She said her response was "She's five, ya," unable to understand how this was a problem. She declared this experience was her "catalyst to get things moving." Jordan also reflected on her teacher training and how she had a vision of what her classroom could and should be but then had "whiplash" to teaching how she was taught. As an instructional coach, she felt horrible having to tell teachers to teach in a way she did not feel was the best type of learning environment for students.

Caring

Teachers who show care for students in their academic and their social and emotional success have the quality of caring that perceptive teaching possess (McConnell et al., 2020, p.

17). The founding teachers all expressed the need to create a "safe space" for students—a space that naturally complemented how students engaged with the world around them. Noddings (2005) explained that when teachers cared for students, "students are set free by their teachers' efforts at inclusion to pursue their growth, and this is exactly the response that good teachers seek" (p. 107). The TRIS mission statement stated explicitly, "We will nurture each students character development."

When I asked Edwin about curriculum, he explained his intention was to "embed character development in the program." He described a "holistic curriculum that created a safe atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity were encouraged," further clarifying that a holistic curriculum was his definition of character education. Edwin's definition of curriculum included "socio-emotional skills" and he intended to create experiences for a pathway to achieve not just academic skills but skills for all pieces of the whole child. He talked about the importance of dealing with socio-emotional skills when they arose for students and how that directly impacted their engagement with learning opportunities and their ability to explore their curiosities safely.

Jordan spoke about care related to character development in the mission statement and how students were taught to care about more significant ideas. Noddings (2005) referred to this as caring for the world and ideas. Students need to not only be cared for and care for others but "they need to think on at least two levels, the personal and political" (Noddings, 2005, p. 135). Jordan spoke to this when she talked about students "trying to think about and process larger problems that exist in the world." Specifically, Jordan referred to students working on compost and renewable energy projects, something she deemed as real problems. She talked about how students at TRIS were focusing on these real problems "almost in conjunction with all of the leaders at the G 20 summit." Jordan's explanation of teaching students to care outside of the

school walls displayed care for her students that extended to students themselves learning to care not only for themselves but for others and ideas.

Personalize the Experience

Recognizing there were many ways of knowing and experiencing the world was a quality all three founding teachers deeply understood. To accomplish this, students pursued their curiosities, resulting in a personalized experience that embraced a variety of pathways for students to create a meaningful understanding of topics. McConnell et al. (2020) explained that "personalizing the experience rejects a one-size-fits-all curricular and instructional mode and embraces multiple pathways to accessing the content" (p. 20). The mission statement at TRIS identified they "will foster an atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged, and students are empowered to become problem-finders and problem-solvers."

Natalie commented on how children drove the learning in the classroom with their questions and their engagement. When she talked about her kindergarten students driving the learning during their study of single-use plastics, she explains that "they understood because they were part of making it." She explained that the planning process used at TRIS allowed for the planning of experiences to promote curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving and finding. Natalie said, "It's been neat to see students able to identify for themselves those moments of curiosity, creativity, and problem solving and finding."

In his intention of creating a safe space for students, Edwin explained that as he planned, he wanted students to have opportunities to meet people and find real problems. He did this by creating experiences for students. The experiences Edwin strove for were meaningful and authentic. He explained that in these experiences, students began thinking about the world in

which they existed and the problems they were approaching. The experiences felt real as they were far from "contrived situations in the classroom."

After students had authentic learning experiences, they began to prepare for museum night. At TRIS, students participated in a community activity to share what they had learned. This museum night afforded each student to show off a project they had self-selected and pursued. At museum night, student-created artifacts allowed students to present their learning to the community of the school as well as the broader community that was invited to attend.

Jordan commented a lot about the learning that occurred during the preparation for museum night—the time in which students were all researching and pursuing a topic they had chosen themselves. She explained that the collaborator's work during this process was to find the resources, people, and places students needed to feed their curiosity and understanding of the chosen topic: "this becomes the curriculum." How students pursued their topic for museum night and how they chose to represent their learning went beyond any traditional scope and sequence of learning. By offering students choice in what they studied and how they studied, the educational experience became individualized and created motivation and engagement arguably well beyond that of a traditional curriculum.

Teach With Intention

According to McConnell et al. (2020), "Teaching with intention involves having purpose and meaning behind one's own pedagogical and curricular sequencing and scaffolding, and requires a larger understanding of a students' future academic and emotional trajectory" (p. 23). The founding teachers of TRIS certainly had intentions to create an environment for students and teachers that differed from what traditional schools offered. When the collaborators worked to plan the curriculum, they began by focusing specifically on three loops of learning for the

upcoming school year. These loops were intentionally chosen to align with student needs and were designed to help foster a sense of awareness of the larger world for students.

The topics for loop learning came from collaborators and students. The collaborators then took all of the suggestions and began to envision the outcomes for students. By intentionally including students in this process, the founding teachers created an opportunity that "empowers learners to understand what they are doing and why they are doing it" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 23). Jordan described this as "a team of people inventing curriculum" for each learning loop, and she recognized how difficult this could be. This provided yet another element of authenticity. The collaborators took risks when they chose topics they were not familiar with; "authentic teachers are not interested in being perceived as all-knowing; rather, they possess humbleness mixed with self-assuredness" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 19). They were willing to take risks, did not interfere with the learning process, and navigated unpredictable situations.

Natalie described the planning process as a time when collaborators sat down and decided "how can we connect real-world content and curriculum by presenting meaningful questions and think about how we can engage with the community? How can we use real tools to support this?" She explains that "we've been so intentional about how we can plan in experiences to promote curiosity and creativity." The phrases she used were grounded in the TRIS mission statement—a mission statement laden with curricular intentions.

Edwin spoke similarly about the creation of curriculum being driven by the mission statement. He explained they included "things that are most important to us" in the mission and that mission, in turn, drove the curriculum of each loop. Edwin referred to his most significant intentions as "pillars." These pillars included what he felt was most valued: "this idea of the whole child-social emotional development being important, this connection to community, and

student-driven learning." Each of these pillars determined how the curriculum unfolded for students. Students drove the learning and the collaborators assisted by paying close attention to their needs as academic learners and their needs as a whole person.

Develop Autonomy

"Teachers who focus on developing their students' autonomy share control of learning with students while teaching them how to think critically and solve problems" work to build capacity, use empowerment as a tool, and build on student strengths (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 23). Developing autonomy allows students to recognize who they are as learners and understand that they can make a difference in the world (McConnell et al., 2020). As discussed previously, students worked on their museum night projects three times a year, which allowed them to reflect on projects they had done in the past and empowered them with each new project.

Jordan talked about how this curriculum's impact was intended to follow students beyond the walls of the TRIS building. She explained she "wants them to have experiences that help them develop skills that will transfer outside of the school." Jordan explained that these were not "just 'studenting' skills," meaning skills they needed in the classroom, but rather more applicable real-life skills. "Working with messy problems and persevering through something that feels really hard to you" was one example Jordan gave. She also noted that having to work with people you do not see eye to eye with and having to see something through from the beginning to the end were all things that built student capacity and developed autonomy for their future.

Edwin believed the students from TRIS "are going to remember more and be better prepared to deal with whatever comes their way." He stated that by thinking about education holistically, "we've improved their educational experience because they want to be here and they want to learn." Students' control over their learning would "bleed over into their experience

down the road and outside of this building," he explained. By helping students think and learn critically, they "become change agents in their lives" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 15).

When Natalie recalled her students' work surrounding single-use plastics, she discussed how they "felt really proud and empowered." Her kindergarteners were "little activists, walking around and wagging their little fingers." As five- and six-year-olds, they had gone into their community and spoken with business owners about plastic straws' impact on the environment. She recalled how passionate they had been, how they had worked and pursued this topic they had become knowledgeable about, and empowered them to elicit change from others.

The founding teachers' description of curricular intentions seamlessly connected to the eight elements of perceptive teaching. The open-mindedness quality necessary for the development of a personalized curriculum was a trait their teachers must have. A heightened sense of awareness combined with the ability to constantly reflect and intentionally provide a learning space in which their mission statement lived was a requirement. The founding teachers strove to create a caring and safe environment in which children were educated in a humane fashion, both academically and socio-emotionally. They worked to instill in students a sense of autonomy by providing them with authentic learning experiences. These qualities of perceptive teaching and their connections to the TRIS intentions are further discussed in Chapter V.

Found Poetry

I took the opportunity afforded through educational criticism and connoisseurship to embrace my own artistic medium and encompass each of their stories with found poetry. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) explained that educational criticism and connoisseurship was "a form of pressing out of meaning. Its aim is not simply to depict, but to evoke images and give the reader a visceral sense of places, people, and situations" (p. 39). Found poetry allowed me to press

meaning out of the interviews and encompass a sense of understanding for each of the founding

teachers.

**Found Poetry from Edwin's
Interview**

To Those Who Come

Experience bleeds beyond these walls.
Pressure disengages,
Authenticity makes sense.
Little boxes defined by those in state,
Can't create pathways for success beyond these walls.
Problem finding,
curiosity encouraged,
Meaningful questions,
Ground yourself in a mission.

Explore,
Grow,
Integrate,
Collaborate,
Communicate,
Question.
Isolation is detrimental,
Space is opportunity.
The test is staying focused, no time to reset,
Established culture IS community.

Think about the world in which you exist,
Emotions are reality.
Here and now provide benefit,
Real-life-memorable-impact.
We've shared openly.
Experience bleeds beyond these walls.

**Found Poetry from Natalie's
Interview**

Painfully Beautiful Intentions

Creating that buzz, that student excitement,
Can't be written down or replicated.
Children ask questions, they create, they learn,

A teacher's manual doesn't plan for that.
Taking risks, experiencing feelings of empowerment,
Informing to ignite the passions,
Isn't always beautiful or painless.
Wagging their little fingers, creating tiny activists,
Requires beautiful integration, constant evaluation.
We create the curriculum,
A continual reevaluation of practices.
Truly personalized- carefully crafted- personal intentional responses,
Requires response to current events, changes in the world.
Agile and flexible,
An unknown future,
A response that gives larger skills, practical applications.
The flow zone is created,
The preparation for a larger life is crafted.

Found Poetry from Jordan's Interview

See Us

Traditional school will crush this kid,
I'll open a school.
Whiplash back to teaching how I was taught,
Daydreaming about what education could look like.
Wanting to get my thoughts out,
Write a mission statement,
Perseverate over every word.

See every space as a space for learning,
Encapsulate our beliefs, feed the mission.
A sense of social responsibility,
Learning doesn't happen via text.
Real objects-
Real spaces-
We're in this together.

See yourself in the wider space,
In conjunction with world leaders.
See yourself as a change agent,
Find things to support excitement.

Hone in the naturally curiosity and creativity,
Learn what creativity is,
Learn to question your world.
The point of school isn't school.

Students learn from their failure and are not ashamed,
Unfinished projects are an opportunity.

Self regulate and self sustain,
They see the world differently than their peers.
Think past what you are told to do,
Opened ended tasks no longer cause a short circuit.

Our students will do better,
We are making a difference.

They just want to see us,
They just want to see what's happening.

Oh my God, this might work!

Summary

The time I spent with the founding teachers and the time I spent planning and analyzing was more exciting than I ever anticipated it being. The stories I chose to tell only presented a small piece of the complexities involved in opening a school. In Chapter V, I highlight the themes that emerged including the connection between their intentions and the eight qualities of a perceptive teaching (McConnell et al., 2020). Elliot Eisner (1994) described representation in the expressive mode as a feeling about what was apparent: "Much of what is most important in human experience is not what is apparent, but, instead, what is felt about what is apparent" (p. 53). This chapter focused on what was intended by the founding teachers when they created TRIS. I hope I was able to capture their feelings in the descriptions provided. Following Uhrmacher's (1995) call to study schools that did things differently, "what one may learn from one school or classroom provides anticipatory frameworks that help us understand other educational contexts and the general educational enterprise" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 49).

CHAPTER V

THEMATICS, EVALUATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Critical Prologue

My very first visit to The Rainbow School of Innovation (TRIS) school was spring of 2019. I had just begun my doctorate program and was taking a philosophy of education class. This class allowed us to explore versions of curriculum I had never considered. I went to TRIS with a colleague with a simple intention, to see how they differed from traditional schools. I knew a small group of students who attended, whose parents raved about the school, boasting about museum nights and outdoor learning opportunities. They spoke about how passionate their children were becoming about changing the world.

The building itself confused us. It was in the middle of a downtown city block, parking lots surrounded it, and doors presented on every side. A beautiful mural of a smiling woman in a chador faced the main street. Her face, painted in black and white, was surrounded by bright blocks of color and a quote touting, "the beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you." I remember gazing longingly at the mural as we circled the building, finding a door and the backside that had something we finally recognized. A tiny silver button accompanied by a speaker would notify the secretary that we had arrived.

A young man let us in, and it was apparent he wasn't aware we were coming, but he smiled and sat us down in the atrium while we waited for our contact to arrive. The space was ample and open; skylights filled the room with sunlight. Chairs of various materials and sizes accompanied tables of different heights and shapes. As we waited, we took in the sounds and

sights. Students bustled through the space, and at one point, a male teacher brought in a group of about five students. He gave them a math problem and sat with them as they worked together to solve it.

When our contact arrived, she gave us a tour of the building, "this bay has kindergarten through 4th-grade students, this one 4th through 6th grade, and finally this one has 6th through 8th graders. As my colleague and I followed her through spaces full of students, I remember feeling very confused. Students were everywhere, constructing what appeared to be contraptions that reminded me of the game Mousetrap from when I was a child. Students were using every type of material imaginable, from toilet paper rolls and string to huge ladders and skateboards. We were told that this was "Rube Goldberg Week," and things were a little bit crazier than usual.

Introduction

As shared in previous chapters, the purpose of this study was to investigate a school that was doing things differently than traditional, standards-based schools. Specifically, I wanted to inquire into the founding teachers' intentions and how they actualized in curriculum and planning processes. I wanted to examine if there was a relationship between intention and application and whether or not this relationship had applications specific to school reform. Understanding this relationship could guide future reform efforts. Research on schools doing things differently could impact future reform efforts related to the testing and accountability culture (Cuban, 1990; Uhrmacher, 1995)

This study focused on a school that had intentionally chosen to create a curriculum that encouraged curiosity and creativity. Teachers do not often find themselves in situations where student interests drove the curriculum. Creating a student-driven curriculum and allowing students the ability and space to explore their interests demanded a specific set of teacher

qualities that are examined further in this chapter. In this study, I found the founding teachers'

mission statement served as a curriculum statement. This allowed the collaborators in the school

to regularly ground themselves in the type of learning environment around which the school was

created. The TRIS mission statement implied a student-driven curriculum by stating, "By

connecting students with meaningful questions and real tools, we will foster an atmosphere

where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged and students are empowered to become problem-

finders and problem-solvers." In his interview, Edwin noted that while they understood students

needed to be able to read and write and be mathematical thinkers as the state standards

recommended, they blended this teaching at TRIS within the context of student-driven

curiosities.

In Chapter IV, I described and interpreted the interviews, planning sessions, and focus

group I conducted with the founding teachers and collaborators at TRIS. This included the

founding teachers' intentions for starting TRIS. I began coding and making conceptual memos

regarding connections and themes throughout the interview and focus group process. I realized

perceptive teaching qualities surfaced in the founding teachers' interviews and planning

processes while writing Chapter IV.

Data presented in this chapter were organized around three research questions:

Q1   What are the intentions of the founding teachers and how are they
      actualized in curriculum?

Q2   How do the founding teachers' intentions, as written in the mission
      statement, inform the curriculum planning process?

Q3   What are the implications of the relationship between intention and
      application for curriculum and school reform?

This chapter further examines the emerging themes during the coding process for each of the research questions. Chapter II explained the in vivo process used for coding, allowing me to prioritize the voices of the founding teachers. Following this, I used the school's mission statement for further analysis. Data used for the analysis came from multiple sources including individual founding teacher interviews, a whole staff planning session, documents that arose from the planning session, and founding teachers' focus group in which they discussed participating in photovoice journaling. I employed the research methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship.

Overview of the Study

Eisner (2002) explained, "All evaluation is interpretive to the degree that one seeks to make some sense of what a situation or experience means" (p. 226). I used the methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship to help make sense of what TRIS school had done regarding reform. Additionally, Eisner stated, "The point of educational criticism is to improve the educational process, and in order to do this, one must have "a conception of what counts in the process" (p. 231). The practical experience I had working in traditional schools with curriculum and at TRIS with their reformed curriculum process created a clear vision of my educational values, allowing me to make judgments based on educational criteria (Eisner, 2002). Eisner explained that opening a discussion on matters, such as the founding teachers' intentions and how they informed the curriculum at TRIS, could lead to "core considerations as well as to the ramifications of alternative policy decisions" (p. 233). The distinctively different way TRIS employed curriculum creation and used it to drive their instruction was a topic of discussion worth having that could inform future reform. Educational criticism and connoisseurship allowed me to describe and discuss the educational value it held.

In this study, I sought to find a school where the curriculum was driven by something other than standards-based materials. I was looking for an example of something that was not "teacher-proof" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Eisner, 2002); in other words, curriculum that was not designed for virtually anyone to provide and improve achievement scores. I found what Eisner (2017) might compare to a composer—a relationship between the planner and the plans. I explore these findings in the upcoming pages.

I visited TRIS before beginning this study and quickly recognized they were doing things very differently from the traditional school where I was working. I had the opportunity to ask one of the founding teachers some questions during one of my initial tours of the school and realized the students informed the planning process at a higher level than state-directed standards. When I found myself working at TRIS a few years later, I understood more deeply how reformed the TRIS curriculum process was. I knew that researching at a school I worked in would require a delicate balance during data collection. Still, I could not let the opportunity pass to tell the TRIS story in hopes of providing insight into future school and curriculum reform.

Educational criticism and connoisseurship are shaped by four guiding dimensions: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). In Chapter IV, I provided the description and interpretations that arose from my data analysis. Eisner's (1998) school ecology was used as a lens to help identify emerging themes. Through the school ecology analysis looking at the five dimensions of intention, curricular, pedagogical, structural, and evaluation, I began to see a connection to the theory of perceptive teaching.

Using a lens of the eight dimensions of perceptive teaching allowed for further analysis. Perceptive teaching is a relatively new theory. McConnell et al. (2020) explained the eight qualities of perceptive teachers in two categories. The first category involved "attributes that are

not explicitly stated nor on display, but rather human traits that make up core values of the teacher" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 14). This included the qualities of open-minded, aware, caring, and authentic (McConnell et al., 2020). The second category included "qualities that direct behavior and interactions with and for students" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 14). The qualities of the second category included personalize the experience, teach the whole person, teach with intention, and develop autonomy (McConnell et al., 2020).

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**Discussion of Themes and Response to
Research Questions**

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In Chapter IV, I presented data of the founding teachers' responses when they were asked about their curricular intentions, their understanding of curriculum, and how they saw curriculum unfold at TRIS. This chapter describes the themes that emerged through my data collection process. Throughout the interview process, the founding teachers were allowed to share their explicit intentions for pursuing the opening of TRIS. This chapter shares the themes generated from their responses regarding curricular intentions and how they manifested within the curriculum and planning process; this included implications of the relationship between curricular intentions, application, and future school reform.

Uhrmacher et al. (2017) noted that "the researcher is likely to go into the setting with prefigured and emergent foci" (p. 54), meaning the researcher had something in mind when going into the process and but as a critic would allow the setting to influence ideas. The concept of thematics within educational criticism and connoisseurship is a process of interpretation that might look different to each critic. My interpretations and the themes I distilled provided "guidance, not a guarantee or prediction, for understanding broader education contexts" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 54).

Research Question One

  Q1 What are the intentions of the founding teachers and how are they actualized in curriculum?

   I distilled two major themes to answer the first research question. The first and most prominent theme was the founding teachers wanted to develop a learning environment that was not driven by a standards-based curriculum. The second major theme was their desire to provide an authentic learning experience for students and teachers. The themes that emerged within their goal of authenticity connected to the following qualities of perceptive teaching: teach with intention, personalize the experience, and develop autonomy. They described intentionally planning to meet student needs and personalizing learning experiences for students. They also intended to create a space in which students could see themselves as change agents in their community and develop autonomy.

Standards-Based Curriculum Impact

   The founding teachers each shared that their experience with standards-based curricula reinforcing the testing and accountability culture impacted their intentions for opening TRIS. TRIS operated under innovation status; in their district, this meant they had waivers that allowed them to create their own curriculum rather than follow district-specified programs. They expressed having felt oppressed by a curriculum that controlled what was to happen in their classrooms. Au (2009) described how standards-based curriculums served as a form of control for the culture of high stakes testing: "High stakes testing manifests into the classroom control vis-a-vis content control, formal control and pedagogical control" (p 85). This control narrowed the instructional curriculum in a way that narrowed the content and curriculum in the classroom (Au, 2009).

Edwin felt as though his classroom was only allowed to be a narrow slice of students' experiences and he was not allowed to veer away from his math content. He recalled a day when students in his math class arrived in visible turmoil due to a theater production. On that day, he chose to take the time away from math to have a significant discussion about identity when his students most needed it. Due to his standards-based curriculum requirements, this was viewed as a distraction rather than teaching what the students needed at that moment. He considered opportunities like this as authentic student-driven curriculum opportunities; these were the opportunities teachers had to keep from disengaging students with pressure to stay the course of a standards-based curriculum.

Natalie's experience was a bit different from Edwin's. She had experienced a non-standards-based curriculum, what she referred to as a developmentally appropriate curriculum, in her early experiences as a teacher. She moved states and found herself very off-put by the standards-based curriculum she was required to use, describing a very scripted direct instruction approach. Rather than being able to provide students with authentic, naturally engaging learning opportunities, she was being asked to make five-year-old children be still and repeat isolated skills for hours over the course of their school day.

Of the three, Jordan most explicitly connected her experience with a standards-based curriculum to the testing culture. Referring to students as the "no child left behind kids," she called out the plan designed to promise "a new era of high standards, testing, and accountability in which not a single child would be overlooked" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 93). Jordan offered that No Child Left Behind's effect on students left them unable to "look past what they were told to," noting that if teachers left anything open-ended, giving students an opportunity to be creative,

they would "short circuit." Jordan experienced this phenomenon with students in middle school and university classrooms.

While many teachers talk about the pressures of using a standards-based curriculum, these three decided to take action. Au (2009) described research finding that "teachers often create space for what they consider to be 'real teaching' in the face of high stakes-testing pressures, but that this usually requires some sort of deception on the part of the teacher" (p. 101). Continuing to teach with the low levels of curricular control afforded was not palatable for the founding teachers. Left with feelings of disheartenment, feelings that they were doing students a disservice, they moved toward action rather than resistance. The founding teachers intended to create a whole space for authentic teaching rather than only pockets within their classrooms.

If more teachers were permitted to develop a meaningful curriculum, it could lead to higher levels of meaningful engagement than those found in traditional standards-based classrooms. I experienced the pressures of teaching a standards-based curriculum that accompanied the sole intention of increasing standardized achievement scores. In my experience, this pressure took away the ability of teachers to form meaningful relationships with students. The constant push to move through the curriculum could eliminate opportunities for relationship building as well as social and emotional learning. Being a teacher at TRIS allowed me to experience an environment that was not driven by the testing and accountability culture. Developing a meaningful curriculum based on student needs rather than testing goals could allow students and teachers a more meaningful experience. At TRIS, the integration of traditional reading, writing, and mathematical skills within the student driven curriculum created an environment of higher student engagement. It also aligned with the culturally responsive

pedagogy research noted by McConnell et al. (2020). McConnell et al. explained, "CRP is an asset model that believes students bring unique knowledge, talents, and experiences to the classroom that can and should be utilized in creating a dynamic learning environment that is meaningful to all learners" further explaining its ability to empower students" (p. 11).

Curriculum of Authenticity

Rather than working from a standards-based curriculum, the founding teachers pursued a more naturally unfolding curriculum vision. Being a public school within the district, part of their innovation status involved curriculum waivers. The waivers allowed them freedom from having to use district-wide standards-based curriculum and assessments. These waivers intentionally allowed them to create their curriculum. Through my interviews with the founding teachers, a theme of authenticity emerged. Each of them presented a case for an element of authenticity that was essential in their pursuit of opening this space. The founding teachers believed an authentic curriculum was one that was student-driven rather than standards-driven. Authentic was defined as genuine. For the founding teachers, authentic curriculum meant creating an original curriculum based on student interests and curiosities. The founding teachers expressed a desire to create a curriculum that was genuine for students.

Perceptive Teaching Qualities

This theme of authenticity covered more than just curriculum. They wanted to allow students to drive their own experiences and use curiosity to find and solve problems with real tools. They wanted a safe space where they were supported academically, socially, and emotionally. They wanted the freedom to create a curriculum based on student interests and needs. They wanted a space where students would naturally become critical thinkers by working to solve problems that were personally motivating to them. Unaware of the perceptive teaching

qualities, the founding teachers identified a specific type of learning environment they wanted to create. All of these intentions of authenticity coalesced to describe the qualities of perceptive teaching (McConnell et al., 2020). The founding teachers' goal to create a learning environment of complexity through the use of organic and safe exploration for students necessitated teachers who were able to create rich learning spaces, attend to individual students, and get to know them as people as well as learners. It required teachers who had perceptive teaching qualities (McConnell et al., 2020).

More specifically in response to Research Question 1, I discovered within the founding teachers' interviews that their intentions to create a safe and authentic environment where students could explore and interact with the world around them, the perceptive teaching qualities of teaching with intention, personalizing the experience, and developing autonomy emerged (McConnell et al., 2020). This made sense that they would arise as themes in the data as the question asked of the founding teachers their intentions for opening a school. The founding teachers identified direct behaviors and interactions they wanted to have with and for students.

Teaching with Intention. McConnell et al. (2020) defined one of the perceptive teaching qualities: teach with intention. This quality required teachers to understand where students were and where they needed to go in their trajectory of learning (McConnell et al., 2020). It also required teachers to "plan with purpose" and select a curriculum design based on what was to be taught (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 23). McConnell et al. further described planning with purpose teachers to "engage students differently and actively by trying out different modes of instruction" (p. 23).

Edwin discussed the idea that developmentally appropriate learning was more engaging. Similarly, Natalie expressed her beliefs in a developmental philosophy of learning. Natalie also

expressed desire to create a learning environment that complemented the ways in which students naturally learned and engaged with the world around them. To intentionally create an authentic environment in which curricular decisions are based on student needs and interests could be argued as opposite of a standards-based curriculum.

While standards-based curricula are aligned to what students should learn while in a specific grade level, intentionally basing decisions on student needs and interests is arguably a more authentic route. In my experience working with students in grade level classrooms, I found not all students in the same grade were developmentally able to do the same level of tasks. While standards-based curricula assume all students of a certain age should be able to complete the same level of tasks, not all students are developmentally capable. Some students are capable of working at grade level tasks, some could work beyond grade level standards, and some simply were not there yet. By providing teachers with the flexibility to meet students where they were developmentally, while also catering to student interests, there laid potential to increase student engagement. Authenticity not only in the developmentally appropriateness for learners but also providing authenticity by meeting student interests could potentially change the landscape of learning altogether.

Personalizing the Experience. Natalie noted she wanted to create an environment where students had access to different options; she wanted to be able to support student curiosities. Jordan wanted to create a space in which problem solving and problem finding were encouraged. Edwin expressed the desire to let students make their own sense of learning. Each of the founding teachers intended to create a space in which students' interests, needs, curiosities, and modalities would be honored. McConnell et al. (2020) described teachers who intentionally individualized experiences for students gave them choice in what was learned and how the

material was covered: "This is essential to creating motivation, developing autonomy, and providing ownership of learning to students" (p. 21)." The founding teachers recognized that student motivation was key to engagement. Creating a space where students had choice in their learning and what material they would cover developed student autonomy and perhaps developed stronger lifelong learning skills. Students who were motivated to learn, excited about what they were learning, and invested in the learning process could have more meaningful and memorable learning experiences.

Developing Autonomy. Jordan wanted to create an environment where students could gain a sense of social responsibility by engaging with their community. Edwin wanted students to remember experiences from school that did not happen inside of the classroom walls. Natalie wanted students to feel empowered. All of the founding teachers shared in some way that they wanted students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. They wanted students to progress on an independence continuum. McConnell et al. (2020) explain that "when teachers develop student autonomy, students come to recognize who they are as learners as well as who they are as people, while fostering an increased sense of confidence in both" (p. 24). Helping students to recognize their power in the world was a step standards-based curricula rarely took. Being able to connect students with topics that were current in the world and by allowing them the opportunity to see themselves as part of a bigger pictures, the founding teachers intentionally created an environment for the growth of change agents. For students, recognizing their value in the world at a young age gave them a leg up on their future endeavors. This could be one way the education system could change to encourage more curative and creative thinking in our future society. Students who believed not only could they make a difference in their communities and the wider world but that they should strive to make changes was perhaps exactly what society

needed. The founding teachers intended to create a learning environment that was not driven by testing and accountability culture. They wanted learning to be authentic for students and intended to accomplish this by creating a personalized student-driven curriculum.

Research Question Two

Q2   How do the founding teachers' intentions, as written in the mission statement, inform the curriculum planning process?

To answer the second research question, I identified four major themes during the interviews with the founding teachers, during the planning session I participated in, and in my analysis of the documents that followed the planning session. These themes also connected to the qualities of perceptive teaching. Connecting the themes to perceptive teaching qualities and the TRIS mission statement allowed me to understand in what way the founding teachers used their mission statement to lay a clear foundation of how they wanted curriculum to be designed and implemented. The first theme was the idea of creating a student-centered curriculum that connected to the qualities of awareness and teaching with intention. The seconding theme was the focus on character development. This theme connected to the qualities of care and teaching to the whole person. The third theme was the founding teachers intended an environment in which students felt comfortable to take risks in their learning and where teachers would have to take risks in their instruction. The final theme that emerged was based on the idea of making connections to the community. The perceptive teaching qualities of authenticity and developing autonomy were necessary in order to accomplish this.

The planning process at TRIS was intense. Writing a new curriculum every year was a laborious process. The collaborators collectively discussed three topics for loop learning; this was typically done at the end of the previous year to engage student input. During the year of this study, the loop topics were renew, pressure, and market. For each loop, collaborators met and put

together essential understandings and questions. Student outcomes and potential resources for instruction were included during this discussion.

The entire curriculum writing process was very much student-driven. The collaborators worked together to determine the essential understandings but they did not have a set string of resources to pull from. Unlike standards-based curricula that were aligned and accompanied by resources, the collaborators at TRIS spent their time choosing authentic and relevant topics to begin each learning loop that they hoped would gain student interest. The planning process was like nothing I had ever experienced. The TRIS followed a curricular sequence of inform, inspire, ignite, and innovate as described in Chapter IV. Collaborators planned the inform and inspire phases, providing students with a pathway into essential understandings. Students took over during the ignite phase as they began to follow their curiosities, leading to the innovate phase in which museum night occurred.

Perceptive Planning

During the planning process for the learning loop titled pressure, I coded for themes connected to the TRIS mission statement:

> Children are naturally curious and creative learners. By connecting students with meaningful questions and real tools, we will foster an atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged and students are empowered to become problem-finders and problem-solvers. We will nurture each student's character development and inspire a sense of social responsibility by creating local partnerships that allow students to engage with their community.

This allowed me to show the themes that emerged representing the values necessary to employ the founding teachers' curriculum and how the mission statement informed the planning. These

themes were organized within their connection to the eight qualities of perceptive teaching (McConnell et al., 2020). The eight qualities were combined to form four categories that contained a quality from McConnell et al.'s (2020) "Who I am" category and one from the "What I do" category (p. 15). This is clearly indicated in Figure 1.

I connected the theme of awareness to the theme of teaching with intention because I believed a teacher who recognized their own values and beliefs was more likely to be knowledgeable of student needs and interests. Teachers who actively got to know their students were possibly even more inclined to make instructional decisions based on students' current needs. Knowing your student's interests and being able to personalize for them is more supportive academically because it empowers them. Knowing your students on a socio-emotional level including their mental capacities allows teachers to support them more fully through their academic learning processes. For example, the collaborators at TRIS chose the topic of pressure because they anticipated students needed extra support after coming off of two years spent in and out of remote learning during the COVID 19 pandemic. They understood that students would need to re-acclimate to social situations and provided them a theme in which they could study this. I connected the qualities of caring and teaching to the whole person because a teacher who believed in the power of creating relationships with students and safe places for learning was most capable of recognizing students as individuals. Teachers who truly knew their students were likely more capable of supporting them academically, socially, and emotionally. The qualities of authenticity and developing autonomy were connected because in order to help students become critical thinkers and believe in their ability to become change agents, teachers must be genuine and open with students. For teachers to help students "realize the tools of empowerment they already possess" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 24), they must "build genuine

relationships with their students to encourage the authenticity in them" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 19). Finally, I connected the qualities of open-mindedness and personalizing the experience. Teachers who had an open mind were willing to take risks; they were receptive to new ideas and situations. A critical quality for a teacher is one that would allow students to learn topics based on their individual curiosities and interests. Not being an expert on a topic could be scary for teachers but teachers personalizing educational experiences must have an open mind and a willingness to learn alongside a student.

Figure 1

Categories of Perceptive Teaching

Who I Am	
Open-Minded	I am receptive and amenable to new ideas, situations, and people.
	I am willing to take risks.
Aware	I understand and reflect upon my own values, culture, beliefs, and practices.
	I actively get to know my students.
	I am open to feedback.
Caring	I believe all students are worthy.
	I build relationships with students and others.
	I create safe spaces for learning.
Authentic	I am present, genuine in my interactions.
	I am appropriately open with students and others.
What I Do	
Personalize the Experience	I provide multiple ways for students to engage with content.
	I invite cultural perspectives into the classroom as a part of the learning.
Teach the Whole Person	I view students as individuals.
	I support their academic, social, and emotional growth.
Teach with Intention	I make curricular and instructional decisions based upon my current students' needs and interests.
Develop Autonomy	I help students think critically, learn to solve problems, and become agents of change in their lives.

Awareness and Teaching with Intention

Perceptive teachers "effectively illustrating academic care are more concerned with student understanding than outcome or performance and encourage students to extend their thinking and apply increased effort in their work" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 19). The planning process was done in three specific steps. First, the collaborators worked as a whole team to create the essential understandings and essential questions used with students from grades K-8. Once this was finished, the collaborators broke into what they called front bay and back bay—the front

bay represented grades K-3 and the back bay represented grades 3-8. During this time, the two teams determined learning outcomes for their students. They were aware that what an eighth grader could produce would look different from that of a first grader. However, the essential understandings and questions remained unchanged. Regardless of the level of student understanding, they all had a similar goal in mind. Once this step was completed, the two bays (K-3 and 3-8) came back together to share and steal ideas. A list of topics and resources was mutually shared throughout this process between all collaborators.

This sharing of resources provided an opportunity for the collaborators to "ruminate on their thoughts, beliefs, motivations, and actions for the purpose of improving as a person or professional" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 16). As stated above, a teacher with the quality of awareness understood their own values, practices, and beliefs. This quality allowed them to make curricular decisions based not only on their expertise but also on the needs and interests of students. My experience with teachers taught me there was a certain amount of pressure on teachers to always know as much as they could about everything they were teaching. I would argue this is not a quality teachers need to possess. Rather, teachers should be willing to learn alongside their students. Not only would this allow teachers to be more open to teaching to student interests but would also allow teachers to authentically model a mindset of lifelong learning. Perhaps if more students understood no one is all knowing at any point, they would be more willing to regularly explore and pursue their own curiosities.

Mission-Driven. Before beginning the planning session, Edwin projected the mission statement to all collaborators; he called this "grounding ourselves in the mission statement." This process was intentionally repeated multiple times throughout the year to focus the planning process on what had been intended for students who attended TRIS. While research was lacking

about mission-driven schools, Berbegal-Mirabent et al. (2021) found that in successful companies, "the components that are worth mentioning in the mission statement to bring about higher performance rates are the product/service offer and the customers" (p. 716). One could suggest that products and services offered by a school are the curriculum they provide to its customers, i.e., students. By going over the products and services before the planning session, TRIS could effectively increase its performance based on the findings from Berbegal-Mirabent et al.

During the planning session, the mission statement could be seen in various ways, many of which follow. For intentionality and awareness, collaborators showed ways in which they intentionally thought about how students would react to the topics being presented and how they hoped students would perform. In the second round of planning, during the outcome discussions, collaborators in the front bay discussed wanting students to be able to perform in a variety of ways, stating, "I want the kids to be able to use their abilities as readers and writers, to be able to use their oral communication skills in a couple of different ways. So, I was thinking of, you know, we've kind of talked about doing models, the circulatory system could be used." Collaborators in the back bay wrote in their student outcome plans for students to "Create a model or experiment that showed how pressure changed as force and/or area changed," noting it would allow for students to show multiple understandings such as

- What happens when there is too much pressure?
- How can we manage or reduce pressure?
- How does the environment impact pressure?

By intentionally being aware of the type of curriculum (services and goods) written in their mission statement and being aware of their capacities, collaborators at TRIS were potentially increasing their effectiveness each time they met to plan.

Caring and Teaching the Whole Person. The founding teachers made it very clear they wanted to create a safe learning space that did not focus on standards-driven content. McConnell et al. (2020) explained that perceptive teachers "aim to teach the whole person and believe that their role as teachers is much grander than what might be measured on standardized assessment" (p. 22). The TRIS mission statement stated they would "nurture each student's character development." Edwin noted in his interview that "teaching to the whole child, teaching social and emotional development" was one of the pillars of their mission statement. Care is an essential component of teaching the whole person "in order to truly care for the student, it is imperative to see the whole person" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 22). According to Bartolomé (1994), care is a humanizing pedagogy inclusive of all students.

Socio-Emotional Impact. During the planning of their pressure loop, the collaborators focused on academically connected pressures like atmospheric pressure and included the concepts of peer pressure, social pressure, and conditional pressures. Edwin noted during the planning session that "each person has a system they are running, and we need to talk about how one manages the pressures within." The essential understandings chosen during the planning process could be connected to socio emotional pressure:

- There are ways to harness and/or make use of pressure.

- Pressure exists naturally

- Pressure can be positive and negative

- Pressure has effects on the human body.

- There are ways to release pressure.

- Pressure leads to change and can lead to renewal.

- There are consequences to the management of pressure.

The CASEL (2022b) framework addressed the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, all of which were planned to be discussed during this pressure loop. Planning documents referred to topics of study such as social and peer pressure, activism—the idea of putting pressure on people to ignite change, and managing emotional pressures. Perceptive teaching involved "teaching life skills such as how to collaborate, how to overcome adversity, how to handle criticism, and many other skills that may not appear in the explicit curriculum" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 22). Still, the collaborators at TRIS had intentionally written them into their curriculum.

The ability to work with students as whole humans, teaching them not only academics but also socio-emotional skills, "reaps benefits for student growth now and in the future"; valuing students as whole people proves "effective in creating valuable learning experiences for students" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 22). Jordan talked about a museum night project a student had done. She explained that the student had not finished her project, had failed multiple attempts, but she presented with confidence on museum night. Jordan recalled her saying, "I failed at doing this, and I learned from that failure because of this, and next time, here's what I'm going to do differently." Jordan stated this happened "organically, I didn't prompt her." The student was able to talk about her failure in a positive way, discussing with community members what she had learned through the process and what she would do next.

Open-Mindedness and Personalizing the Educational Experience. Again and again during the interview process, the collaborators referred to a student-driven environment.

McConnell et al. (2020) explained that perceptive teachers "who individualize the educational experience provide choice in what is studied, how they cover material, and how long they spend with it; this is essential to creating motivation, developing autonomy, and providing ownership of learning to students" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 21). To do this, teachers must recognize and be open to teaching about topics with which they are unfamiliar; not knowing at times what curiosities a student would want to explore meant the teacher must be willing to explore new ideas and take risks—another quality of perceptive teaching (McConnell et al., 2020).

The TRIS mission statement allowed personal learning to happen when it stated, "By connecting students with meaningful questions and real tools, we will foster an atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged and students are empowered to become problem-finders and problem-solvers." Students who felt empowered by choice were shown to put forth more effort, were more likely to persist, and tended to engage and learn more (McConnell et al., 2020). The second half of each learning loop was entirely student-driven. Collaborators worked to provide students with the resources and experiences they needed to pursue their curiosities.

Student-Driven. A typical loop of learning at TRIS was 12 weeks long; the collaborators could only plan for the first half of this during their loop planning sessions. This was due to the student-driven aspect. Allowing students to take over for the second half of their learning was a risk the collaborators happily obliged. The collaborators understood that their work during the second half of each loop would engage them in taking risks by finding multiple ways for students to engage with the content they had chosen. In the back bay, where collaborators were planning documents for work with students in grades 3-8, I found the following plan (see Figure 2):

Figure 2

Museum Night Plan

```
MUSEUM NIGHT!!
_____

1:00  Project work time

12-13-Museum night proposals completed and research started

1-3-Museum night research

1-10-Museum night research completed

1-17-Museum night projects started

1-24-Museum night projects completed and presented
```

This was representative of the unknown, the not knowing exactly what work would be needed on the collaborator's end, and understanding that much of the time it was more intense than the work done at the beginning of the year.

During the planning process, one of the collaborators in the front bay said, "I never know what they are going to latch on to. Usually, it's exactly the opposite of any predictions I make." In the front bay outcome planning conversation, where they worked with students in grades K-3, I found a section where they were talking about offering a variety of mini-lessons to help students see the variety of things they could choose for museum night. The topics they were coming up with included musical instruments, weather, and rocks. Open-minded teachers who were willing to participate in this type of curriculum development represented perceptive

teaching; they operationalized in myriad ways and were receptive, flexible, and resourceful (McConnell et al., 2020).

      Authenticity and Developing Autonomy. A perceptive teacher "personalizes the educational experience by recognizing that there are many ways of knowing and experiencing the world" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 19); they offer numerous ways to learn, show understanding, and make meaningful connections. Allowing students to learn authentically contributes directly to their development of autonomy. At TRIS, they stated in the mission statement that they would "inspire a sense of social responsibility by creating local partnerships that allow students to engage with their community." The development of autonomy occurred authentically in their curriculum as they shared "control of the learning with students while teaching them how to think critically and solve problems" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 23). Natalie spoke in her interview about how experiences engaging with the community "can't be written down or replicated." Natalie explained that these situations were a larger application of learning to something bigger and those moments outside of school "make students feel really proud and empowered." She further tied this to the authentic experiences this provided for teachers, noting it was a similar feeling of empowerment for teachers when they recognized a student idea tied multiple experiences together. Sharing these connections authentically with students as they unfolded gave a sense of empowerment to students and teachers alike. These were the authentic experiences that helped students develop autonomy.

      Connection to the World Beyond the Classroom. McConnell et al. (2020) explained,

      At its core, culturally responsive pedagogy, and in turn, perceptive teaching, seek to

      empower students to become more active social agents of change (Gay, 2000; Ladson-

Billings, 1994) and to help students recognize that they can, in fact, make a positive

difference in the world. (p. 24)

During the planning process, I mentioned how a running list of topics and resources was created

and shared among all collaborators. The list made multiple references to experiences that would

connect the students with their community on the planning documents for this loop. These

included a teacher's husband who worked in the natural gas industry and calculated well pressure

daily, the local hospital that brought in lungs to demonstrate air capacity, a walk to the local fire

station, learning about indigenous cultures at the History Colorado museum, and exploring

environmental pressure at the outdoor learning center they visited once a month, to name a few.

When I looked at the planning documents in the student outcomes section, I saw many

examples of how students would connect to their community and the world beyond:

- The student will create an original experiment and/or model to demonstrate how
  weather and climate work in the natural world

- I can describe a real-world example of climate change

  ○ The student will write a persuasive argument about the impact of climate
  change

  ○ The student will create an original advertisement/brochure to inform others
  about consequences connected to choices we make to manage climate
  change.

The collaborators not only planned experiences but also expected that students would recognize

they could inform and elicit change in the world around them. By making connections to current

and relevant issues in the world beyond the walls of the classroom, the collaborators at TRIS

hoped to "build capacity in their learners by helping them realize the tools of empowerment they

already possess," which could lead to students recognizing they could make a positive difference in the world (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 24).

Research Question Three

> Q3   What are the implications of the relationship between intention and application for curriculum and school reform?

Three themes emerged through my data analysis in response to Research Question 3. The first theme was TRIS is a mission-driven school. While there were few research studies surrounding mission-driven schools, I believe the research around the success of mission-driven organizations was applicable in some ways. The second theme was the connection between the environment the founding teachers wanted to create and the theory of perceptive teaching. To create a successful authentic environment as described by the founding teachers, it necessitated teachers with all eight qualities of perceptive teaching. The final theme was that of a curriculum that broke the current standards-based model. Not only did the founding teachers strive to create an authentic learning environment, they wanted their model to reflect a learning environment that connected students to the world around them. They wanted student learning to happen beyond the walls of the classroom.

The founding teachers of TRIS had specific curriculum intentions when they opened their school. They wanted to create a safe space where learning could authentically unfold without the pressures of standardized curriculums. To do this, they wrote a mission statement that encapsulated their ideologies, giving specific curriculum intentions. Their past experiences in traditional schools and non-traditional schools left them with a clear vision of what educational experience they wanted to provide for students. Their curricular intentions aligned with perceptive teaching, allowing them to "create rich learning spaces" where teachers got to know

their students as people and learners and could engage them fully and authentically in their learning (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 9).

The mission statement they created was arguably a statement of curricular intentions. By doing this, they could constantly reflect and ground themselves in the ideas that brought TRIS to life. The planning process they created used the mission statement as a guide, helping collaborators consistently focus on the services/goods they promised to their students. Having a belief statement that doubled as a curriculum statement created a connectedness in their purpose that could be a tool used in future reform efforts of the educational system.

Mission-Driven

Children are naturally curious and creative learners. By connecting students with meaningful questions and real tools, we will foster an atmosphere where risk-taking and curiosity are encouraged and students are empowered to become problem-finders and problem-solvers. We will nurture each student's character development and inspire a sense of social responsibility by creating local partnerships that allow students to engage with their community.

Utilizing a mission statement to drive the curriculum in a school setting was not an area widely researched. The implications drawn in this study could help schools in the future create more meaningful mission statements that allow them to focus more deeply on their proposed ideologies. Jordan remembered the writing of their mission statement fondly. It was not something they thought would take more than a few hours to complete. This might have been true if they had gone with a mission statement similar to many other schools—one that was a generalized statement about keeping kids safe or providing excellence in academics for all. But the founding teachers of TRIS arguably went above and beyond.

To start a mission statement with a belief statement, the words "Children are naturally curious and creative learners" presumably set the stage for values that encompassed their curricular intentions and a set of values they worked to provide to students who attended TRIS. The qualities of perceptive teaching also aligned with their mission statement; allowing students to find and solve problems develops autonomy, nurturing character development connects closely to care, allowing for risk-taking, and empowerment calls for personalizing the experience. While the TRIS mission statement encapsulated their curricular intentions, one might consider the effect it would have to add in ways in which they hoped to accomplish this.

Perceptive Teaching

Perceptive teaching qualities could encapsulate this idea and further develop a mission statement to describe a complete vision of what one could expect at a school. Each of the founding teachers had a different experience in education that led them to value a specific learning environment. They envisioned an authentically safe place where students could follow their curiosities and allow learning to unfold in a developmentally appropriate and meaningful manner. During the coding process and the writing of chapter four, the connection between their values and perceptive teaching appeared. The eight qualities of perceptive teachers allowed for curriculum planning and the reformed space TRIS provided to its students.

Perhaps schools should look more closely at what it values in their teachers. Teaching is an art form and each teacher employs a set of gifts different from the next. Perceptive teaching looks at qualities teachers continually work to develop and improve. Perceptive teachers are open to improving their practice and evolving as the needs of their students change. Teachers who possess the qualities of perceptive teaching are open-minded and flexible within their beliefs of themselves and their students' beliefs. At TRIS, the collaborators regularly participated in

grounding activities where they learned and shared about themselves, openly developing personal awareness as a team. If schools invested more time helping teachers develop themselves, this could affect how teachers approach students in their classrooms.

Reflection

Another theme I recognized within the collaborators at TRIS was their willingness to allow self-reflection to guide their teaching. During the focus group, the founding teachers' reflections on the visual depictions of the curriculum and their mission statement created a safe environment for reflection. Reflectivity could be a quality of perceptive teaching. It allows teachers to continually learn about themselves and think about their teaching craft as an ever-evolving art. While the eight qualities of perceptive teaching recognized open-mindedness, risk-taking, and awareness, they did not specifically identify the benefits of reflection during the teaching process.

Curriculum Re-Imagined

Finally, how the collaborators at TRIS developed curriculum in a timely manner was something to be noted. Connecting their topics to what was happening in the world around them gave a notable advantage for students, relating them to a scope beyond classroom walls. The innovation in planning lies in the fact that the learning loops are planned and catered to student needs. By choosing the topics for each year, they are able to align them with student socio-emotional needs as they arise, create avenues for connections between what is happening in the world politically, and adjust to meet student curiosities. Knowing the increasing pressure students felt from peers and social media, the collaborators at TRIS, were able to choose this topic and encapsulate an environment in which students looked reflectively during socio-emotional learning. Students were able to self-identify and connect to the topic and practiced

their skills as researchers on one another for their museum night projects. Allowing teachers to craft a curriculum students could more personally connect with created a natural engagement that rarely presents itself in a standards-driven curriculum.

Suggestions For Future Research

Numerous times throughout my data analysis, I found myself missing the student point of view. What did the students think about having to choose their own topics of study? How did the students feel about socio-emotional learning being threaded throughout their days? Did the students enjoy working with their community? Were world relevant topics something students found interesting? I think that having a student perspective on a school like TRIS would give even more insight into the impact this re-imagined environment could have on future reform efforts. I think it would be important to talk to students with different past experiences as well. TRIS had been open for five years at the time of the study. This meant half of the students had spent their entire careers in this environment but half of the students had not. It would be interesting to talk to students who have also had experience in traditional standards-based environments, I believe they could provide a critical perspective to the field.

Closing Comments

When I started teaching 17 years ago, I had no idea what it meant to educate students. I spent the first 15 years educating students in a school driven by standards and strove to provide an exemplary education for all. Exemplary meant high test scores and I worked tirelessly trying to achieve the highest. Reflecting on my time doing this, I felt both accomplishment and sadness. I did increase test scores by focusing on standards and high stakes assessments and creating relationships with students; care is a quality teachers must possess for many reasons. I am saddened when I think back about all of the missed opportunities students in this learning

environment had. I was so overcome with moving through the standards at a pace that put my students where they needed to be to pass a test that I never encouraged them to seek out problems, let alone come up with creative solutions. I never taught them to research and pursue their passions; I never encouraged them to become change agents in their own lives. My sole intention was to see them succeed on an assessment.

During this study, I self-reflected on my teaching practice and the opportunity I am now afforded at TRIS. Creating a timely curriculum, having time to meet the needs of students emotionally and educationally, and watching children work as change agents in the world is truly spectacular. I realize I am a different teacher now and, more importantly, my concept of myself has changed. I feel good about what I do, I reflect, I encourage, I openly care, and I enjoy watching students chase after their curiosities and passions.

The TRIS has created a safe environment for students, just as they intended to do, but they have also created a safe place for teachers. Perhaps the teacher shortage would subside if everyone had the opportunity to teach, create, and encourage in an environment like the one I found at TRIS. Perhaps if all schools were driven by mission statements that encapsulated curricular intentions that authentically allowed teachers and students to naturally engage in learning, the stigma the testing culture has created rewarding scores rather than creativity would subside. As Eisner (2002) stated, "Standardized teaching, from an educational perspective, is an oxymoron" (p. 7).

The founding teachers of TRIS did something truly remarkable by creating a highly engaged community of learners who will have knowledge beyond their standards-based learning peers. They created a safe place for teachers and students like no other I have seen in my 17 years of teaching and coaching teachers. It was not easy to create a school, teach in that school,

and keep it running smoothly, but I believe the safe environment they created allowed them to do precisely that.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: #adifferentkindofschool: The Curricular Intentions of an Innovation School

Researcher: Tatum Monaghan, University of Northern Colorado, School of Teacher Education
Phone Number: xxxxxx   email: xxxxxx
Research Advisor: Dr. Christine McConnell, University of Northern Colorado
Phone Number: (720) 849-5611   email: christine.mcconnell@unco.edu

Procedures: I would like to invite you to participate in an educational research study.
If you participate in this study, the research will take place from October 2021- January 2022.
Co-founders will participate in one interview (approximately 45 minutes long), a photo-elicitation activity (3-5 photos per week for 10 weeks), and one focus group (approximately 60 minutes long.) Collaborators will be observed during the planning process for the second loop of the 2021/22 school year. Interviews, focus groups, and observations will be audio-recorded and transcribed. No information will be disclosed that will harm participants. Pseudonyms will be given to all participants within the transcriptions of the interviews, observations, and focus groups. Data will be stored in secure locations for seven years per current APA standards.

Questions: If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Christine McConnell at christine.mcconnell@unco.edu. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, University of Northern Colorado at nicole.morse@unco.edu or 970-351-1910.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____
Investigator Signature   Date

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

Date: 09/27/2021

Principal Investigator: Tatum Monaghan

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**
Action Date: 09/27/2021

Protocol Number: 2108028562
Protocol Title: #adifferentkindofschool: Curricular Intentions of an Innovation School

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(701) (702) for research involving

Category 1 (2018): RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS. Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

UNIVERSITY OF
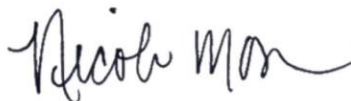# NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).

- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).

- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.

- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - http://hhs.gov/ohrp/ and https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

**Interview with Co-Founder Questions-
Initial interview questions for Sept/Oct**

1- What were your intentions when you opened TRIS?

  -Tell me your favorite "opening the school process" story.

2- How do you define curriculum?

3- Within the mission statement, where do you consider the curriculum represented?

  -Describe how you see the mission statement appear throughout the school and in

planning processes.

  -If you were to rewrite it, would you change or add anything?

5- What types of experiences do you want students and collaborators to have?

  -Tell me a story about a time your curriculum vision came to fruition.

6- What has been the most significant impact curriculum has made in the school?

7- Do you believe your curriculum intentions are improving education? If so, in what

way?

**Explain photo elicitation process

-Each founder will be asked to create a photovoice journal over the next 3 months, using

photo elicitation to "show the mission statement in images."

-Founders will provide 3-5 photos per week during the loop of study into a shared photo

drive.

Focus Group with Co-Founders around Photovoice journals-

Interview questions for February

1- Describe how your photos represent the curriculum.

2- Where do you see representation of the school's mission statement?

*Provide founders with their definition of curriculum from August interview.

3- This was your previous definition of curriculum, is there anything you would want to

add or change?