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A Consideration of Tracking Within A Bounded Educational System

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

American education is built upon a cultural paradigm of equality and access. Tracking

students into homogenous classes based on prior academic performance could

disadvantage lower-achieving students, thereby reinforcing inequality. The problem in

the study district is that homogenous tracking was implemented, yet the system had not

been evaluated within the context of implementation. The purpose of this qualitative case

study was to examine educators' perceptions of the practice of tracking. Bandura and

Maslow's social cognitive theory provided the conceptual framework and Dewey's

beliefs on social justice and a spirit of equity provided the theoretical foundation. Open-

ended narrative questionnaires were disseminated to approximately 109 educators in a

public school district in rural northwestern New Jersey. Ten purposefully sampled

interviews were also conducted for triangulation and to reach a robust understanding of

the qualitative data. The data were content-analyzed through open coding and

categorizing of emergent themes. The findings indicated a gap between existing district

cultural norms and both current and seminal research as educators supported the district's

practice of tracking. The majority of participants stated that creating homogenous

classroom settings, based upon student behavior, work ethic, and motivation, improves

the instructional environment for educators. The results informed the development of a

white paper for the school board and district stakeholders with policy recommendations

for the local tracking model. The implications for positive social change are that these

endeavors may inspire the consideration of heterogeneous grouping models to better

support student learning, student self-efficacy, and equity in how students are served.

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Dedication

I dedicate this effort to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father; to my precious and mighty wife, who taught me how to be a Godly man; and to my five beautiful children (Noah, Jonah, Hannah, Rebekah, and Sarah), in whom I am immensely proud and whom I endeavor to bless throughout their lives. Without those mentioned above, I would be nothing and could never have persevered through this process.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The concept of a free public education reflects a social construct of American culture. Instructing a nation's populace on the culture and heritage of that nation is essential in maintaining traditions and cultural identity. History has also affirmed that democratic institutions, such as the framework of the United States government, demand an educated and literate populace. As discussed by Davies (1996), the history of Western culture has demonstrated that education and literacy serve as the panacea to the subjugation of the masses. A learned populace does not accept tyranny, but has historically revolted against such regimes. It is upon this edifice that American education has been constructed, as expressed by Biafora and Ansalone (2008).

Publically funded education has been a hallmark of the American vision of equity, access, and opportunity. Students, indigenous and immigrant, beginning in the late 19th century, were provided access to social and economic mobility through a free, public educational system as they were assimilated into the American culture through the application of the English language (Ayres, 1909; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Brace, 1880; Terman, 1923). The educational system can be considered the incubator in which American culture is spawned. It is also a reflection of the social implications of that cultural construct. The manner in which American children have been educated is a reflection of the values of American society.

Western civilization has, since the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, moved inexorably towards the progressive left of a linear political spectrum

(Davies, 1996). Reactionary and conservative institutions have come under the scrutiny of an increasingly educated populace. While there have been periodic oscillations to the right, the movement toward the left has continued, as discussed by Davies (1996). As education is a government institution, it becomes a subject for political discourse. Political and social agendas have profoundly influenced the panoply of the history of American education. The manner in which Americans educate their children is clearly within the spectrum of political debate. As the American social construct has undergone significant changes, so too has its educational construct (LaPrade, 2011).

John Dewey (1916) referred to the American educational system as the great equalizer in the attempt to establish a level of social equality. This idea has come under scrutiny since Dewey's work almost a century ago. Several landmark studies have indicated that America's educational construct may not have resulted in increased opportunity and equal outcomes, but rather social stratification, which is often based upon socio-economics (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld et al., 1966; Jenks, 1972). This stratification is often manifested by placing students into homogeneous environments that are ostensibly based upon student ability; the reality is that these homogeneous educational environments demonstrate institutional social engineering (Biafora and Ansalone, 2008). This homogeneous construct is often referred to as tracking, defined by Ansalone (2010) as "…the separation of students by ability" (p. 4). Homogenous classrooms settings do not foster social equity.

Social equality can be considered a noble endeavor and reflective of a progressive democratic society. The homogeneity of educational tracking, however, may be

established upon a zeitgeist of inequality. Biafora and Ansalone (2008) claimed that the

origins of tracking to have been the 19th-century migration of "…poor southern blacks

and farm workers," (p. 589) as well as the influx of millions of European immigrants.

Biafora and Ansalone (2008) argued that institutional bias and racism of migrant and

immigrant students led to a "multi-tiered educational system," that separated students

based upon perceived ability. While subsequent legislation and court rulings have

attempted to deconstruct this system of educational tracking, Ansalone (2010) stated that

the research reveals that tracking remains "…pervasive in American schooling" (p.3).

Racial and economic inequality remains a pervasive reality in the American educational

paradigm.

Educational tracking can result in social stratification based upon socio-economic

status, thereby limiting opportunities for minorities and the indigent. Multiple studies

have indicated that tracking has a deleterious effect on student self-esteem and motivation

(Kususanto, Ismail, & Jamil, 2010; Parekh, Killoran & Crawford, 2011; Govinda &

Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Kim, 2012; Mirci, Loomis & Hensley, 2011). Children who are

tracked resign themselves to the station of economic degradation more readily than their

upper-track peers (Kususanto et al., 2010). Kususanto et al. (2010) also addressed the

lower tracked student's level of self-esteem and the manner in which their teachers

perceived them. These outcomes maintain an inequitable economic and social status quo.

Tracking has a demonstrated history of maintaining economic and racial inequality.

Tracking serves as a form of social engineering or as a component of eugenics, as espoused by Terman (1923). Educational tracking perpetuates a class structure where birth and wealth are championed above perseverance, will, character and effort. It can be argued as an empirical consideration, that early 20th century overt forms of racism and class warfare have become more covert in 21st century American culture; however, the practice of educational tracking can be seen as a form of apartheid, where opportunity and advancement are the purview of privilege (Terman, 1923; Kususanto et al., 2010; Parekh et al., 2011; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Kim, 2012; Mirci et al., 2011).

It is this practice of tracking that is addressed in this study. Educator perceptions of tracking were gathered and analyzed so as to draw conclusions by which to inform decisions. It was anticipated that there was an existent gap between the local perceptions and practices of tracking and the literature. The goal was to examine educator perceptions and the local practice of tracking so as to compare with current research regarding best practice in educational grouping for successful student learning experiences. This study was an attempt to expose that gap so as to inform district leadership on the need for a vision of educational and social reform.

Statement of the Problem

The school district under investigation is located in the northeastern region of the United States. The district is a one-school high school located in a rural setting. Local culture weighs heavily on any proposed progressive educational changes. The community and staff culture tend to be reactionary. The teachers' association is highly organized and powerful; it has recently emerged from a ten-year long conflict with a

previous superintendent and Board of Education, over myriad issues. Reform was difficult to achieve in such an environment because change was filtered through the lens of suspicion and mistrust. This exacerbated the problems of implementing changes that confront the issue of diversity. As a district educator for the past 18 years, the culture was clearly evident to me.

The power of the local teachers' association was juxtaposed with the desire of a previous superintendent to impose his will upon the district. This resulted in ongoing conflict, which was not conducive to a progressive educational vision. The rural culture in the area tends towards a reactionary, or regressive, political perspective that is reflected by the association membership. That culture continues to support and affirm the educational status quo, where progressive visionary change is difficult to institutionalize. Recent attempts to implement equity and access in the curriculum have resulted in slow and measured change; however, educator perceptions continue to support an antiquated vision of homogeneity in the classroom.

It is unclear as to whether or not individual educators would embrace a more equitable educational construct. While increased equity and access would seem to be necessary for increased student achievement, educator perceptions were affected by the negative climate and culture. Therefore, it was hoped that the collection of data would reveal local educator perceptions on the practice of tracking so as to inform progressive change.

Rural communities in the United States have historically been ethnically homogeneous – generally of white European descent, according to Lichter (2012). While

such demographics have begun to change over the past decade, as established by Lichter

(2012), predominantly white and politically conservative communities remain. Bagley

and Hillyard (2011) determined that rural communities are often politically conservative

so as to secure the cultural status quo. The local community, in which this study was

conducted, is not ethnically diverse: students of color comprise less than 3% of the

student population. The faculty and staff, of approximately 175, are even less diverse as

there are no employees of color. Much of the staff resides locally and has been

inculcated with the local culture and character. More than 60% of the staff lives within

the district, and almost all of the remaining staff reside within 20 miles of the district in

contiguous townships or counties. According to local demographics, the local

community and county are predominantly registered Republicans; the Republican

congressional representative is a graduate of the district. As expressed by Bagley and

Hillyard (2011), these demographics may serve to frustrate a progressive educational

vision.

The conservatism manifest in the local political demographics can also be

considered to be evident in the perennialist pedagogical beliefs of many local educators.

While participating in committees and in interactions with the teaching staff members,

over the years, it is apparent to me that teachers tend to rely upon their experience to

guide their perspectives on education. There appears to be a pervasive belief that the

onus of responsibility for the growth and achievement of the student rests entirely upon

the student. Erlich (1997) discussed the negative impact of a perennialist pedagogical

perspective of teaching as the "I teach, you learn" philosophy. Perennialism places the

onus of responsibility for a child's success upon the child, rather than the educator. Such a philosophy is contrary to a progressive approach to learning and is largely considered anachronistic as established by Erlich (1997). Perennialist philosophy would necessarily support separating students by their perceived abilities. This perception supports the local notion that students should be homogeneously grouped. There are few heterogeneously constructed classes in the building; those that are grouped as such are contained within the elective departments, e.g., technological studies, industrial studies, and the fine and performing arts.

The perennialist philosophy that the student is solely responsible for his or her academic growth is supported by the manner in which students are tracked at the school. The school currently operates using a graduated tracking system to schedule students. Students classified with disabilities comprise 15% of the student population, according to the director of special services; these students receive various disparate levels of inclusionary practices, depending upon the course and their level of disability. In this district, special education classrooms are constructed as follows: self-contained multiply-disabled; self-contained learning disabled; self-contained language learning disabled; as well as many pullout replacement classes, that serve to segregate the students from the least restrictive learning environment and from their non-disabled peers. The child study team, as well as the director of special services, states their belief that they have appropriately placed the students in the least restrictive environment.

While it is not my attempt to question the determinations of the educational professionals assigned to this task, the number of self-contained classrooms may be

viewed to support the perception of homogeneity. The percentage of students being served in self-contained placements supports the contention that services favoring homogenous groupings are preferred for serving students with disabilities. The district's director of special education noted in 2014 that 2.9% of the district students were placed in self-contained classrooms (R. Seipp, personal communication, May 23, 2014). Thus, the homogenous grouping practices extend to not only the students without disabilities but to those with disabilities as well.

Students with disabilities are not the only children who are tracked in the local setting. The nature of tracking students based upon their perceived abilities is the paradigm by which all students in the district are scheduled. Other tracks include College Prep A-level, College Prep B-level and College Prep C-level; honors and advanced placement tracks also exist. This arrangement does not reflect currently acknowledged best practices of equity for all students, student access to the full curriculum, individual student accommodations, least restrictive educational environments, heterogeneous classroom settings, differentiated instruction, and fomenting positive and progressive social change (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010; Obiakor, 2011). The local problem is that there is little equity within the curricular construct as antiquated, homogenous tracking models deny students' access to a diverse curriculum and student population. Students with disabilities and students deemed as at-risk or of lower ability are denied equal access to the curriculum enjoyed by students without disabilities and those considered of greater ability.

The curriculum is ostensibly modified based upon the educational track. This means that the degree of rigor is greater for higher tracks, and lower for lower tracks (R. Zywicki, personal communication, April 21, 2014). Whereas a higher-level track in an English Language Arts course might read Shakespeare, a lower-level track, might watch a performance of a particular play. To some in the local setting, this demonstrates appropriate levels of exposure to the same curriculum, thereby fulfilling the need to provide equity and access. Others argue that the richness, depth and complexity of the curriculum are compromised due to the homogeneity of the classroom environment and the omission of critical thinking required in the engagement of the text. Critical thinking is a fundamental component of a 21st-century curriculum to which all students should be exposed.

District educators state that the appropriate pace of instruction is necessary for student knowledge acquisition and retention. A district administrator indicated that teachers believe that the inclusion of students with perceived lesser abilities and students with disabilities slows the pace of delivery of instruction (R. Zywicki, personal communication, April 21, 2014). From personal observation and experience, the perceptions of educators within the district seem to be that students with disabilities have an adverse effect on the learning of those students without disabilities. The students with disabilities, and students deemed to have lesser ability, are segregated from the least restrictive learning environment through the pervasive practice of tracking. This practice negates diversity by homogenizing instruction. Denying students with lower cognitive abilities and students with disabilities equal access to a diverse and rich curriculum is

contrary to the spirit of nascent educational legislation and is not supported by current educational research (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010; Obiakor, 2011). Abu El-Haj and Rubin (2009), McLaughlin (2010), and Obiakor (2011) argued that such a philosophy as denial of access is inherently unethical as it is contrary to federal legislation (Free Appropriate Public Education, [FAPE], USDOE, 1973 and Public Law 94-142, P.L. 94-142, which was reauthorized in 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, [IDEA, reauthorized in 2004]), as well as current educational research.

The current tacking system could be revised so as to establish equity and access. This would provide for greater access to the curriculum among students with disabilities and students who are served under the Title I designation, and defined as at-risk. Currently, Title I students and students with disabilities have limited educational options in their effort to obtain a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (USDOE, 2010). Equal access to the curriculum would increase diversity and equity; current research supports heterogeneously grouped classes for the benefit of all students and classifications (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010; Obiakor, 2011). This supports my belief that the local district needs to increase the number of heterogeneous classroom options for all students

I do not support immediate full inclusion in the district, as such a leap would be too radical and one in which there is still significant local debate, at least on the secondary level. Also, full inclusion would be such a change in practice that it could not be effectively implemented in the current culture – at least in my estimation. Incremental

change will prove far more effective in providing for the needs of the children of the local community.

The first step in this process towards increased diversity, equity and access would be to eliminate the college prep-C (CP-C) track. This track seems to be the most egregious example of segregation and denial of equity for and among all students. The curriculum for all CP-C classes is somewhat abridged from that of the CP-A, or CP-B levels of instruction, arguably denying students equal access to a rich and rigorous curricula. The CP-C track is defined by a district administrator as "…providing basic academic preparation for higher education" (R. Zywicki, in personal communication April 21, 2014). The construct of this level of instruction is to provide a "developmentally appropriate" level of instruction (R. Zywicki, in personal communication April 21, 2014). Higher order and critical thinking skills are not evident in the curricula of the CP-C courses. As previously considered, the denial of access to rigorous and challenging curricula negates equity by perpetuating a culture of segregation. Children are denied access to their social peers through this segregation; this manifests in social inequity.

Whereas the CP-B curriculum might include Shakespeare, the CP-C curriculum is far less rigorous and rich, and excludes such offerings as it is deemed, by some local educators, as educationally and developmentally unsound practice to expect such high expectations and achievement from students covered under Title I, and students with disabilities. By eliminating the CP-C track, students who are currently segregated from the mainstream curriculum would immediately have access through the CP-B curriculum.

The homogeneity currently existent in each track would immediately change, so as to create a more heterogeneous classroom; this would benefit all students and foster a diverse environment. Future elimination of the CP-B track might be considered based upon the level of success in the institutionalization of the practice of inclusion and equity.

There appears to be the belief, among staff members and administration, that the mandated least restrictive environment is realized through the CP-C level of instruction. This level has become so similar to the pullout replacement, special education class, that there are no discernible differences between the two classrooms or levels of instruction. The CP-C classes are homogeneous and deny student access to the full array of curriculum experienced by their educational and social peers. This level is also not a recognized or accepted level of instruction by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2013) clearing house, which determines eligibility for college athletes. Therefore, students who fulfill the graduation requirements of the local district by completing courses listed under the CP-C level of instruction will not be eligible to participate in collegiate athletics   The CP-C level of instruction denies access, it limits diversity and denies future access; it can be argued that it is not reflective of the legislatively mandated least restrictive environment, according to FAPE (USDOE, 2010) and should be eliminated across the curriculum.

The students currently served in the CP-C level of instruction should be provided access to the CP-B level of instruction, so as to increase their access to the curriculum and to their peers. The administration and teaching staff seem to defend the tracking system as an appropriate placement, which they believe to be beneficial to the student.

This regressive educational philosophy may reflect the local culture; however, it can be argued that it does not appropriately conform to federal and state legislation as mentioned.

Another concern is that teachers with the least experience and expertise are more often scheduled to teach the CP-C level classes, as these courses are deemed least desirable by a veteran teaching staff. King and Watson (2010) and Hanushek and Rivkin (2009) demonstrated that student achievement increases when educated by the more accomplished and veteran educators. The average year of teaching experience for all CP-C tracked courses is 9.4 while the average for all non-CP-C courses is 12.4. Further examination of math and English CP-C tracked courses exposes a greater disparity of experience between staff members. The average years of teaching experience for math and English CP-C courses is 6.1 years; while the average for all other levels of instruction within the math and English departments is 15.8 years. This further denies access, to not only the curriculum, but to that which is most important in-school influence to a student's growth and achievement – teacher expertise, as established by Mangiante (2011), Luschei and Chudgar (2011) and Marshall and Sorto (2012). While novice teachers can benefit from professional learning communities of veteran mentor educators, according to Mullen (2011), the district does not employ such an option. Mentoring in the district is a state mandated, top-down construct, which is not implemented in the manner recommended by Mullen (2011). This further complicates the practice of scheduling inexperienced teachers with the more at-risk students within the CP-C track.

Administrators in the local educational setting, who wish to reward their veteran teachers, schedule them for what they determine to be the more desirable courses – the upper-level tracks. Lower-level tracks, such as CP-B and CP-C, are generally taught by novice teachers who tend to lack the maturity and expertise to support the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities and those served under Title I. This is a clear denial of access and equity and is contrary to the needs of our most at-risk students. It is necessary for educational leaders and administrators to demonstrate moral courage in prioritizing the needs of the students over the professional wants and desires of teachers; this is necessary for equity and the establishment of a more diverse educational paradigm.

However, tracking remains the culture of the school as state performance reports indicate a high performing district on state standardized tests. The research may demonstrate that district educators are serving the needs of all students. However, the dropout rate is greater than 2%, with a graduation rate of approximately 87%. While these numbers are comparable to other like districts within the state, personal communications with director of curriculum and instruction, R. Zywicki, May 30, 2014, reveal that the students who are dropping out, or who are not graduating with their cohorts, are those students served under federal Title I and IDEA programs – the students who populate the CP-C track. While personal communications with R. Zywicki, May 30, 2014, indicate that district test scores are among the more competitive schools in the county, such scores are only one measure of a districts performance.

The problem of implementing appropriate progressive change is aggravated by an administration which is either equally reactionary to change, or too fearful of the

repercussions from disagreeing staff. Moral courage is imperative in administrators, according to Sherblom (2010). Rather than setting the educational course of the district based upon current research, the previous long-serving superintendent, attempted to mollify a contrary teachers' association by supporting the concept of extensive tracking, thereby creating homogeneous groupings on all educational levels. Having subsequently retired, the next superintendent served in an interim capacity; he supported the evaluation of the CP-C track. However, he also stated his preference to leave such long-term determinations to the next superintendent.

The interim superintendent chose to continue past practice by increasing the number of CP-C sections during his tenure by adding three new CP-C courses. The CP-C level of instruction was also added to an industrial technology course and to a fine arts course, both of which had previously only included sections under the CP-A level of instruction. The interim superintendent, who was not a local resident, stated that it was not his desire to fuel dissent or to perpetuate a negative climate in the district. His concern was for a positive culture to emerge during his tenure and that issues of equity and access, if they were a recognized problem, would need to be addressed by the next superintendent. It is this setting within which this research was conducted with the expectation of promoting positive social change.

In an effort to direct the course of the education of future children in the district, I chose to study the current district practice of tracking, specifically the CP-C track. The intention was to obtain data by which to inform the superintendent and Board of Education, to reconsider the CP-C track. The elimination of the CP-C track would

promote social change within the district and necessitate the provision of educational

trainings to district employees. As considered throughout this document, current research

and legislation support heterogeneous educational settings. I endeavored to study the

issue of tracking, in spite of the vitriol that this issue provokes in many district educators.

The purpose of the study was to identify and explore district educator experiences and

perceptions about tracking, specifically, the CP-C track, so as to more fully understand

the phenomenon of local educational tracking. It was hoped that such an understanding

would serve to inform a possible decision on the CP-C track and to foster positive social

change. Social change will be manifest in heterogeneous classrooms where students of

divergent abilities and life experiences are able to interact with their peers and a diverse

and rich curriculum.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The district schedules CP-C courses throughout the curriculum; this includes core

courses, such as math, language arts, science and social studies, as well as electives, i.e.

technological studies, world languages, business studies. The total student population is

1022, with more than 20% of those, or 252 students, receiving CP-C level instruction.

There are approximately 500 sections of courses for which students are scheduled

throughout the school year. Of those sections, 21 are at the CP-C level of instruction, or

track. There is an average of 12 students in each of those 21 sections. Such a low

number within the CP-C sections is indicative of a significant drop in student enrollment

over the past six years, from a high of 1379 to a current enrollment of 1022. The

teaching staff has not been reduced respectively; this results in class sizes, which are far lower than the state average – especially in the CP-C sections, which are considered more successful with lower class sizes. These students are either classified as in need of special education services, or served under the Title I designation. The number of students receiving special education designation is 152, or 14.9%; the number of students served under Title I is 137, or 13.4%. According to R. Zywicki, in personal communication on May 30, 2014, the percentages of students served under special education and Title I, are generally correlative with other demographically similar districts within the state.

Access to the data was provided by central office administration. Further access was provided to the Title I account and how it is managed, by the central office administration, as well as the full NCLB/ESEA grant. The statistics were accessed through administrative access to PowerSchool (the school's student account system).

This tracking system serves to segregate an economically disadvantaged subculture within the district. There is a significant disparity of wealth in the district, which is designated by the state as a *DE* district factor group (DFG) school. The state defines DFG schools by their socioeconomic demographics for the purpose of comparing school performance on state assessments: *A* schools are the most economically disadvantaged, while *J* schools are the most affluent. Each gradation between *A* through *J*, indicates increased wealth within each district, in ascending order. Therefore, a *DE* district is generally less affluent than *F* through *J* districts. However, the disparity of wealth in the district within this study exacerbates the negative effects of tracking. Of the

five municipalities that send their children to the regional high school, one is classified as

DFG *B*; while the others range from *DE* to *I*. The majority of students served under Title

I are from the one municipality categorized with a DFG of *B*. This reality serves to

segregate these students from their peers from other municipalities, thereby perpetuating

social stratification while denying equity and access, as well (NJDOE, 2013). This is

indicative of that which has been considered earlier, that economically at-risk students

tend to be separated from their more affluent social peers.

Currently the local school dropout rate stands at 2.2%. The state has determined

that the local district must remain below 2.0% dropout rate to meet expectations. Of the

22 students categorized as having dropped out of school during the previous year, 19

were either receiving special education classification or were served under Title I

designation. With such a high percentage of the district's at-risk population dropping out

of school, the practice of educational tracking must come under scrutiny. Both the

director of curriculum and the former interim superintendent have stated their concerns

with the dropout rate and the reasons for those dropouts. Again, this information comes

from access to the central office administration: the director of curriculum (R. Zywicki,

personal communication, November 12, 2013), the business administrator (A. Bresett,

personal communication, August 19, 2013), and the office of the superintendent (T.

Brennan, personal communication, June 7, 2013). The director of curriculum is tasked

with communicating as the liaison with state agencies.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

      Social Justice. The practice of tracking is built upon an edifice of institutionalized racism, as considered by Ayres (1909); Bowles and Gintis (1976); Brace (1880); Mirci et al. (2011); and Terman (1923). Williams and Lemons-Smith (2009) also addressed the gap between the performance of white and minority students as an existential reality on the American educational landscape. When children are placed in homogeneous educational placements based upon perceived abilities, those placements manifest the socioeconomic construct of our larger society. Mirci et al. (2011) constructed a framework by which the practice of tracking is evaluated through the context of race, elitism, exclusion and the cultural paradigm of segregation, as minority and indigent students are disproportionately represented in lower tracked classrooms. The authors consider the result of tracking to be insidious and harmful. All students' education is harmed when students are denied access to an equitable curriculum and to their peers.

      The insidious nature of tracking becomes clear when considered through the relationships between children and their teachers. Loomis (2011) demonstrated that teachers have lower expectations of children placed in lower tracks; children see themselves through this same prism as they adopt a negative self-image, according to Loomis (2011). Teacher perceptions of students have a profound impact on student achievement. In a study by Rubie-Davies et al. (2010), referenced by Mirci et al. (2011), lower teacher expectations of students demonstrated lower student achievement and self-image, even five years after high school graduation. Student fulfillment of teacher

academic and social expectations is referred to as the Pygmalion effect, as considered by Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1992). The notion that students who are marginalized by the larger society and culture are also compromised by the educational system should be anathema to all educators and those who believe in social justice. This reality mitigates social mobility and perpetuates a cultural underclass from which children cannot escape.

The existent educational achievement gap, which is manifest along socioeconomic lines, is widely misunderstood by those who implement social and political policy, according to Portes (2008). Portes (2008) stated that our society has trivialized the concept of social justice as we continue to compromise the education of generations of marginalized children. Portes (2008) described a four-year achievement gap in the achievement scores between minority and majority students. Again, this demonstrates a culture in which equitable educational opportunities are denied to the disadvantaged, thereby maintaining a social construct of apartheid.

The educational apartheid is less apparent for students with disabilities. Martin and Cabigo (2011) considered how social integration and inclusion have changed over time. As the conceptual framework for disabilities has changed, so too has the extent of social integration – marginalization has been mitigated, however painstakingly. Thompson (2012) stated that inclusive education has increased with the passage of IDEA (2004) and NCLB (2001). The process of establishing inclusive educational settings for students with disabilities has been slow. Nevertheless, in his mixed-methods study, Thompson (2012) studied pre-service mathematics teacher perceptions about inclusion – the results affirm the gradual cultural change toward more inclusive education.

Thompson (2012) concluded that pre-service educators were increasingly receptive towards the practice of inclusion. It is therefore anticipated that as pre-service teachers are inculcated with conceptual and theoretical frameworks, which are more sanguine toward inclusive education, the landscape of education will be more reflective of equity and access to rigorous curricula.

LaPrade (2011) established the foundation of tracking upon the United States Supreme Court decision of 1896, Plessy v. Ferguson, in which the notion of "separate but equal" was established. In spite of historical progressive movements over the past century that championed equity, tracking persists according to LaPrade (2011).

LaPrade (2011) provided multiple examples of districts and schools where detracking strategies resulted in significant increases in student outcomes, especially for students who are typically marginalized by the practice. Portes (2008) is far less sanguine, however, about the macro-society and institutional change. The author considers that marginalized minority populations are institutionally segregated and discriminated; without policy and culture change, the social and ethical injustices of unequal educational paradigms inherent and endemic in our society, will continue to broaden the achievement gap and result in generational socioeconomic oppression.

Equity and Access. Opertti, Brady and Duncombe (2009) stated that "…heterogeneous learning environments…" (p. 209) have proven to support learning outcomes for all students. Opertti et al. (2009) also considered the reality that individuals and society at large are preconditioned to demonstrate prejudice towards diversity and students with disabilities. We have marginalized students due to our own bias and

prejudice; this marginalization is a manifestation of our cultural predilection to discard individuals from our social paradigm for whom we have a prejudice. Opertti et al. (2009) also addressed the structural and pedagogical differences between what are referred to as "deviance" and "inclusion." Such an argument is at the core of the consideration of my own educational environment: teachers tend to explain student failure, or lack of growth, as a component of the student's limitations of both cognition and effort. Local educators also tend to consider that the curriculum must be tailored to each individual student's ability range. Opertti et al. (2009) juxtaposes this deviance concept with that of inclusion – all students should be provided access to the same curriculum and that student failure is a function of the failure of the curriculum to be diverse and inclusionary, rather than upon a student's cognitive deficiencies.

Pedagogical practice can positively affect student perceptions of their educational and social peers. Diamond and Hong (2010) studied the actions of 72 children from an inclusive preschool setting; they concluded that teachers could support student acceptance of the inclusion of children with disabilities through the use of effective intervention and support. Diamond and Hong (2010) used a mixed-methodology to demonstrate that moderate physically demanding activities were not an impediment to all children including students with physical disabilities into their physical activities. The researchers concluded that the more frequent the interaction, the greater the understanding and acceptance of the students with disabilities. It is therefore the responsibility of the educator to foster a classroom environment where all students are welcomed, affirmed and supported. This is beneficial to all students.

Obiakor (2011) emphasized the critical nature of establishing a culture conducive to the inclusion of all students within a "…community of learners" (p. 15). School leaders must establish the expectation that all students can achieve at high levels; inclusion in the classroom and school community is a critical component of a larger social agenda. Obiakor (2011) stated, "…education must have the power to uplift humanity" (p. 15). An inclusionary vision of non-discrimination and desegregation is that which is required of the visionary educational leader, and of society, as considered by Obiakor (2011).

It is not enough to include or detrack, according to Abu El-Haj and Rubin (2009); teacher preparation and education is essential for the successful implementation of heterogeneously grouped classrooms. Ill-prepared teachers often sabotage efforts to detrack classrooms, according to Abu El-Haj and Rubin (2009). In their ethnographic study, Abu El-Haj and Rubin (2009) attempted to construct a vision of educational equity and access, through the deconstruction of traditional paradigms and prejudices, among educators. There is considerable frustration and philosophical conflict among teachers who are not edified in the deeper concepts of equity and inclusion. Abu El-Haj and Rubin (2009) established an educational framework to prepare teachers for the fundamental changes inherent in transitioning to a heterogeneous classroom. Teachers must understand the diverse ways in which students learn; they must unlearn the educational tendency to rank and compare students, according to the Abu El-Haj and Rubin (2009) study. Successful detracking and inclusionary practices must be built upon the edifice of effective teacher training.

Definitions

At-Risk. Students who are served under Title I, who are considered academically at-risk of failing, performing below expectation on the determined level of proficiency on state assessments; students who receive free and reduced rate lunches, as determined by the state's economic formula, are also considered to be at-risk (Eunjyu, 2013).

College Prep Track (A, B, C). The local school district's tracking system in which students are placed into homogeneous educational settings within each classroom, based upon perceived academic ability. It is the vision of the local district to separate college-bound students so as to provide appropriate levels of instruction at a pace that is perceived by the educator to be appropriate to the student's ability, (R. Zywicki, personal communication, April 21, 2014.)

Inclusion. The full participation, assimilation and integration of all students, regardless of ability or disability, into a general educational setting (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013).

Pullout replacement (POR). An educational placement for students with disabilities who are separated from their regular educated peers. Students, who are placed in this setting for some classes, are scheduled with their regular education peers for other classes (R. Seipp, personal communication, April 21, 2014).

Title 1, Part A. A component of the ESEA in which local educational agencies (LEA's) are provided funding for low-income students (USDOE, 2014).

Track. A homogeneously constructed level of instruction within a school (Ji-Kang & Astor, 2011).

Tracking. The practice of separating students within a school by perceived academic or ability groups (Ji-Kang & Astor, 2011).

Qualitative research. "A process of inquiry that focuses on uncovering the meaning and interpretations of social phenomena" (Bourgeault, 2012, p. 1).

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Significance

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The practice of scheduling students by their perceived academic or behavioral abilities, so as to construct homogeneous educational settings, presents significant problems for the local district and its students. Denying all students access to a rich and robust curriculum, and access to all their social peers, is contrary to research and to the spirit of legislation that has attempted to limit such practice. Students scheduled in the lowest track are at increased risk of dropping out of school, having lower self-esteem and underperforming on standardized tests. Students placed in the higher tracks are denied heterogeneous educational settings with their social peers.

It can be argued that the practice of tracking has the effect of perpetuating a distinct underclass of children and adults. For the local community to overcome the economic degradation of the one municipality, which is most disadvantaged, the practice of tracking at the regional high school must come under scrutiny. Opportunities for economic recovery and advancement might be aided by a reevaluation of the local education agency's practice of tracking. Other social indicators might also be mitigated by the elimination of the CP-C track, i.e. the need for behavioral modifications and

interventions, bullying incidents, suicide rates, academic failures, and ever increasing instances of counseling for drug and alcohol abuse.

In a larger context, society would be served by the elimination of tracking for some of the same issues as are manifest on the micro level. On the macro level: economic vitality might increase, the necessity of public assistance might be mitigated, unemployment rates might decrease, the marketplace might benefit from increased innovation and creativity, public physical and mental health might be improved, and social mobility might also increase.

From a social and cultural perspective the practice of tracking serves to perpetuate segregation and mitigate progress. When societies are provided equality of opportunity they flourish; when societies are provided equality of outcome, they are more vibrant and inclusive. Anachronistic nationalistic paradigms of the 19th and 20th centuries will evolve into global communities when every individual is provided equality of outcome through educational equity. Segregating students by ability must be scrutinized as antiquated, anachronistic, racist and elitist; tracking should be examined as a form of social engineering in which the rights of the privileged overwhelm those of the underprivileged. Detracking will advance the American educational system thereby serving the global society, on the micro and macro level.

Guiding/Research Questions

Teacher perceptions regarding student ability have a profound impact on student self-esteem and student achievement. In an effort to address the local problem of tracking, which limits access to the curriculum and denies equity for all students, an

evaluation of teacher perceptions on tracking was necessary. By assessing the culture of the educators in the district, this qualitative case study provides a rich description of the rationale and theoretical understanding of district tracking. Any consideration of stimulating positive social change must begin with a thorough examination of the perceptions of educators.

It was hoped that the findings of the survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews of educators would provide sufficient data by which to determine the future of tracking within the district. The research and literature support detracking; social justice demands the district appropriately scrutinize the manner in which it provides instruction to the local children. The collection of the qualitative data in this study may be that which is necessary to inspire the local district to implement a more equitable and accessible educational paradigm.

To gain an understanding about how teachers describe their experiences and perceptions related to student tracking, the following research question guided this study: What are the perceptions and attitudes of the district certificated educators towards the implementation of a CP-C track within the institution?

Review of the Literature

The literature review was conducted through the utilization of the Walden University virtual library using educational databases: ERIC and Education Research Complete. Key words which guided the search of literature and peer reviewed journal articles were as follows: inclusion, inclusionary practices, detracking, heterogeneous grouping, ability grouping, equity in education, equity and access in education, least

restrictive environment, educational leadership and equity. The perusal of references cited in the literature also provided suggested resources so as to achieve saturation of the literature.

Throughout the examination of current research, primary documents also emerged as seminal works within the omnibus of the literature. These sources were accessed via the Internet, or purchased through online vendors and at various educational resource outlets.

Conceptual Framework

Public Law 94-142 (P.L. 94-142), which was reauthorized in 1997, and again in 2004, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), began the lawful inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom. While this study did not focus exclusively, or specifically, on students with disabilities, federal legislation (P.L. 94-142, and IDEA), established statutes upon which the concept of equity and access for all students should be constructed. Subsequent research, as considered in the literature review, addressed the practice of grouping students into homogeneous classrooms. It is this issue with which the author will contend so as to evaluate the local practice of tracking students that has frustrated efforts to construct heterogeneous classrooms that provide equitable access to a rich and rigorous curriculum, as well as access to one's social and academic peers.

I have included Coleman et al. (1966), Rubin and Noguera (2004) and Taylor and Harrington (2003), as seminal theoretical works in the text of my literature review for current research. These authors provide the conceptual framework for equity and access

for all students in public education. I have also included in the current research literature review the statutory hallmarks that mandate equity and access, such as Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (USDOE, 2010).

A conceptual framework can be built upon the motivation inherent in cooperative learning pedagogical practices as considered by Johnson and Johnson (1994), and Slavin (1990). Maslow's (1954) humanistic theories on motivation can be considered in an attempt to provide context for student motivation in an inclusive educational environment. Finally, Bandura's (1994) social cognitive theory can be considered in relation to self-efficacy in student motivation and teacher perceptions in their ability and willingness to function within an inclusive environment.

Initially, the practice of free public education in a democratic society demanded equity. McLaughlin (2010) addressed the manner in which one defines equity as a compelling factor in the discussion of educational access. McLaughlin (2010) considered the 1954 Supreme Court case: Brown v. Board of Education. Equal access and equal opportunity were no longer sufficient to determine that which was deemed equitable. The question, as articulated by McLaughlin (2010) was whether it was sufficient for the state to provide equal opportunities, or was it necessary to ensure equal benefit.

The Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS), also known as the Coleman Study, was seminal research on equity in education. Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that student achievement was based far less upon the resources within the school, than it was upon the student's economic status. Through the utilization of random sampling, over a period of 20 years, on a national scope, students, teachers and

administrators completed surveys to evaluate myriad variables which might affect student achievement; researchers in the Coleman et al. (1966) study concluded that socio-economic background had the most significant impact on student achievement. The manner in which students valued the concept of education and the attitudes they held for the process had a profound impact on achievement. Therefore, diverse classrooms, where such positive attitudes about education were more evident, resulted in greater student learning. The problem was, and to some degree, is today, that schools are a reflection of their communities; students from privileged communities outperform students from underprivileged communities. Diversity, it would seem, would need to be an artificial construct within the schoolhouse, if not within the community.

The Coleman et al. (1966) study demonstrated that when students are educated among those who have greater personal expectations and more favorable social and economic status, achievement improves. Although, the Coleman et al. (1966) study was the result of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and was essentially a study of ethnicity in educational opportunity and inequity, it has significant impact on the concept of educational equity for all students – diversity, whether based upon race or ability, improves student learning.

As a seminal work, the Coleman et al. (1966) study was groundbreaking and impacted future studies on equity in education. Subsequent research has reiterated the efficacy of the Coleman et al. (1966) report: Jenks (1972), Taylor and Harrington (2003). Similar demands for equity for students with disabilities emerged from the research of Coleman et al. (1966). Equal access to a free, public education was the focus of the

Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA), according to McLaughlin (2010).

If minority, disadvantaged, or disabled students were less ambitious to access educational opportunities, progressive thinkers and philosophy countered that it was incumbent upon the state to encourage such aspirations. Equality of opportunity, which was the spirit of the Brown decision, was replaced by the notion of equality of outcome, according to McLaughlin (2010). It was this very concept of equality of educational outcome, rather than opportunity that was the essence of *Inequality*, the seminal work of Christopher Jenks. Jenks (1972) stated that one of the problems with implementing equality of outcome in education is that there is a disparity of power in the construct of society; as the most powerful in our society fear the loss of that power, they quell the distribution of that power which might result from the promotion of educational equity.

Legislation such as the aforementioned EAHCA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004), Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA 2001, Title I, the No Child Left Behind Act) provide for equal access to curriculum for all students. McLaughlin (2010) stated that such considerations demand individual accommodations, individualized instructional plans and the elimination of the practice of student segregation with the provision of providing for the "least restrictive environment" for students with disabilities. It is the spirit of the Coleman et al. (1966) report, which is at the core of such legislation that provides equity for students with disabilities. McLaughlin (2010) also considered that although there might be a philosophical and mechanical conflict existent between federal legislation that fosters

equity, and the implementation of standards-based educational reform, the rights of each student to receive access to equitable outcomes, is more compelling than the demands and requirements of standards-based reform.

Evidence from Research

Worthy (2010) stated that pejorative euphemisms originally associated with tracking and ability grouping may have changed, however, the practice of tracking remains a ubiquitous reality across our modern educational landscape. In his qualitative study of 25 middle school teachers, Worthy (2010) exposed the prejudicial perceptions of today's educators. Teacher perceptions regarding tracking are evident in the following comments:

The regulars, they don't even bring in their homework, and I've given up on them reading at home. Their parents don't read; they don't see it modeled (p. 272).

The honors class is wonderful in every respect. They are every teacher's dream. The regular class is very, very low. They are my most difficult class, and my biggest discipline problems are in that class (p. 272).

The school in which Worthy (2010) conducted his research tracked students as either "Honors" level or "Regular" level. Worthy (2010) confirmed that teachers provide a different level of instruction and access to the curriculum for students who are labeled as regular. Teachers treat the regular education students with a level of disdain not evident in honors level classrooms. The speed of instruction is slower in secondary tracks and elementary classrooms, which utilize ability grouping.

The research of Makel, Lee, Olszewki-Kubilius and Putallaz (2012) demonstrated that children who are placed in heterogeneous classrooms or groupings are more likely to maintain a more positive academic self-concept than those who are placed in homogeneous classrooms or groupings. Makel et al. (2012) stated that a student's self-concept was more than two times as likely to increase when placed in groups in which students of high-ability participated. This research presents evidence to support the elimination of tracked classrooms by demonstrating the benefits to students, who would otherwise be categorized as being of low-ability, when placed among their high-ability peers.

Beacham and Rouse (2012) acknowledged that teachers generally accept the concept and positive aspects of inclusive education; however, they stated that teacher's perceptions of inclusive educational practices are less sanguine when faced with the realities of actual implementation. In their study of student teachers, Beacham and Rouse (2012) considered that younger teachers are more likely to embrace the practice of inclusive education. Nevertheless, pre-service teachers, in the study, stated that they were ill prepared for the rigors and challenges of heterogeneous classroom settings. Beacham and Rouse (2012) concluded that student teacher perceptions of inclusion would be enhanced through the facility of university classrooms, which included both general and special education.

In a qualitative case study, Glazzard (2011) analyzed the barriers to establishing heterogeneous classroom settings. Glazzard (2011) clearly indicated that inclusive education would continue to be compromised by negative teacher perceptions; without a

paradigm shift in embracing the conceptual framework that all students can learn, inclusive education cannot succeed. There must be a "good faith…effort" to accept and embrace equity in the classroom, according to Glazzard (2011, p.57). The perceptions of educators reflect their own life experiences and political beliefs; however, it is the responsibility of each to consider the ramifications of their beliefs on children. Glazzard (2011) discussed the tension between the goals of inclusive education and the nascent standards based agenda; essentially, at-risk students are marginalized in the standards based agenda. In fact, the author concluded that the standards agenda served as the most significant barrier to educator acceptance of inclusive educational environments where equity is championed over an anachronistic concept of students stratified by dubious definitions of achievement.

Glazzard (2011) affirmed the conclusions of Beacham and Rouse (2012) when he determined that pre-service teacher training is a seminal component to the successful implementation of equitable heterogeneous classroom settings. In support of both Glazzard (2011) and Beacham and Rouse (2012), McCray and McHatton (2011) also examined pre-service teacher perceptions in their mixed- methods study of inclusive settings. McCray and McHatton (2011) also concluded that pre-service general educators must receive training so as to prepare them for inclusive educational settings. That training cannot be exclusive to pre-service educational curricula, or to the professional training of veteran educators; the paradigm shift can only come through ongoing and sustained culture change in the training of all educators. The extent to which this is

possible must be considered a significant challenge on the local, state, national and international levels.

In a qualitative study of the perceptions of 34 Israeli elementary school teachers, Gavish and Shimoni (2011) concluded that regular education teachers believe themselves ill-equipped for the challenges of an inclusive classroom. They believed themselves to be victims of the circumstance of an educational and social construct in which inclusive education was proffered in spite of limited educator training and preparation. Gavish and Shimoni (2011) stated that the regular education teachers created in-class homogeneous groupings so as to contend with the mandate of inclusion; this transferred responsibility for the education of the marginalized students to the special education teacher and facilitated a contrary classroom culture.

In their consideration of early childhood inclusive education, Odom, Buysse, and Soukakou (2011) stated that inclusion became a relevant practice following passage of PL 99-457 in 1986. The authors attested to the positive sociological and psychological outcomes of inclusive classrooms. Odom et al. (2011) defined inclusion as "…essentially about belonging, participating, and reaching one's full potential in a diverse society" (p. 347). While the context of this literature review examines the outcomes of equitable educational environments, there remains contention among educational practitioners over both the psychological and sociological benefits of educational equity.

Darragh (2007) in support of a theoretical framework for equity and access for all students stated that the inclusionary classroom is not a place, but rather a philosophy – equity for all. The author states that children should not be defined by their disability, but

that they are "…children first" (Darragh, 2007, p. 167). Darragh (2007) supported the philosophical notion that inclusion is fundamentally about equality and that the isolation of children into tracks or restrictive environments is contradictory to the belief in equality.

Lees (2007) considered that equity is a matter of social justice. Lees (2007) demanded the elimination of the western educational paradigm, which he stated was based upon an "unacceptable status quo" (p. 57). Lees (2007) contended that there is a "dissonance" (p. 52) between government efforts at standardization and the realities of human societies and interactions as diverse and differentiated. Education should not be based upon a one size fits all monolithic top down government dictate, according to Lees (2007); but rather upon a local individualized approach which is decentralized, collaborative, creative and innovative inquiry.

The process of establishing inclusionary practices and equity in a school is profoundly challenging, when traditional convention and teacher preparation strategies are not aligned with that vision, according to a study by Ryan (2010). However, Ryan's (2010) case study focused on the establishment of inclusionary practices in a new school where the principal had the ability to choose the teachers who were advocates for equity and inclusion. The three-year study demonstrated that the culture of the community has an impact that can negate effective implementation. Ryan (2010) also considered that full inclusion may never be an attainable goal, and that partial inclusion is essentially better than no inclusion. The political makeup of a community has an impact on the vision of local educational agencies.

Vandenbroeck (2007) considered that equity in education is based upon a neo-liberal social construct, a reflection of the politics of power and white-middle class normative cultural hegemony. This presents significant issues for all non-normative learners; research, pedagogy and institutional practices are based upon an inequitable reflection of those who hold power. A paradigm shift is therefore necessary, according to Vandenbroeck (2007), who considered the educational, social, cultural and economic needs of those who have been marginalized by a post-modern western cultural construct.

Campbell (2010) also considered inclusion and equity through the lens of public policy: "Classroom inclusion, one means of distributing resources, serves as a microcosm of the larger public policy issue regarding the social inclusion or social exclusion of individuals on the basis of classification" (p. 236). In the context of the nascent global education reform movement, based upon notions of accountability, Vandenbroeck (2007) and Campbell (2010), present alternative considerations of equity in education, based upon redistribution of resources to those in society who have little to no power and whose education is built upon an edifice of inequity.

In a mixed-methods exploratory analysis of the attitudes and perceptions of elementary students and their parents, Campbell (2010) evaluated the impact of inclusion on non-disabled students. The manner in which inclusionary practices are provided and delivered has a significant impact on the perceived and measurable benefits of inclusion on non-disabled and disabled students. Campbell (2010) concluded that the implementation of the theory of planned behavior into the culture of classroom inclusionary practices, results in positive academic and social growth in students with and

without disabilities. This study clearly supports an equitable construct in which students learn in a legislative mandated least restrictive environment.

Peters and Oliver (2009) studied global educational practices of inclusion juxtaposed with the market economy reform elements implemented in the United States. The authors conclude that market-based economy high-stakes testing requirements for accountability have had a deleterious effect on student achievement and have led to an increase in marginalization and exclusion of at-risk students and students with disabilities from the mainstream curriculum. Peters and Oliver (2009) contended that it was public policy, such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, which were meant to close the achievement gap, which have led to an increase in exclusion and have expanded the achievement gap. Market-based public educational policy reforms have failed to include students with disabilities; the high-stakes testing aligned with such reforms have also failed, according to Peters and Oliver (2009). Educational reform might therefore be a reflection of political expediency.

Roland (2008) discussed the concept that "…schools are instruments of socialization" (p. 54). This reality demands a consideration of a global perspective of inclusion and diversity in classrooms. Roland (2008) stated that educators, who provide this global perspective, socialize their students for the diverse world into which they exist – not an anachronistic, provincial and exclusive world based upon inequity and disappearing normative relations. Roland (2008) further questioned the role of the majority values as directive of the educational narrative; the implementation of majority values is inherently exclusive and is not a reflection of the current social construct of the

21st century world. A model of community socialization, citizenship and sense of belonging can be fostered by the establishment of mentoring programs designed to include all members of a diverse community, according to the Roland (2008) study.

Pedagogical practices must change so as to include all students into the educational discourse. Mack (2012), a teacher in a multi-cultural Asian environment, conducted critical action research to increase the oral participation of all students in her classroom. Mack (2012) concluded that pedagogy and inclusion increased student participation and voice in the classroom.

Rojas-LeBouef and Slate (2011) provided an overview of the empirical evidence of a significant achievement gap between white and non-white students in the American educational system. Throughout their survey of the research Rojas-LeBouef and Slate (2011) reiterate the negative impact of current educational philosophy and practice on non-white students. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) espoused a solution to this issue by suggesting that culturally relevant pedagogy must be employed. Without an understanding of the minority experience within the social construct, education will continue to offer limited opportunity to minority children. A curriculum shift in the manner in which our schools provide instruction is necessary so as to invite minority students into the process of their own education and identity construction, according to Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011).

Riehl (2008) addressed the role of the administrator as change agent in the establishment of inclusive schools. One of the issues which Riehl (2008) confronted was the problem with institutional change; stakeholders, from within and without, must

deeply believe in the need for the change. This is a concern, as Riehl (2008) stated that administrators tend to be reactionary to change. Rural educational paradigms also serve as bastions of conservatism. The political position of maintaining and defending the status quo is a significant barrier to implementing inclusive educational environments, particularly as the American educational system champion's local control. Significant social forces contrive to mitigate the necessary change in the process of implementing inclusive schools, according to Riehl (2008); however, administrators have the ability to override these forces so as to create learning environments that are more equitable, rather than homogenous.

Taylor and Harrington (2003) also considered the seminal role of the administrator in the implementation of inclusion. Taylor and Harrington (2003) discussed the dynamic between the principals need to balance the interests and input of all stakeholders, with what is educationally in the best interest of the students. The authors consider that there may be the occasion when the political beliefs and motivations of the stakeholders are contrary to that which is in the best interest of the students – especially regarding students with disabilities. When this conflict is manifest, Taylor and Harrington (2003) contended that the principal or administrator must demonstrate the moral courage to infuse inclusion into the school system, as this is what is best for all students.

Revolution or Evolution

Acedo, Ferrer and Pamies (2008) attempted to address myriad issues regarding equity in education. The article addressed the outcomes of an international conference on

inclusion held in Geneva in 2008. Acedo et al. (2008) considered that there were conflicting opinions on inclusive education across the globe. Some of the issues addressed by Acedo et al. (2008) are as follows: is inclusion a component of education for all; does inclusion represent a paradigm shift in the manner in which education is implemented; is inclusion an issue of human rights; is it possible to implement both equity and quality; can an educational system pursue justice without inclusion being a necessary component part; is tracking contrary to equity; in what way do teaching methods need to change? These issues were addressed at the 2008 conference; it was clear that there was still some discord among the educational community with the appropriate manner in which to establish equity in education. Opponents contend that there are more pressing global education issues regarding the concept of education for all, namely that there are areas around the globe in which there is limited access to education for all, not just those students with disabilities. The conference was demonstrative of the economic and political factors which influence the landscape of American education. Competitive global markets demand an educated and competitive workforce. This extends the consideration of equity in education to a global perspective.

Jiang and Lijuan (2010) also considered the conference held in Geneva in 2008. Jiang and Lijuan (2010) called for an international shift in the theoretical framework of education; if democratic ideals are the foundation of education, than all students must be included in a global egalitarian age of knowledge and support of human rights.

Alur (2007) also considered the nature of education as fundamental to human rights. Erudition might well be considered the panacea for much of humanity's

subjugation. Those who have held power throughout human civilization have attempted

to withhold education from the masses as a form of oppression. Alur (2007) discussed

this very issue in the nation of India, and that exclusion is more the order than inclusion.

Girls in India, according to Alur (2007) are excluded from equal access to education as a

cultural, political and religious reality. A social and religious caste system and systemic

misogyny are at the center of activist's attempts to inspire the Indian government, and the

governments around the world, to provide human rights through inclusive educational

systems.

García-Huidobro and Corvalán (2009) confronted the concepts of equity and

inclusion within the context of establishing modern democratic societies and that

education is fundamental in the participation in that democracy. Garcia-Huidobro and

Corvalán (2009) state that:

> Education systems are intimately bound up with a design for a society that is in
>
> keeping with increasingly democratic aspirations. This is why the shape,
>
> dynamics and regulation associated with an education system are never neutral in
>
> terms of outcomes and must meet the collective aspirations generated by
>
> democratic debate (p. 249).

It is impossible to separate education from its political foundation and as such our

educational institutions must reflect the democratic foundation upon which they are built.

Watkins (2009) contended with those who advocate for a holistic or Utopian

approach to reform as he referred to this as "social engineering" (p. 216). From a

philosophical approach to educational reform, Watkins (2009) advocated what he called a

"piecemeal approach to social engineering" (p. 216). The position taken here is akin to

the classical conservative belief in slow and measured change, as espoused by Edmund

Burke. Watkins (2009) believed that a holistic approach is too revolutionary and has

proven ineffective in other spheres of human endeavor; a Utopian vision of educational

reform is too difficult to obtain and too difficult to measure. One of the seminal shifts in

thinking considered by Watkins (2009) is the notion that inclusion of students with

disabilities must be seen as a positive end which results in diversity. The author

contended that currently the inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream of

education is considered a negative, something that brings unwanted or unnecessary

challenges to the majority. But, as Watkins (2009) considered, how does society change

its cultural prejudices and predilections without some form of revolution? Watkins

(2009) summarized the global plight from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO) perspective – a perspective to which he does not

subscribe:

> The ''excluded'' are excluded because the schools are not inclusive. Rather than
>
> welcoming diversity as an opportunity, the schools see differences as problems to
>
> be handled by Special Education. Therefore, broad and sweeping changes are
>
> needed, and only by reorganizing, reformulating, and reconceptualizing the
>
> world's educational systems, will the excluded finally be included (p. 217).

Watkins (2009) disagreed with the blame being placed on the schools and on

teachers; he stated that the issue is one of exclusion and adult illiteracy. Inclusion of

certain groups to foment diversity within the classroom is a distant hope, according to

Watkins (2009); when integration is not a reality, inclusion must not be the primary goal.
When the change is a mandated call from above to manufacture a social construct with
which those who seek change are comfortable, there can be no true cultural alteration,
according to Watkins (2009). Change must come from a sense of dissatisfaction with the
current system, with a sense that the status quo is no longer the appropriate course.
Change based in such a way as Watkins (2009) suggested might never come to those who
are excluded from the current status quo; the dissatisfaction of those who are excluded
might never compel those who hold the power, to implement inclusive education.
Essentially Watkins (2009) stated that change is experiential and not based upon current
research or a sense of human rights; only when those who exclude experience the need to
include, will inclusive education become a global reality. In what must seem anathema to
those who advocate for full inclusion, Watkins (2009) posed the following question: "Is
all opposition to inclusion policies motivated by self-interest rather than the interests of
the children?" (p. 221).

Ryan (2010) may have come to a similar conclusion as that which Watkins (2009)
espoused: inclusion of all students is akin to the eradication of polio or poverty – a global
paradigmatic shift might not be an achievable goal. A measured and focused agenda,
which addresses specific issues within the discussion, will prove far more impactful than
the attempt at swift revolutionary change as advocated by UNESCO.

Exclusion is an inherently inequitable solution, which is contrary to the ideals
upon which modern civilization depends and thrives. David (2007) continued this
discussion by posing the query: how can a society, which contends it protects and

supports individual liberties and rights, "…cultural pluralism [and] social diversity…" (p. 426) deny the rights of its disabled children? The politics of justice and compassion have resulted in a shift in thinking, research and programs to include those who have been excluded, according to David (2007).

The practice of tracking increases at-risk behaviors among those children who are most at-risk, according to Bryson (2010). Bryson (2010) considered that the school, at its most fundamental level, serves as a safe-haven for our at-risk child population; it is within such a benign environment, where children are provided the resources and safety, which are often absent from their lives. Home and the community are often places of violence, fear, depression, and stagnation; school can be safe, supportive, and healthy and stimulate a child's social, emotional and academic growth. Excluding an underclass of children from the mainstream curriculum and their peers within the school, defines the child's future access to employment and opportunity, according to Bryson (2010). Educational patterns must be considered for their impact on the social construct and the landscape of our modern cultural malaise. Bryson (2010) demonstrated that the long-term cost of providing for an underclass of underemployed and the indigent is significantly greater than the cost of providing for the educational support of all students. The rights of children must not be denied by the educational system, which purports to serve them; it is a moral imperative, according to Bryson (2010), that our educational systems champion those rights.

Cross, Cross and Finch (2010) considered the nature of social dominance orientation as a component of social stratification. Gifted students are culturally

reflective of the authoritarianism within a society; those who maintain social, cultural and political authority maintain an inequitable level of control over civil institutions. Therefore, as Cross et al. (2010) stated, education is stratified by race and income levels. The white upper-middle and affluent class represents a disproportionate level of access to the most rigorous academic curricula. Such an authoritarian social construct is reflective of the educational apartheid existent with the current system; minority and economically disadvantaged children are denied access to programs that could open lifetime doors of opportunity and an exodus from the perpetual underclass of American society. If education has served as the panacea to the subjugation of modern humanity, the authoritarian nature of our educational system, serves as a reactionary mode of social control.

Throughout the literature review, it is evident that current research supports social equity to the curriculum; however, arguments against inclusive environments remain. The research suggests that these arguments are reflective of cultural norms, mores, perceptions, educational and cultural experiences, a lack of educational supports, ineffective pre-service educational programs, cultural myopia, and a lack of moral courage among educational leaders. Inclusive education might be scrutinized through the prism of societal inclusion: To what extent have global societies and cultures been successful in including all members? While education may be a microcosm of a larger social construct, it was the intent of this study to consider educational paradigms into which all are included.

In considering the theoretical approaches to educating students who have been marginalized and omitted from equitable educational settings, Mole (2012) stated that the theoretical approach must change from a "…medical model to a social model" (p.63). This is a theoretical consideration in that the onus of responsibility for the context is transferred from the student to society. Educational settings therefore reflect social models that can often betray social bigotries and discriminatory bias. Again, it can be concluded that educational settings are not devoid of political expedience; human banality has not been extricated from the equation, in spite of cultural sophistication. Mole (2012) goes further by stating that most educational accommodations are provided merely due to legal necessity and not for the wellbeing of the student. This is emblematic of a society's failure to transcend provincial and antiquated thinking.

Tracking is reflective of a society's socioeconomic status, according to Oakes & Wells (1998). In his seminal work *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol (1991), exposed the disparity of the educational product between the upper and lower tracks; the marginalization of students in the lower tracks perpetuates the endemic social stratification established upon race and income. Landsman (2004) stated succinctly "the system that sets up the hierarchy of intelligence and excellence [tracking] is racist" (p.3).

LaPrade (2011) suggested that tracking was more beneficial to educators than it is to students. There is efficiency to the educational process, according to teachers, when students are scheduled by ability grouping. This philosophy places the needs of the institution and the educators above those of the children. A fundamental consideration that all students can learn is necessary for successful detracking according to LaPrade

(2011). LaPrade (2011) also concluded that teacher attitudes toward students must also change for successful detracking. Teacher attitudes in which students are judged and marginalized by their perceived abilities are reflective of the cultural miasma of the school; this cultural miasma must be confronted so as to foster an inclusive climate.

Janks and Adegoke (2011) addressed the necessity of cultural responsiveness in pedagogical practice. Educational settings must refrain from maintaining the cultural discourse of fragmentation by perpetuating an Us/Them context. Janks and Adegoke (2011) considered the difficulty in establishing this cultural responsiveness; however, education can be used as a catalyst for social justice and equity – indeed, it is with manifest urgency, with which education must establish the mantle of progressive cultural change. Cultural segregation has heretofore been affirmed, even established, in the schoolhouse. Janks and Adegoke (2011) offered that education should be the forum in which integration might be championed.

Mirci et al. (2011) demonstrated that negative teacher perceptions are a form of social injustice. Low expectations of at-risk students have a clear and negative impact on relationships between students and teachers; this frequently results in students perceiving themselves through the same prejudicial prism. The self-esteem of at-risk and marginalized children is compromised. Mirci et al. (2011) addressed the marginalization of students:

> When students are marginalized, excluded, negatively labeled, and do not fit what is considered to be normative, they may experience social injustice because of the ways in which oppression have been institutionalized within the education

system. For the purposes of this article social justice is defined as the pursuit of

equity and the creation of inclusive school cultures that are absent of overt or

covert oppression. Oppression is a sense of powerlessness and exclusion. In

schools, students face social injustice when they are oppressed based on racism,

sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, audism, sizeism, ageism, and religious

intolerance (p.58).

Mirci et al. (2011) refer to these students as "invisible," where teachers' negative

perceptions of low-ability children are evident and readily discerned by those children.

Mirci et al. (2011) went so far as to suggest that ability grouping, based upon intelligence

testing, can be considered a form of eugenics. No society or culture can proclaim its

inherent goodness or advancement when eugenics is even suggested as a component.

It is evident that current research supports curricular equity and access for all

students. Tracking as segregation is anachronistic and continues to be a reality in many

school districts. Although, the genesis of tracking can be traced to the 19th century, the

social construct upon which tracking was built is manifestly different today. Current

research and progressive social change support equity and access throughout American

society. If the American educational system is to be built upon the edifice of equality of

access, opportunity and outcome, than reactionary segregationist practices are inherently

inequitable, unethical and contrary to legislation.

The research indicates that children, who are denied access to their educational

and social peers, and to the full panoply of rigorous and inclusive curricula, are at

increased risk of failing. The research also indicates that children, who are placed in the

lower tracks, are treated differently than children who are placed in the higher tracks. The research presented supports the elimination of placing children in classrooms based upon their perceived ability. It is this inequity, which is the focus of this research study.

Institutional Change

A paradigm shift is necessary in the manner in which we educate our children. The inequities inherent in our current practice must change. While it may seem evident that educational reform is necessary, changing the perspectives of educators is an institutional challenge. Resistance to change often thwarts necessary reform. Connolly, James and Beales (2011) considered that an educational institutions culture is an "objective phenomenon that can be managed by a series of managerial actions" (p. 425). Connolly et al. (2011) determined that effective leadership is paramount in fostering long-term and institutionalized change. Fullan (2009) considered the issues of resistance to change and the importance of understanding institutional culture. Effective change can only be achieved by managing the culture and the factors of resistance. Cultural change within an institution must be managed properly. Large scale reform is only recently being effectively implemented in the United States, according to Fullan (2009).

Connolly et al. (2011) further considered organizational culture as a "shared phenomenon" (p. 425). However, that culture is not static; change can be fostered as a process. The manner in which this is achieved is dependent upon the leadership style or model chosen by the institution and its leadership. While Connolly et al. (2011) discussed initial dictatorial leadership, so as to inspire change; the inertia of the change might be manifest in different models not within the purview of this study. Regardless of

the leadership style employed, changing the culture of an educational institution is fluid, but possible.

Hall and Hord (2006) considered the difficulties of establishing change within the educational system in their consideration of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) framework. Learning communities are essential components in fomenting change among educators, according to Hall and Hord (2006). While utilizing the CBAM program, Tunks and Weller (2009) demonstrated that with continued support, educators are more willing to sustain and institutionalize the necessary change.

Change must therefore be understood as a progression, not an episode, according to Hall and Hord (2006). That progress must come from the educators within the system – teachers and leaders must be on-board so as to adopt the vision for change. The teachers must understand and recognize the issue as problematic prior to the intended change. There must be a desire for change within the system. This desire must be nurtured with a clear focus on the need for change and how that change will aid children and educators. Hall and Hord (2006) advocate for a long-term vision for change built upon patience and a steadfast belief in the vision.

Implications

Although, the qualitative research conducted in this case study was inductive by nature, it was anticipated that the findings might demonstrate that local educators were not in favor of creating more heterogeneous educational classroom settings. It was anticipated that the local conservative, even reactionary, political paradigm might inform the notion that tracking has a positive impact on students and education at large. Their

environment and their experiences have formed the perceptions of local educators; it was anticipated that these perceptions might be contrary to the research. It was therefore anticipated that the data collection and analysis might reveal a gap in the perceptions of educators, the practice of the district and the research.

Although, the district is rural and lacks diversity, there is a considerable population of depressed economic status. The research has demonstrated most educational tracking exists in suburban upper middle class and wealthier districts; detracking exists in urban and rural diverse and indigent districts. This case study revealed that the current practice of tracking within the district supported the research that economically disadvantaged students are disproportionately represented in the lower tracks.

By considering teacher perceptions of tracking and the performance abilities of those tracked students, this qualitative case study was also conducted to possibly reveal prejudicial perspectives among local educators. These perspectives might be contributing to the underperformance and self-image of students of poverty within the district. The possible exposure of negative perceptions of educators for children might also enable the district to provide appropriate professional development interventions so as to mitigate student achievement gaps. These achievement gaps are indicated in district testing where economically disadvantaged students underperform when compared with their non-disadvantaged peers. This information was provided by the curriculum office and the director as the district testing coordinator.

Economically disadvantaged children achieved a proficiency rating of 68.6% on the 2013 High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA); non-economically disadvantaged students achieved a proficiency rating of 93.2%. These scores are irrespective of student disability classification, whether for economically advantaged or economically disadvantaged children. Such a significant disparity is supported by the achievement gap indicated in the research.

This qualitative case study research was intended to provide sufficient support for the consideration of the removal of the current CP-C track. It was anticipated that with professional development support and a deeper understanding of the deleterious effects of tracking on an indigent population, that a transition plan could be implemented so as to detrack within the district.

Summary

Throughout the introduction to this study, I have considered the practice of tracking in a local district. The practice of tracking students by their perceived ability level is contrary to research and tends to have a negative effect on student outcomes. However, tracking is pervasive in the local district; Ansalone (2010) suggested that tracking is also pervasive throughout American education. At issue is the well being of all children. The research suggests that the denial of an equitable educational opportunity and the denial of access to curriculum and one's peers are tantamount to educational and institutional malpractice.

The purpose and goal of this qualitative case study was to understand the phenomena of tracking and the systems that were implemented and the resistance to

change and attitudes related to that resistance. By examining a possible gap between

educator perceptions and the research, this qualitative case study may be used as a

possible catalyst for the elimination of the CP-C track.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design

The nature of the research question within the bounded system being examined, in this study, supports qualitative inquiry. According to Nolen and Talbert (2011), qualitative research has evolved through multiple 20th-century permutations. The current evolutionary state upon which a theoretical foundation for qualitative research can be built is postmodernism. A postmodern philosophy or framework for research establishes that the researcher must uncover or expose the naturalistic nature of that which is being examined; there is subjectivity in the results and the data which are reflective of the local narrative or culture being examined (Nolen and Talbert, 2011). The local culture being examined in this study is dependent upon the experiences and perceptions of the local educators. Postmodernist philosophy establishes that truth is subjective to the individual or the local culture; this study was designed to examine the local culture of a rural school district and the perspectives of the educators within that culture. Subjectivity establishes that the truth which is to be uncovered through the process of research will only allow for assertions to be made, rather than conclusions to be drawn, as expressed by Nolen and Talbert (2011). A postmodernist philosophy precludes the generalizability of the conclusions drawn from this study, to other districts.

The philosophical framework chosen for this study was reflective of an axiological perspective where the perspectives and perceptions of the researcher and the participants reflected the ethics and culture of the educational setting that was examined. The study was designed to record and describe the culture of the local setting, in which

educators have developed a theoretical framework of their own that is predominantly based upon educator experience, not current research or literature. This presumption came under scrutiny through the process of data collection. I investigated subjective human experiences by employing a qualitative case study research design, as stated by Bogdan and Biklen (2007).

Creswell (2012) considered that a fastidious adherence to the alignment of the research question with the collection of triangulated data would likely support the validity of the research assertions. The inductive nature of the qualitative inquiry negates an initial construction of validity; however, it is up to the researcher to assiduously maintain an adherence to the concept of validity throughout the study. As Merriam (2009) stated, the qualitative case study is an "…analysis [of] a single bounded system…to illuminate a phenomenon" (p. 54). In my efforts to understand the culture of the local education agency, and the perceptions of its educators, so as to answer my research question, the case study was the appropriate methodology to employ.

Merriam (2009) expressed that the purpose of the qualitative case study was to come to an understanding of the setting being researched. The perceptions of the educators in the local setting is that which I attempted to examine and understand; I compared this evidence with that of the literature on tracking. Merriam (2009) differentiated between three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. This case study was intrinsic. I was interested in the local case of tracking and the local culture, which defined educator perceptions: it was of intrinsic interest to the researcher,

as defined by Merriam (2009). The parameters of the case study were inherent in the data collection: the survey questionnaire and the interviews.

The case study methodology was easily determined for the purpose of this study as other qualitative methods, grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenological, were not appropriate, as I was examining a bounded system. This case study was quite similar to an ethnographic study, as considered by Creswell (2012). This study was an examination of the actual case as manifest in the local setting; whereas an ethnographic study is more of an examination of a broader cultural context or theme, as expressed by Creswell (2012).

It was anticipated that the qualitative data gathered would provide a rich description of the case study. Quantitative methodology, as considered by Creswell (2012) was not appropriate for this study, as the purpose was to consider teacher perceptions regarding the phenomenon of tracking within the bounded system. This required a robust analysis of those perceptions through the utilization of open-ended responses and semi-structured interviews.

Ethical Treatment of Human Participants

I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) course: Protecting Human Research Participants as part of my doctoral studies at Walden University. Successful completion of this course enables the researcher to submit an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to conduct qualitative research on human participants. On July 30, 2014, I received IRB approval #07-31-14-0271890, from Walden University, to conduct research for this doctoral study.

All prospective participants in my research study were present or former adult professional educators. So as to protect the participants in my study, I ensured voluntary participation (Appendix A and Appendix B). The survey questionnaires were distributed to all currently employed district educators. Completion of the survey questionnaire (Appendix B) provided for current district educators' implied consent. The survey questionnaire stated that participation would remain completely anonymous to the researcher. The survey instrument contained a notice of implied consent. Thus, upon completion of the survey all participants would have read, understood, and consented to participate in the project study. All interview participants were chosen from among the former district employees who were provided with informed consent information (see Appendix A). Only former district employees participated in the interview data collection method; this was to ensure that participants were protected from perceived coercion to respond, as those still employed by the district were subordinates of mine, as I was promoted to the position of district superintendent during the proposal stage of this project study. There was therefore no risk of harm to the participants in my research study. The central office of the superintendent and the director of curriculum, instruction, and technology provided access to district data, as the issue of tracking has become a concern among members of the board of education and the administration.

Participants

The initial component of data collection consisted of convenience-sampling survey questionnaires (Appendix B) distributed to approximately 110 currently employed certificated district educators. As stated previously, implied consent was inherent in the

anonymous participation of current district educators. The central office disseminated the anonymous surveys to all current district certificated educators via the all-teacher email list server. The researcher data collection procedure via Google Forms ensured the anonymity of all subjects and maintained the highest ethical standards consistent with the NIH. The survey was designated as anonymous in Google Forms; the setting of *anyone with the link* ensured that responders are anonymous. All data will be kept for five years after the study on a password-protected Google Drive database, after which all data will be deleted. Google products have been IRB approved at major universities throughout the world.

Within the construction of the survey questionnaire, questions of identification were omitted; all questions were open-ended. I "limit[ed] the number of links between answers and specific participant identifiers," so as to ensure identity protection (Creswell, 2012, p. 402). Further protection included the destruction of all survey questionnaires upon completion of the research, as suggested by Creswell (2012).

Previously employed district educators, of whom there are approximately 40, were also invited to participate in the stratified sampled interviews, by providing informed consent (Appendix A). This document was disseminated to former district educators through email, physical mail, and hand-delivery, according to whichever method was most convenient. Creswell (2012) indicated that 10–12 interview participants is an effective sampling for the purpose of conducting qualitative interviews; therefore, 10 interviews were conducted as a component of data collection. As the interview participants were sampled from previously employed district educators, it was

anticipated that a professional relationship existed between the participant and researcher. This facilitated the data collection process.

The focus of the qualitative data was on educator perceptions, so it was unnecessary to stratify the sampling by ethnicity or gender. It was anticipated that the emergent and iterative nature of qualitative research might expose themes upon which the ethnicity or gender of the participants were correlative; for this reason, the gender of the former educator interview participants of the study were catalogued. Current employee participants remained completely anonymous, thereby eliminating any consideration of ethnicity or gender. Collecting participant data on ethnicity was not applicable as the district studied lacked ethnic diversity. There were no participants of color in either the survey's or interviews. Although, the surveys were conducted anonymously, there were no certificated district educators of color at the time of the study. The formerly employed participants were educators within a bounded system, so the sampling of interview participants need not be stratified beyond the previously stated reference to gender.

Data Collection

In an effort to answer the research questions and sub-questions, which emerged through the inductive data collection process, I employed survey questionnaires and interviews so as to proceed through what Creswell (2012) stated is a non-linear and iterative process. The methods by which I endeavored to collect the necessary data were informed by a theoretical approach akin to phenomenological theory, as considered by Roulston (2010).

Consent forms (Appendix A) were distributed to approximately 40 former district educators, via email, regular mail, or hand-delivered, as necessary. Survey questionnaires (Appendix B) were disseminated using Google Forms to all current district educators. This enabled me to more easily organize the questionnaires and the collection of the data in a secure and anonymous manner.

Finally, to triangulate the results of the data collection, I chose 10 educators, previously employed by the district, to participate in individual, in-depth interviews (Appendix C). Those participants were chosen from among those who provided informed consent through the completion of Appendix A. It was anticipated that the selection of educators would provide a rich description of the organization's culture regarding the practice of educational tracking. The interview participants did not necessarily teach a CP-C level track at some point during their career; however, it was necessary to include such educators among the interview participants. It was important that the interview participants selected enabled the researcher to understand the phenomenon of educator attitudes with the bounded system, according to Creswell (2012).

The data was organized to facilitate retrievability to more easily expose emergent themes and understandings. Data management is an important component of data collection, according to Merriam (2009). The data was managed by utilizing cataloging of the questionnaires, reflective researcher logs about the collection of the data and emergent themes and reflective memos so as to appropriately organize and maintain copious data, as discussed by Merriam (2009). The interviews were transcribed for

organizational purposes, as well as to facilitate necessary coding and recoding of data. Descriptive and reflective field notes, as discussed by Creswell (2012), also aided in the process of compiling important pieces of data during the interview process.

Theory-based questions developed from the survey questionnaires (Appendix B) and from the literature were posed to the interview participants for the purpose of understanding their educational experiences and perceptions of the practice of tracking students into homogeneous educational environments. As qualitative methods are inductive by nature, according to Creswell (2012), open-ended questions were posed during the interviews, which were reflective of the interview discourse. The purpose of the semi-structured interview, with components of both phenomenological and ethnographic theoretical approaches, was to describe human experiences, according to Roulston (2010). The interviewer took a neutral stance in which there was no infusion of self into the process, as would be anticipated in a Socratic-Hermeneutic approach (Roulston, 2010).

During the conducting of the interviews, follow-up questions were infrequently posed for the purpose of probing for further detail or elaboration, as expressed by Creswell (2012). The inductive nature of this theoretical approach necessitated that each interview was essentially unique as the data gathered was an attempt to understand interviewee perceptions and experiences. It was expected that interview participants would divulge personal viewpoints that would provide insight into the phenomenon being considered in the study. Although, interview questions were prepared (Appendix C), the nature of the interview was led by the perceptions expressed by each interviewee.

However, I did not allow the interviews to become conversational as that would negate the theoretical foundations of my methodology (Roulston, 2010). This ensured that I avoided the possibility that the interview might become confrontational or too intimate.

As the researcher, I have past and current relationships with the participants in the interview process, and in the educational setting. It was therefore important for me to consider possible researcher bias. Although the validity of the research results will inevitably be scrutinized, it is the purpose to establish a practical understanding of the research question within the context of the setting; this supported the necessity of the researcher's past and existent professional relationship with research participants. As I designed the instrument for the survey questionnaire, it was necessary to pilot test the questionnaire on a random sample of the bounded system educators. This ensured the reliability of the instrument. Similar anonymity was inherent in this process as was considered previously. I reviewed the pilot study survey questionnaires so as to develop an understanding of the perceptions of the educators being studied (Maxwell, 1992). The pilot study surveys indicated quite similar results to each of the six questions, which ensured the reliability of the instrument, and supported the iterative nature of qualitative research. By triangulating the data collection using survey questionnaires and interviews I furthered promoted reliability.

Data Analysis

A constant comparative method of analyzing the qualitative case study data was employed (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). As multiple sources of data were utilized, the inductive nature of the study provided categories and relationships within the data that

revealed emergent themes. This essentially allowed for the process of cognitive research. By utilizing a triangulated research design, the analysis of different types and methods of data provided an analytical elucidation of my research question (Roulston, 2010).

The process of data analysis "…is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes; it explores and describes and builds grounded theory" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.207). However, as stated in Roulston (2010), the analysis of the data proceeded with initial coding; recoding was employed so as to consider exploratory categories. The categories of data were further managed for depth of understanding of revealed themes. Coding validation and reliability were also a consideration for necessary data analysis (Roulston, 2010 and Merriam, 2009).

Coding was done by using hand tabulations. Survey questionnaires were reviewed and common themes or responses were noted and assigned a specific number as a response. After this process the questionnaires and interviews were again reviewed and the numbers of the codes were tabulated. Tabulations of all the various responses were made. If there was a response that did not fit into any of the umbrella codes they were noted separately so that none of the data, or comments, was lost. The sample size negated the need for cross-tabulation or disaggregation of the data.

Interview Data

I proceeded with transcription analysis, content analysis, and coding and theme development. The analysis was heuristic as it was anticipated that unexpected themes or relationships within the data would emerge resulting in reconsideration of the phenomenon about which the study was oriented (Merriam, 2009). The nature of

heuristic inquiry and analysis allows for an evaluation of alternative conclusions, which

might not have been anticipated by the researcher. Once the initial data analysis was

performed, I was able to draw conclusions with respect to the themes that were evident

from the data. As the research study was inductive and iterative, I did not anticipate the

results of the bounded system or phenomenon, which were studied. As such, it was

important to consider negative case or discrepant case data that emerged during the

coding of themes within the data analysis process. Discrepant cases are those that might

disprove the case in question; examining for discrepant cases is necessary to ensure

validity and to refine the hypothesis (Merriam, 2009). Discrepant pieces of data or

themes are addressed later in this document. They are reported as a component of the

research study so as to allow the reader to draw their own conclusions.

Thirty-nine invitations to participate were disseminated to former district

employees – 10 indicated their interest. This negated the need to randomly choose which

participants to interview, as 10 participants were sufficient to proceed with data

collection. While the iterative nature of qualitative research negates any formal

hypotheses prior to analysis of the data, it was difficult to not have had some anticipation

of the findings. As stated earlier, I had an existent relationship with each of the interview

participants. This relationship facilitated the process of setting up the times and locations

of each interview. A neutral location was chosen for eight of the interviews; two

interviews were conducted over the phone. Each interview was recorded using an iPhone

and the Voice Memos application. Each interview was subsequently sent to my office

desktop computer via email, where free online software, InqScribe

(http://www.inqscribe.com/), was utilized for transcription of each interview. Dragon

Naturally Speaking software was also utilized for transcription; however, this was

insufficient for the purpose of member checking. Transcriptions of each interview were

provided to each participant for the purpose of member checking. Each participant

agreed that the transcripts were authentic and accurate.

Field notes were taken following each interview, so as to capture my immediate

impressions of that which was communicated. Appendix D provides the typed field notes

from my first interview session with Agnes (pseudonym). The field notes were cross-

referenced with the transcriptions of each interview, so as to further establish validity of

the data findings. My field notes frequently aligned with the coding of the interviews

which were done with the assistance of the free online software, dedoose

(http://www.dedoose.com/). I highlighted the transcribed interviews so as to proceed

with initial coding. The software provided for a cross-reference of coded themes to those

which I developed. I followed the same procedures of coding for each subsequent

interview. Interview coding continued throughout the interview process, which was

completed within two weeks of the date of the first interview with Agnes.

Survey Questionnaire Data

The pilot surveys were utilized so as to secure the belief in the quality and validity

of the instrument, as responses were congruent with the questions posed and with the

respondents. I distributed the pilot survey questionnaires to a random sampling of 10

current district educators; this was done through the assignment of random numbers to

the 109 current district certificated educators.

Following the two-week timeframe anticipated for data collection, 43 current district educators provided a sufficient number of anonymous responses for data collection and analysis. I collected the surveys through Google apps with the construction of a spreadsheet where each respondent response was catalogued. The spreadsheet data was transferred as a Word document so as to more easily enable coding of the data. The free online qualitative data analysis tool, dedoose, (http://www.dedoose.com/), was utilized to assist in facilitating the process of coding. Each participant response was coded and recoded for emergent themes. The data provided for a rich understanding of current district educator perceptions on the practice of tracking within the district.

Evidence of Accuracy

Two professional colleagues assisted with reviewing my data analysis for both the survey questionnaires and the interviews. One colleague has an earned doctorate from Columbia Teachers College and has served as a dissertation advisor at a university in New Jersey; the other colleague was in the process of completing his own mixed-methods doctoral dissertation from a university in New Jersey. This enabled the data to be peer reviewed for researcher bias and validity of initial findings (Creswell, 2012). The interview participant member checking provided further validity of the findings.

Negative and Discrepant Case Analysis

The interview participants provided very little negative case data. The majority of the 10 participants supported the CP-C track; they acknowledged some concerns, but their tone, tenor, and perceptions of the policy were supportive. Interview participants

tended to acknowledge that teachers could have a deleterious impact on student self-efficacy in the CP-C track, thereby providing discrepant data from the survey findings. However, there was one participant who provided for the negative case. The negative case data came from a former superintendent. He was adamant that current research demonstrated the failure of tracking and that the districts employment of the CP-C track was based exclusively upon the local cultural norms. The perceptions of this particular participant were clearly based upon a scientific and research based framework; he was disdainful of the existential perceptions of the district norms.

While this participant provided negative case information, the data provided for greater clarity in the findings of the case study. The findings were supportive of existential district norms; the singular discrepant data came from a relative outsider of the district. This participant was a retired former district interim superintendent who had served as a long-time superintendent in a neighboring county. His background in education provided for a macro perspective on tracking, its impact on children, communities, and educational outcomes. This participant provided the negative and discrepant case data gathered by this study. Although the data from this participant differed greatly from the data gathered from the other interview participants, it was in line with current research as catalogued in section one of this study.

Assumptions

The data collected and analyzed in this research were intended to provide an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of district educators. It was assumed that the methods of data collection ensured validity and reliability of the findings. It was

assumed that participants provided candid and honest responses to the questions posed. The responses of current and former district educators provided the data by which I constructed a policy recommendation white paper. The white paper was constructed upon the assumption of the validity of the case study research. The white paper recommends a reconsideration of the current tracking paradigm.

Limitations

Due to the bounded educational system in which this research was conducted, the findings may not be generalizable. Further research and exploration would be necessary so as to consider any attempt to generalize the findings to other educational institutions. However, the purpose was to examine district educator perceptions, not to generalize, as discussed by Creswell (2009).

Creswell (2009) indicated that the number of participants in both the survey questionnaire and interviews are insufficient to ensure external validity. I collected survey data from 43 of the approximate 110 current district educators, over the three week period of data collection; 10 former district educators agreed to be interviewed from among 39 who were invited. While the number of participants was sufficient to provide for a rich understanding of the bounded system, it was hoped that participation numbers would have been greater. The two-week timeframe allotted for data collection may have contributed to the lower number of participants. However, several weeks after the timeframe ended, there were only three more responses, which would indicate that the timeframe was sufficient for participant solicitation.

The interview participants may have anticipated the purpose or outcomes of the research, as they each had a previous or existent relationship with me. This may have had a conscious or sub-conscious influence on the responses provided by the participants. However, as I have no current professional relationship with the interview participants, it was hoped that such limitations were mitigated.

Delimitations

It was anticipated that the triangulation of survey and interview data was sufficient for a rich description of the bounded system by which to draw valid conclusions. However, one might consider that the observation of CP-C level classes may have provided further triangulation. This would have compromised the anonymity of the participants, as my position as superintendent of the district would compromise the ethical treatment of the participants, if I were physically present in such observations. Furthermore, while historical student statistics might have provided supportive data, they would not be appropriately aligned with the research question, which was focused on educator perceptions.

Students and parent perceptions were not included in the scope of the methodology of this study. The purpose was to draw conclusions for the efficacy of the policy of tracking from the perspective of educators, not students or parents. As district cultural norms are the edifice upon which the paradigm of tracking is built, stakeholders who are outside those norms were not included.

Findings

The findings of both the survey questionnaires and interviews supported my initial beliefs of district educator perceptions. While I had considered that the existential norms would have supported the practice of tracking, specifically the CP-C track, I had not anticipated the findings would be as supportive. The survey questionnaires provided the most decisive support of tracking; they also defined the existential nature of district cultural norms. There is a clear disparity between the current research catalogued in this document and the perceptions of the district educators.

Significant consideration was given to student effort and work ethic by all participants, in both the survey questionnaires and the interviews. Participants intimated that there is a disparity between the work ethic of students between academic tracks. Participants from both data sets were disdainful of the work ethic of the lower-track students. Lower tracked students were categorized as "lazy," "unmotivated," "disaffected," even "dumb." There was a noticeable dearth of responses which recognized that these students come from disadvantaged and indigent home lives. There was only marginal or perfunctory sympathy expressed for the life challenges experienced by students. While the educators consider themselves to be compassionate and caring professionals who might care deeply for individual students on a personal level, the data demonstrate that they support the paradigm of tracking employed by the district. Participants indicated a lack of a thorough knowledge of current scientific and peer reviewed research which indicates that tracking harms children.

Another theme that emerged, that was not necessarily within the construct of the inquiry, was the ascribing of blame for the necessity of tracking to the elementary schools. District educators from both groups indicated that the elementary schools that send their students to the regional high school are not preparing the students properly. Again, the secondary district educators can see this as an abdication of responsibility. They communicated the belief that the elementary sending districts have failed the children of the community and that the CP-C track might be less necessary if they would only, "Do their jobs," as one participant stated. While this was an emergent theme, it was not uniformly expressed. It can be considered that this is further evidence of the refusal of district educators to accept responsibility for student performance.

The findings provide a rich description of a district steeped in cultural norms, which are contrary to current research. Study participants tended to indicate their belief that students are singularly responsible for their own progress and achievement; respondents seem to have abdicated their responsibility to motivate, encourage, stimulate, cajole, love, and inspire their students. The findings further demonstrate that the district policy of tracking is entrenched and demonstrative of the local political and social narrative. Participant responses indicate the belief that tracking supports students and teachers and that their empirical evidence supports the structure of tracking in the district.

Survey Questionnaire Findings

The dominant themes which emerged from analysis of the data indicated that the educators placed the onus of responsibility for student success upon the student. The data indicate that the educators may be abdicating their responsibility in motivating and

engaging the CP-C level track student. The quoted participant responses provided in

Table 1 support such a conclusion.

Table 1

Survey Questionnaire Participant Responses

Upper level tracks should be available to motivated and capable students.

I think it's the same as the Varsity and JV levels; some kids all they can do is the JV.

Students' abilities are usually consistent from year to year. So, one should expect the same level of performance and success as accomplished in past years.

Students will only learn based upon their ability and their effort.

When a student who can barely write a complete sentence or perform basic math says that they want to be a vet because they love animals what do you do? Encourage them because we all can learn at a high level? Or do you find another option for an animal lover that they could actually do?

Teachers treat students the way they act and treat the teachers.

Teachers believe that they should not have to teach the lower level students because it is a waste of their teaching abilities.

The higher-level class will get more homework. Why: Because they can work independently and learn on their own.

Students alone should be held accountable for their performance.
Only students who are perceived to be able to profit from a rigorous curriculum should be presented the curricula.

I've been in those classes where the kids are hangin' out the windows. In the CP-A class, those students are quiet and want to learn.

The responses listed in Table 1 were randomly taken from all six questions. While this is

only a sampling of the responses they indicate that teachers base their perceptions of

tracking on their own experiences, beliefs, and norms. The responses are incongruent

with current research. Student behavior was a compelling motif in the data; district educator participants indicated they believe that the behavior of the CP-C level track student has a deleterious impact on other students in a heterogeneously grouped classroom. They state that this behavior detracts from the classroom environment, thereby supporting the notion that homogenous classrooms of higher level tracks aid the students who "want to learn," as one educator stated. There was no consideration for the impact of homogenous classrooms on the CP-C track, as the prevailing perception was that students "track themselves." Furthermore, many stated that teaching this level was "beneath" them and that novice teachers should be scheduled for such classes.

The dominant themes which emerged from the anonymous participant responses were based upon student conduct. Behavior, work ethic, effort, and motivation were the most frequently used terms coded from survey questionnaires. It was here where the existential cultural norms were clearly manifest; participants tended to base their opinions of tracking upon student behavior. Table 2 lists anonymous participant responses which referenced student behavior, work ethic, and motivation.

Table 2

References to Student Behavior, Work Ethic and Motivation

Honors and A level students shouldn't be exposed to the poor behavior of those kids.

Scheduling should be based on work ethic.

Those students are disengaged and lose interest.

Only students who have the drive to succeed should have the opportunity for higher level courses.

Students who put the time in and who want to work hard should be allowed to schedule freely without restrictions.

It's impossible to reach most of those students.

Lower tracked students are not focused or willing to work hard.

Lower tracked students are more difficult to manage, they are less motivated and they cause more problems in class.

I have spent years trying to get these kids to do their homework and to be respectful but they just don't respond.

Students should be held accountable first and foremost!

Survey's that offered tepid support for heterogeneous classrooms, also addressed student

behavior and work ethic. While not all participants believed that student abilities were

static, they remained concerned about the inclusion of all students into heterogeneous

educational settings. Respondents communicated that the CP-C tracked student remains

disaffected, disengaged, and disinterested in following rules and in establishing a strong

work ethic.

Finally, survey participants communicated their concerns over the pace of instruction. The speed and depth to which instruction is provided was referenced often. Educators stated that an appropriate instructional pace is important for the CP-C level track; that those children are discouraged when they are challenged or in class with students of perceived greater abilities. Table 3 provides a sampling of the comments which referenced pace of instruction.

Table 3

Pace or Level of Instruction Responses

Ability tracking allows for the appropriate pace of instruction.

Students should be placed with their intellectual peers so as to receive the right level of instruction.

I have seen so many students fall through the cracks because they couldn't keep up with the pace of the course.

Students of the CP-C level cannot handle the B level of instruction.

Students should be placed in the properly placed classes.

I love the CP-C level; it allows my B kids to move at a much more appropriate and faster pace.

Teachers are in the best position to determine the appropriate pace of instruction – not the students or their parents.

So that teachers can pace their teaching properly and so that students are able to succeed.

One current district educator expressed that the higher tracks should be sacrosanct and that "those students" should be excluded from accessing the higher levels. "Students should be placed in the properly paced classes. The less motivated or less intelligent

should be excluded." While this response was disturbing to those who perceive tracking as harmful, it was by no means aberrant. The data suggest that tracking is supported by the staff; discrepant data was limited in the survey questionnaire data.

Not all participants communicated support for the CP-C level of instruction. While those responses were in the minority, Table 4 demonstrates that there were a small minority of the respondents who believe that the CP-C track may have some negative effects on students.

Table 4

Comments Contrary to the CP-C Level of Instruction

With parent and teacher support some students have a great chance of succeeding.

When you have a mix of abilities, it brings out the best in all students.

Every teacher should be able to differentiate instruction to reach all students in their classroom.

I am against scheduling based on ability.

Students sometimes get trapped by their past performance and behavior. Students mature greatly during high school.

Students should be encouraged to examine their own perception of their abilities and set scheduling goals appropriately.

A great deal of superficial and socio-economic prejudices are employed in tracking kids at an early age.

Children are scheduled by ability because nobody has had the courage to offer an alternative.

Some teachers perceive the CP-C students as dumb. This has a negative effect on students' self-esteem.

The responses listed in Table 4 were among the few comments which would be considered contrary to the district practice of tracking. Nevertheless, the stated comments above demonstrate that some of the anonymous participants did communicate reservations regarding the CP-C level of instruction.

Perhaps the most disturbing data was that which was expressed by survey questionnaire participants when asked about how the tracking level impacts the manner in which teacher educators treat or perceive students. The thematic coding of the data resulted in findings that are most contrary to current and seminal research. The following response revealed the general consensus: "Low level=dumb; advanced placement=smart."

Interview Findings

Interview participants were supportive of the CP-C level track. However, that support was less definitive than that of the anonymous survey questionnaire participants. The interview participants did acknowledge some concerns with tracking, as evidenced in current research; all of them supported the efficacy of the CP-C level track. Table 5 enumerates comments from all interview participants and their support for the CP-C level track.

Table 5

Interview Participant Responses Supporting the CP-C Level Track

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Those kids are not interested in literature and need to be in classes that are hands on.

There are problems with student behavior in classes which are not tracked. The smarter kids want to learn; their education suffers from those types of kids in the same classes.

Those classes are a place to put all the ones who are not really going to college.

I support the CP-C track. I don't think the track is harmful to students as it is there to serve the students who can't succeed in the A or B level.

I think some of those kids should be trained for something as they don't have the background to do anything more than McDonald's. They need to be together in one classroom.

Relevance is everything to those kids – they need to be educated together.

I have seen too many occasions where that level of kid has disrupted other kids.

There's no question that we need the CP-C track.

It's not our fault as educators; that level of kid is totally disinterested in learning. They should be together.

I think kids do better when challenged, but behavior is such a problem when those kids are in other tracks that it is what is most fair for all students.

_____

While Table 5 demonstrates participant support for the CP-C track, interview participants did offer some critical statements of educators that were not present in the survey questionnaire findings. The interview participants were less supportive of other educators who have a negative view of teaching the CP-C track. While interview participants confirm that the cultural norm in the district is for veteran educators to eschew this track, they are far less supportive of current educators who profess such a

belief. Perhaps this was due to the fact that they were conscious of the impact of their responses, as they were not anonymous participants.

The survey questionnaire participants were anonymous; there were no ramifications or social stigmas, which could be attached to their responses. This may indicate that the anonymous respondents were more truthful, or it might indicate that the current district educators are more existentially attached to the cultural norms of the district, than those who have moved on with their lives and careers.

Table 6 lists interview participant comments that were critical of current district educators. Nine of the ten interview participants communicated concerns over the manner in which CP-C level tracked students are perceived by other educators.

Table 6

Interview Participant Critical Statements of Other Educators

Some teachers categorize teaching the C-level as a death sentence.
No one [teachers] helps them [CP-C level tracked students].
Veteran teachers believe they have earned the right to teach only higher level tracks.
Some of those teachers don't always treat those kids as they should.
I know a teacher who would send a kid they didn't like to the office almost every day during [a CP-C] class.
Teachers did not want to teach those kids.

The interviews yielded slightly less support for the CP-C level track. One former member of the child study team stated that the CP-C level of instruction "…gets the trouble makers out of the CP-B class." The interview participant's support of the CP-C

level track can be summarized in the following statement: "I support tracking. I don't think the [CP-C] track is harmful to students as it is there to serve the students who can't succeed in the A or B level [track]." The following interview response was indicative of the tone of most participants: "It's not our fault as educators. That level [CP-C track] of kid is totally disinterested."

There was, however, some discrepant case data provided by the interview participants. One former administrator made the following statement: "I am not in favor of homogenous grouping as I once was – kids do better when there's a challenge." Another interview participant stated: "The CP-C track does not prepare students for college and career readiness." The most passionate critic of the CP-C level track was the aforementioned interim superintendent who stated unequivocally: "Creating so many college prep tracks is ridiculous!" This former district interim superintendent has served multiple districts as a superintendent, has an earned doctorate, and serves as a professor at a New Jersey university. Of all the interview participants in this study, he is the only one who might be considered to be an outsider; the majority of his career was not within the local district and he was the only participant with an earned doctorate. This supports the conclusion that the local cultural norms are existential and not generalizable.

Conclusion

The qualitative case study methodology of this research is reflective of the research question posed in section one of this document. In an effort to examine the perceptions of district educators, survey questionnaires and interviews were chosen as appropriate data collection tools, and for the purpose of ensuring validity through

triangulation. My purpose was to "…illuminate the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p.54)

that exists in the educational setting, in which educators support student tracking. My

chosen methodology provided the most appropriate manner of data collection so as to

understand this circumscribed educational setting.

      The findings of this project study will be utilized for the purpose of a

consideration of phasing out the CP-C level track – with the full removal of the track as

the ultimate end. As previously considered, revolutionaries rarely survive to see the

fruition of their vision. The elimination of the CP-C level track, in the bounded

educational system examined in this study, will require educating the district and

changing the existential cultural norms – this must be implemented with a high degree of

finesse. Nevertheless, it is a paradigm, which has been demonstrated through current

research to result in the harm of children. The project was developed so as to bridge the

gap that exists between the local culture and current research, so as to ensure effective

and necessary social change, for the benefit of the micro and macro systems.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This project study identified the perceptions of educators in a rural school district in the northeastern United States regarding a local practice of tracking students by their perceived abilities. This study specifically examined the phenomenon of tracking within a bounded educational system so as to draw conclusions about the CP-C level of instruction and evaluate means of fostering effective social change by changing the district's educational policies.

This section contains a thorough catalogue of the project explanation and purpose. This includes a detailed rationale for the choice of the project and a review of current and seminal literature that examines the project genre and the interconnectedness of the concepts upon which the project was constructed. An implementation proposal, or policy recommendation white paper, is also presented along with a discussion of potential resources and barriers, and existing supports. A timetable for the management of effective social change is provided, along with the roles and responsibilities of the members of the organization. The project was constructed so as to foment positive social change by constructing an educational paradigm of social equity and justice that will positively affect both the micro and macro systems. Social equity and justice will be manifest with the anticipated removal of the CP-C level track. This will result in all students having access to their educational and social peers, as well as access to a rich and rigorous curriculum. Student self-efficacy will increase when a culture based upon

social cognitive theory is implemented. Equality of educational outcomes is the anticipated goal of this project.

Description and Goals

The purpose and focus of this qualitative case study was to explore the phenomenon of tracking within an organization. Tracking is a practice employed by the local district that has profound and lasting implications on children. The perceptions of educators currently and recently employed by the district provided insight into that district's social structure, culture, and practices. It was necessary to provide an in-depth consideration of those educator perceptions of the CP-C track, so as to understand the nature of the practice and to determine if there was an existent gap between educator perceptions and current and seminal research.

The goal of the project study was to inform policy and practice so as to appropriately align with current and seminal research. The project was a formative evaluation that produced a policy recommendation white paper (Appendix E) that will be utilized to inform district educators and leadership to consider alternatives to the manner in which instruction is delivered within the district. The hoped for result is the elimination of the CP-C track, and a change in district cultural norms. The achievement of social justice demands a commitment in which we endeavor to change the culture of the bounded system whereby educators recognize the efficacy of social cognitive theory and student self-perceptions. Therefore, it is insufficient to foment structural change without also fostering cultural change. This is the focus of the formative evaluation and policy recommendation white paper.

Rationale

The manifest problem that prompted this study was a gap between the current research consensus and the local practice of tracking, specifically regarding the CP-C educational track. This problem informed the choice of a qualitative case study formative evaluation designed to produce a policy recommendation. The purpose was to ensure that the educational institution provided a rigorous curriculum accessible to all students, and an educational culture of equity so that all students might be educated with their academic and social peers.

An analysis of the study data demonstrated that many district educators considered the practice of employing the CP-C track to be an effective educational construct and practice. The data revealed that district educators believed that the specific track permits a level of instructional pace and homogeneous environment that is believed to support student learning. This overarching institutional belief that tracking supports student learning and increases teacher effectiveness is contrary to current research (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Campbell, 2010; Darragh, 2007; Glazzard, 2011; Makel et al., 2012; Odom et al., 2011). The local culture of tracking has become institutionalized. This was evident in the interviews of the former employees who indicated similar, if not slightly less enthusiastic, support of the practice of tracking. It is this institutional culture of constructing homogenous learning environments that informed the choice of the project genre: a qualitative case study formative evaluation policy recommendation.

The formative evaluation was used to expose the relative weakness of the local practice of tracking students so as to provide for a policy recommendation. Project

studies, evaluations, and policy recommendations enable an examination of a policy or program so as to identify areas of need, gaps in practice, strengths, or weaknesses. Projects focused on formative evaluations and policy recommendations are an important component in efforts to improve educational paradigms and served the purposes of this study appropriately. The data collected definitively exposed the weaknesses of the institutional practice of tracking, when compared to current research. The project will serve as the catalyst for a solution to the problem of local tracking.

Review of the Literature

Case Study as an Examination of Social Phenomena

The chosen mode of inquiry for answering the primary research question was qualitative case study formative policy evaluation and recommendation. This methodological approach enabled a rich description of the local culture that informed district decision-making; such a description has enabled an in-depth understanding of the culture, which was considered so as to inform district policy and practice. I was intrigued by the social construct and epistemology of the district's culture in which the adoption and practice of tracking was implemented and supported. The purpose of qualitative research, as stated by Marshall and Rossman (2011) is "…the study of social phenomena" (p. 3). This project study is a systematic consideration of the social phenomenon of tracking within the district.

An examination of the perceptions and experiences of educators requires rich descriptions that result from qualitative methodology. A statistical analysis based upon a quantitative methodological approach would not have elucidated the existential district

cultural norms as expressed by educator perceptions. It was necessary to employ a qualitative approach to obtain an understanding of the bounded system, so as to inform social change. Poovey (1995) stated that, "There are limits to what the rationalizing knowledge epitomized by statistics can do. No matter how precise, quantification cannot inspire action, especially in a society whose bonds are forged by sympathy, not mere calculation" (p.84) (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.1). Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that qualitative methods focus on the perspective of the location being studied – they are revelatory, emergent, and iterative. An examination of the social discourse within the district necessarily informed the methodology of the study. As I am seeking to qualify educator perceptions and to inspire action, the most appropriate method of inquiry was qualitative, rather than quantitative.

Stake (1994) stated that the "case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied" (p. 236). My purpose was to study the culture of the district, or "object," through an examination of educator perceptions. Through such a consideration of educator perceptions, I hoped to gain an understanding of the practice of tracking, specifically the CP-C track. This project study was therefore an attempt to inform policy and practice, within the bounded system.

Smith (1978) defined the case study as a bounded system in which the system has its own procedures, integration, purpose, and culture. Stake (1995) defined the intrinsic case study as an examination or consideration of a bounded system, inspired by an expectation or hopes to more fully understand the particular case, rather than to consider transferability, or to build a particular theory. The intrinsic interest is in the case being

studied. Stake (1994) further asserted that the case study is to be utilized as an examination of what can be learned from a study of the single case. The seminal works of Smith (1978) and Stake (1978, 1994, and 1995) informed the choice of case study as the appropriate research methodology.

Henfield (2011) utilized qualitative case study methodology to examine the perceptions of black male student experiences to micro-aggressions. The Henfield (2011) study was based on a consideration of the life experiences and perceptions of a specific group of students. The researcher used multiple modes of data collection so as to understand the social phenomenon. Henfield (2011) posed both broad and focused interview questions to the purposefully sampled participants so as to come to a more rich description of participant experiences. Qualitative case study methodology provided for the researcher's attempt to understand the experiences of black students, so as to inform policy and practice, for the purpose of social change. It is the goal of informing institutional change for the purpose of fomenting positive social change that was the force behind the methodology of this project study.

Ashton (2014) critically examined two co-teachers while examining and seeking to understand the social phenomenon and implementation of co-teaching practice. Data collection methods included video recording classroom interactions as well as semi-structured interviews. While Ashton (2014) was able to conclude that there was transferability in the research findings, the social interaction and relationships between the educators provided a deeper understanding of the social dynamics of the nature of co-teaching. The results of the qualitative case study provided sufficient insight so as to

inform policy and practice for future co-teachers. By examining the empirical aspects of

social phenomenon, Ashton (2014) was able to draw conclusions by which to inspire

necessary social change.

Positivist and Postmodern Theory

Chongwon and Hye-Won (2010) discussed the presumed subjective nature of

qualitative inquiry, relative to the objectivity of quantitative methodologies. If research is

an attempt to uncover truth, upon what foundation can the qualitative researcher construct

an edifice of social change, if truth is subjective? However, Chongwon and Hye-Won

(2010) stated that it is assumed by most qualitative researchers, that qualitative research

maintains a positivist approach to truth. The empirical observation of social life –

qualitative methodology – enables the researcher to firmly establish validity and

reliability of emergent knowledge. It is this knowledge, which serves as the foundation

for social change. It is this positivist approach, which served to guide the course of my

project study, and to inform the choice of the research genre.

The empirical nature of qualitative case study methodology is evidenced in the

research of Ching Sing (2010). Ching Sing (2010) concluded that teacher epistemic

beliefs were based upon their experiences and their perceptions of student abilities. As

education is a social science and built upon a social construct, knowledge tends to be

built upon individual educator experience and the culture of the organization in question.

Using interviews, Ching Sing (2010) exposed the relativistic nature of knowledge and the

difficulties of establishing social and educational axioms upon which to inform social

change. It is therefore important that the qualitative researcher employ a theoretical framework of positivism, or post-positivism.

Savin-Baden and Major (2010) challenged the positivist approach of qualitative research design. If truth is not objective, and there is no empirically observable prescriptive manner in which to improve the human condition, how can the researcher draw conclusions that are transferable? Savin-Baden and Major (2010) challenged the positivist underpinnings of qualitative research, by considering the ramifications of a postmodern philosophy. If there is no absolute truth, as postmodernism would suggest, upon what can one construct a categorical imperative; if all empirical information is subjective to the individual, how can one draw conclusions by which to inform social change?

Boboc and Nordgren (2014) more pragmatically and practically considered the necessity of utilizing a postmodern paradigm for education and school reform. They juxtapose the difference between modern and postmodern, less on notions of truth, and more on notions of analysis and modes of delivery. The industrial world provided the context for the philosophical movement of modernism; the post-industrial world and a knowledge economy in a globalized culture provided the context for the philosophical movement of postmodernism. While my project study is not essentially on the application of postmodern pedagogical techniques, it is necessary to differentiate between theoretical frameworks. Webb (2013) further deconstructed postmodernism as an amalgam of modern cultural archetypes. However, the purer, more acrid forms of postmodern truth remain unsullied by corporate consumerist platitudes, according to

Webb (2013). Nevertheless, postmodernism, based upon empirical and relative truth, is a

progenitor of qualitative inquiry. As such, I am seeking to understand truth, or a truth, as

evidenced by the perceptions of the educators within an organization. Qualitative

research, as well as postmodern philosophy, tends to dismiss the concept of application to

the whole of society as it does not espouse or support the possibility of universal truth.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is of seminal importance in qualitative research

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Robson, 2011;

Maxwell, 2012). The conceptual framework tends to be built upon multiple beliefs,

theories, conventions, expectations and norms, according to Maxwell (2012) and Robson

(2011). Kumar and Antonenko (2014) stated that it is the "researcher's responsibility to

construct a conceptual framework by critically analyzing the relevant theories and

empirical evidence and extracting the most useful and pertinent pieces…in a way that

makes most sense in the context of the research problem" (p. 55). Kumar and Antonenko

(2014) further stated that the conceptual framework "connect(s) theory, practice and

research" (p. 61). The conceptual framework is the method by which the researcher

contrives their study during the early stages of research (Knight & Cross, 2012). Berman

(2013) explained the conceptual framework as the milieu in which the project study is

conceptualized and where new knowledge is created. Berman (2013) further stated that

while the conceptual framework may reference multiple theoretical frameworks, it is the

construct in which the problem, theory, research design, and conclusions are knit

together. The research of Veselý (2012) supports Berman's (2013) understanding and explanation of the conceptual paradigm.

The conceptual framework provided the interconnectedness of the problem and theory: educational tracking limits equity and access to a diverse curriculum and one's educational peers, thereby denying social justice. The district practice of tracking, and the culture of segregation of students based upon perceived abilities, informed the research design; the literature review provided evidence of the gap between current research and the current practice of tracking.

Owen (2012) articulated the importance of the theoretical frameworks when considering the design of the conceptual framework. The theories of seminal research in all areas of education must undergird the overarching conceptual framework. This is a fundamental concept when supporting the conceptual framework in which one is conducting research and in which one hopes to foment positive social change.

An important component of the conceptual framework in which this research was conducted, is social cognitive theory. In his seminal works on social cognitive theory, Bandura (1986, 1997) addressed the profound impact of one's self-perception on educational and occupational success. Outcome expectations are based upon how one perceives themselves and their relative abilities in context to others. Bandura (1986) built his social cognitive theory around the idea of individual self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the self-assurance for performing tasks that result in the achievement of individual objectives or outcomes.

Children frequently perceive themselves through the lens of those with who they are in daily contact – especially teachers, and other authority figures. This is clearly manifest in the self-efficacy of low-income students, as demonstrated in the research of Garriott, Flores, and Martens (2013). This research supported social cognitive theory and that outcomes are often predictable based upon ones socio-economic background. Garriott, Flores, and Martens (2013) clearly indicated that the manner in which the students were perceived by their teachers had profound effects on their self-efficacy. Educational programming is vital in any effort to address low-income students' self-efficacy.

Pittman (2011) further demonstrated the complications of low-income students advancing to higher education in that the cost is not only prohibitive, but that they are frequently called upon to support the family while still in high school. Low-income students are therefore either denied, or lack vital access, to educational services that might otherwise enable them to continue to higher education. However, low-income students tend to see themselves as less capable of attaining higher education as do their more affluent peers (Ibrahimovic & Potter, 2013; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). Ibrahimovic and Potter (2013) indicated that low-income students not only receive less education than their more affluent peers, but that the education they do receive is of lower quality. Student success, or academic achievement, is increased when students have confidence in their abilities and their efforts to succeed (Kitsantas, Cheema, and Ware, 2011; Ramdass and Zimmerman, 2011). This further emphasizes the importance of social cognitive theory and self-efficacy on student achievement. Using a social

cognitive theory framework, Erlich and Russ-Eft (2011, 2012) demonstrated that by systematically focusing student counseling on self-efficacy and self-reflection, student behavior and motivation were positively affected.

Davis, Burnette, Allison, and Stone (2011) indicated that when those who are disadvantaged, such as low-income students who are academically tracked, are placed in situations in which they are perceived to have little to no opportunity for success, they tend to be dismissed or forgotten by their peers and educators. This exacerbates the struggle by students who are perceived by their teachers as incapable of overcoming the obstacles before them. Furthermore, Allison and Goethals (2011), (as cited in Davis et al., 2011, p. 334), stated that students from whom teachers expect less, receive lower grades and evaluations.

Citing social constructionist theory, Cheng (2009) suggested that disabled or non-normative students are often "…marginalized through oppressive societal attitudes and behaviors" (p. 114). This in turn affects self-perception and behaviors. While also building upon social constructionist theory, Jahoda, Wilson, Stalker, and Cairney (2010) catalogued the profound challenges experienced by people with mild cognitive impairments. While not all CP-C level students are mildly cognitively impaired, some lower tracked students suffer from social stigmas to which students assigned to other higher tracks do not. Jahoda et al. (2010) went so far as to mention the concept of social eugenics to emphasize the depths of despair suffered by a marginalized population. Self-perception is a common motif throughout social theory; when students have a negative

self-perception they are vulnerable to an array of negative experiences and a more profound struggle to reach their personal life goals and aspirations.

Maslow's (1943, 1954) social cognitive theories on human motivation provided an understanding of the basic and fundamental needs of each individual. An individual's needs are hierarchical and built upon each other; basic needs must be fulfilled, prior to ascending to the achievement of higher levels of motivation or achievement. If our need for love goes unfulfilled, we cannot expect to attain the highest level or need – self-actualization, or the highest form of self-efficacy. Subsequently, when our students come to school hungry, we cannot expect that they will readily find the innate motivation to reach high levels of achievement, as the more basic need of sustenance has gone unfulfilled, according to Maslow (1943, 1954). When educators fail to realize that their student's fundamental needs have not been fulfilled, they labor in vain to conciliate their students to the rigors of their subject matter.

Social Justice as Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework upon which the conceptual framework can be constructed or considered is Dewey's (1916, 1938) notion of progressive educational philosophy and social justice. Dewey (1916, 1938) viewed with contempt the construct of modern education built upon a model of social control and authority. Education was to be an answer to the subjugation of the oppressed, as it had been for others throughout history. Education is that which sustains culture (Dewey, 1916, 1938). As a social endeavor, education had the power to reform the evils of society and to liberate the underprivileged. Schools were to inspire social justice and the liberation of the individual

to reach their fullest potential for the realization of the social good, according to Dewey (1916, 1938).

Vygotsky (1978) addressed the importance of peer to peer relationships in the classroom and that diverse group interactions have a positive effect on student outcomes. Vygotsky (1978) demonstrated that learning is a social experience and that meaning is more readily assigned to learning through social interaction with one's peers. This further supports the belief that students' educational needs are better served when they are educated among their diverse peers.

Formative Evaluation and Policy Recommendation

While the literature catalogued throughout sections one and two supports heterogeneously grouped classrooms, which promote equity, access, and student self-efficacy, the findings of this study suggest that the existential cultural norms are incongruous with current scientific research. It is this gap that is addressed through a formative evaluation and policy recommendation.

In a formative evaluation Liwen and Tung-Liang (2012), considered a lack of student commitment in using Twitter as a collaborative educational tool. The research examined student perceptions and their inhibitions to collaborative online work. A qualitative case study was the chosen methodology in this evaluation of an online learning program.

Han, Hu, and Li (2013) conducted an exploratory case study and formative evaluation framework to assess a teacher preparation program. Student teacher perceptions about the program were analyzed so as to determine the viability of the

program. The critical feedback provided by the student teachers formed the basis for the recommendation of the authors to improve the program so as to foster positive change.

Clarke, Doabler, Strand Cary, Kosty, Baker, Fien, & Smolkowski (2014) conducted a study of a theory-of-change model regarding math interventions. The consideration for changing pedagogical and instructional strategies for at-risk students, within a response-to-intervention framework, provided the basis for the evaluation and policy recommendation.

In a case study policy recommendation, Leonard (2013) considered early college programs, offered in high school, to prepare students for college readiness. The study is demonstrative of case study research and its use in educational policy recommendations. Through the development of a rich description of the experiences of the participants, Leonard (2013) provided support and rationale for the continuation of the policy of funding early college high school. The rich descriptive findings of my qualitative case study provide for a formative policy recommendation on the removal of the policy of tracking students in the CP-C level track.

Skiba (2013) conducted research for the purpose of informing federal policy to address the racial and ethnic disparities within special education. The policy recommendation in the Skiba (2013) study was for the purpose of implementing positive social change. There was a gap between the implemented policy and the anticipated results of the policy. Skiba (2013) exposed the gap and provided recommendations so as to improve education on the national level.

In two formative policy recommendation studies, Yuhong (2013) and Halász and Michel (2011) provided observations, analysis, implementation strategies, and key obstacles to overcome before offering policy recommendations that were aimed at fomenting positive social policy and change. Youhong (2013) and Halász and Michel (2011) conducted research so as to refute or support existent policies; their recommendations were based upon the culmination of the research. The research of Youhong (2013) and Halász and Michel (2011) provide support and context for my current project study as a formative policy recommendation.

Implementation

An understanding of tracking should shape district policy. The findings of this project study indicate that the culture of the district is not built upon the edifice of scientific research, but upon educator experiences and opinion. As revealed previously, the findings indicate educator perceptions are contrary to heterogeneous student scheduling. The literature review in section one supports heterogeneous classrooms where children are provided equity and access to the curriculum and to their social peers. However, the district constructs homogeneous classrooms where children are scheduled based upon their perceived ability. This has become an institutionalized existential cultural norm within the district.

This qualitative case study revealed findings that informed the implementation of the project so as to foment positive social change. A formative policy recommendation was chosen as the appropriate project with the final construction of a white paper so as to advocate for the removal of the CP-C track as the appropriate solution to the problem

posed by this study. This subsection will address the resources, supports, potential

barriers, effective timetable for implementation, and the roles, and responsibilities of all

stakeholders involved. The project will provide recommendations for the effective

removal of the CP-C level track within the bounded educational system.

Potential Resources, Existing Supports and Potential Barriers

The following resources will be necessary to implement positive social change as

enumerated in the white paper (Appendix A): an appropriate time allocation, professional

development training for district educators, and possible further research. Progressive

educators within the district, administrators within the district, local or state districts that

have effectively implemented detracking procedures and the district superintendent will

serve as existing supports for project implementation. Potential barriers to implementing

the recommendations of the white paper include: possible cost prohibition, non-alignment

with current district stated and published goals, limited professional development time

allocation, existing culture of support for current paradigm, a lack of buy-in by staff and

administration and a local community which might be reticent to accept progressive or

research supported change. These barriers present the most difficult challenge in the

proposal to change policy. Visionary and effective leadership will be essential in the

successful institutionalization of the proposed change (Fullan & Miles, 1992).

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The manner in which this change is managed is the most compelling factor in the

success or failure of the project. While I was promoted to the position of superintendent

during the writing of the proposal of this project study, the nature of the formative

evaluation implementation changed from one of conciliating the superintendent, to one of

conciliating the district educators. The need to address the district culture is that which

became clearly manifest following data analysis and the expression of the findings.

Through the dissemination of the white paper and the long-range plans for

professional development, it is hoped that positive social change will result by changing

the district culture. The effective institutionalization of the hoped for changes will

require effective district leadership, professional development and patience (Fullan &

Miles, 1992). As superintendent, I now have the authority to implement positive social

change; however, that can only occur if effective change strategy is employed. Fullan

and Miles (1992) postulated that it is foolish to assume that complex problems in

education can be solved quickly. Plans to implement innovative change will fail if there

is insufficient grass roots support, according to Fullan and Miles (1992). Fullan and

Miles (1992) also stated that reform should not attend simply to "structure, policy, and

regulations, but on deeper issues of the culture of the system" (p. 11).

For effective social change to be implemented in the bounded educational system,

we must focus on the deeply entrenched existential institutional cultural issues addressed

in this study. The timetable for initial implementation of the project will be four months.

Beginning in September, I will present the project white paper to the director of

curriculum and the principal of the district. This will be followed by presentations to the

personnel and policies and curriculum committees of the Board of Education. Finally,

there will be a presentation to the full Board at an open public session, perhaps by

October or November 2014. The white paper will then be disseminated to all district

educators via internal electronic mail, with a presentation to the staff in November.

Finally, the district course catalog will reflect the elimination of the CP-C track

throughout the curricula. Subsequent professional development to prepare teachers for

increased heterogeneous classrooms and to focus on student self-efficacy will be ongoing

beginning with the January in-service agenda. The removal of all CP-C tracked classes

will be manifest in all student schedules beginning in September 2015. Embedded and

prolonged professional development will begin with the January 2015 district in-service.

Continued professional development to support district educators will be ongoing.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The stakeholders responsible for the implementation of this project are relatively

small. As superintendent, I have a unique opportunity to foment positive social change,

without having to conciliate those in authority; however, that does not dismiss the

necessity of fostering change effectively, so as to conciliate all stakeholders. The

construction of the white paper and the presentations to the administration, the Board of

Education and the staff are my responsibility. The necessary professional development

support will be the responsibility of the administration, specifically the director of

curriculum, instruction, and technology. The construction of the course of study catalog

for 2015-16 school year will also be the responsibility of the director of curriculum,

instruction, and technology. The elimination of the CP-C tracks from the course of study

catalog is the beginning of the change; long-term success will be based upon the ability

of the administration to build a district culture built upon a theoretical framework of

social cognitive theory.

Project Evaluation

A formative evaluation is appropriate for my project study and frequently utilized in education so as to provide data for recommendations for the improvement of educational practices (Spaulding, 2008). While, Ross (2010) enumerated scores of evaluation approaches, this evaluation was based upon the need to understand the local existential educator culture.

This formative evaluation and policy recommendation project was proposed for the purpose of resulting in positive social change. While the initial change can be implemented with relative ease, as structural barriers do not exist, institutionalization of a culture of equity and access will require a long-term commitment, with embedded and prolonged professional development and support. The Project White Paper (Appendix E) enumerates the manner in which the change will be fostered.

The project as formative evaluation and policy recommendation has been constructed upon the gap that exists between the findings of the study and the current and seminal research on the impact of tracking. The process for social change will begin in earnest during the autumn months of 2014. It is anticipated that the institutionalization of a culture of equity and access will take several years. The manner in which educators view and treat children, so as to increase student self-efficacy, will require significant long-term embedded professional development and the possibility of other structural changes. While not within the scope of this study, the creation of a comprehensive Response-to-Intervention program might be necessary so as to provide supports for at-risk and disaffected students. This would require a financial commitment by the district

so as to provide training and the hire of a behaviorist and an interventionist. Such a

construct would require a culture change within the district that would embrace at-risk

students and their ability to access a rigorous and equitable curriculum.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

This project will have a significant and positive effect on the needs of the learners

in the local educational community. The project addressed the needs of the students who

have been placed in educational settings in which they have been denied equity and

access. Student tracking within the district is based upon an anachronistic educational

paradigm that is contrary to Dewey's (1916, 1938) espoused beliefs of social justice.

When students are separated from their social peers, all students, the institution, the

community and the larger society suffer. By limiting the practice of educational tracking,

specifically the CP-C track, in the local community, at-risk students will benefit from

heterogeneous classroom settings, increased self-efficacy, increased motivation,

increased academic rigor, and increased access to academically relevant curricula and

increased educational equity with their more affluent peers.

Students within the community will be provided classroom settings that are

heterogeneous and that are reflective of current research as the CP-C track is eliminated

in the coming years. It is anticipated that student self-efficacy and motivation will

improve. This will in turn improve student achievement and increased access to higher

education. Students who are not pursuing higher education will benefit from having been

placed in educational settings in which they are a seminal component of the educational

community in which all are supported and affirmed. This will impact the lives of students beyond their secondary educational experience.

The impact of this project study on all stakeholders will also be significantly positive. Community partners with education will experience increased career readiness as graduating students will enter the workforce with a level of motivation and self-efficacy previously thwarted by the practice of tracking. This will have a positive impact on employment, employers, the local economy, and housing. Families will suffer less from the social stresses of poor individual self-image, substance abuse, incarceration, divorce, physical abuse, child abuse, unemployment, and hopelessness. The impact of individual self-image, affirmation, and support fostered by the elimination of educational apartheid in the local community will be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. This case study of the local program of educational tracking and the scholarly and academic evaluation inspired by the desire for positive social change will have a long-lasting and beneficial impact on the local community.

Far-Reaching

Social segregation has had a deleterious impact on all societies, according to Davies (1996). Through scholarly research such as that which is contained in this document, instances of educational segregation can be mitigated, if not eliminated. Communities and societies that embrace diversity thrive. When local communities experience economic and social vitality through the construction of integrated and diverse institutional paradigms focused on equality of outcome, the larger macro society is also positively affected. The impact of positive social change will have far-reaching

socio-economic effects. As discussed earlier, current research indicates the positive effects of diverse educational communities; socio-economic vitality results when our children are educated in a progressive and visionary environment.

The notion of referencing tracking as educational apartheid is not hyperbole, as considered in this study. One could go so far as to consider that educational tracking is akin to social engineering – eugenics. The elimination of the most acute and extreme educational tracking will result in a more socially and intellectually diverse and self-actualized community and larger society.

Conclusion

The chosen project study genre of qualitative case study, formative evaluation and policy recommendation, was informed by the current and seminal research catalogued within this document. The findings of section two and the desire to foment positive social change have informed the choice of the construction of a white paper. The purpose of the white paper is to demonstrate to all district stakeholders the manifest gap that exists between current and seminal research and the local educational cultural norms. The planned removal of all CP-C level tracks within the bounded system will require appropriate change management, supports, and training so as to institutionalize a district culture that is supportive of heterogeneous classrooms that result in equity and access for all students. The implementation of positive social change is made easier as I currently serve as the district superintendent; however, as the focus of this study has been on educator perceptions, long-term supports for professional development will be necessary so as to institutionalize the change and to foment a culture built upon social cognitive

theory and progressive educational paradigms. This qualitative case study and formative evaluation policy recommendation has been built upon the edifice of positive social change so as to improve the lives of children and the larger community. Current and seminal research supports the proposed change. It is anticipated that this study will have a long-lasting positive impact on local education, and the local community.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Throughout this project study, I have focused on examining the culture of a

school district. That examination provided for an understanding of the local support for

the policy of tracking. It was the findings of the study that provided the impetus for the

formative evaluation and policy recommendation. That project led to the construction of

a white paper (Appendix E) that describes the district policy in detail, including the need

of remediation and reform.

This section is reflective in nature; in it, I discuss the strengths and limitations of

the project study, the role and necessity of scholarship, the project's development and

evaluation, and the role of leadership in the process of change. Self-reflection will

provide the substance of the analysis of self as scholar, practitioner, and project

developer. The potential impact for social change, implications, and applications are

presented within this section. Finally, a consideration of the possible direction for future

research and concluding comments are presented in section four.

Project Strengths

Spaulding (2008) stated that while applied research in the form of a case study

can certainly foment change within an organization, a formative evaluation could bring

about that change much more quickly. In fact, Patton (1997), as referenced in Spaulding

(2008), believed that entire projects are perfunctory without resultant change. The

project that I chose was appropriate as it was designed to result in decisive and swift

positive social change. Current and seminal research is definitive regarding the negative

impact of tracking on children, institutions, communities and society. The positive social

change for which this project was chosen will begin to be implemented in the autumn of

2014, with full integration of the removal of tracking in September 2015. The culture

change will take far longer, however.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

As stated previously, the project was designed with the goal of producing swift

structural changes that will result in positive social change; however, the cultural change,

which must also come to fruition, will take much longer. The necessary change

presented in the project will require effective and visionary leadership, however, and

remains focused on the belief that detracking helps children and that equality of outcome

is appropriate for all children. This project cannot be successful in the long term without

a prolonged commitment to the findings and the policy recommendations. Fullan and

Hargreaves (1996) addressed this very issue of necessary and courageous leadership in

establishing long-term systemic change. Fullan (2001) further noted the necessity for a

commitment by all stakeholders so as to institutionalize change within educational

systems. Change should be seen as being grass roots change, so as to fully engage all

stakeholders (Fullan, 2001). The problem of implementing cultural change might be

remediated by providing internal supports and prolonged and embedded professional

development (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

An effective presentation of the white paper to district educators will be necessary

so as to ensure educator buy-in for the proposed change. Once having presented the

white paper to the staff, a committee of educators can be formed to investigate the

efficacy of the proposed changes. An informed committee will ensure that the changes

will be viewed as not being mandated from the superintendent or administration.

Scholarship

The process of scholarship cannot be rushed – it is inherently labor intensive. To

attempt to mitigate one aspect of the process would be to diminish the whole.

Scholarship is the method by which one constructs the edifice of far-reaching social

change. Any problem that one endeavors to solve requires the necessary steps of

scholarship so as to support the findings and to implement necessary change. Williams,

Slagle and Wilson (2014) addressed the importance of scholarship in educational

practice. Scholarship was considered as a seminal component to teaching in higher

education, according to Williams et al. (2014). Scholarship provides the practitioner with

the substance and support to produce conceptual theories that are built upon research.

By engaging in each step of this study, I have come to appreciate that change built

upon systematic scholarship is more likely to inspire staff buy-in. By effectively

presenting the scholarship to the staff, there is a greater likelihood of support for the

proposed changes. Through the scholarship requirements in the pursuit of the doctoral

degree, my own perceptions on education have changed and are now informed by

research. It has been that scholarship that has fostered a progressive thinking in the

manner in which I fulfill my job responsibilities. When educators construct their

conceptual framework exclusively upon their own limited experience the gestalt of that

construct can result in ineffective and harmful educational settings. Scholarship provides

the roadmap by which the scholar-practitioner can construct effective educational

programs to benefit all children and the larger community. Without scholarship, cultural norms, based exclusively upon educator experiences, would result in hermetic institutions that negate progressive change.

Project Development and Evaluation

Johnston (2012) stated that educational reform has been transformed from common activity plans to outcome-driven plans. Johnston (2012) further stated that project development is the manner in which schools now seek to improve. Project development addresses and defines the institutional problem and results in targeted interventions (Spaulding, 2008). The qualitative case study informed the use of the development of the project, evaluation and policy recommendations.

This was my initial formal experience with project development and evaluation, but I was previously introduced to project development and evaluation, at least in an informal manner, through my previous professional position as director of curriculum and instruction, within a secondary school district. I have implemented multiple project development and program evaluations throughout my years as an education administrator; however, this experience was far more intensive and specific. Achieving my goal of institutionalizing a culture of equity and access will strongly inform my determination to continue to pursue such a scholarly approach to project development and evaluation.

Leadership and Change

Leadership is the catalyst for the success or failure of an institution. It has become apparent throughout this study that passionate, informed, and courageous

leadership was necessary to lead the district into a progressive vision for the future, as described by Fullan (2001) and Marx (2006). The old paradigm of homogenous classrooms where students were segregated by perceived ability supported a reactionary culture where the existential district cultural norms dictated the lack of progress. In a miasma of political reaction, change could only be fostered through effective leadership. Leaders must be change agents – the project exposed the need for fundamental change. While a teacher could also have exposed the importance of this project study, it is the leadership who must ultimately support this project through implementing social change. Changing the culture of an institution requires dynamic and inspired leadership (Fullan, 2001; Marx, 2006).

It was clear that the current and former district educators supported the CP-C track, even if that support was somewhat incongruous. Improving education is not about changing the students, but changing the adults. For the culture to change, leadership must foster the belief that it is necessary to change and that it is what is best for children. For staff to buy in to the vision they must trust leadership; trust is earned over time through the demonstration of character and integrity. Courageous and compassionate leadership can change the world; it is this type of leadership, which is necessary to compel over 150 district educators to adopt the progressive vision of serving the needs of all students.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

The project study demanded a level of immersion in the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, which was quite daunting. The virtual environment demanded a

level of self-directed study that resulted in a more rich and complete knowledge of the

process of scholarship, as well as the nature of scholarly inquiry. Veletsianos and

Kimmons (2012) addressed those same rigors and challenges in virtual or online

scholarship. I frequently experienced moments of profound discouragement, as well as

feelings of intellectual inferiority and anxiety. The only antidote for these feelings was a

level of time sacrifice to which I had never committed myself as a student. I presumed

that I had previously worked assiduously to obtain academic success; those presumptions

were sacrificed on the altar of academic asceticism to which only those who have

endured might comprehend.

As I persevered, clarity emerged in the scholarly pursuit. I slowly began to

understand the construct and purpose of the process. The gestalt of the project study was

only realized in the final month. Prior to such clarity, the goal was to endure each step,

even if it were seemingly disconnected from the whole. That gestalt was only achieved

through full scholarly immersion in the program, the research, theory, and the

methodology. I appreciate the nature of scholarly research, but only now, at the end of

the process. I could not appreciate the process until it became a component of reflection.

The project study enabled me to grow as an academic scholar, even as I

previously presumed to have ascended to such a moniker. The breadth of academic

scholarship is far wider than I had presumed in my ignorant arrogance. In the process of

conducting such meaningful research, I see the world of academics and research more

lucidly. At one point in my academic career, I constructed a worldview based entirely

upon my own experiences; this has been deconstructed throughout this process of

scholarly research. It is apparent that my experiences were limited and failed to provide a rich description of the issues about which I conducted my research. Believing that education and instruction was singularly an art form, I dismissed any notion of scientific inquiry and current research, as they did not line up with my worldview. I therefore come to the conclusion that the construction of one's conceptual framework, the gestalt of my professional persona, has been enriched through the scholarly process.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

When the issue of the CP-C track began to become of more acute interest to me, in December of 2012, I was employed as a director of curriculum and instruction. I had been a teacher, and assistant principal, but was in a position to influence the district students in a more far-reaching manner. As a teacher, I had heterogeneous classrooms that I believed were a more appropriate construct than were homogenous classrooms. But as a director of curriculum I began to see the larger picture, as a practitioner. I recognized that extensive tracking was not in the best interest of the student and those administrators who lacked courage continued to schedule the most inexperienced educators with the most at-risk children. It seemed to me that the CP-C track was in the best interest of the teacher and not the student. This was the genesis of my inquiry. This is the manner in which through self-reflection the practitioner inspires educational reform, as considered by Wood (2010).

As a teacher, I presumed to believe that my experiences defined the breadth of education. If current research was contrary to my experience, it was dismissed as based upon a progressive political agenda. As my professional experience broadened, so too

has my understanding and appreciation for current research; I no longer view the world through the prism of my own experience. This has enabled me to foster a far more equitable and accessible curriculum and culture in the district in which I am employed.

During the pursuit of the doctorate, and during the construction of this project study, I was promoted to superintendent. The knowledge I have gained through my virtual education at Walden, and through the construction of this project study, have made me a better educator – a better practitioner – and as stated by Wood (2010), one who transforms ones environment through social change. I am now focused on constructing an educational community where the culture and climate are that of equity and access. Without having endured this process, I might never have emerged as the educator to which I aspire – transcendent. Proposed changes are now filtered through current research and what is best for all students. The vision for my district is now one of social change and impacting a generation of children – the status-quo has been replaced by progressivism.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

My initial presumptions of being able to easily navigate this process were quickly and continuously denied. It is in the area of project developer where my growth was most clearly manifested. I was profoundly frustrated by the required revisions; however, at each step, it became clear that my project needed clarification. I had unanswered questions, or confusion, prior to submitting each section; with each required revision, those questions were answered. The beginning project was a confusing amalgam which required so much work, it is curious, at this point, that it was considered worthy of

consideration. I endured significant periods of self-doubt, followed by blind, but dogged, determination. Perseverance was the necessary quality for completion – far more important than intellect.

When I attempted to look at the whole of the project, I became discouraged. When I merely attempted to understand each section – each step – I progressed. The proverbial "light at the end of the tunnel" did not emerge until I obtained IRB approval. However, the genre of the study remained beyond my intellectual reach. The Walden University resources, which I had generally eschewed during the three years of course work, became absolutely necessary. I had to read every resource so as to come to an understanding as to that which was required. As the program evaluation emerged, the gestalt of the project emerged.

At this point, I believe that I could write another dissertation, or engage in another project study, with far less difficulty and groping. While I may not pursue academic scholarly work in the future, I believe that I am now equipped to do so, should it be necessary. I have demonstrated the patience and the perseverance to fully ascertain the breadth of the process; I am less intimidated by academic scholarly work and the development of such a project, as I was prior to this journey. It is the project development, which might be most beneficial to my career as a chief academic officer. Effective visionary leadership demands project development skills so as to foster the academic environment and culture that will most benefit children.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

When children are provided access to a diverse curriculum in which they are educated among their social peers, they experience increased self-efficacy and motivation to improve and to succeed. To examine a program that denies equity and access in the educational paradigm is to provide for the possibility to impact a community and society at-large.

The culture of the local community was steeped in conservative support of the status quo. Teachers embraced the past so as to inform the future; administrators attempted to manage the system while they anticipated retirement. As district superintendent, I have the opportunity to change the educational structure and culture. I have the opportunity to impact the lives of the children of the community.

Through the conducting of the research for this project study, it has become apparent that my own beliefs were based upon existential norms. I tended to believe that veteran educators should be relatively autonomous in the construction of classrooms that were based upon their expertise. Over the course of the past four years, during which I have worked to earn a doctorate in education, I have had the occasion to reconsider my previous educational myopia. Unique hermetic cultures that are not transferable are inherently built upon an edifice of inequity and segregation.

While district educational leaders cannot be disdainful of the experiences of veteran educators, progressive change requires courageous visionary leadership. This project study is a bold response to the district status quo. A progressive educational vision will have a long-term impact on children. By fostering a culture based upon

current and seminal research and an understanding of social cognitive theory, student

self-efficacy will improve. When children believe in themselves and have hope in their

future, they will remain in school and persevere to achieve their personal life goals. This

is established, in part, by constructing heterogeneous classrooms where children are

educated among their social peers. A diverse classroom where curriculum is rigorous and

differentiated will provide children with improved self-efficacy and self-image.

Life-long opportunities for children who persevere are far greater than those who

drop out of high school. The lives of the individuals who choose to remain in school are

forever improved. They are able to more easily gain employment and have opportunities

for financial and personal success. They are less likely to remain unemployed, to become

incarcerated, or require public assistance. There will be a direct impact of this project

study on local and state culture and society, through the improvement of the lives of each

child within the district. Current and seminal research supports this belief – it is not

hyperbole.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

It is my belief that this project study is an important work that will result in

positive social change. The scholarly pursuit of the ultimate educational degree has

resulted in the construction of an educational gestalt built upon progressivism, rather than

conservatism. Coming to an understanding that tracking is a form of social segregation

had a profound impact on my thinking and conceptual framework. My personal

conclusion that tracking is tantamount to educational apartheid – even social eugenics –

may seem hyperbole to those with whom I work; however, I have sought research saturation in my investigation of the topic.

Further research regarding the issues presented in this project would likely be more fruitful on the macro level. While my research has been conducted in a bounded system, thereby mitigating the probability of transferability, the practice of educational tracking, especially on the secondary level, seems ubiquitous. Each institution has its own unique culture, which is likely built upon a conceptual framework of existential norms. This negates the equity and access discussed in this project study. More historical data might be necessary across multiple locations to draw macro-level conclusions on the subject of tracking. After almost 50 years, the Coleman report (1966) is the definitive and seminal work on segregated classrooms and student performance. If our society is to progress, if our educational system is to result in the social justice discussed by Dewey (1916, 1938), than the Coleman report (1966) cannot be the end of the research.

Future research in the area of educational tracking should provide institutions with sufficient data by which to eliminate the practice. Education should be built upon an edifice of social justice (Dewey, 1916, 1938). Modern tracking is less overt than that which necessitated the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. Educational tracking in the 21st century remains a form of social engineering by separating students who are perceived non-normative, from their perceived normative peers. This has societal implications that must be the subject of future longitudinal studies.

Conclusion

Throughout this section, I have focused on the implications of the project study and myself as scholar-practitioner. The process of becoming a reflective practitioner is vital to my success as an educational and community leader. My professional position cannot be separated from this project study, or from my position as scholar-practitioner. My role as educational leader demands a high level of scholarly knowledge. It is imperative that I am transformed through the process of attempting to transform my educational institution and my community. This qualitative case study, project study, formative evaluation and policy recommendation, is constructed on the desire to inspire positive social change; however, that change had to occur in me, prior to any hope of transforming my educational environment. That personal transformation occurred through the scholarship conducted during this study.

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Appendix A: Consent Form for Former District Employees

CONSENT FORM

As a former High Point Regional High School (HPRHS) educator, you are being

invited to take part in a research study regarding the process of tracking students into the

CP-C level of instruction at HPRHS. The researcher is inviting previously employed

educators from the HPRHS district, such as yourself, to be in the study. This form is part

of a process called "informed consent" which allows you to understand this study before

deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Scott Ripley, who is a doctoral
student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a colleague and
former co-worker but this study is entirely separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this case study is to examine educator perceptions of the process of
tracking, specifically the use of the CP-C level of instruction.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- ____ Indicate your interest in participating in an in-depth interview with the
  researcher regarding the practice of tracking in the HPRHS district. The
  interview will be conducted with the researcher and will require a time
  commitment of approximately thirty minutes to one hour, conducted at the
  location and discretion of the interviewee. The interviews will be audio recorded.
  Should follow-up meetings be required to clarify interview data or to review
  transcripts and/or perform member checks (confirming validity of researcher's
  interpretations) those will be scheduled as needed at the convenience of the
  interview participant.

Here are some sample questions:
- What was your experience with teaching CP-C level courses?
- Describe your perception of the impact that CP-C courses have on the students
  who are enrolled?
- How do teachers impact students' self-image as learners?
- Describe your overall opinion about CP-C level courses?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at HPRHS will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as the time commitment for the completion of the interview process; considerations regarding the climate and culture of your former work environment. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

It is anticipated that your participation may enable the researcher to draw conclusions on educator perceptions of student tracking and how best to serve the needs of both students and educators within the district. The conclusions reached during this research study may be utilized to inform either a change in the current practice of tracking, an expansion in the practice, or as a support for the current practice.

Payment:
You will receive no recompense for your efforts to participate in the study; however, you will have the appreciation of the researcher and the knowledge that you have participated in a meaningful and influential study which may inform future practice within the district.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project; no identifiable information will appear in the study. Hard copies of data will be kept secure in a file folder; digital copies will be maintained on a flash drive and on a secure Google Drive account. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions, you may contact the researcher via email at scott.ripley@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is # 07-31-14-0271890; it expires on July 30, 2015.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.
Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I believe that I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of Consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

                                             _____

Appendix B: Educator Survey/Questionnaire for Current District Employees

As a current district educator at High Point Regional High School (HPRHS), you are invited to participate in a survey questionnaire. By completing this survey questionnaire, you are providing implied consent to voluntarily participate in this research study. However, there are no identifying characteristics to this survey, so your participation will remain completely anonymous to the researcher – no one will be able to identify your participation or your responses. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty and there are no foreseeable risks or discomforts in your participation. You may decline or discontinue participation at your discretion. Such a determination to decline or discontinue participation will have no effect on your relationship with the researcher, as your participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. There are no inherent risks or potential conflicts should you choose to participate. In Google Forms the survey is designated as anonymous; the setting of "anyone with the link" will ensure that responders are anonymous. All data will be kept for five years after the study on a password protected Google Drive database, after which all data will be deleted.

While there are no direct benefits or compensation for your participation, this research may assist the district in determining how to best serve the educational needs of its students. The stated purpose of the research study is to consider district educator perceptions regarding educational tracking, or scheduling students based upon their perceived ability.

You were invited as a possible participant, as you are currently employed as a certificated district educator. The duration of your participation in this research study will be the length of time it takes for you to complete this survey questionnaire. You should anticipate allocating between 15-45 minutes for completion of the survey. This statement of consent is yours to keep. Your participation offers no conflict of interest to yourself or the researcher, and is entirely voluntary. The researcher's position and role as superintendent are completely separate from this study, as the researcher is serving exclusively in the capacity as a doctoral student. The researcher thanks you for your consideration to participate.

The researcher, Scott Ripley, is a doctoral student at Walden University; if you have any questions, you may contact the researcher via email at scott.ripley@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210.

Educator Perceptions Survey Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine educator perceptions about the manner

in which students are tracked within the local district. Please indicate your opinion to the

following, in as much detail as you determine to be necessary to answer the question

posed. Please answer based upon a secondary educational setting.

The questionnaire will be disseminated electronically.

1. What is your perception of scheduling students based upon perceived ability i.e. standardized test scores, historical grades, teacher recommendations etc.?

2. What role should perceived ability play in the scheduling of student classes?

3. In your opinion, why are students placed in perceived ability groups?

4. "All students can learn at a high level." How do you feel/think about this statement?

5. In your opinion, how does the tracking level impact the manner in which teacher educators treat or perceive students?

6. In your opinion, should all students be provided access to rigorous curricula?

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What is your level of experience with the CP-C level track?

2. What is your perception of the CP-C track at High Point?

3. How does the CP-C level track assist students?

4. How does the CP-C level track assist teachers?

5. What concerns might you have about the manner in which students are tracked at this school?

6. How should the school district proceed in utilizing the CP-C track?

7. How should novice and veteran teachers be scheduled for the CP-C track?

8. How does the CP-C track prepare students for college and career readiness?

Appendix D: Filed Notes from Participant Interview

August 6, 9:00 AM EST, Agnes (pseudonym); neutral site

Immediately following the interview – general impressions:

I was so focused on remaining unbiased that I am sure there were comments and beliefs which I missed. I was conscious of Agnes not feeling as if I were not attentive or her feeling as if I was mentally elsewhere; however, I did not want to interject any communication – verbal or non-verbal – which might affect her responses. It seemed as if her initial impressions and perspectives were contrary to the practice of tracking; however, as she proceeded she seemed far more sanguine about the impact she, as an educator, had on the CP-C level students. She clearly enjoyed interacting with these students, who she referred to as "problem children." She believed that life had dealt them a harsh hand and that she wanted to help them in their life goals. She also seemed to want to "mother" them. She stated that the CP-C tracked students tended to be disciplinary problems for most teachers, who preferred to avoid these students. She stated that she allowed these students to have more freedom to express their emotions than she did in "higher" tracked classes. She communicated disdain for another teacher who she believed "looked down" on the CP-C students. She believed that the CP-C students were not interested in *Othello*, so why were we attempting to cram it down their throats? These were kids who needed more relevance in the curriculum, therefore, the curriculum needed to be tailored to their needs and interests. Agnes did not believe that these students were "college bound," and that they needed to be treated as such. She

believed that they benefited from limited access to a rigorous curriculum. However, this was juxtaposed by her statement that these students benefitted from being around the higher tracked students as they had the opportunity to see students who were serious about their schooling and how they behaved. I thought this was curious as the two notions seemed to be contradictory. This prompted my thinking that qualitative data might not always be linear or symmetrical. I also considered that she might have been answering some questions or speaking under the impression that I had a specific agenda in the study and questions and that she was answering some questions to align with her assumptions of my intentions, and answering some questions from her own perceptions, without censoring her responses. Perhaps the iterative nature of qualitative case studies result in such mixed messages and incongruous responses.

Agnes did not appear to labor to respond to any of the questions and that she answered honestly and that none of her responses were contrived to an assumed outcome. The incongruity of her responses was confusing and disheartening; I thought, for a moment, while she was speaking, that I would have difficulty drawing conclusions from information which was so non-linear. Data collection is not as antiseptic as I had presumed or hoped. How can I draw definitive conclusions, if the participants offer answers from which conclusions cannot be drawn? While Agnes was surely in favor of heterogeneous classrooms, she also believed that the curriculum needed to be limited in scope and less academically rigorous for the CP-C level student. She seemed to believe that these students were not going to proceed to college so they needed to have relevant classroom experiences where they were treated with love, but were encouraged to

establish attainable life goals. While I think that Agnes believes she supports

heterogeneously grouped classrooms where students are educated with their social peers,

regardless of perceived ability, she frequently contradicted this notion. I think she was

expressing her love for these kids and her hopes to help them be successful in life;

however, she communicated her support of the institutional norms of tracking and the

CP-C level. I will certainly evaluate the transcript of the interview and provide Agnes

with the transcript for appropriate member-checking; however, until such time as that

occurs, I believe that Agnes supports the program in question and provided sufficient

anecdotal memories of her experiences with students to indicate that she believes the

program is effective.

Appendix E

The Project White Paper:

Formative Evaluation and Policy Recommendation on District Tracking

Equity and Access: A Consideration of the CP-C Track

Table of Contents

Section 1: Summary and Introduction

This formative evaluation was developed to understand the perceptions of district

educators. Current and former district educators provided their perceptions on the district

culture and the practice of tracking students in the College Preparatory-C (CP-C) level

track. The evaluation plan is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Formative Evaluation Plan

	Description
Purpose	Understand the perceptions of current and former district educators on the practice of tracking students according to perceived ability, so as to consider the possible removal of the CP-C track.
Goal	Initiate, implement and institutionalize a district culture of equity and access and to foment positive social change.
Scope	Current and former district educators.
Results	A significant gap was exposed between educator perceptions and current and seminal research. The findings have informed this policy recommendation to eliminate the CP-C track.

The district has employed multiple levels of instruction by which students are

tracked based upon their perceived ability. This has resulted in homogeneous classrooms

in which educators believe that the pace of instruction is appropriate for each level. The

existential culture and perceptions of district educators reflects the belief that this

construct edifies students, educators and the district. Educator perceptions on the CP-C

level track will be highlighted, examined and compared with current and seminal

research on educational tracking. I will offer recommendations for creating a culture and

construct of educational equity and access. This formative evaluation and policy

recommendation will inform the decision to eliminate the CP-C track. The manner in which this recommendation is implemented will determine the level of long-term effectiveness. Embedded and prolonged professional development for the support of the change in district educator culture will be necessary for effect institutionalization of this recommended change.

Section 2: Background of the Problem

This formative evaluation and policy recommendation focused on the district cultural norms that are informed by those of the rural local community. Most district educators reside locally; the local culture reflects a social conservatism which supports the status quo. Rural communities in the United States have historically been ethnically homogeneous – generally of white European descent, according to Lichter (2012). While such demographics have begun to change over the past decade, as established by Lichter (2012), predominantly white and politically conservative communities remain. Bagley and Hillyard (2011) determined that rural communities are often politically conservative so as to secure the cultural status quo.

The CP-C track is an existential cultural norm within the district. The nature of tracking students based upon their perceived abilities is the paradigm by which all students in the district are scheduled. Other tracks include College Prep A-level, College Prep B-level and College Prep C-level; honors and advanced placement tracks also exist. Clearly, this arrangement does not reflect best practices of equity for all students, student access to the full curriculum, individual student accommodations, least restrictive educational environments, heterogeneous classroom settings, differentiated instruction,

fomenting positive and progressive social change etc., as supported by current research (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010; Obiakor, 2011). The local problem is that there is little equity within the curricular construct as antiquated, homogenous tracking models deny students' access to a diverse curriculum and student population. Therefore a lack of equity in our educational paradigm is clearly manifest as students with disabilities, and students deemed as at-risk, or of lower ability, are denied equal access to the curriculum enjoyed by students without disabilities, and those considered of greater ability.

The perceptions of educators are that students deemed to be of lesser ability, students who are considered behavioral problems or students who are less motivated have an adverse effect on the education process. At-risk, often less affluent students are segregated from the least restrictive learning environment through the pervasive practice of tracking. This practice negates diversity by homogenizing instruction. Denying students with perceived lower cognitive abilities and students with disabilities equal access to a diverse and rich curriculum is contrary to the spirit of nascent educational legislation and is not supported by current educational research (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010; Obiakor, 2011). Abu El-Haj and Rubin (2009), McLaughlin (2010), and Obiakor (2011) constructed an argument that such a philosophy as denial of access is inherently unethical as it is contrary to federal legislation (Free Appropriate Public Education, [FAPE], USDOE, 1973 and Public Law 94-142, P.L. 94-142, which was reauthorized in 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, [IDEA, reauthorized in 2004]), as well as current educational research.

There is a pervasive local belief that the onus of responsibility for the growth and achievement of the student rests entirely upon the student. Erlich (1997) discussed the negative impact of such a perennialist pedagogical perspective of teaching as the "I teach, you learn" philosophy. Perennialism places the onus of responsibility for a child's success upon the child, rather than the educator. Such a philosophy is contrary to a progressive approach to learning and is largely considered anachronistic as established by Erlich (1997). Perennialist philosophy is supportive of separating students by their perceived abilities.

Another concern is that teachers with the least experience and expertise are more often scheduled to teach the CP-C level classes, as these courses are deemed least desirable by a veteran teaching staff. King and Watson (2010) and Hanushek and Rivkin (2009) demonstrated that student achievement increases when educated by the more accomplished and veteran educators. The average years of teaching experience for all CP-C tracked courses is 9.4; while the average for all non-CP-C courses is 12.4. Further examination of math and English CP-C tracked courses exposes a greater disparity of experience between staff members. The average years of teaching experience for math and English CP-C courses is 6.1 years; while the average for all other levels of instruction within the math and English departments is 15.8 years. This further denies access, to not only the curriculum, but to that which is most important in-school influence to a student's growth and achievement – teacher expertise, as established by Mangiante (2011), Luschei and Chudgar (2011) and Marshall and Sorto (2012). While novice teachers can benefit from professional learning communities of veteran mentor educators, according to

Mullen (2011), the district does not employ such an option. Mentoring in the district is a state mandated, top-down construct, which is not implemented in the manner recommended by Mullen (2011). This further complicates the practice of scheduling inexperienced teachers with the more at-risk students within the CP-C track.

Administrators in the local educational setting, who wish to reward their veteran teachers, schedule them for what they determine to be the more desirable courses – the upper-level tracks. Lower-level tracks, such as CP-B and CP-C, are generally taught by novice teachers who tend to lack the maturity and expertise to support the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities and those served under Title I. This is a clear denial of access and equity and is contrary to the needs of our most at-risk students. It is necessary for educational leaders and administrators to demonstrate moral courage in prioritizing the needs of the students over the professional wants and desires of teachers; this is necessary for equity and the establishment of a more diverse educational paradigm.

The practice of tracking students in the CP-C track segregates students based upon perceived ability. This manifests in homogeneous classrooms in which at-risk, often economically disadvantaged, students are segregated from their social peers. This results in reduced student self-efficacy, increased behavioral issues of concern, increased drop-out rates, all of which have a profound and lasting impact on children and the local community. The current regressive educational philosophy within the district may reflect the local culture; however, it can be argued that it does not appropriately conform to federal and state legislation as mentioned earlier in this document.

Section 3: Formative Evaluation of District Tracking

Purposes of Evaluation Method

A formative evaluation is appropriate for our purposes and frequently utilized in education so as to provide data for recommendations for the improvement of educational practices, according to Spaulding (2008). While, Ross (2010) enumerated scores of evaluation approaches; this evaluation was based upon the need to understand the local existential educator culture.

In a formative evaluation Liwen and Tung-Liang (2012), considered a lack of student commitment in using Twitter as a collaborative educational tool. The research examined student perceptions and their inhibitions to collaborative online work. A qualitative case study was the chosen methodology in this evaluation of an online learning program.

Han, Hu, and Li (2013) conducted an exploratory case study and formative evaluation framework to assess a teacher preparation program. Student teacher perceptions about the program were analyzed so as to determine the viability of the program. The critical feedback provided by the student teachers formed the basis for the recommendation of the authors to improve the program so as to foster positive change.

Clarke, Doabler, Strand Cary, Kosty, Baker, Fien, and Smolkowski (2014) conducted a study of a theory-of-change model regarding math interventions. The consideration for changing pedagogical and instructional strategies for at-risk students, within a response-to-intervention framework, provided the basis for the evaluation and policy recommendation.

In a case study policy recommendation, Leonard (2013) considered early college programs, offered in high school, to prepare students for college readiness. The study is demonstrative of case study research and its use in educational policy recommendations. Through the development of a rich description of the experiences of the participants, Leonard (2013) provided support and rationale for the continuation of the policy of funding early college high school. The rich descriptive findings of this qualitative case study, however, provide for a formative policy recommendation on the removal of the policy of tracking students in the CP-C level track.

Skiba (2013) conducted research for the purpose of informing federal policy to address the racial and ethnic disparities within special education. The policy recommendation in this study was for the purpose of implementing positive social change. There was a gap between the implemented policy and the anticipated results of the policy. Skiba (2013) exposed the gap and provided recommendations so as to improve education on the national level.

In two formative policy recommendation studies, Yuhong (2013) and Halász and Michel (2011) provided observations, analysis, implementation strategies, and key obstacles to overcome before offering policy recommendations which were aimed at fomenting positive social policy and change. Youhong (2013) and Halász and Michel (2011) conducted research so as to refute or support existent policies; their recommendations were based upon the culmination of the research. The research supports the chosen project as a formative evaluation policy recommendation.

Evaluation Design

A formative evaluation was chosen for this qualitative case study so as to understand the culture of the district. The case study methodology was easily determined for the purpose of this study as other qualitative methods, grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenological, were not appropriate for this study, as we are examining a bounded system. This case study is quite similar to an ethnographic study, as considered by Creswell (2012). This study will be an examination of the actual case as manifest in the local setting; whereas an ethnographic study is more of an examination of a broader cultural context or theme, as expressed by Creswell (2012).

It was anticipated that the qualitative data gathered would provide a rich description of the case study. Quantitative methodology, as considered by Creswell (2012) was not appropriate for this study, as the purpose was to consider teacher perceptions regarding the phenomenon of tracking within the bounded system. This required a robust analysis of those perceptions through the utilization of open-ended responses and semi-structured interviews.

The initial component of data collection was convenience-sampling survey questionnaires distributed to approximately 110 currently employed certificated district educators. As stated previously, implied consent was inherent in the anonymous participation of current district educators. The central office disseminated the anonymous surveys to all current district certificated educators via the all-teacher email list server, using the Google platform. The researcher data collection procedure via Google Forms ensured the anonymity of all subjects and maintained the highest ethical standards

consistent with the NIH. In Google Forms the survey was designated as anonymous; the setting of *anyone with the link* ensured that responders are anonymous. All data will be kept for five years after the study on a password protected Google Drive database, after which all data will be deleted. Google products have been IRB approved at major universities throughout the world.

Within the construction of the survey questionnaire, questions of identification were omitted; all questions were open-ended. I "limit[ed] the number of links between answers and specific participant identifiers," so as to ensure identity protection (Creswell, 2012, p. 402). Further protection included the destruction of all survey questionnaires upon completion of the research, as considered by Creswell (2012).

Participants

Previously employed district educators, of whom there are approximately 40, were invited to indicate their desire to participate in the stratified sampled interviews, by providing informed consent. The consent form was disseminated to former district educators through email, physical mail or hand-delivery, whichever method was most convenient. Creswell (2012) has indicated that 10 to 12 interview participants is an effective sampling for the purpose of conducting qualitative interviews; therefore, 10 interviews were conducted as a component of data collection. As the interview participants were sampled from previously employed district educators, it was anticipated that a professional relationship existed between the participant and researcher. This facilitated the data collection process.

Data Collection Procedures

In an effort to answer the research questions and sub-questions, which emerged through the inductive data collection process, I employed survey questionnaires and interviews so as to proceed through what Creswell (2012) stated is a non-linear and iterative process. The methods by which I endeavored to collect the necessary data were informed by a theoretical approach akin to phenomenological theory, as considered by Roulston (2010).

Consent forms were distributed to approximately 40 former district educators, via email, regular mail, or hand-delivered, as necessary. Survey questionnaires were disseminated using Google Forms to all current district educators. This enabled me to more easily organize the questionnaires and the collection of the data in a secure and anonymous manner.

Finally, to triangulate the results of the data collection, I chose 10 educators, previously employed by the district, to participate in individual, in-depth interviews. Those participants were chosen from among those who provided informed consent through the completion of Appendix A. It was anticipated that the selection of educators would provide a rich description of the organizations culture regarding the practice of educational tracking. The interview participants did not necessarily teach a CP-C level track at some point during their career; however, it was necessary to include such educators among the interview participants. It was important that the interview participants selected enabled the researcher to understand the phenomenon of educator attitudes with the bounded system, according to Creswell (2012).

The data was organized in such a manner so as to facilitate retrievability to more easily expose emergent themes and understandings. Data management is an important component of data collection, according to Merriam (2009). The data was managed by utilizing cataloging of the questionnaires, reflective researcher logs about the collection of the data and emergent themes and reflective memos so as to appropriately organize and maintain copious data, as discussed by Merriam (2009). The interviews were transcribed for organizational purposes, as well as to facilitate necessary coding and recoding of data. Descriptive and reflective field notes, as discussed by Creswell (2012), also aided in the process of compiling important pieces of data during the interview process.

Theory-based questions developed from the survey questionnaires and from the literature were posed to the interview participants for the purpose of understanding their educational experiences and perceptions of the practice of tracking students into homogeneous educational environments. As qualitative methods are inductive by nature, according to Creswell (2012), open-ended questions were posed during the interviews, which were reflective of the interview discourse. The purpose of the semi-structured interview, with components of both phenomenological and ethnographic theoretical approaches, was to describe human experiences, according to Roulston (2010). The interviewer took a neutral stance in which there was no infusion of self into the process, as would be anticipated in a Socratic-Hermeneutic approach as considered by Roulston (2010).

During the conducting of the interviews, follow-up questions were infrequently posed for the purpose of probing for further detail or elaboration, as expressed by Creswell (2012). The inductive nature of this theoretical approach necessitated that each interview was essentially unique as the data gathered was an attempt to understand interviewee perceptions and experiences. It was expected that interview participants would divulge personal viewpoints that would provide insight into the phenomenon being considered in the study. Although, interview questions were prepared, the nature of the interview was led by the perceptions expressed by each interviewee. However, I did not allow the interviews to become conversational as that would negate the theoretical foundations of our methodology, as established by Roulston (2010). This ensured that I avoided the possibility that the interview might become confrontational or too intimate.

Section 4: Discussion of Results

The findings of the qualitative case study starkly revealed the existential cultural norms of the district. The anonymous survey questionnaire results were the most revealing of these cultural norms. Some of the most reveling comments are catalogued in Table 8.

Table 8

Survey Questionnaire Participant Responses

Responses
Upper level tracks should be available to motivated and capable students.
I think it's the same as the Varsity and JV levels; some kids all they can do is the JV.
Students' abilities are usually consistent from year to year. So, one should expect the same level of performance and success as accomplished in past years.
Students will only learn based upon their ability and their effort.
When a student who can barely write a complete sentence or perform basic math says that they want to be a vet because they love animals what do you do? Encourage them because we all can learn at a high level? Or do you find another option for an animal lover that they could actually do?
Teachers treat students the way they act and treat the teachers.
Teachers believe that they should not have to teach the lower level students because it is a waste of their teaching abilities.
The higher level class will get more homework. Why: Because they can work independently and learn on their own.
Students alone should be held accountable for their performance. Only students who are perceived to be able to profit from a rigorous curriculum should be presented the curricula.
I've been in those classes where the kids are hangin' out the windows. In the CP-A class, those students are quiet and want to learn.

While the anonymous responses provided for an understanding of current

educator support for tracking, the former district educator interviews also yielded muted,

but similar data. One former member of the child study team stated that the CP-C level

of instruction "…gets the trouble makers out of the CP-B class." The interview

participants overwhelming support of the CP-C level track can be summarized in the

following statement: "I support tracking. I don't think the [CP-C] track is harmful to

students as it is there to serve the students who can't succeed in the A or B level [track]."

The abdication of responsibility expressed in the survey questionnaires is also evidenced

by interview participants by the following statement: "It's not our fault as educators.

That level of kid is totally disinterested."

Student behavior was a compelling motif in the data. District educators believe

that the behavior of the CP-C level track student has a deleterious impact on other

students in a heterogeneously grouped classroom. They state that this behavior detracts

from the classroom environment, thereby supporting the notion that homogenous

classrooms aid the students who "want to learn," as one educator stated. There was no

consideration for the impact of homogenous classrooms on the CP-C track, as the

prevailing perception was that students "track themselves." Furthermore, many stated

that teaching this level was "beneath" them and that novice teachers should be scheduled

for such classes. Interestingly, the interview participants were less supportive of

educators who have a negative view of teaching the CP-C track. While they confirm that

the cultural norm is for veteran educators to eschew this track, they are far less sanguine

and supportive of current educators who profess such a belief. Perhaps this was due to

the fact that they were conscious of the impact of their responses, as they were not

anonymous participants. The survey questionnaire participants were anonymous; there

were no ramifications or social stigmas which could be attached to their responses. This

may indicate that the anonymous respondents were more truthful, or it might indicate that

the current district educators are more existentially attached to the cultural norms of the district, than those who have moved on with their lives and careers.

Significant consideration was given to student effort and work ethic. Generally, all participants, in both the survey questionnaires and the interviews, intimated that there is a profound disparity between the work ethic of students between academic tracks. Most educators were disdainful of the work ethic of the lower-track students. Lower tracked students were categorized as "lazy," "unmotivated," "disaffected" even "dumb." There was a noticeable dearth of responses which recognized that these students come from disadvantaged and indigent home lives. There was only marginal or perfunctory sympathy expressed for the life challenges experienced by students. While the educators consider themselves to be compassionate and caring professionals who might care deeply for individual students on a personal level, the data demonstrate that they support the paradigm of tracking employed by the district. District educators demonstrate a profound ignorance of current scientific and peer reviewed research which indicates that tracking harms children.

The levels of tracking were considered by the educators for their pace of instruction. One current district educator expressed that the higher tracks should be sacrosanct and that "those students" should be excluded from accessing the higher levels. "Students should be placed in the properly paced classes. The less motivated or less intelligent should be excluded." While this response was disturbing to those who perceive tracking as harmful, it was by no means aberrant. Tracking is so

institutionalized that discrepant data was almost non-existent in the survey questionnaire data.

The findings of the project study provided for a rich understanding of the culture of the district which affirms the practice of tracking students based upon their perceived abilities. The hermetic district culture is contrary to current research; the policy of tracking students, specifically the CP-C track should be considered as having had a deleterious effect on children.

Section 5: Policy Recommendation

The data findings revealed above demand an action plan for change. While the structural change of eliminating the CP-C track from the course catalog will require the conciliation of the administration and the Board of Education, the larger, more complex issue of change will be in the area of changing the perceptions of the district educators.

This white paper will be disseminated to district administration beginning in the autumn of 2014. The white paper will then be presented to the Personnel and Policies Committee and the Curriculum Committees of the Board of Education. The white paper and the findings of the project study will then be presented to the Board of Education in open public session at the subsequent Board meeting. This will provide the stakeholders of the district and the community access to the study, so as to begin the process of changing cultural norms. Following the presentation to the public at the November Board of Education open public session, the staff will be presented the findings of the study. This will begin the process of fomenting change within the culture of the district

educators. Prolonged and embedded professional development will be provided so as to institutionalize a culture of equity and access.

The construction of the course of study catalog will begin in earnest during the beginning months of the 2014-15 school year. The administration will consider the ramifications of the removal of the CP-C track from the course catalog. It is anticipated that the superintendent, the author of this document, will conciliate the administration to adopt a more equitable and accessible educational paradigm upon which we can build a progressive vision for social change.

Process for Systemic Change

1) Present the findings of the project study and the white paper to district administration during the autumn months of 2014.

2) Present the findings of the project study and the white paper to Personnel & Policies and Curriculum Committees.

3) Present the findings of the project and the white paper to the Board of Education and public stakeholders at the November Board of Education open public session.

4) Present the findings of the project and the white paper to the district educators at a staff meeting in November or December.

5) Present the course of study catalog for Board of Education approval at the December open public session. The catalog will reflect the elimination of all courses labeled as CP-C.

6) Begin the process of prolonged and embedded professional development to support the institutionalization of equity and access in the classroom at the January 2015 district in-service meeting.

7) District administration will seek out and write discretionary and competitive grants to financially support the development of a district culture of equity and access built upon social cognitive theory.

8) The district will consider the possible hire of a behaviorist for the purpose of implementing a Response-to-Intervention program (RtI) so as to support at-risk students.

9) The district will consider the possible hire of an interventionist for the purpose of implementing an RtI program so as to support at-risk students.

Curriculum Vitae

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     Phi Alpha Theta National History Honors Society
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     Honors Thesis: *19th Century European Intellectual History: the Superman Theory*
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Professional Experience

9/13-pres   **Superintendent, High Point Regional High School**
Chief Academic Officer of high performing visionary district in rural northwestern NJ

9/14-pres   **Adjunct Professor, St. Peters University**
Graduate school instructor for Educational Leadership

6/10-8/13   **Director of Curriculum & Instruction, High Point Regional High School**
District level administrator

12/09-8/11   **Assistant Principal, High Point Regional High School**
School level administrator

9/06-8/09   **Adjunct History Professor, Sussex County Community College**
Western Civilization I & II

1/98-12/09   **Teacher of Social Studies, High Point Regional High School**
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Who's Who Among America's Teachers—seven consecutive years
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Coach: Bowling, Assistant Football