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Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Effects of High-Stakes Testing

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Walden University
2012

Abstract

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by

Amy Pavia

M.S., University of Scranton, 2006

B.S., Kutztown University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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June 2012

Abstract

High-stakes testing has increased since the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Many teachers are using teacher-centered activities with memorization and testing coach books instead of creating student-centered higher-order thinking activities. Some school districts are eliminating subjects that are not tested on state assessments. The purpose of this study was to collect information regarding the teaching experiences of 9 elementary teachers from the same school within one public school district. Teacher interviews were utilized in this case study to explore the perceived effects of high-stakes tests on elementary curriculum and instruction. The theoretical foundation for this study was based on the theories of behaviorism and constructivism. The study research questions addressed teachers' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction. Qualitative coding was used to identify patterns and themes in the data through the systematic analysis and constant comparison of data sets. Data from interview transcripts were analyzed to determine factors, events, conditions, personal perspectives, and concerns of the elementary teachers. Teachers felt that high-stakes testing has resulted in a rigid, unbalanced and narrow curriculum. Teachers described that high-stakes testing has resulted in clear expectations for teachers which have helped them to know exactly what they have to teach within their classrooms. Implications for positive social change include providing teachers with necessary professional development relating to the effects of high-stakes testing; this can lead to curricular and instructional change that provides more instruction in higher-order thinking.

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Dedication

This document is dedicated to my Irish angels, Lindsey, Kyle, and Uncle Joe. Lindsey showed me that life is too short to put things off until tomorrow. Kyle taught me that the love of family and friends can get me through the most difficult times. Uncle Joe reminded me that I can do and be anything I put my mind to. These lessons inspired me to finish the doctoral study process.

I would also like to dedicate this study to Nonnie and Pop Pop. Nonnie and Pop Pop were always encouraging me and supporting my educational goals. They were both an example that life is a balance of hard work and fun, education and experience, and good times and bad. These lessons kept me focused as I worked on my dissertation. I hope that Lindsey, Kyle, Uncle Joe, Nonnie and Pop Pop are as proud of me as I am to have known and loved each of them.

This paper is also dedicated to my grandfather, Mr. James Ceccoli. He is one of my best friends. His love, support, and encouragement have motivated me to work harder and to focus on completing my doctorate degree. He is my example that hard work pays off and that it is important to appreciate the simple things in life. I hope that I can inspire him and guide him as he did for me as he begins writing his very own book about his life as a firefighter.

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Thank you to my biggest supporter, my husband, Brian. At times when I felt overwhelmed with information, he reassured me that I could do this. He dealt with a lot of stressful nights of frustration and defeat. His pride and belief in me encouraged me to want to succeed in this program. I am thankful for his love, patience, and understanding in all that he dealt with in the last 4 years as I pursued my doctoral degree.

I would also like to acknowledge my mom, Debbie. She listened to my complaining and knew when I needed to shop, talk, or walk to relax after hours of working on my paper. She is my best friend and I am grateful to have her guidance and support throughout all aspects of my life.

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Last but not least, I'd like to acknowledge my dog, Oreo. He was by my side through all of this. His snuggles, play time, kisses, and unconditional love through this process were immeasurable. I know that he is thrilled that I am finished because now he gets even more belly rubs and trips to the park!

Table of Contents

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Teacher number	Years of service	Highest degree earned	Subjects and grades taught
1	12	Master's	SFA reading* and math grade 4*
2	3	Bachelor's	Math grades 4-6*
3	3	Master's equivalency	SFA reading* and humanities grade 6
4	5	Master's	SFA reading* and science grade 5
5	17	Master's	SFA reading* and math grade 6*
6	8	Master's	SFA reading* and science grades 4*-6
7	5	Master's	SFA reading* and math grade 3*
8	8	Master's	SFA reading* and science grade 6
9	6	Master's	SFA reading* and humanities grade 4
Note. * Represents subjects that were assessed on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment			

Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to collect information from elementary educators within one public school district in northeastern Pennsylvania and their perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction. This study was important because the standards and accountability movement has widened in influence and deepened in impact, as found by Lambert et al. (2002). Since testing has become the focus of education, it was important to understand teachers' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on elementary curriculum and instruction. Weinbaum et al. (2004) reported that high-stakes testing has narrowed curriculum and instruction to focus on test preparation. Jones (2007) claimed that state standardized testing has affected both curriculum and instruction by reducing time taught on untested subjects. Jones also reported an increased use of memorization, testing coach books, and pencil and paper activities. Teachers' perceptions provide meaningful insight relating to testing preparation, practices, and realities within the classroom. Raising awareness of the perceived effects in testing, gives teachers a voice in education in an era of high-stakes testing. This research will contribute to a better education for the elementary students within the district. Administrators and school leaders will be made aware of the current realities of the effects of testing. Raising awareness of the effects of testing on curriculum and instruction can lead to positive curricular and instructional changes in the district.

Problem Statement

Researchers, as discussed in Section 2, have found that testing has a negative impact on elementary curriculum and instruction. Behrent (2009) expressed that the NCLB era has forced teachers to focus on preparing students to beat the test. Behrent added that teachers feel a loss of freedom and enthusiasm as they focus instruction on test taking rather than learning. The Center on Education Policy (CEP) (2006) found that, "71% of the nation's 15,000 school districts have reduced time spent on art, social studies, and history since 2002" (p. 1). The report also showed that "27% of the districts reported reduced instructional time in social studies. Science was cut by 22% and 20% reported similar cuts in art and music" (CEP, 2006, p. 1). In this research, I determined what the elementary teachers of one school building from a public school district in northeastern Pennsylvania perceived to be the effects of high-stakes tests on their curriculum and instruction. The domains of interest for this study were educational change, accountability, academic standards, public policy, evaluation methods, educational improvement, elementary curricula, and federal legislation.

In elementary education, in Pennsylvania public schools, high-stakes testing and NCLB accountability have harmful consequences for curriculum, instruction, classroom testing, and student learning. Vogler and Virtue (2007) found that teachers under the pressure of high-stakes tend to use teacher-centered instructional practices, such as lecture, instead of hands-on activities such as role-play, cooperative learning, and projects. Currently, most districts have realigned their curriculum to match the assessed state standards. This results-oriented atmosphere affects some teachers by placing

increased pressure on them to produce student scores. Increased pressure on teachers has a negative impact on instruction as teachers use more teacher-centered instructional strategies and test prep lessons instead of exploratory inquiry-based teaching. The problem is that, in an era of high-stakes testing, teachers do not have a voice in their classrooms. This case study recorded the experiences and perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the effect high-stakes testing has on curriculum and instruction in their classrooms.

The pseudonym of Richard Elementary School (RES) and Zoo Area School District (ZAD) were used to maintain the privacy of the school and school district in this study. The most recent data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE, 2011a) provided a summary of the RES adequate yearly progress (AYP) results. AYP is an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100% of students achieving at state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math that sets the minimum level of proficiency that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related educational indicators (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The Pennsylvania Systems State Assessment (PSSA) test was given to students in third through sixth grades in RES. The scores of reading and math were used to assess academic performance of the students. RES met 23 of 25 criteria in the 2009/2010 school year. If all measures are not met, a school does not meet AYP standards. RES did not make AYP status. School improvement is needed for schools that do not meet AYP status. PDE (2011a) found the 2009/2010 school year is the third year that RES did not meet all AYP measures. When a school does not meet AYP for the third

year, it is placed in *School Improvement II status*. RES must review its improvement strategies and create a new school improvement plan, so it can meet AYP next year. PDE (2011a) also noted that students in RES qualify for school choice, which means parents may send them to a different school within the ZASD. This has a direct effect on the school population. Some students have left RES to go to a higher performing school in the district. In addition, RES must also provide supplemental school services, such as tutoring to eligible students. For RES to have all students meet proficiency targets by 2014, the school must meet AYP for 2 years in a row.

Some researchers (Starnes, Saderholm, & Webb, 2010) have suggested that NCLB education is more about scripted curricula and doing programs than actual hands on teaching. As a result of not meeting AYP, the ZASD implemented a research based reading program. The research-based program titled Success for All (SFA) is aimed at improving the academic performance of students. SFA (2011) noted that the SFA program was designed to help students read at or above grade level. Students in RES receive 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction. Administrators and SFA facilitators create reading classes based on students' reading levels and not their grade level. The SFA program is an approved model of the NCLB legislation aimed at increasing test scores. The SFA program provides RES with research-based curriculum materials and assessment tools. Students in RES also take quarterly assessments to record performance. The SFA program is what Starnes et al. (2010) referred to as a *scripted curriculum* (p. 17). Jones (2007) argued that a scripted curriculum results in the lack of creativity and student-centered approaches to instruction. I interviewed teachers in this

study to determine what effects the teachers perceive high-stakes testing had on their daily instructional practices and curriculum used in their classroom.

Since its development, NCLB testing practices have increased, and teachers' autonomy in the classroom have decreased (Quiocho and Stall, 2008). An increased understanding of the effects these teachers perceive testing has on curriculum and instruction is necessary. Teachers' perceptions in this study provided meaningful insight relating to testing preparation, practices, and realities within the classroom. This research will contribute to a better education for the elementary students within the ZASD.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of elementary teachers from the ZASD regarding the impact testing had on curriculum and instruction. I used qualitative interviews to represent the perspectives of several elementary teachers. The purpose of this study was to determine what the elementary teachers perceived to be the effects of high-stakes testing on the ZASD curriculum. In this study, I also determined what the elementary teachers perceived to be the effects of high-stakes testing on their instructional strategies. The study contributes to social change by informing educational leaders, personnel related to curriculum programs, and policy makers of the perceived effects high-stakes has on curriculum and instruction within the ZASD. It is important for the school board and supervisory personnel to understand the teachers' experiences and the perceived effects of high-stakes testing. This understanding will contribute to positive curricular and instructional change within the district.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative research includes interpretation and naturalistic approaches to make sense of or interpret phenomena. Creswell (2007) stated that "qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). The research goal of this study was to understand and describe elementary teachers' perceptions regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction within their classrooms. This study focused on teacher experiences, perceptions, and meaning making relating to high-stakes testing. The participants were members of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) and were certified elementary teachers in the district. I am a certified fifth grade teacher in the Dallas School District whose relationship to the participants was purely collegial. Creswell (2007) noted that qualitative researchers collect data in a natural setting to the people in the study. I interviewed 9 elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD in their classrooms. Creswell stated that qualitative data analysis includes identifying patterns, categories, and themes (2007). I analyzed all data by involving the participants, so they had a chance to help shape the themes that emerged from this process.

Research Questions and Objectives

1. What do elementary teachers in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum?
2. What do elementary teachers in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on instruction?

The objective of this research was to describe the need for increased understanding of the perceived impact high-stakes testing has on elementary curriculum and instruction. Section 3 will include the qualitative research methods used in this study.

Conceptual Framework

Behavioral theories of learning suggest that behavior can be predicted, intelligence is fixed, and learning treatments can be described based on levels of intelligence (Lambert et al., 2002). High-stakes testing results in an increase use of behaviorism in the classroom. Research has shown that behaviorism in the classroom results in more rote memorization and teacher-centered activities. Constructivism and the community of learners movement result in better student achievement than behaviorism. The theories of behaviorism, constructivism, and the community of learner's movement are evident in today's classrooms. The best approach to education is an increasing debate and the increased use of high-stakes testing has resulted in much controversy.

Lambert et al. (2002) found that, in the classroom, behavioral psychology translates into teachers breaking down large concepts into parts and discrete skills. Information is commonly taught in isolation with large-group instruction. These behavioral approaches include increased dependence on standardized measures of achievement, offering rewards for learning as a way of shaping student behavior. High-stakes testing has increased the use of behavioral methods of instruction. Teachers are using large-group instruction instead of small-group student centered approaches to teaching. The teachers interviewed in this study shared their perceptions regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on their instructional practices.

Constructivist learning describes how people construct their reality and make sense of their world (Lambert et al., 2002). The capacity to learn is not fixed and the social construction of knowledge must be an active and interactive process. Achievement is increased when the culture of the school supports learning for both students and adults. In a high-stakes testing context, scripted curricula and limited time are affecting teachers' opportunities to make learning interactive. Students do not have the opportunity to construct their own reality to make sense of their world because high-stakes testing results in drill and skill activities which result in rote memorization and teacher-centered classrooms (Jones, 2007). Smyth (2008) found that high-stakes testing has changed from exploratory learning to constant test taking practice. In this study, teachers had the opportunity to share their experiences regarding opportunities for interactive lessons. Teachers described their use of instructional practices and how high-stakes testing has affected their use of student-centered approaches to teaching. Teachers also had the opportunity to share their perceptions of the effects high-stakes testing had on their curriculum.

Lambert et al. (2002) found constructivist approaches allow the student to direct the learning to generate understanding and meaning. Students have background knowledge and experiences that help them to understand by relating supplementary material to what they already know. Learners make connections based on what they know and reshape it in new and meaningful ways. In high-stakes testing, teaching becomes teacher-directed and fast paced. Students are not able to direct the learning which generates understanding and meaning. Researchers have argued over which instructional

methods result in the most teacher effectiveness. Constructivist approaches are used less often in elementary classrooms as testing becomes the focus of education (Smyth, 2008). It was important to know whether or not NCLB is affecting the instructional strategies of the teachers in the ZASD. Interview responses in this study revealed that teachers used instructional models similar to both behaviorism and constructivism.

Definition of Terms

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): An individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 % of students achieving at state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math that sets the minimum level of proficiency that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related educational indicators (United States Department of Education, 2009).

Curriculum: A list of all courses of study offered by a school or college (Curriculum, 2009).

Differentiated instruction: A method of instruction in which the teacher uses leveled materials and activities based on student differences to teach a variety of content. It is a responsive approach to teach which aims at meeting individual learners' needs (Pool, 2000).

High-stakes testing (HST): Testing is high-stakes if it carries serious consequences for students or for educators (AERA, 2010).

Instruction: The act or practice of instructing or teaching (Instruction, 2010).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): A policy implemented by the federal government that requires states to assess students in grades 3-8 in reading and math.

(United States Department of Education, 2011a).

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA): The PSSA test is a yearly test in which a standard- based, criterion-referenced assessment measures students' academic achievement is reading and math. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 take the reading and math assessments. Students in grade 4, 8 and 11 take the science assessment. Students in grades 5, 8 and 11 take the writing assessment. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011b).

School Improvement II Status: When a school does not meet Adequate Yearly Progress for the third year, it is placed in "School Improvement II" status. This status requires that the school must make necessary changes to improve student achievement. These changes include supplementary school services such as tutoring and remedial reading and math programs (PDE, 2011a).

Success For All (SFA): A research-based program that is designed to improve academic performance of students. SFA (2011) noted that the reading program is a scripted curriculum aimed to improve student reading levels.

Title I: Schools that have a large concentration of low-income students will receive additional funds to help in meeting students' educational goals. Title I schools are determined by the number of students that receive a free or reduced lunch. In order to qualify as a Title I school, 40% of the students must be enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011c).

Assumptions

Researchers cannot assume the honesty of participants' answers in qualitative interviews. Creswell (2007) suggested that assumptions provide facts that are true but cannot be verified. I assumed that the participants were honest in their opinions and interview answers. I also assumed the teachers had their K-6 Pennsylvania teacher certification, which aligns with the NCLB mandates of highly qualified teachers.

Limitations

Limitations in this study pose potential weaknesses to the study results. Limitations are the potential weaknesses of the study identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). This research limited itself to the perceptions of a sample of elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD. This study was limited to teachers in third through sixth grades from RES within the ZASD. This study was limited to a small sample size to allow the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews to explore the participants' perceptions and experiences. This research should not be used to infer or generalize about all teachers in RES or all teachers in the ZASD. In addition, this research cannot be used to generalize about all teachers and districts across the state. Future research could focus on student, school leader, or community perceptions of the effect of testing on curriculum and instruction. Future research could also include the perceptions of testing on high school curriculum and instruction.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study included the boundaries of the study. For this case study, the boundaries included 9 elementary teachers from one elementary school who taught

grades third through sixth. The nine teachers were purposefully selected because they taught a grade that was assessed on the PSSA test. This study was bound to the perceptions of the teachers in grades 3-6 from RES in the ZASD regarding the perceived effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction.

The scope of this study was further delimited by the participants and the time used for this study. The participants were suitable for this study based on predetermined criteria. The study was limited to 2 weeks. Interviews were conducted in the teachers' classrooms before and after school hours. Future research could focus on student, school leader, or community perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction. Future research could also include the impact of testing on high school curriculum and instruction.

Significance of the Study

Many principals and parents have agreed that high-stakes tests are doing grave damage to education and to the lives of children (Neill, 2006a). Since testing has become the focus of education, this study applies to the professional field of education because it is important to understand teachers' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on elementary curriculum and instruction. This study applied to the local problem of Pennsylvania's high-stakes tests. Little research exists regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing in Pennsylvania. This study will contribute to the body of research because in this study, elementary teachers described their perceptions regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and

instruction within their classrooms in the ZASD. Teacher perceptions were analyzed and this information will be shared with school leaders.

Standardizing and simplifying education would be easy if all students learned the same way, schools had similar resources, and all students were on comparable levels in math and reading (Lambert et al., 2002). Not all students in the ZASD learn the same way. They do not have similar resources and they are not on comparable levels in reading and math. Teachers' perceptions can provide meaningful insight relating to testing preparation, practices, and realities within the classroom. Teacher perceptions change current practice by increasing or decreasing the amount of constructivist approaches of instruction. This study contributes to social change by informing educational leaders, personnel related to curriculum programs, and policy makers of the perceived effects high-stakes testing has on curriculum and instruction within one public school in northeastern Pennsylvania. It is important for the school board and supervisory personnel to understand the teachers' experiences and the perceived effects of high-stakes testing because teachers are expected to prepare their students for state tests while providing meaningful learning experiences. Teachers need to use student-centered approaches to instruction while incorporating the arts, science, and social studies. Administrators need to be made aware if teachers believe that high-stakes testing is causing them to use more teacher-centered approaches. School leaders also need to be informed if teachers perceive that high-stakes testing is causing them to neglect untested subjects such as science, social studies, and the arts. School leaders can use the data analysis from this study to make educational decisions within the district. Providing necessary professional

development for teachers regarding effective teaching practices and allowing teachers to have a voice by sharing their experiences of high-stakes testing will contribute to positive curricular and instructional change within the district. This study will make administrators and school leaders aware of the current realities of the effects of testing. Raising awareness of the perceived effects of high-stakes tests on curriculum and instruction will also lead to positive curricular and instructional changes in the ZASD. Positive curricular and instructional changes in the ZASD will contribute to a better education for the elementary students within the ZASD.

Summary and Transition

High-stakes testing has an effect on elementary curriculum and instruction in Pennsylvania public school districts. Section 2 includes a closer look at the related research and literature clearly related to this problem. Section 3 will outline the qualitative methodology of the study. In Section 3, I will explain the interview process as well as the data analysis of the information. Section 4 includes the data presentation and will include analysis of factors, events, conditions, personal perspective, and concerns of the teachers interviewed for this study. The study concludes in Section 5 with a brief overview of the significance of the study. It will include interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for action.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

High-stakes testing has become a controversial topic in public education in the United States. In this section, I review the history of assessment and the impact of high-stakes testing on public education in the past 5 years. The literature review is organized around topics related to high-stakes testing. In the first section, I explain the theories of behaviorism and constructivism in education. Then I describe the history of assessment from the 1800s to current times, the goal and effect of the NCLB (U. S. Department of Education, 2011) policy, the phenomenon of teaching, and the impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum. I also assess the research on elementary teachers' perceptions of high-stakes effects on curriculum and instruction. No studies were found on Pennsylvania elementary teachers' perceptions on the effects of high-stakes tests and curriculum and instruction.

The literature review presented in this section includes studies and articles that focus on high-stakes testing. A search of databases in the Walden University library including Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Proquest and Education Research Complete, as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Education website and other electronic sources, provided the most relevant data appropriate to this topic of study. Keyterms searched included *NCLB, high-stakes testing, behaviorism, constructivism, history of assessment, teacher attitudes about high-stakes testing, teacher perception of the effects of high-stakes testing, NCLB's effect on curriculum, NCLB's effects on instruction*, and *teacher effectiveness*. Some of these topics were combined or

reworded and in order to reach saturation, I searched until the same articles were repeated. Mostly peer-reviewed articles less than 5 years old were included in this review. A few articles regarding behaviorism and constructivism were more than 5 years old but were still included in this review due to the valuable information they provided.

Behaviorism and Constructivism

Behaviorism is a theory that views learning as a response to stimuli existing in the environment (Lu & Ortlieb, 2009). People are the passive reactors and they learn through imitation and reinforcement. Behaviorism is designed to examine simple tasks, not complex behaviors. According to Lu and Ortlieb (2009), behaviorism has dominated views of learning in the recent high-stakes testing era.

Behaviorism asserts that people are conditioned through punishment and reinforcement to behave in specific ways (Laitsch, 2006). In an era of high-stakes testing, Laitsch (2006) found that teachers want to avoid punishments for poor student achievement so they decide to narrow their efforts and teach only tested topics. Laitsch found that high-stakes testing may cause educators to change their behavior from what they know as best practice to less desirable behavior in order to avoid consequences of negative testing outcomes.

Tobin and Tippins (1993) found that behaviorist approaches to teaching involve the teacher as the facilitator of the curriculum who directs students to practice the information until they are proficient at solving problems independently. The teacher is the transmitter of knowledge and there is little interaction between

the students. In behaviorist classrooms, lessons are taught skill-by-skill and instruction is content and process oriented.

Behaviorist lessons are very specific and use rote memorization through drill and skill techniques (Tobin & Tippins, 1993). Students are viewed as passive receivers of knowledge. Students are expected to listen, learn, and demonstrate what they have learned on assessments. In the recent emphasis on accountability, some teachers are using behaviorist strategies in order to prepare students for state assessments. Teachers present eligible state content, students listen and memorize necessary information, and teachers frequently assess student learning.

Constructivist approaches to teaching focus on the student as an active participant in the learning process. Richardson (1997) described *constructivism* as a learning theory in which students make sense of their own understanding by relating knew information to what they already know. Tobin and Tippins (1993) described the *constructivist teacher* as a facilitator between the student and student's prior knowledge. Students are actively engaged in the learning process and students interact with each other throughout the lesson (Tobin & Tippins, 1993).

Constructivism is not a prescriptive theory to best teaching practices. Instead, it is a descriptive theory in which teachers can use students' prior experiences to make sense of new information (Richardson, 1997). Learning is not based on a step-by-step drill and skill practice and memorization patterns. Constructivist teachers must be aware of students' background knowledge,

developmental readiness, and problem-solving strengths (Tobin & Tippins, 1993). Weirlch (2000) found that constructivist classrooms must allow for continued reflection on new understandings and exploratory learning.

Constructivist teachers are nonjudgemental about answers (Tobins & Tippins, 1993). Instead, teachers look at the students' problem solving strategies and why their answer may be incorrect. Tobins and Tippins (1993) found that this will encourage students to share and explore their problem-solving methods. Students have the opportunity to decide how to solve problems and create meaning of new information as it is presented to them.

Tobins and Tippins (1993) found that constructivist lessons are aimed at interactive and small group learning. The teacher presents a topic which includes an open-ended question. Information does not follow a skill-by-skill sequence and students are not expected to memorize bits of information before moving on to new topics. Instead of being content or process oriented, content and process are combined to create a meaningful learning experience (Tobins & Tippins, 1993). Some teachers feel that in a high-stakes testing environment, there is not enough time to allow for open-ended questioning and group work. Teachers feel forced to follow scripted curricula which limits their opportunity to allow for interactive, meaningful learning experiences.

Historical Perspective of Assessment

Current assessment practices have their roots in the 1800s, when the economy changed from a manufacturing environment to an industrial industry, and when business

leaders eliminated working class participation in local school boards (Emery, 2007). During this time, tracking systems were used to identify students' strengths, and standardized tests emerged as a way for high schools to create a variety of programs (Emery, 2007). The events of World War I also facilitated these assessment changes, as can be seen by the U.S. Army. Within the army, Alpha assessment tests were created. Such standardized testing instruments have been used to assess student performance in K–12 public schools (Emery, 2007). In addition, the Army Alpha allowed military officials to test recruits for suitable positions (Emery, 2007), with assessments based on intellect, ability, and potential (Emery, 2007). Educators discovered the method of evaluation and adapted the format to meet educational purposes (Smyth, 2008).

Assessment continued to become evident in education in the 1950s, a trend which has been attributed to the 1957 launch of the Sputnik satellite in the former Soviet Union and the 1966 release of *The Coleman Report—Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Leistyna, 2007, p. 61). The launch of Sputnik and the release of *The Coleman Report* placed emphasis on individual performance. The findings of *The Coleman Report* demonstrated the reality that student achievement is beyond the control of the school (Towers, 1992). Towers (1992) found that *The Coleman Report* provided evidence that social surroundings and environment can affect student achievement. *The Coleman Report* was replicated in the *Brookover Study* (Brookover et al., 1978). *The Brookover Study* (1978) was significant regarding school effectiveness because it established school climate as a central feature of effective schools. Brookover et al. found that common characteristics including; clear school mission, high expectations for students, effective

leadership, regular assessment and evaluation of student progress, the amount of structured teaching time on task, a school climate that facilitates learning, and the home school relationship affect student achievement.

Turner (2009) stated American standardized testing began with the development of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which held states accountable for education by providing yearly assessments. The expansion of standardized testing resulted in increased accountability for states. ESEA would later be the founding basis for the NCLB policy of 2001. In 1969, the federal government produced the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Leistyna, 2007). The significance of NAEP is that it is the largest assessment of America's students (NAEP Overview, 2011). The NAEP has increased student assessment by providing continual assessments in reading, math, and science. It has been suggested that the Minimum Competency Test of 1979 pushed the drive for federal and state funding for the standardization movement (Leistyna, 2007).

In 1983, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* called for improving teaching through higher benchmarks and standards and high-stakes tests. This publication had a dramatic effect on education reform, as it ushered in the contemporary standards and high-stakes testing movement (Au, 2009). Indeed, within a year of *A Nation at Risk*'s publication, 54 state level commissions on education existed, and 26 states raised graduation requirements (Au, 2009). In the 1990s, 43 states had statewide assessments for K-5, and by 2000, Iowa was the only state not to administer a state test (Au, 2009). These data help

support the impact of *A Nation at Risk* on graduation requirements, statewide assessments, and accountability in American public education.

The federal government became more involved in education as states set mandates for reform. Extensive involvement of state and federal government in education is a relatively new phenomenon in the United States, dating to the 1980s when New York, Florida, and Texas began mandating passing scores on high school exit examinations as a requirement for high school graduation (Hursh, 2005). These examinations served to usher a shift in control over educational decisions for students, families, and teachers to policymakers and bureaucrats (Hursh, 2005). These exams also result in de facto state curricula as classroom teachers attempt to cover tested material (Hursh, 2005).

No Child Left Behind

By the year 2001, the government had played an increased role in public education. In 2002, the federal government reauthorized the ESEA, now renamed as NCLB (PDE, 2011a). In 2011, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) stated that by 2006, the NCLB policy required all students in Grades 3-8 and 11 to be tested in reading and math. In 2008, all students were tested once in science on either an elementary, middle, or high school level (PDE, 2011a). These data help to support the impact of the NCLB policy on states' use of mandated state assessments.

The NCLB policy has been the topic of debate since its creation in 2001, largely because it has deviated from its intended effect (Packer, 2007). Some have suggested that the NCLB policy has had good intentions of raising the achievement gap of populations

of students and by requiring highly qualified teachers (Packer, 2007). Indeed, the goals of NCLB have been well aligned with these merits: NCLB's intention was for all students to have an equal opportunity to have a high-quality education. This policy of assessing what children know and can do mirrors the goal of the NAEP of 1969. Yet the NCLB policy remains one of the greatest controversial topics in education (Cobb and Rallis, 2008), and one of the most significant pieces of education reform in history (Gay, 2007).

Critics of NCLB argue that national standards have taken U.S. education in the wrong direction (Zhao, 2010). Teaching practices, since the implementation of NCLB, have been heavily described as data driven and dictated by best practices (Bunting, 2007; Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, & Crump, 2008). These practices, while not inherently negative, have taken away the time typically allotted for inquiry-based teaching and hands-on learning, pedagogical practices which have been associated with organic learning and creativity (Bunting, 2007).

Educational researchers have studied the relationship between students' achievement and high-stakes testing. Terry (2010) developed a case study to examine a P-12, metropolitan district in response to the challenges of NCLB mandates. Despite the district's successful implementation of state assessments, the school did not raise student achievement, nor did they close gaps between student subgroups in response to NCLB's central purpose.

The new test-driven external accountability movement has changed the nature and target of high-stakes testing. As the focus of high-stakes testing policy has shifted from minimum competency to proficiency, an increasing number of states have held schools

and teachers accountable for test results over the past 2 decades (Lee, 2008, p. 608). Teachers have an increased pressure to produce student results, which has been attributed to limited teacher autonomy and decision-making in the classroom (Lee, 2008). The combination of increased pressure due to accountability and less autonomy in the classroom can affect teacher's opportunities to make decisions about their curriculum and instruction (Quiocho and Stall, 2008).

Researchers have analyzed teachers' perceptions of NCLB's effect on teacher autonomy and pedagogy. To help them better understand teachers' perceptions of autonomy, Quiocho and Stall (2008) developed a 10-item survey to determine the extent to which teachers felt restricted by NCLB requirements regarding curriculum decisions and methodology implementation (p. 20). Results of the survey have shown that teachers felt a great deal of autonomy in how they taught the content. Teachers also reported that NCLB has affected their decision-making opportunities, with primary grade teachers feeling more strongly about this lack of opportunity than did teachers in Grades 4-8. Teachers in grades 4-6 did not feel a great deal of satisfaction and 33% of those teachers felt unsatisfied. This data indicated clear differences between grade levels. Most limitations in instructional style and curricular decision-making occurred in grades 4-6. Additional research with teachers in this grade level is necessary in order to understand why this is happening frequently in grades 4-6. Qualitative interview research regarding teachers perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing could reveal why teachers feel this is happening. An exhaustive search of the literature did not produce any qualitative interview studies.

Additional researchers have published the results of teachers' experiences with the key elements of NCLB. Cassidy and Cassidy (2007) surveyed teachers in 2005 and 2006. The survey addressed seven key issues of NCLB: benefits, funding, implementation, assessment, effects, sanctions, and highly qualified teachers. Results in 2006 were similar to those 2005, with teachers supporting the basic premises of the law but disapproving of the law's implementation. Teachers also demonstrated that teachers felt that assessment provisions were not effective in assessing student progress, evaluating teachers, and making decisions about school effectiveness.

High-stakes testing and NCLB have also produced high-stakes teaching. Crocco and Costigan (2006) interviewed English and social studies teachers in New York City's public schools. The researchers drew upon experiences of beginning NYC teachers in English and social studies. Many of the teachers interviewed noted that high-stakes testing accountability is throughout their school. Teachers reported on the influence of high-stakes testing. Results suggested a friction between faculty and school leadership, attributable to high-stakes testing.

Supporters of NCLB argue that education has improved due to policies implemented by the federal government. Many aspects of the law help the children who need it most (Margolis, 2006). In addition, NCLB has increased help for struggling students (Margolis, 2006). Others have noted that NCLB's focus on achieving proficiency has forced schools to clarify and strengthen their curriculum (Zavadsky, 2008), as well as create common benchmark assessments (Zavadsky, 2008). These

actions, along with improved classroom instruction, demonstrate the benefit of strong standards, data driven decisions, and effective district-wide coordination.

Some educators contend that high-stakes testing is necessary and should not be viewed as stressful (Fedore, 2006). Fedore (2006) argued that teachers are responsible for creating a stress-free environment for their students. Fedore's position was that educators should release testing tension with entertainment. Fedore stated that after 2 years of dances, singing, breakfasts, cheers, and chants, the number of students meeting standards dramatically increased. Fedore found that, in an attempt to support students, they ended up improving test scores and that when teachers show a positive attitude about testing it will have a positive effect on students. Fedore's suggestions of eliminating testing pressures can also be related to the Byrrd-Blake et al. (2010) study in which teachers expressed that increased pressure due to testing had a negative effect on their morale. If teachers use the suggestions of Fedore, they can prevent the pressures and negative effects on moral identified by Byrrd-Blake et al.

High-States Testing's Effect on Curriculum

One issue that has fueled the debate of high-stakes testing since the 1980s is the effect testing has on curriculum. *Curriculum* has been defined as the list of classes provided by a school or university (Curriculum, 2009). Weaver (2007) found that many struggling school districts take out subjects such as the arts, science, and foreign languages. These subjects are taken out because there is not enough time to teach subjects that are not on the state assessment. Teachers are required to spend more time on reading

and math because these subjects are on the state assessments. Neil (2006b) found that education reform cannot happen by handing teachers scripted curriculum.

Madaus (1983) found that the emphasis on minimal competency levels for students resulted in schools teaching only the required, tested curriculum. This resulted in narrowing of the curriculum (Madaus, 1983). The Center on Education Policy (CEP) (2006) found that the majority of the nation's 15,000 school districts have reduced time spent on untested subjects since 2002. The report also showed similar cuts in science, art, and music. These data revealed that since the development of NCLB, districts across the U.S. have reduced time spent on untested subjects. Berliner's (2009) summary of this data reported that of the 350 school districts, 62% had increased time spent on elementary language arts and math. Berliner stated that 44% of the district reduced time on science, social studies and the arts. The CEP also found that 97% of high-poverty districts had policies which prevented students from using the curriculum. According to the CEP, high-poverty districts prevented students from the using the curriculum by only exposing them to subjects taught on the state assessments. The CEP found that high-poverty districts often schedule students for remediation, testing prep courses, and reading and math. This did not leave any availability in the students' schedules. These findings show that since the development of NCLB, schools do not provide students with a broad curriculum. The data in the CEP's study suggest that reading and math instruction consume the majority of the school day for teachers and students.

McGuire (2007) found that high-stakes testing has increased literacy and math, but it has caused a lack of attention for other subjects. Teachers modify their curriculum

based on state tests by getting rid of content that is not tested (Grant, 2007). Beveridge (2010) reported that budget cuts provide more funding for tested subjects that directly affect AYP. Rome (2008) found that even though the arts may be a core academic subject listed under NCLB, instructional time for the arts has been in decline.

To learn more about the impact of state and federal accountability systems on curriculum, instruction, and student achievement, the CEP (2009) conducted case studies of schools in Illinois, Rhode Island, and Washington State. From the winter of 2007 to the spring of 2009, the CEP studied a total of 18 schools in 16 school districts, in the three states. Schools included elementary, middle, and high schools, and both Title I and non-Title I schools. To conduct the case studies, they interviewed district superintendents, principals, teachers, instructional specialists, parents, and students in each state. They also conducted in-depth, formal observations in 105 classrooms to understand the amount of time teachers and students spent on various types of instructional practices and interactions. The educators reported that their efforts to align curriculum to standards and focus on tested material in reading and mathematics have diminished the class time available for social studies, science, and other subjects or activities. These findings reveal that high-stakes testing has an effect on the amount of time spent on untested subjects.

The CEP's (2009) observations of the use of classroom time supported that high-stakes testing is narrowing curriculum by forcing teachers to spend more time on reading and math instruction. In this study, all of the people interviewed reported that the curriculum has narrowed because of standards-and test-driven accountability. Rothstein

and Jacobsen (2007) found that Americans want children to learn social skills and work ethic, citizenship, and physical education. Americans also supported emotional health, arts, literature, and employment skills education (Rothstein & Jacobson, 2007). Rothstein and Jacobson found the respondents did not want educational institutions to narrow their scope of what they offer. Berliner (2009) found that the "narrower the curriculum provided to our students, the less well-prepared they are likely to be for intellectual competition in a rapidly changing, quite unpredictable international economy" (p. 289). The CEP noted that the emphasis on teaching tested content has diminished time available for other subjects or activities. Some teachers in the CEP's study discussed the limited time to teach the full range of knowledge necessary to provide students with a complete education. The extent to which content is covered is also an issue in the era of high-stakes testing. Jones (2007) also noted that "because some educators believe that the tests cover a wide range of topics in the curriculum areas tested, they might be less likely to devote the time needed for in-depth exploration of a topic" (p. 70). Jones found that this can be problematic because learning with understanding, as opposed to rote memorization, takes time. This issue may be worse in states that administer their tests in February and March because the teachers must fit the entire year's worth of curriculum into about two-thirds of the academic year. This information is important because it implies that high-stakes testing is resulting in a shallow curriculum. The CEP's study claims that teachers are not able to provide students with an in-depth analysis of topics emphasized by Rothstein and Jacobson (2007) due to time constraints.

Packer's (2007) research on the effects of testing on curriculum included a survey by the National Education Association (NEA). In June 2006, the NEA surveyed 1,000 of its members and found that their feelings about NCLB were the same as the public. The research showed that NEA members believe that NCLB does not provide enough funding, and it has not improved public education. The participants of the survey felt the NCLB policy is also narrowing the curriculum. Packer's survey provides a broad example of the negative effects of high-stakes test. The reader of this study cannot determine if the curriculum is narrowing do to the less variety of subjects taught or depth of content covered. Unfortunately, this example of survey research is too broad to provide an in-depth analysis of the teachers' perceptions of the specific negative effects of testing.

Social studies have also been affected by high-stakes testing policies. Winstead Fry (2009) presented a qualitative study involving the perceptions of student teachers' experiences teaching social studies in the NCLB era. Four elementary teachers interviewed regarding their experiences. Winstead Fry noted there was little time for social studies. Results concluded that the student teachers had to include science and math into other subjects in order to cover the topic in-depth. An interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning provided a meaningful experience for teachers in that study. This information is important because if teachers do not have enough time to incorporate social studies into their curriculum, administrators need to be made aware of this reality. This information is also important because new teachers are entering the

work field with the expectation that they will teach a variety of subjects. Sometimes they are unprepared to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach to instruction.

Not all research reports show that educational accountability has had a negative effect on curriculum. Anderson (2009) compared instructional time for various subjects before accountability and after accountability. The mean from three schedules posted on the Internet provided information for that study. The teachers were from all areas of the United States. In summarizing the results, the research demonstrated that the curriculum has not been narrowed because of accountability. Anderson showed that language arts and math have historically been a significant part of elementary curriculum. In addition, that science and social studies have traditionally had less time spent on them (Anderson, 2009).

Some reports show that accountability and NCLB have resulted in a broader curriculum. Au (2007) used the method of qualitative metasynthesis to study 49 qualitative studies. While results did show that the majority of high-stakes testing has narrowed curriculum to tested subjects, this was not true in all cases. In a minority of cases, some high-stakes tests have led to curricular expansion. The study revealed that the extent of curricular control is dependent on the structure of the tests themselves (Au, 2007). This information is important because it suggests that high-stakes tests have a positive impact on curriculum. Au's study contradicts data found in the CEP's (2006) study. Au's results are also contradictory to Weaver (2007) and Berliner's (2009) studies. This information relates to my study because interviews will allow teachers to share their perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum.

Additional research has supported that NCLB does not marginalize untested subjects. In an interview study by Kornhaber, Mishook, Edwards, and Nomi (2006), the authors interviewed 10 arts-focused public schools in Virginia. “The researchers began the investigation anticipating some reduction in the content of the arts curriculum” (Kornhaber et al., 2006, p. 54). The researchers transcribed and coded the interviews. The results surprised the researchers. The data indicated that arts education was not marginalized. Testing and accountability positively influenced the arts in that study. Principals in the study contributed the positive influence to an increased appreciate of art as an academic subject by parents (Kornhaber et al., 2006). Information in Kornhaber, et al.’s study is important because it shows a contrasting point of view to McGuire (2007) and Rome’s (2008) studies. The research in Kornhaber et al.’s (2006) study produced surprising results which defends supporters of NCLB’s claims that NCLB has positive effects on curriculum.

Research relating to NCLB’s effect on science and social studies has also shown support for high-stakes testing. Research by Winters, Trivitt, and Greene (2010) included a regression discontinuity design to evaluate the effect of high-stakes tests on science student achievement in Florida. The researchers stated, “high-stakes test did not hurt science proficiency; it led to improvements in science proficiency” (Winters, et al., 2010, p. 144). Winters et al.’s (2010) study contradicted Crocco and Costigan’s (2006) study because Winters et al.’s study demonstrated that test prep and assessment resulted in improved student achievement. Winters et al.’s (2010) study is important because it demonstrates that high-stakes testing can have positive effects on student achievement.

Fitchett and Heafner's (2010) study explored the trend of elementary social studies marginalization. Researchers conducted a comparative analysis to compare differences in instructional time between social studies and other subjects (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). Fitchett and Heafner incorporated 17 years of data from the National Center for Educational Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey. The results demonstrated that while social studies have declined over the last two decades, NCLB is not the sole reason (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). According to Fitchett and Heafner, social studies marginalization has been the trend for the last two decades. These data are important because they dispute the argument that NCLB is decreasing the time spent on subjects that are not tested on state tests, such as social studies. Anderson (2010) and Fitchett and Heafner's (2010) studies are similar in that both studies argue that while social studies has declined over the past few years, NCLB is not to blame for social studies marginalization. Fitchett and Heafner's study provides a contrasting point of view to the majority of the research discovered in the literature review.

High-Stakes Testing's Effect on Instruction

Another issue that has contributed to the NCLB debate is high-stakes testing's effect on instruction. Instruction has been defined as the act of teaching or giving instruction (Instruction, 2010). High-stakes testing produces teaching to the test. Neill (2006a) reported that teaching has become focusing on test prep and instruction has started to mirror the tests. Neill (2006b) reported this problem impacts students because if instruction only focuses on tests, students have few opportunities to display higher-order thinking skills. Students need higher-order thinking skills in order for them to achieve

success in school, college, and life (Neill, 2006b). This information is important because if teachers are only focusing too much on test taking, students will not have exposure to in-depth instruction and critical analysis of content.

Some researchers have argued that teaching to the test has not increased student achievement. Boyle and Bragg (2009) found that drilling students to pass a test is not working for those in disadvantaged circumstances. Boyle and Bragg conducted a survey representing 375 Michigan secondary schools. Boyle and Bragg analyzed the data using multiple regression modeling statistics. They investigated the percentage of teaching time allocated to reading and math and its relationship to testing outcomes. The analysis of Boyle and Bragg's data showed that a high percentage of teaching time on tested subjects and practice tests does not directly impact test outcomes. Boyle and Bragg suggested that time should be spent focusing on richer aspects of the curriculum. Boyle and Bragg also argued that using practice books is a waste of resources. They defended that money should be used on something different that will help test results. This information is important because it is evidence that increased teaching time spent on test taking strategies does not result in increased student achievement.

Research has shown that state assessments take over classrooms. Lamb's (2007) research included a descriptive study of how the testing culture affected students and instruction during one school year in two small, rural Mississippi secondary mathematics classrooms. As a participant observer, Lamb collected data through interviews, observations, and written documents. Lamb found that more than half of the instructional time was spent on using test prep materials and strategies to teach student how to take

tests. Lamb concluded that if NCLB continues to mandate state assessments, then schools will continue to encourage students to memorize test items. This information is important because it provides evidence that more than half of secondary mathematics instruction is replaced with test prep and practice books.

An additional concern about high-stakes testing's influence on instruction is the effect on students and teachers' creativity. Longo (2010) found that high-stakes testing is a controversial issue which has a negative effect on creativity. Siegel (2009) stated,

> Before we are students, citizens, employees, or Americans, we are humans, deeply moved by our power to imagine. We are creative. We are playful. We like to laugh. We like the moment of inspiration. We live in families and cultures. Without them and the creative urge, no one would paint, play music, help others, or, indeed, do just about anything worth doing, including plowing a field or curing a disease. Public education can help students discover the spark of creativity, connect to folk traditions that distinguish humanity, and tap the creative wells of our traditions. (p. 742)

Longo (2010) and Siegel (2009) both support that public education needs to foster students' creativity. Smyth (2008) defended that teaching to the test reduces teacher creativity. This means that teachers did not use innovative teaching strategies. When teachers do not use innovative teaching strategies, it results in a lack of student and teacher motivation. Smyth also noted that instruction changed from exploratory learning to teaching to the test through drill and kill. Drill and kill is when teachers constantly use prep books, practice tests, and worksheets to drill students on state-tested material.

Smyth (2008) also argued that teaching to the test is inappropriate conduct for teachers. When students drill on test content, it has a dramatic effect on the validity of the exam. Smyth defended that teachers' jobs are at stake. Teachers help students achieve high scores by prepping them with test content. Smyth found that this method is not helping student achievement or teachers. It leads to invalid scores and misleading data (Smyth, 2008). Smyth, Boyle and Bragg (2009) and Terry (2010) all demonstrated that increasing time spent on test prep and assessment does not result in student achievement.

Education is moving away from best instructional practices and is moving towards scripted curricula and teacher centered classrooms. Starnes, Saderholm, & Webb, (2010) found that public schools are increasing the use of programs and scripted curricula. This makes it difficult to prepare student teachers for a future career in teaching. Starnes et al. found that if student teachers are not allowed to use best practices in the classroom, it is difficult to teach them what exemplary teaching looks like. Student teaching experiences have changed. Cooperating teachers do not give student teachers freedom to create, assess, and plan because they are too busy implementing prescribed reading and math programs (Starnes, et al., 2010).

Starnes, Saderholm, and Webb, (2010) argued that new teachers constantly struggle between what they have learned in college and what they should do in their classrooms. The authors defended that this issue becomes challenging when the topic of teaching diversity comes into the picture. Margolis (2006) studied the experience of a student teacher and cooperating teacher. Margolis researcher collected field notes, interviews, and website discussion boards. The main research question was: “Do

globalistic education policies hinder or further new teachers" learning to attend to diversity issues in the field?" (Margolis, 2006, p. 31). Margolis found that new teachers are receiving little support in incorporating diversity into their teaching pedagogy. Even though new teachers learn to implement diversity into their instruction, time constraints and related issues prevent them from doing what they have learned (Margolis, 2006). Starnes et al. and Margolis demonstrated the importance of providing new teachers with realistic experiences in the classroom. Starnes et al. also raised awareness of the effects of scripted curricula on teacher's creativity.

Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2006) found a strong link exists between writing assessment and instruction. The researchers reported that high-stakes testing significantly influences the teaching of reading and writing. Their research included a survey of the 50 states' writing tests. The research revealed that most states require students to write in one response to a prompt: narrative, informative, expository, or persuasive. Traditional test preparation for writing typically includes a five-paragraph essay. When students write in response to a prompt, and when they practice this method, writing becomes a product-oriented instruction. Higgins et al. concluded that student writing will improve with instruction on the features of writing. They identified the features as most important such as; ideas, organization, voice, word choice, conventions, and sentence fluency. This study demonstrates that students must be shown the difference between good and poor writing examples. This information is important because Higgins et al. found that these approaches will help students to acquire skills needed to perform well on high-stakes tests, and they also help them to become more successful writers.

Assaf (2008) examined the professional identity of a reading specialist through the use of a case study. The research examined how a reading teacher's decisions and pedagogy shifted in response to testing pressures. The reading specialist had professional beliefs and knowledge, but high-stakes testing affected decision-making and instructional methods in the classroom. Assaf illuminated the problems teachers face when they must decide how they will cover tested content while remaining true to themselves. Analysis of ethnographic and grounded theory methodologies in this study showed that testing pressures affect instructional styles and teachers' professional identities. This information is important because it demonstrates the difficulty teachers have when they are faced with curricular and instructional decision making in their classrooms.

NCLB can affect teacher attitudes and beliefs about their instruction. Behrent (2009) expressed that the NCLB era has forced teachers to focus on preparing students to beat the test. Behrent added that teachers feel a loss of freedom and enthusiasm as they focus instruction on test taking rather than learning. In a case study by Moloney, (2006) teachers participated in an online chat. Moloney explored teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers in the era of accountability. The transcript of a teacher discussion about NCLB was the focus of this study (Moloney, 2006). Moloney found the teachers in the chat felt a shift of autonomy due to NCLB. Teachers felt frustrated, ineffectual, and silenced as a result of overwhelming pressures relating to NCLB (Behrent, 2009; Moloney, 2006). Moloney also found teachers were less able to differentiate lessons to meet the needs of learners. Moloney's study is an example that when teachers have less authority over curriculum they become frustrated, defeated, and silenced. Moloney stated

that “if Americans are really interested in improving our public education system, we must demand that teachers’ voices and experiences become the focus of our conversation” (p. 24). Moloney’s quotation demonstrates the need for to teachers to have a voice in public education.

Additional research has analyzed teachers’ perceptions in regards to test preparation and instructional practices. Lai and Waltman (2008) administered questionnaires to examine teacher perceptions and use of test prep practices. Questionnaire respondents rated test prep practices based on frequency and ethicality. The researchers assessed the extent to which perceptions and practices differed across schools and grade level. Telephone interviews also focused on teachers’ reasoning on test preparation practices. Lai and Waltman transcribed and coded the interviews. A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the questionnaires. Results indicated that the use of test practice procedures and perceptions of ethicality did not vary across levels of student achievement. Lai and Waltman found that the use of test practice procedures and perceptions of ethicality did vary across grade levels. Data analysis suggested that elementary teachers use test prep practices more often than secondary teachers. Teacher perceptions of ethicality with regard to test prep practices differed from secondary teachers (Lai & Waltman, 2008). This study demonstrates the need for additional research of teacher perceptions of testing. Additional research could provide important data regarding why there is a difference across grade levels but not across student achievement levels.

It is important to understand the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding demands placed on educators in a high-stakes teaching environment. Faulkner and Cook (2006) conducted a study of 216 Kentucky educators. The study explored middle grades perceptions of how high-stakes testing has affected instructional strategies in classrooms. Researchers used a 66 Likert-format item and three open-ended responses survey. Faulkner and Cook (2006) coded the responses and categorized the data into themes. Teachers acknowledged that they used a variety of instructional practices. Faulkner and Cook found that 100% of teachers agreed they used these practices on a regular basis. When teachers were asked to "identify the instructional practices used in the last 30 days, teachers reported use of whole-class discussion (93%), lecture (90%), and worksheets (86%) as the most commonly used practices" (Faulkner & Cook, 2006, p. 7). Approximately 74% of the teachers reported that they used effective teaching practices, but they reported the use of lecture and worksheets which are ineffective strategies. This study is important because the mismatch between teacher responses demonstrates the need for additional research (Faulkner & Cook, 2006).

Advocates for NCLB claim that teaching to the test and preparing students with test taking strategies is just like any other profession. Supporters for NCLB argue that teachers prepare students just like chefs teach new cooks and nurses teach nursing students. In other words, teachers are doing what they have to in order for students to know and be able to do what the state expects. Bond (2008) found that teaching to the test is a form of coaching, not corruption. Bond argued that coaches drill young athletes on skills. Typing instructors teach students to use the fingers they will use when typing.

Bond stated that “these practices are not seen as unethical or unsavory for the simple reason that in the two domains instruction and assessment merge into a single activity” (p. 217). This information is important because it provides a contrasting point of view to the majority of the research in the literature review.

Research has shown that teachers’ instruction should be guided based on content and not student learning styles. Glenn (2010) found that “tailoring lessons to the type of material being learned helps all children learn better” (p. A1). Glenn defended that the style of teaching and instruction when teaching to the test will depend on the content. Learning styles should not dictate teachers’ instructional decisions (Glenn, 2010). Instruction may require a lecture, hands on activity, or lab. The activity should depend on the content. Glenn found that the variety of state assessed content enables teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies. High-stakes tests help teachers to incorporate a variety of strategies in their programs. This information is important because it represents a contrasting point of view of the effects of high-stakes testing on instruction.

Teacher perceptions about teaching in a high-stakes era can be positive. Upadhyay’s (2009) case study investigated the impact of high-stakes testing on science teaching. The paper presented experiences of one elementary teacher as she taught science in a high-stakes testing environment. The findings indicated that even though the teacher experienced many dilemmas, the issues were negotiated successfully. Upadhyay found that instructional practices do not have to change. Teachers can still demonstrate effective teaching practices in an era of high-stakes testing. This information is important

because it demonstrates that high-stakes testing does not have to have an effect on instructional strategies.

Whether or not high-stakes testing has an effect on instruction is still in question today. Educators against NCLB claim that one of the side effects of high-stakes testing is that test prep consumes their instructional time (Rome, 2008; Weaver, 2007). Even if teachers do not admit that testing is affecting their teaching style, research has shown that teacher-centered approaches to instruction are taking over (CEP, 2006; Crocco & Costigan, 2006). On the other hand, proponents for NCLB argue that testing does not have to change your instruction (Fedore, 2006 Upadhyay, 2009). Supporters of NCLB defend that good teachers should know how to deliver the content without losing the effective methods they have learned (Fedore, 2006; Upadhyah, 2009). More research regarding teachers' perceptions about the effects of high-stakes testing on elementary teachers' instructional styles is necessary.

Summary

NCLB is impacting education in the United States. Advocates of the policy claim that high-stakes testing, mandated by NCLB, has helped education. Supporters defend that aligning the standards to the curriculum is beneficial and testing does not have to affect best practices in the classroom. Those against NCLB argue that high-stakes testing narrows curriculum by eliminating untested subjects (CEP, 2006; CEP, 2009; Rome, 2008). Educators also report that testing pressures cause them to use drill and skill activities instead of what they know are best practice (Crocco & Costigan, 2006). A lot of the literature in this study reported the effect testing has curriculum and instruction. I

found limited literature about teachers' perspective regarding NCLB. Most research in this study that included teacher perspectives was of high school or middle school grade teachers.

As I reviewed the literature, I found that elementary teacher's perspectives were not commonly included in the research. Yet the reality is that "many principals and teachers have concluded that high-stakes testing, particularly that mandated by the NCLB Act, is doing grave damage to education and the lives of children" (Neill, 2006a, p. 28). It is important to understand what elementary teachers perceive the effects of testing on their curriculum and instruction. I searched Walden University's ERIC and Education Research Complete Database along with the PDE website. I did not find research involving Pennsylvania's elementary teachers' perspectives of the effects of high-stakes tests on curriculum or instruction. Research including Pennsylvania's elementary teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing's effect on curriculum and instruction would benefit school leaders and administration.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze teacher perceptions of high-stakes testing and the effects that this testing had on curriculum and instruction. This study contributes to social change by informing educational leaders, personnel related to curriculum programs, and policy makers of the perceived effects high-stakes testing has on curriculum and instruction within one public school in northeastern Pennsylvania. It is important for the school board and supervisory personnel to understand the teachers' experiences and the perceived effects of high-stakes testing because teachers are expected to prepare their students for state tests while providing meaningful learning experiences. Teachers need to use student-centered approaches to instruction while incorporating the arts, science, and social studies. Administrators need to be made aware if teachers believe that high-stakes testing is causing them to use more teacher-centered approaches. School leaders also need to be informed if teachers perceive that high-stakes testing is causing them to neglect untested subjects such as science, social studies, and the arts. Providing necessary professional development for teachers regarding effective teaching practices and allowing teachers to have a voice by sharing their experiences of high-stakes testing will contribute to positive curricular and instructional change within the district.

The purpose of qualitative research was to understand and interpret data gathered in the natural setting. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD regarding the impact testing had on curriculum and instruction in their classrooms. A qualitative research design derived from

this problem. Hatch (2002) stated that qualitative researchers explore the experiences of people in their natural setting. Hatch also found that qualitative researchers study the perspectives of real people and how people make sense of their own reality. In this study, the problem was that due to the demands for achieving quantifiable results in context of high-stakes testing, teachers do not have autonomy in their classrooms. An interview topic guide (see Appendix A) was given in advance to participants in this study. An interview topic guide allowed the participants to organize their thoughts and perceptions of the topics in the interview. Interview questions (see Appendix B) were conducted to address this problem by representing the perspectives of several elementary teachers regarding their perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing. The interview responses were analyzed to determine what the teachers from RES perceived to be the effects of high-stakes testing on their curriculum and instruction.

Section 3 contains a description of the qualitative tradition used in this study. The choice of research design is justified, with explanations why other research designs were not chosen. The design of the study and the research questions are presented. The context for the study is described and justified. Measures for ethical protection of participants are clearly explained in conjunction with descriptions of procedures for gaining access to participants. The role of the researcher is described in detail. A justification for the number of participants and criteria for selecting participants is specified in this section. This section articulates data collection and analysis procedures and ends with a description of methods to address validity or trustworthiness.

Research Design

The research paradigm for this study was qualitative. The philosophical assumptions, strategies for inquiry, and data collection methods of qualitative research were a better fit than quantitative research for this study. This will be explained in this section of this paper. The qualitative design for this study was case study research. Case study design was the most effective design for this study based on focus, the problem, and data collection and analysis.

The philosophical assumption of quantitative or qualitative studies describes how and what researchers will learn during a project. Creswell (2003) found that an absolute truth can never be found in quantitative research. Creswell noted that because an absolute truth can never be found, evidence established in research is always imperfect. Researchers make claims and most quantitative research starts with a test of a theory. Laws or theories need to be tested using the scientific method. My study did not start with the test of a theory. Philosophical assumptions of qualitative research include the experiences of the participants in the study. Creswell stated that individuals seek to make sense of their world. The job of the researcher is to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into variables or theories like in quantitative research. Qualitative researchers generate a theory inductively, such as the approach used in quantitative research. This study mirrored the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research. This research includes the experiences of elementary teachers from the RES in the ZASD. I worked with these individuals to understand their perceptions of high-stakes testing and its effect on curriculum and instruction.

The strategies of inquiry used in quantitative and qualitative approaches differ. Quantitative strategies of inquiry often include experimental designs and nonexperimental designs such as surveys. Creswell (2003) found that the experiments are complex with many variables and treatments. Surveys are cross-sectional and longitudinal. Merriem (2002) believed that quantitative research offers a logical and empirical approach to research. The qualitative strategies for inquiry include narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory, and case studies. Each strategy in qualitative research includes the researcher seeking to understand the setting of the participants through visiting and gathering information personally (Creswell, 2003). The strategies of inquiry for this study were qualitative because they did not include experiments, surveys, or empirical data; instead the researcher was seeking to understand the experiences of elementary teachers within their classrooms.

The research methods of data collection and analysis are different in quantitative and qualitative approaches. In quantitative research, researchers use instrument based questions. Creswell (2003) noted that the researcher collects data on predetermined instruments to yield statistical data. Statistical procedures test or verify theories by identifying variables and relating variables in questions or hypotheses. Quantitative analysis requires the researcher to observe and measure information numerically. Creswell found that qualitative researchers first collect open-ended data and then they search for themes or patterns in that data. Qualitative researchers analyze text and image data of interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials. The research method for this study was qualitative because I am the primary instrument for data

collection and analysis. I collected open-ended data from teacher interviews regarding perceptions of high-stakes testing with the intent of developing themes of the data.

The case study design was chosen for this study because as Kiriakidis (2008) found, case study design involves aspects of the individual experience. My study included the individual experiences of selected elementary teachers and their perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing. Each of the nine elementary teachers was classified as a case. A case study design was chosen for my study because I wanted to understand the perceptions of the teachers to learn the complexity of the case or cases of the participants (Stake, 1995). The data collection form in case study research uses open-ended interview questions. Creswell (2007) found that case study research explores an issue within a bound system. In this study, I asked open-ended interview questions to teachers from RES in the ZASD to explore the issue of high-stakes testing. Creswell also found the focus of case study research is to develop an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases. Within the RES of the ZASD, nine teachers participated in in-depth interviews regarding their perceptions of high-stakes testing. Merriam (2002) and Hatch (2002) defined *case study research* as an analysis of a phenomenon or social group. Creswell (2007) described *case study data analysis* as a description of the case and themes of the case. In this study, several teacher interviews were analyzed to explore the perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction within elementary classrooms of RES in the ZASD.

Ethnography and grounded theory qualitative designs were rejected for this study. Creswell (2003) found that ethnographies study cultural groups over a prolonged period

of time using mostly observational data. Hatch (2002) found ethnographic research involves participant observation and artifact collection. A case study design was a better fit for this study because the intent of this study was not to have the researcher immersed in the daily lives of a cultural group in an attempt to study that cultural group over a prolonged period of time. Merriam (2002) found that in grounded theory research develops a theory grounded in the data field. Data collection in grounded theory studies involves interviews with 20 to 60 individuals (Creswell, 2007). The goal of this study was to describe teacher perceptions, not to develop a theory, therefore, grounded theory was not chosen and case study research was the appropriate choice.

Research Questions

1. What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum?
2. What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on instruction?

Context for the Study

The "case" for this study was 9 elementary teachers from RES within the ZASD in the northeastern part of Pennsylvania. The most recent data shows that the ZASD has a total of 6,708 students (School Data, 2011). The students and grades with each school are: One high school serves students in ninth through twelfth grades; two high schools serve grades 7-12; one middle school includes grades 7 and 8; and five K-6 elementary schools are within the district. The elementary school selected for this study is a Title I school. In order to qualify as a Title I school, 40% of the students must be enrolled in the

free and reduced lunch program (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011c). Of the students in RES, 79% are eligible for free or reduced school lunch compared with the state average of 33% (School Data, 2011).

School Data (2011) reported a rating scale that is used to compare schools within the district in which 1 represented the lowest or worst possible score, and 10 represented the best possible score. RES received the lowest rating on the School Data report of 2 out of 10 compared to other elementary scores of 4, 3, 3, and 7. Scores were based on school performance and state assessment scores. RES is also the least populated building in the district. The population of RES is 450 students (School Data, 2011). RES has the lowest population of the ZASD elementary schools with a population of 450 students compared with student populations of 489, 906, 694, and 860 students in each of the other schools. RES is in School Improvement II status which means that this school did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress for 3 consecutive years. PDE (2011a) also noted that students in RES qualify for school choice, which means parents may send them to a different school within the ZASD. This has a direct effect on the school population. Some students have left RES to go to a higher performing school in the district. School Data reported the ethnicity of RES is 45% European American compared to the state average of 73%. RES has a 33% black, not Hispanic population compared with 16% in the state. The district also has a 21% Hispanic population compared to 7% in the state. Of the students in RES, <1% has an Asian/Pacific Islander ethnicity compared to 3% in the state, and <1% are American Indian/Alaskan Native which is equal to the state average.

Participant Selection & Protection of Participants

First, I gained institutional review board (IRB) approval through Walden University in order to protect the rights of the human participants in this study. Walden University's approval number for this study was 06-02-11-0079608**.** Then I emailed a consent form (Appendix C) to the superintendent of the ZASD to obtain permission to interview the teachers. After I received the approval form from the ZASD, (Appendix D), 12 teachers were invited to participate in the study through the ZASD's email (Appendix E).

Creswell (2007) found that researchers must decide which bounded system to study. The teachers in RES were selected based on the recent school performance and population of RES. The teachers were purposefully selected for this study because they taught grades 3-6 which were assessed on the PSSA. Creswell also found that "the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less depth in any single case" (p. 76). Hatch (2002) found that homogeneous groups who share common characteristics are useful when studying small subgroups in depth. Hatch noted that when samples of participants are homogeneous it controls extraneous variables. The participants were selected from one elementary school in the ZASD. At RES, three third grade teachers, three fourth grade teacher, three fifth grade teachers, and three sixth grade teachers were asked to participate in the study. I chose 12 participants for this study. The smaller number of participants allowed me to have a more in-depth interview with each of the participants. There were 12 teachers selected to participate in this study, so the maximum amount of participants was 12. I interview all teachers that

were willing to participate in this study. The rationale for selecting teachers of grade 3-6 was that grades 3-6 have state assessments that determine AYP. All of the teachers selected to participate have used the research based SFA reading program to teach reading for 1.5 hours each day.

Teachers that decided to be in the study, returned the participant demographic profile (Appendix F) to me. I then had the selected participants electronically sign the necessary consent (Appendix G) form required by Walden University. This consent form had assurances of ethical protection. It informed the participants of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form notified participants that interviews would tape recorded and would last between 50 to 60 minutes. The consent form also notified participants of the voluntary nature of this study. Participants were also informed that they would be compensated with a catered dinner and they would not be penalized if they decided to not participate in the study. I informed the participants that they had the right to review any materials related to the study. I advised them that their confidentiality and privacy would be maintained and protected throughout the study and no names of teachers or school district information would be released.

After the participant consent form (Appendix E) was signed and returned, I emailed the participants to set up interview time that were most convenient to them. I gained access to the participants before and after school based on the participants' preferences. Interviews took place based on the participants' schedule, flexibility, and convenience.

Participant information was kept confidential and the researcher maintained their privacy. I used the pseudonym RES and ZASD throughout this study. Teachers were labeled teacher 1, teacher 2, and so on. Audiotapes of the interviews were saved and locked in a lock box in the researcher's home. Transcriptions of interviews were saved for 5 years on a Microsoft Word document on a password protected computer in my home.

Role of the Researcher

Creswell (2007) found that studying in one's own workplace can raise questions about balance of power. Hatch (2002) found the role of researcher and educator can be conflicting when both are within the same context. I am not an employee of the school district in the study. I am employed in a neighboring public school district. I do not have any past or current professional role in the RES or the ZASD. The relationship between the researcher and participants is purely collegial. The collegial relationship with the participants did not affect data collection.

Creswell (2003) found that, in qualitative research, the researcher explores the case in-depth. I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. I collected open-ended data from teacher interviews regarding perceptions of high-stakes testing with the intent of developing themes of the data. Emails established a researcher-participant working relationship.

Qualitative researchers need to identify their biases within their study. Creswell (2003) found that researchers have the responsibility to express their personal beliefs, values, and interests. Merriam (2002) stated, "rather than trying to eliminate these biases

or '*subjectivities*', it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of the data" (p. 5). I am a fifth-grade teacher in a neighboring school district. I have perceptions of the effects of testing within my classroom. The topic of study was interesting to me. I have worked in other school districts where high-stakes testing has had a negative effect on curriculum and instruction. I believe that elementary teachers are not enabled to be active participants in curricular and instructional decisions that are affected by high-stakes testing. I care about the students in the RES and want teachers to have an opportunity to share their experiences.

Data Collection

Hatch (2002) stated that qualitative researchers are the primary data collection tool for collecting data. I collected the data in this study using open-ended interview questions (Appendix B). Hatch found that interviews uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experience. I asked participants to make sense of and describe their perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on their curriculum. Hatch also noted that "interviews can be the primary or only data source in some qualitative approaches" (p. 91). Formal in-depth interviews were conducted with the elementary teachers in this study. The researcher lead the interview and the discussion were tape recorded. The guiding questions were open ended and elicited an in-depth description of the experiences of the participants in the study.

Hatch (2002) found that the power of qualitative interviews is that it allows participants to share their unique perspectives in their own words. The purpose of this

study was to describe the perceptions of elementary teachers. Interviews allowed the teachers to share their perceptions and experiences regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction.

Interview questions were designed to get the participants to talk about their experiences and understandings. I asked each participant 15 in-depth interview questions that were aligned with the research questions in the study. Interviews were held before and after school hours based on the preference and availability of participants. I tape recorded and then transcribed each interview.

Data Analysis

Data from interview transcripts were analyzed to determine factors, events, conditions, personal perspectives, and concerns of the elementary teachers from RES. Data analysis began as soon as I finished each interview. Hatch (2002) found that qualitative data analysis requires synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison and pattern finding. Hatch noted that a well designed and implemented interview study provides a substantial amount of evidence related to participants' perspectives on the topic of interest. After each interview, I transcribed the interview and then I reread the transcription of each interview several times. While reading each transcript, I wrote notes, listed ideas, and watched for special vocabulary that participants used. I looked for information that answered the research questions. I compared the responses for common experiences and combined responses in order to make sense of the information to recognize patterns. Creswell (2003) suggested that data analysis should begin with a coding process. As I read the interview responses, I

identified codes based on the patterns and themes in the data through the systematic analysis and constant comparison of data sets. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that highlighting each section based on codes is the beginning steps in data analysis. As I color coded each interview into sections and identified codes, I conceptualized and labeled data by categorizing individual phenomena that exists in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Color coding and highlighting text provided a visualization of the data so that I could reexamine it at a later date (Hatch, 2002). The coded interview responses were kept on an electronic journal. I made a copy of the coded data and then I cut out the color coded sections. I sorted and labeled the coded data into themes according to topics. I reexamined each theme to ensure that everything in the theme related to the label. I made changes as needed which included combining or deleting themes. After the interview transcripts were coded and themes were recognized under each research question, I shared the findings with the participants. The practice of sharing the findings with the participants ensured that the interpretation accurately reflected the participant's perspectives.

Validity

Internal validity helps the researcher to constitute reality of the research. Merriam (2002) identified member checking as a common strategy for ensuring validity. Merriam suggested that member checking involves having the participants look over the tentative findings to see if the researcher's interpretations match the participants' interpretations. The participants in this study had the opportunity to comment on the researcher's

interpretation of the data. The participants were able to read the researchers transcriptions to check for accuracy and correct interpretations of the interviews. Merriam found that taking tentative findings back to the participants allows the participants to ensure you have interpreted their experiences and perceptions correctly.

Merriam (2002) suggested that different assumptions and generalizability need to be thought of in qualitative and quantitative research. This study cannot be used to generalize about all elementary teachers within the ZASD or with the state of Pennsylvania. Readers need to determine how closely their situations match and whether findings can be transferred.

Merriam (2002) found that trustworthy studies are valid, reliable, and done ethically. The interviews in this study were conducted in an ethical manner. The researcher used member checking to ensure validity. This research cannot be used to generalize about all teachers in the school or district in the study. These efforts maintained the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

This section contained a description of the qualitative tradition used in this study. The choice of research design was justified, with explanations why other research designs were not chosen. The design of the study and the research questions were presented. The context for the study was described and justified. Measures for ethical protection of participants were clearly explained along with descriptions of procedures for gaining access to participants. The role of the researcher was described in detail. A justification for the number of participants and criteria for selecting participants was specified in this

section. This section articulated data collection and analysis procedures Section 3 ended with a description of methods to address validity or trustworthiness.

Section 4 will include the process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded. The systems used for keeping track of data will be described. The findings will be built logically from the problem and the research design. Findings will be presented in a manner that addresses the research questions. Patterns, themes, and relationships will be described. Section 4 will end with a discussion of evidence of quality.

Section 5 will include an overview of why and how the study was done. A detailed interpretation of the findings will be included. The implication for social change and recommendations for action will be in this section. A reflection on the researcher's experience and a concluding statement will conclude Section 5.

Section 4: Results and Findings

Introduction

This section includes the process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded. The systems used for keeping track of data are described. The findings were built logically from the problem and the research design. Findings were presented in a manner that addressed the research questions. Patterns, themes, and relationships were described. Section 4 ends with a discussion of evidence of quality. This case study was structured around the following research questions:

1. What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum?
2. What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on instruction?

This section contains the results of data analysis. Data includes demographic information and narratives from personal interviews. The research questions were answered by breaking the data into themes by supporting data for each question.

Problem and Purpose

In elementary education, in Pennsylvania public schools, high-stakes testing (HST) and NCLB accountability have harmful consequences for curriculum, instruction, classroom testing, and student learning. Vogler and Virtue (2007) found that teachers under the pressure of high-stakes tend to use teacher-centered instructional practices, such as lecture, instead of hands-on activities such as role-play, cooperative learning, and projects. Currently, most districts have realigned their curriculum to match the assessed

state standards. This results-oriented atmosphere affects some teachers by placing increased pressure on them to produce student scores. This has a negative impact on instruction as teachers use more teacher-centered instructional strategies and test prep lessons instead of exploratory inquiry-based teaching. The problem is that, in an era of high-stakes testing, teachers do not have a voice in their classrooms. This case study recorded the experiences and perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the effects high-stakes testing has on curriculum and instruction in their classrooms. The purpose of this study was to analyze teacher perceptions of high-stakes testing and the effects that this testing had on curriculum and instruction. It is important for the school board and supervisory personnel to understand the teachers' experiences and the perceived effects of high-stakes testing because teachers are expected to prepare their students for state tests while providing meaningful learning experiences.

Demographics

Nine elementary teachers from Richard Elementary School (RES) in the Zoo Area School District (ZASD) were interviewed in this study. The demographic information for each participant was collected by the information the participants provided on the demographic profile sheet (Appendix F). Participants provided information on their years of experience, highest degree earned, and subjects and grade levels taught. There were similarities and differences in the demographic information of the participants that offered a variety of insights. The details for each participant are described in more detail in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Teacher number	Years of service	Highest degree earned	Subjects and grades taught
1	12	Master's	SFA reading* and math grade 4*
2	3	Bachelor's	Math grades 4-6*
3	3	Master's equivalency	SFA reading* and humanities grade 6
4	5	Master's	SFA reading* and science grade 5
5	17	Master's	SFA reading* and math grade 6*
6	8	Master's	SFA reading* and science grades 4*-6
7	5	Master's	SFA reading* and math grade 3*
8	8	Master's	SFA reading* and science grade 6
9	6	Master's	SFA reading* and humanities grade 4
Note. * Represents subjects that were assessed on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment			

Data Collection

The first step of this research was to contact the school district administrator who was responsible for granting permission to conduct this study (Appendix C). After receiving approval to continue this study, I emailed three third grade teachers, three fourth grade teachers, three fifth grade teachers, and three sixth grade teachers an invitation to participate in the study (Appendix E). Teachers that agreed to be in the study, returned the participant demographic profile to me (Appendix F). The participants

also electronically signed and returned the necessary consent form required by Walden University (Appendix E).

Emails were sent to the participants to set up interview times that were most convenient to them. I planned access to the participants before and after school based on the participants' preferences. An interview topic guide was given in advance to participants in this study (Appendix A). This allowed the participants to organize their thoughts and perceptions of the topics in the interview.

Interviews took place in the teachers' classrooms based on the participants' schedules, flexibility, and convenience. Perceptions were gathered from 9 teachers from RES in the ZASD regarding the impact testing has on curriculum and instruction in their classrooms. Fifteen qualitative interview questions were used to collect the narrative data (Appendix B). Interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes. Interviews were held in the month of June, 2011.

Interviews were recorded on an audio recorder. I transcribed the interview responses onto a Microsoft Word document and saved each copy on a password protected computer in my home. Each participant was provided an opportunity to review the interview in order to provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcription. All 9 participants in the study returned their interview responses and agreed the transcriptions were accurate.

Participant information was kept confidential on a Microsoft Word document on a password protected computer in my home. I maintained the participant's privacy by assigning labels to each teacher. The pseudonym RES and ZASD were also used

throughout this study. Audiotapes and transcriptions will be saved and locked in a lock box in my home for 5 years and then they will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Data from interview transcripts were analyzed to determine factors, events, conditions, personal perspectives, and concerns of the elementary teachers from RES. Data analysis began as soon as I finished each interview. Hatch (2002) found that qualitative data analysis requires synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison and pattern finding. Hatch noted that a well designed and implemented interview study provides a substantial amount of evidence related to participants' perspectives on the topic of interest. After each interview, I transcribed the interview and then I reread the transcription of each interview several times. While reading each transcript, I wrote notes, listed ideas, and watched for special vocabulary that participants used. I looked for information that answered the research questions. I compared the responses for common experiences and combined responses in order to make sense of the information to recognize patterns. Creswell (2003) suggested that data analysis should begin with a coding process. As I read the interview responses, I identified codes based on the patterns in the data through the systematic analysis and constant comparison of data sets. Then I conceptualized and labeled the data by the phenomena and then gave each phenomenon a color code. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that highlighting each section based on codes is the beginning steps in data analysis. As I color coded each interview into sections and identified codes, seven themes emerged in the data.

Color coding and highlighting text provided visualization of the data so that I could reexamine it at a later date (Hatch, 2002). The coded interview responses were kept on a Microsoft Word document. I made a copy of the coded data and then I cut out the color coded sections. I sorted and labeled the coded data into themes according to topics. I reexamined each theme to ensure that everything in the theme related to the label. I made changes as needed which included combining or deleting themes. After the interview transcripts were coded and themes were recognized under each research question, I shared the findings with the participants. The practice of sharing the findings with the participants ensured that the interpretation accurately reflected the participant's perspectives.

Emerged Themes

The following section presents analysis of the information gathered from interviews with the 9 participants. Two research questions were used to identify factors, events, conditions, personal perspectives and concerns about the impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction. Seven total themes emerged from the data analysis. In this section, I will discuss each theme and provide supporting evidence for each theme that I found.

Seven qualitative interview questions regarding curriculum were used to explore teachers' perceptions about the impact HST has on the daily curriculum used within their classroom (Appendix B). The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four key themes related to Research Question 1: What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum?

Teachers felt that the ZASD's curriculum is too rigid. The first theme noted was that the teachers felt that the ZASD's curriculum was too rigid. This section provides detailed examples of teachers' perceptions about the ZASD's curriculum and is supported with evidence of how the rigid curriculum affects the teachers' flexibility, creativity, and the math curriculum. Teachers described that high-stakes testing has impacted the daily curriculum used within their classrooms by resulting in a daily curriculum that is aligned to the PSSA. Teachers noted that due to the excessive amount of content assessed on the PSSA, teachers were required to cover too many topics in a short amount of time.

Teachers shared concerns of the curriculum being too strict. Teacher 2 explained that the daily curriculum is handed to the RES teachers. She explained, "There is no wiggle room. It gives us a lesson a day, and we are expected to follow that curriculum to a T." Teacher 4 also expressed that the rigid curriculum has taken away some of independence to incorporate tiered activities to focus on multiple intelligences. The entire curriculum taught by the teachers at RES followed a daily sequence. They expressed that a rigid curriculum does not allow them any flexibility with their curriculum. Teacher 4 stated, "There's not as much flexibility in the curriculum for reinforcement and differentiated instruction because it's so rigid." Teacher 6 noted that the curriculum for subjects assessed on the state test was even stricter than untested subjects. Teacher 4 explained that "because the curriculum is so rigid, we have to be more teacher centered in our approach in order to get through all of the content." She explained that because there is so much material to cover and the program is scripted, there is less flexibility in the classes. Teacher 3 displayed frustration as he stated, "I mostly skim the surface on

teaching the topic and move on daily to the next activity because my curriculum standards are one day at a time and we previously built on that information from day to day." Teacher 7 also showed disappointment as she explained how the district's curriculum was "pretty much scripted, and our district is pretty keen on us following by the book."

The teachers explained that a rigid curriculum limits their opportunities to be creative. Teacher 5 expressed that due to being told what she has to teach on a daily basis, "there's not enough time to put anything fun or creative in it because you have to get through what they give you because you barely make it through as it is." Teacher 6 also explained that "because there is so much that we are told to teach, you don't have time to use your own creativity." Teacher 9 mentioned that in humanities, which was not a tested subject, she could "use more creative strategies". Also, that she "does not use a lot of them because the curriculum is laid out for them and they are only supposed to spend so many days on a topic, so that does affect our creativity."

Teacher 6 noted that teachers do not have the ability to be creative with the students anymore. She stated, "We're basically almost puppets teaching exactly what we are told to." Teacher 5 also expressed concerns that teaching to a scripted and rigid curriculum prevents not only creativity, but spontaneity, as well. Teacher 3 felt that the rigid curriculum affects both teachers and students. He expressed concern for the students that "don't have an opportunity to use their creative section of their brain because they are just doing the same daily routine over and over."

Teachers also believed that the rigid curriculum negatively impacted the quality of the math curriculum. Teacher 5 described how she was told what to teach every single day. She explained that the math program "tells you what to teach this day and the next day you move on to something else and then the next day you move on to something else." Teacher 7 stressed that she had 45 days in a marking period, and she had 44 math lessons to teach. Several teachers expressed that the math pace was too fast for lower learners and prevented the students from having fun learning. Teacher 8 stated, "I don't think that we get to have enough variation in the things that we cover, and I think that we are teaching to the test, so I feel it's almost, not as fun for the kids, and they don't get as much out of it as they would if we had more time to do a variation." Every math teacher expressed concerns about the pace and quality of the math curriculum. Teachers all seemed to understand that the PSSA eligible content included all of the material that the district provided in the curriculum. All math teachers suggested that they needed more time than a lesson a day to cover the math content in its entirety.

Teachers felt that HST has resulted in a narrowed curriculum. The second theme noted was that the teachers felt that HST has resulted in a narrowed curriculum. This section provides detailed examples of teachers' perceptions about the effects of HST on the ZASD's curriculum and is defended with evidence of how the narrow curriculum has affected content mastery, curricular depth, and opportunities to expand on topics of student interest.

Several teachers noted that because the curriculum is so narrow students do not have the opportunity to master content. Teacher 6 noted that nothing is mastered. Teacher

9 added that she only taught the surface of the material. She and teacher 3 suggested that the curricular programs do not allow students to master the content. Teacher 3 also expressed that students are pushed so fast through the curriculum they do not have the opportunity to master the required content from grade level to grade level. Several teachers suggested that they are unable to review and repeat information as needed. Teacher 2 expressed worry in not being able to spend enough time on certain topics. He shared that slower learners are not able to get a true understanding of the material. Teacher 1 also shared concerns for the lower level students. She said, "Because students are not provided an opportunity to master each skill, a lot of students end up getting left behind." Teacher 5 stated "they don't master anything. You just teach it and then you move on. You don't worry if they master it or not. We just teach it so they are familiar with it, and then we move on." Most teachers explained that these strategies resulted in students forgetting what they have learned. Teacher 9 said, "If students do not master a skill, they do not remember anything they've learned from year to year."

Teacher's perceptions about the narrow curriculum were supported with several statements about the lack of depth in the curriculum. Teachers discussed that they were not able to cover most in-depth topics. Teacher 1 expressed that most of the time she had to present the topic and then move on to something new rather than go in-depth in a lesson. Teacher 2 explained that teachers cannot go in-depth because there is not enough time. He added that all of the topics on the test must be covered. Teacher 5 described how she had to squeeze everything into her day because there was a lot to cover. She suggested that HST affect the depth of lessons because it is impossible to fit detailed

lessons into the day, lesson, or unit because there is just too much to cover on the PSSA. She also discussed the impact testing had on the depth of untested subjects. She defended that children need more time learning the basics of social studies and English. She explained that HST has impacted the depth of social studies, English, and writing.

Teachers also expressed that the narrow curriculum affected their ability to expand on a topics as needed. They expressed that sometimes they have to stop an activity because they are out of time. Teacher 6 expressed that HST has not had positive effects on curriculum because she does not have the opportunity to expand the subject that students have an interest in because they have to move on to new material. Teacher 4 described how difficult it was to expand on topics when she only had 45 minutes to teach science. She explained that "it's really difficult to cover anything in detail when we have so much to cover." The inability to expand on topics and connect to students' interests narrows the curriculum. Teacher 2 described that when he taught science he "had a lot more room to elaborate or stay on certain subjects the students had an interest in." He added that, with tested subjects, you have to get through a certain amount of work and you cannot treat those subjects equally. Teacher 8 also displayed disappointment as she described how years ago teachers were able to spend days on a topic. Teachers 2 and 8 expressed that education used to be much different before HST.

Teachers felt that HST has resulted in an unbalanced curriculum. The third theme noted was that teachers felt that HST has resulted in an unbalanced curriculum. This section provides detailed examples of teachers' perceptions about the ZASD's unbalanced curriculum and explains how an unbalanced curriculum has resulted in too

much time spent on tested subjects and test prep. All teachers noted that more time is spent on tested subjects and test prep than on curricular content and untested subjects. Teachers believed that testing had an effect on untested subjects too because teachers spend more time on tested content. Teachers seemed disappointed by the lack of time to teach humanities. Several teachers described the allotted time to teach humanities as unfair, not enough, or too short. Teacher 7 expressed that she "definitely thinks that HST pulls away from untested subjects."

All teachers expressed disappointment that reading and math are taught the majority of the day. In addition, several teachers emphasized how much time they spent on test prep and test taking strategies for both tested and untested subjects. Some teachers expressed that as the state test approached; they focused only on test prep and test taking strategies. Teachers 2 and 3 noted that as it got closer to the month of the test, they basically taught only to the test. Teacher 3 stated, "During the months of February and March, I often stop my curriculum and focus mainly on reading activities that will better prepare my students for standardized testing." Teacher 5 suggested that "Nobody is really looking at the other ones." On the other hand, teachers 7 and 1 expressed that they spend more time on content than test taking strategies. Teacher 1 stated, "I would put it at like 60% being content and 40% being how to take the test." Teacher 7 noted that she tried to teach the skills, and not the test taking strategy during the school year. Teachers 1 and 7 agreed that it was a difficult balance to teach meaningful lessons and test taking strategies at the same time.

Teachers also shared concerns about the lack of time spent on science and the humanities. Teachers explained that science and the humanities have very little time spent on them. Teacher 7 suggested that the scripted curriculum prevents teachers from exploring necessary topics in science, social studies, English and writing. Teacher 4 emphasized that HST definitely limits the amount of time spent on science. She noted that teachers had to teach 90 minutes of reading because their scores were so low. Teacher 8 explained how science teachers are required to take time out of their science teaching time to teach math. She noted that due to HST, teachers were unable to fit all of the required content into the math curriculum, and that as a result, science teachers have to cover math content in their class.

Teachers 6 and 9 added that regardless of whether the subject is tested or not, every class teaches test taking strategies that should help students on the state test. Teacher 9 stated, “Even when you teach an untested subject, they give you the entire test taking strategies that you would need to teach the students for the tested subject.” Teachers 1, 5, 7, and 8 shared that they tried to balance test taking strategies with curricular content into their daily teaching without forcing the strategies on the students. Teacher 8 suggested that balancing out test taking strategies with curricular content is the best move. She stated, “A good teacher should be able to balance it into the curriculum, but can we do it, not all of the time.” The other 5 teachers in the study noted that they felt they spend too much time on test taking strategies. Teachers 2, 3, 4, 6, and 9 teachers expressed that too much time is spent on teaching test taking strategies. Teachers noted that students at RES have a PSSA prep class once every week for 45 minutes. Teachers 4

and 7 explained that the PSSA prep class is designed specifically to teach test taking strategies. Teacher 9 shared that even when teachers are trying to cover content it "always goes back to the strategies."

Teachers know exactly what they have to teach. The final theme that emerged from this research question was that HST has resulted in clear expectations for teachers in the classroom. This was the only positive theme relating to Research Question 1. This section provides evidence that teachers appreciate knowing exactly what they have to teach as a result of clear expectations outlined in their curriculum.

The teachers defended that the curriculum maps and sequence that have been given to them in order to cover everything on the PSSA have created clear expectations for teachers. Four out of nine of the participants felt that HST does have positive effects on curriculum within their classroom. Some teachers noted the benefits of being given a scripted curriculum. Teachers 2, 4 and 7 shared that because the curriculum is outlined so clearly, teachers know exactly what they have to teach. Teacher 7 stated, "Our curriculum is outlined for math. I have exactly what I need to teach and the standard that it aligns to." Teacher 2 noted that HST has forced the district to pay attention to the important topics. Teacher 4 also suggested that the ZASD has improved its curriculum because HST has caused them to break down the curriculum to show the anchors, standards, and exactly what teachers are supposed to teach. Teacher 7 also noted that she is "lucky" to have her curriculum scripted out for her so that she does not have to waste time searching standards.

The next set of themes that emerged answered Research Question 2: What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on instruction? Eight qualitative interview questions regarding instruction were used to explore teachers' perceptions about the impact HST has on their daily instruction used within their classroom (Appendix B). The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed three key themes related to question two. Two out of nine of the participants felt that HST had positive effects on their use of instructional strategies. In this section, I will discuss each theme and provide supporting evidence for each theme that I found.

Teachers do not have enough time. The most dominant theme in this study and in relation to question two was that teachers have too many time constraints. This section includes supporting evidence to show how these time constraints affect teachers' use of small group instruction, student-centered learning, creativity, and differentiated instruction.

Teachers repeatedly stressed that there is not enough time to incorporate the instructional strategies they prefer. Teacher 4 suggested that "there just isn't enough time to teach the way that we want to teach due to limited time." Participants expressed that their use of small group instruction was limited because there is not enough time to break into small groups for every subject. Teacher 4 noted that in order to get through all of the material, sometimes she has to teach the whole class. Teacher 2 also noted that there is too much curriculum to get through and "getting through the material and developing small groups takes time and time is very valuable." There were additional concerns for untested topics and subjects. Teachers stated that even untested subjects moved too

quickly to allow a small group instruction. Teacher 9 shared that even though humanities is not a tested subject, they are still teaching test taking strategies and a lot of content and "there's really not much time for small group instruction in those subjects."

Participants expressed that time constraints affected their use of student-centered instructional strategies. Teachers noted that due to HST they have too much eligible content and PSSA material to cover. In order to get through all of the material, some teachers admitted that they just talk to their students in a lecture style setting. Teachers shared that math and humanities are whole class instruction. Reading was taught in small groups. Science was mostly taught in small groups depending on the activity. Teacher 2 shared that when he taught humanities he felt he had too much material to cover in an hour. He noted that "It's a lot of teacher centered instruction where I just present the material and then have them work on it hoping they remember it." Teachers 1, 4, and 5 shared concerns about not using enough student centered practices. Teachers 2 and 5 also shared that in math, they used more teacher centered practices just to get through the material. Teacher 5 stated, "Math is all teacher centered because you don't have enough time to do anything for them to explore and learn it."

Two teachers in this study provided information that is contradictory to what most teachers believed about the effects of HST on their use of student-centered activities. Teachers 6 and 3 described that HST has not limited their use of student-centered instruction. Teacher 6 expressed that HST has increased her use of student-centered activities. She stated, "You can't be as teacher-centered because of the curriculum provided by the school district. It is a more student-centered curriculum." Teacher 6

added that, “In humanities now we are mostly student-centered.” Both teachers felt that HST has increased their use of student-centered activities.

Teachers in this study also expressed that time constraints due to HST also impacted their use of creative teaching strategies. Teachers noted that when you have to stick to the test and teach to the test, opportunities to teach creatively are limited. Teachers expressed the lack of a variety in teaching strategies and a little creativity has made teaching less fun than in the past before the strong emphasis on testing. Teachers shared that if they had more time then they might be able to incorporate more creative teaching strategies in their classrooms. Teacher 5 expressed that there “is no” creative teaching anymore. She stated, “because there’s not enough time. We are told what we have to teach. There’s not enough time to put any fun or creativity in it.” Teacher 6 also stated that teachers cannot be creative because they are told exactly what to teach and they cannot add anything to the curriculum.

Teachers also expressed that time constraints affect their use of differentiated instruction in the classroom. Even though most teachers agreed that it was necessary to meet the needs of all learners, several teachers noted that there was not enough time to differentiate learning for all students. Teachers believed that HST impacted lower level students the most because there is no time to reteach based on student need. Teachers expressed frustration as they discussed the pressures to prepare their students for state assessments. Teachers shared that the only subject they have the opportunity to differentiate instruction in is reading because it is required through the SFA program. Several teachers felt that they were not providing the students a fair chance at a proper

education. Teacher 3 stated, “I am not able to focus on the individual needs and areas that students need in order to obtain a proper education.” Teacher 7 felt that remediation and differentiated instruction come down to the time. She believed that it was very tough to teach one way to one child and another way to a different child when you had little time. Teacher 8 explained that when you have little time and a lot to cover, it is difficult to veer from the script. Teacher 3 also added that even though the reading program is designed to differentiate instruction, all students have different learning styles. She expressed that different teaching styles need to be incorporated in order to provide these students with an adequate education.

Teachers consistently used effective instructional strategies. The second theme revealed in relation to Research Question 2 was that teachers consistently used effective instructional strategies. When teachers compared their instructional strategies for tested subjects to untested subjects, most teachers expressed that they used similar strategies for both regardless of the PSSA.

Teacher responses to the interviews revealed that teachers in this study used effective teaching strategies. Teachers consistently tried to incorporate technology and engaging activities in their lessons. Teacher 3 noted that they were similar because regardless of what he was teaching, he was “constantly focusing on meeting the proficient or advanced levels on the PSSA testing.” Teacher 7 stated that she “tries to teach the same way regardless.” She added that she tried to be pretty energetic and positive with the students so that she can make learning fun for them.

Most teachers included technology in their instructional strategies. Teachers 1, 5, 7, and 8 noted that they used a Smartboard for instruction. Teacher 5 also explained that she used a computer program called Compass Learning to help students with specific math topics. Teacher 7 also discussed how she used Compass Learning in the computer lab. Laptops, PowerPoint, interactive websites, web quests, and the Internet were all used by several of the teachers in this study. None of the teachers mentioned PSSA coach books, practice books, assessments, or drill and skill activities in their instructional strategies. The activities they described as their instructional activities did not include practice for HST or memorization of PSSA eligible content.

Several of the teachers in this study also noted that they try to incorporate hands on learning in their instructional practices. Teachers described strategies based on inquiry and investigations. Teacher 4 stated that she started her lessons with a small group discussion. Teacher 6 noted that she used cooperative learning groups throughout reading and science activities. Teacher 3 stated that he allowed his students to brainstorm and discuss before completing writing assignments. Teachers also described the hands on science kits provided by the district. Teacher 8 shared that the science kits are a good learning experience at the beginning of the year which they try to carry on throughout the year.

Teachers described the positive aspects of the SFA program. The final theme revealed in relation to Research Question 2 was the positive aspects of the SFA program. Teachers were not asked about the benefits or disadvantages of the district's SFA reading

curriculum, but data analysis revealed that most of the interview responses relating to instructional strategies included a remark about teaching the SFA program.

Even though several teachers expressed disappointment with the district's scripted curriculum and referred to the curriculum as rigid and too fast pace, several positive comments about the SFA program were noted. Many of the teachers described that the reading program was taught in small groups. Therefore, instruction was geared to small groups and the use of the whole class instruction was very little. Teacher 6 described that the district felt it was more beneficial for students to learn in small groups than whole class instruction. Teacher 7 noted that SFA is good because it fosters partner work and cooperative learning. Teacher 3 noted that teachers at RES have been instructed to model all other classes like reading class. He stated that students are working cooperatively and independently in small groups. He added that a small group activity allowed him to help the students that needed help.

Teachers at RES that were interviewed also explained that the SFA program encouraged student-centered instruction. Teacher 3 explained that after the district purchased SFA, the use of student-centered instruction increased. Teacher 6 explained that the district completed studies on the use of student centered teaching strategies. She noted that the district felt those strategies were more beneficial, and as a result, the district incorporated SFA into the district's reading program. Several teachers discussed that the only subject they taught that was student-centered was reading. Most teachers mentioned that reading is student-centered because that is what they are told to do.

Another positive aspect of the SFA program recognized by the teachers was the ability to differentiate instruction in the reading program. Teachers acknowledged that due to HST they are typically unable to differentiate instruction due to time constraints, but because the reading is mandated by the district, it provides teachers an opportunity to differentiate across grade levels. Teacher 3 stated, "HST doesn't allow us to differentiate between learning levels. In our reading program we currently have, students were tested every 8 weeks. Students are obtaining their knowledge and skills in their learning level, not their age level." Teacher 9 also explained that students are assessed on their independent ability level. She added that it was unfortunate that this differentiation does not happen in other subject areas besides reading.

In summary, four themes were identified in responses relevant to Research Question 1. The first theme recorded was that teachers felt the ZASD's curriculum is too rigid which has resulted in little flexibility, creativity, and a poor math program. A second theme emerged that teachers felt that HST has narrowed the ZASD's curriculum which has resulted in a shallow curriculum that has prevented students from mastering content and teachers from expanding on topics of student interest. Evidence supported a third theme that teachers felt that HST has resulted in an unbalanced curriculum which has resulted in too much time spent on tested subjects and test prep in the ZASD. Finally, the last theme to emerge was that teachers felt that HST has resulted in clear expectations for teachers which have helped them to know exactly what they have to teach within their classrooms.

In conclusion, three themes were identified in responses relevant to Research Question 2. The most dominant theme noted was that teachers felt that time constraints prevented them from using small group activities, student-centered instruction, creativity, and differentiated instruction. A second theme revealed that the RES teachers used consistent instructional strategies including cooperative learning, inquiry and investigations, and hands on learning activities regardless of the PSSA. The final theme revealed the positive aspects of the SFA program which noted that SFA is cooperative, student-centered, and differentiated.

Evidence of Quality

After the interview transcripts were coded and themes were recognized under each research question, I shared the findings with the participants. The practice of sharing the findings with the participants ensured that the interpretation accurately reflected the participant's perspectives. Internal validity helped me to constitute reality of the research. Merriam (2002) identified member checking as a common strategy for ensuring validity. Merriam suggested that member checking involves having the participants look over the tentative findings to see if the researcher's interpretations match the participants' interpretations. The participants in this study had the opportunity to comment on the researcher's interpretation of the data. The participants were able to read the researchers transcriptions to check for accuracy and correct interpretations of the interviews. Merriam found that taking tentative findings back to the participants allows the participants to ensure you have interpreted their experiences and perceptions correctly.

Merriam (2002) suggested that different assumptions and generalizability need to be thought of in qualitative and quantitative research. This study cannot be used to generalize about all elementary teachers within the ZASD or with the state of Pennsylvania. Readers need to determine how closely their situations match and whether findings can be transferred.

Merriam (2002) found that trustworthy studies are valid, reliable, and done ethically. The interviews in this study were conducted in an ethical manner. The researcher used member checking to ensure validity. This research cannot be used to generalize about all teachers in the school or district in the study. These efforts will maintain the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

This section included the process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded. The systems used for keeping track of data were described. The findings were built logically from the problem and the research design. Findings were presented in a manner that addresses the research questions. Patterns, themes, and relationships were described. Section 4 ended with a discussion of evidence of quality.

Section 5 will include an overview of why and how the study was done. A detailed interpretation of the findings will be included. The implication for social change and recommendations for action will be in this section. A reflection on the researcher's experience and a concluding statement will conclude Section 5.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This section begins with an overview of why and how the study was done. A brief summary of the findings is followed with implications for social change. Recommendations for action and further study in relation to the perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing (HST) are included. A reflection on my experience and a concluding statement complete Section 5.

The problem is that, in an era of high-stakes testing, teachers do not have a voice in their classrooms. The purpose of this study was to analyze teacher perceptions of high-stakes testing and the effects that this testing had on curriculum and instruction. In this case study, 15 qualitative interview questions were used to find this information. It is important for the school board and supervisory personnel to understand the teachers' experiences and the perceived effects of high-stakes testing because teachers are expected to prepare their students for state tests while providing meaningful learning experiences.

Analysis of narratives of teacher interviews revealed that HST has both positive and negative effects on curriculum and instruction at Richard Elementary School (RES). Teachers described that HST has resulted in a rigid, narrow, and unbalanced curriculum. Several teachers also expressed that time constraints due to HST have impacted their use of small group instruction, student-centered learning, creativity, and differentiated instruction. Some teachers felt that HST has resulted in clear expectations for teachers. Many teachers described using effective teaching strategies regardless of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) testing which included cooperative,

student-centered, and differentiated teaching in the Zoo Area School District's (ZASD) Success for All (SFA) reading program.

Interpretation of Findings

The research questions were answered by breaking the data into themes that support each question. Data analysis revealed seven themes regarding the impact testing had on curriculum and instruction in classrooms. This case study was structured around the following research questions:

1. What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum?
2. What do elementary teachers from RES in the ZASD perceive to be the effects of high-stakes testing on instruction?

Interview responses relating to Research Question 1 revealed that teachers felt HST had several effects on curriculum. Teachers perceived that HST has resulted in a rigid, unbalanced and narrow curriculum. A few teachers believed that HST has had positive effects on their curriculum by mapping out exactly what they had to teach.

High-stakes testing's effects on curriculum in the ZASD have negatively impacted teachers' say in what is being taught in the district. Teachers do not have control in how much time they spend on certain subjects. Teachers are frustrated and overwhelmed with the amount of content that they are expected to cover in the little time they are given. Many teachers expressed that a day-by-day sequence in their curriculum is unrealistic and unmanageable. Teachers want to feel they have covered a topic completely and thoroughly before they move on to a new topic. I think that teachers

know their students best and they know which topics require more time to be taught effectively. Teachers at RES should be included more in the curriculum mapping process so they can express which topics need more or less time spent on them.

Teachers also described that HST has impacted their curriculum because it has resulted in a narrow curriculum. I think that teacher experience usually helps teachers know which topics require more in-depth discussion. Teachers in this study questioned the value of education if their students were not provided an opportunity to master content due to the fast pace of the curriculum. Teachers expressed that when students are not able to master the necessary content, it results in problem the following year. As students pass through the grade levels and fall short on content mastery, they struggle more with new material. For example, a student will struggle with division if he or she has not mastered multiplication facts. Teachers in this study expressed that the pace of the curriculum is unrealistic and too demanding. They blamed HST for setting the pace set by the district. Teachers seemed to understand that they are required to cover a lot of content, but they expressed that rushing through the topics is not the answer. The ZASD needs to reevaluate the pace of the curriculum. Teachers should be included in this process so they can share their opinions and experience of how lack of content mastery has impacted their students' successes.

Teachers in this study expressed that HST has effects on the amount of time they are able to spend on untested subjects. I think that students need art, English, social studies, music, science, and health as much as they need reading and math. In order to be successful adults, students need exposure to all subjects and a variety of topics.

Unfortunately, HST does not allow the teachers at RES the opportunity to make choices on how much time they spend on each subject. They must follow the daily schedule given to them by the district. The ZASD should reevaluate the daily schedule of the elementary teachers. Teachers expressed that as it is, they do not have enough time in reading and math to get through the required content, so maybe taking time away from those subjects is not a realistic suggestion, but training teachers on how to incorporate science into math and social studies into reading may be more beneficial to both teachers and students.

Even though several teachers expressed that HST has had negative effects on curriculum, some teachers appreciated having expectations made clear for them. Some teachers enjoyed not having to look for the materials to teach the lessons. Teachers noted that they have little time as it is and being handed a curriculum saves them time and energy. Some teachers expressed that HST has made their job easier because curriculum mapping and HST have taken the guess work out of teaching. I think that most teachers are usually given a curriculum with the required learning objectives, but HST has placed more emphasis on those objectives which has made teachers more aware of exactly what they have to teach. This was the only positive effect of HST on the curriculum at RES in the ZASD.

Interview responses relating to Research Question 2 revealed that teachers perceived that HST has had several effects on instruction. When teachers were asked if they felt that HST has impacted their use of small group, student-centered, differentiated learning strategies, they reported that time constraints due to testing have prevented them from using these strategies. Although teachers reported that HST has had negative effects

on their instruction, when teachers were asked to describe the instructional strategies they used on a daily basis, they described using the strategies they previously mentioned as unable to use because of testing. I think that the conflicting data represents that even though the teachers felt that HST can negatively impact your instruction, it does not have to. It seemed that most teachers used effective instructional strategies on a daily basis, but they felt that they could use even more effective strategies if they had more time and less demands of testing. Teachers also described that HST has caused the ZASD to use a scripted reading program. Even though teachers described their dislike for scripted programs, they listed several positive effects on their reading instruction as a result of using the SFA reading program. I think this is because the SFA program is research based and proven to be effective. It is based on instructional strategies that have been proven to raise reading test scores. I think that most of the teachers in this study will be surprised to read all of the positive aspects they mentioned in relation to the SFA program. It almost seemed that they did not even realize all of the good techniques and effective strategies they listed as they described how they taught reading.

Time constraints were the biggest issue for most teachers. They expressed difficulty in using teaching strategies that they prefer such as small groups and student-centered learning because of limited time. They repeatedly noted that they did not have the time to cover everything that was required with the limited time they were given. Teachers seemed stressed by the amount of material they had to cover in the limited time they had to cover it. This finding could be applied by the ZASD providing professional development in time management for the elementary teachers at RES. Time management

could help teachers to incorporate more strategies that they feel would be more effective for their students.

Although teachers described that HST has impacted their instructional strategies because it has decreased the time they have to use the strategies they prefer, when teachers were asked to describe the instructional strategies they use, they described using small group, student-centered, and effective teaching strategies. It seemed that the teachers' perceptions were that HST has had negative effects on their instruction, but when it came down to it, teachers were actually using the same strategies they said they could not use because they did not have the time. All of the strategies the teachers described were positive. I think the issue is that teachers want to use more of those strategies, but as they described the demands of testing have limited their time to do so.

Teachers also expressed their dislike for scripted programs. They explained that day-by-day lessons are unrealistic and they would prefer to be able to put more of their own creativity into their teaching. I found it interesting that as they spoke about the district's scripted reading program, everything they said was positive. For the most part it seemed that the teachers' attitudes were negative about HST resulting in scripted and rigid curricula, however, interview responses revealed many positive aspects of their own scripted SFA program. Teachers explained that SFA is student-centered, differentiated, and engaging. Even though teachers seemed against the program because they were forced to change how they taught reading, most of their comments about reading instruction revealed that the strategies they used in reading were the same strategies they wished they had more time to use in other subjects. I think that teachers understand that

the program is effective and does result in improved reading scores. Maybe if the teachers did not feel forced to follow what they described as a rigid program with zero flexibility that they have no control of, they would have better attitudes about the program. This finding could be applied by the ZASD including teachers in curricular decisions and curriculum mapping. That would allow teachers a say in what they have to do which may result in better attitudes and perceptions about scripted programs. The district should also provide professional development for teachers on ways to incorporate the positive aspects and instructional strategies of the SFA program into the other subjects they teach.

Integration of the Findings with the Conceptual Framework

Lambert et al. (2002) found that, in the classroom, behavioral psychology translates into teachers breaking down large concepts into parts and discrete skills. Information is commonly taught in isolation with large-group instruction. These behavioral approaches include increased dependence on standardized measures of achievement, offering rewards for learning as a way of shaping student behavior. High-stakes testing has increased the use of behavioral methods of instruction. The teachers in my study reported that HST has resulted in an increase in whole-class activities. Teachers in my study reported time constraints as the reason for using large-group instruction instead of small group, student-centered approaches to teaching. Teachers also reported using a scripted curriculum for reading and a curriculum map for math. Teachers noted that the curriculum is rigid which has affected their flexibility, creativity, and math program.

Behaviorism asserts that people are conditioned through punishment and reinforcement to behave in specific ways (Laitsch, 2006). In an era of high-stakes testing, Laitsch (2006) found that teachers want to avoid punishments for poor student achievement so they decide to narrow their efforts and teach only tested topics. Every teacher in my study felt that too much time was spent on tested subjects which has caused the curriculum to become narrow and unbalanced. Laitsch stated that, "In effect, high-stakes systems may result in practitioners changing their behavior from what they consider ethical best practice to altered, undesirable behavior in order to achieve the mandated outcomes and avoid punitive consequences" (p. 7). Several teachers in my study acknowledge that HST has caused them to use more teacher –centered instruction.

Tobin and Tippins (1993) found that behaviorist approaches to teaching involve the teacher as the facilitator of the curriculum who directs students to practice the information until they are proficient at solving problems independently. The teacher is the transmitter of knowledge and there is little interaction between the students. In behaviorist classrooms, lessons are taught skill-by-skill and instruction is content and process oriented. Teachers in my study noted that they skimmed through a wide variety of topics in an effort to expose students to all of the eligible content on the PSSA. They expressed concerns that students did not have an opportunity to master content and teachers could not teach topics-in-depth. They expressed that time constraints and the pace of the rigid curriculum prevented them from incorporating creative, in-depth, student-centered learning activities.

Constructivist learning describes how people construct their reality and make sense of their world (Lambert et al., 2002). The capacity to learn is not fixed and the social construction of knowledge must be an active and interactive process. Achievement is increased when the culture of the school supports learning for both students and adults. In a high-stakes testing context, scripted curricula and limited time are affecting teachers' opportunities to make learning interactive. Students do not have the opportunity to construct their own reality to make sense of their world because high-stakes testing results in drill and skill activities which result in rote memorization and teacher-centered classrooms (Jones, 2007). Smyth (2008) found that high-stakes testing has changed from exploratory learning to constant test taking practice. Although teachers in my study expressed that too much time is spent on test prep, they described their instructional strategies as inquiry based, technology dependent, and cooperative.

Lambert et al. (2002) found constructivist approaches allow the student to direct the learning to generate understanding and meaning. Students have background knowledge and experiences. This helps them to understand by relating supplementary material to what they already know. Learners make connections based on what they know and reshape it in new and meaningful ways. In high-stakes testing, teaching becomes teacher-directed and fast paced. Students are not able to direct the learning which generates understanding and meaning. The teachers in my study noted the positive aspects of a scripted reading program. They described SFA as student-centered, cooperative, and differentiated.

Researchers have argued over which instructional methods result in the most teacher effectiveness. Constructivist approaches are used less often in elementary classrooms as testing becomes the focus of education (Smyth, 2008). Teachers in my study reporting using both constructivist and behaviorist approaches to teaching. Teachers reported that they used similar strategies for tested and untested subjects. Teachers noted that they try to balance their use of test prep with engaging learning activities such as technology, inquiry, and scientific investigations.

Researchers have analyzed teachers' perceptions of NCLB's effect on teacher autonomy and pedagogy. To help them better understand teachers' perceptions of autonomy, Quiocho and Stall (2008) developed a 10-item survey to determine the extent to which teachers felt restricted by NCLB requirements regarding curriculum decisions and methodology implementation (p. 20). Results of the survey have shown that teachers felt a great deal of autonomy in how they taught the content. The results of my study differed from those in Quiocho and Stall's study. The teachers in my study expressed that they do not have much autonomy in how they teach. They expressed that time constraints and a rigid curriculum have prevented them from using strategies they prefer. The results of my study were similar to Quiocho and Stall's study in that all teachers reported that NCLB has affected their decision-making opportunities.

Others have noted that NCLB's focus on achieving proficiency has forced schools to clarify and strengthen their curriculum, as well as create common benchmark assessments (Zavadsky, 2008). A few of the teachers in my study expressed that HST has had positive effects on the ZASD's curriculum. Their interview responses were similar to

Zavadsky's findings that some teachers feel HST has strengthened the district's curriculum by mapping out exactly what they have to teach.

Integration of the Findings with Other Literature

To learn more about the impact of state and federal accountability systems on curriculum, instruction, and student achievement, the CEP (2009) conducted case studies of schools in Illinois, Rhode Island, and Washington State. From the winter of 2007 to the spring of 2009, the CEP studied a total of 18 schools in 16 school districts, in the three states. Schools included elementary, middle, and high schools, and both Title I and non-Title I schools. To conduct the case studies, they interviewed district superintendents, principals, teachers, instructional specialists, parents, and students in each state. They also conducted in-depth, formal observations in 105 classrooms to understand the amount of time teachers and students spent on various types of instructional practices and interactions. The educators reported that their efforts to align curriculum to standards and focus on tested material in reading and mathematics have diminished the class time available for social studies, science, and other subjects or activities. These findings reveal that high-stakes testing has an effect on the amount of time spent on untested subjects. The results of my study were similar to the CEP's study. Several of the teachers in my study expressed that too much time was spent on tested subjects. Teachers expressed that the ZASD's curriculum has become narrow and shallow. Teachers also shared that the majority of their time was spent on reading and math instruction.

Assaf (2008) examined the professional identity of a reading specialist through the use of a case study. The research examined how a reading teacher's decisions and pedagogy shifted in response to testing pressures. The reading specialist had professional beliefs and knowledge, but high-stakes testing affected decision-making and instructional methods in the classroom. Assaf illuminated the problems teachers face when they must decide how they will cover tested content while remaining true to themselves. Analysis of ethnographic and grounded theory methodologies in this study showed that testing pressures affect instructional styles and teachers' professional identities. The teachers in my study also expressed that their instructional styles were affected by testing pressures. They expressed that they want to be more creative and able to decide how they should present a lesson based on the needs of their students. Teachers expressed that the districts provided them with detailed day-by-day lessons and curriculum. They expressed that limited time and too much content has forced them to use whole class lectures and teacher-centered instruction. Teachers expressed that they want more say in instructional and curricular decision making in their classrooms.

Faulkner and Cook (2006) conducted a study of 216 Kentucky educators. The study explored middle grades perceptions of how high-stakes testing has affected instructional strategies in classrooms. Researchers used a 66 Likert-format item and three open-ended responses survey. Faulkner and Cook (2006) coded the responses and categorized the data into themes. Teachers acknowledged that they used a variety of instructional practices. Faulkner and Cook found that 100% of teachers agreed they used these practices on a regular basis. When teachers were asked to “identify the instructional

practices used in the last 30 days, teachers reported use of whole-class discussion (93%), lecture (90%), and worksheets (86%) as the most commonly used practices" (Faulkner & Cook, 2006, p. 7). Nearly 74% of the teachers reported that they used effective teaching practices, but they reported the use of lecture and worksheets which are ineffective strategies. This study is important because the mismatch between teacher responses demonstrates the need for additional research (Faulkner & Cook, 2006). My study is related to Faulkner and Cook's study because the teachers in my study reported that they used effective teaching practices. My study differs from Faulkner and Cook's study because in my study when teachers were asked to describe the instructional strategies they used on a daily basis they listed evidence of effective teaching strategies. They explained that HST has caused them to use more whole-class discussion, lecture, and worksheets, but none of the teachers in my study listed those practices as strategies they used on a daily basis.

Implications for Social Change

Many principals and parents have agreed that high-stakes tests are doing grave damage to education and to the lives of children (Neill, 2006a). Since testing has become the focus of education, this study applies to the professional field of education because it is important to understand teachers' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on elementary curriculum and instruction. This study applies to the local problem of Pennsylvania's high-stakes tests. Little research exists regarding elementary teachers' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing in Pennsylvania. This study contributes to the body of research because in this study, elementary teachers described their

perceptions regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction within their classrooms in the ZASD. Teacher perceptions were analyzed and this information will be shared with school leaders.

My study offers school administrators a valuable resource for understanding the impact HST has on curriculum and instruction at RES in the ZASD. This study describes many of the effects of HST on the ZASD's curriculum and instruction. Teachers expressed that the rigid curriculum is inflexible, lacks creativity, and minimizes the quality of the math curriculum. Teachers discussed concerns about the quality of education in the ZASD in relation to content mastery and the depth of the curriculum. Interviews revealed that not enough time is spent on science and the humanities. Concerns about limited opportunities to expand content were noted by several teachers. All teachers agreed that they do not have enough time to incorporate small group, student-centered, creative, and differentiated learning activities in other subjects besides reading.

This study contributes to social change by informing educational leaders, personnel related to curriculum programs, and policy makers of the perceived effects high-stakes testing has on curriculum and instruction within one public school in northeastern Pennsylvania. It is important for the school board and supervisory personnel to understand the teachers' experiences and the perceived effects of high-stakes testing because teachers are expected to prepare their students for state tests while providing meaningful learning experiences. Teachers need to use student-centered approaches to instruction while incorporating the arts, science, and social studies. Administrators need

to be made aware if teachers believe that high-stakes testing is causing them to use more teacher-centered approaches. School leaders also need to be informed if teachers perceive that high-stakes testing is causing them to neglect untested subjects such as science, social studies, and the arts. School leaders can use the data analysis from this study to make educational decisions regarding curriculum and professional development for teachers within the district. The findings of this study can be applied by providing necessary professional development for teachers regarding effective teaching practices and allowing teachers to have a voice by sharing their experiences of high-stakes testing will contribute to positive curricular and instructional change within the district. This study will make administrators and school leaders aware of the current realities of the effects of testing. Raising awareness of the perceived effects of high-stakes tests on curriculum and instruction will also lead to positive curricular and instructional changes in the ZASD. Positive curricular and instructional changes in the ZASD will contribute to a better education for the elementary students within the ZASD.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action are based on the results of data analysis of both research questions in this study. In this section, I will provide tangible improvements to the RES teachers' instructional strategies and ZASD's curriculum. Administrators, teachers, and school leaders need to pay attention to the results of this study.

The first recommendation for the ZASD is based on the first emerged theme from data analysis of Research Question 1 in which teachers felt that HST has resulted in a rigid curriculum. Teachers explained that a rigid curriculum affected their flexibility,

creativity, and math program. One suggestion for school leaders is to provide professional development to teachers to show them ways to incorporate creative teaching strategies within the provided curriculum. Another suggestion is that school leaders in the ZASD should reevaluate the ZASD's pace of their elementary curriculum. Administrators can provide teachers with the eligible content for the PSSA without directing them to teach a lesson a day. Teachers can cover the content required for testing but more flexibility with the content would allow opportunities to review or repeat as needed. School leaders could also include more elementary teachers in the curriculum mapping process. Since elementary teachers have taught the information before, they may be more aware of which topics need more time spent on them. Including teachers in the curriculum mapping process will allow teachers a voice in the education of their students.

Theme two revealed that teachers felt that HST has resulted in a narrow curriculum. Teachers were concerned about content mastery, curricular depth, and opportunities to expand on topics of student interest. One suggestion for action is that the ZASD provide professional development to provide teachers with strategies to incorporate higher level activities and questioning strategies which will result in more in-depth discussion. The ZASD should also reexamine their expectations for content mastery. Teachers and administrators should work together to set specific and realistic expectations for students across testing grade levels.

The third theme revealed that HST has resulted in an unbalanced curriculum. Teachers felt that too much time is spent on tested subjects, too little time is spent on

science and the humanities, and too much time is spent on test prep. The ZASD should reevaluate the RES daily schedule. More time should be designated for science and humanities. In addition, the ZASD can provide professional development for teachers to teach them cross curricular activities and ways to integrate science and humanities into reading and math.

The final theme relating to teachers' perceptions about curriculum revealed that some teachers enjoy knowing exactly what they have to teach. Teachers suggested that HST has resulted in clear expectations for teachers. The ZASD should ensure that all grade levels, included untested grades and subjects, have clear expectations defined for them too. In addition, administrators should encourage teachers to define clear expectations for their students. Teachers need to explain to students what they will be tested on, why they are being tested, how their results will be interpreted, and the importance of doing their best on HST.

Another recommendation for the ZASD is related to the data analysis of Research Question 2. Teachers expressed that time constraints due to HST have limited their opportunities to incorporate small group instruction, student-centered learning, creativity, and differentiated instruction in their instructional practices. The ZASD should provide extensive professional development in time management. Teachers need to learn to incorporate student-centered, creative, and differentiated activities that do not require a lot of time. Teachers should be given the opportunity to shadow teachers in other school districts that have a current and effective differentiated instructional model to learn ways to differentiate their instruction in all subjects.

Most teachers expressed that they use consistent effective instructional strategies. They described that they used technology, inquiry, scientific investigations, cooperative learning, and hands-on activities in their classrooms. Administrators at RES should allow teachers an opportunity to observe other teachers in their building. Peer observations and modeling would allow teachers an opportunity to learn additional effective teaching strategies. The ZASD should provide additional technology training so that more teachers at RES could engage in technology related activities. The ZASD could also allow time for teachers to meet and share their ideas. Team meetings and grade level planning would allow teachers to share which effective teaching strategies work best for their students.

The final emerged theme in relation to Research Question 2 is that teachers noted the positive aspects of the SFA program. Teachers described that the SFA program allowed students the opportunity to work in small groups. They noted that they enjoyed that SFA is student-centered and engaging for the students. Teachers also appreciated that students were taught on their ability level and not their grade level. Some teachers noted that they were told their other classes should look like the SFA program. The ZASD should provide professional development to show teachers how to make their instruction of other subjects mirror the positive aspects of the SFA program.

Results of this research will be emailed to the ZASD's superintendent. This study should also be shared by me with the ZASD's school board and administrators with a paper copy. The superintendent, school board, administration, and teachers should work together to engage in positive curricular and instructional changes in the ZASD. Positive

curricular and instructional changes in the ZASD will contribute to a better education for the elementary students within the ZASD.

Recommendation for Further Study

This study included elementary teachers' perceptions of the effects of HST on curriculum and instruction. Future research should look at comparisons of teachers' perceptions at RES to other elementary teachers in the ZASD. Studies may be used to compare teachers' perceptions in schools that have met AYP and those that have not. Perceptions of teachers that teach only tested subjects to teachers that teach a few tested subjects should also be compared and analyzed in a research study. Further research may determine if years of experience affects teachers' perceptions of HST. A comparison of middle school and high school teachers' perceptions of the effects of HST would add additional insight to this topic. Studies might reveal the perceptions of school board members and administrators about the effects of HST. Further studies may also include students' perceptions of the effects of testing on their education. In addition, studies regarding parents' perceptions of the effects of HST on their child's education may be useful. Finally, quantitative studies would allow researchers to gain information from elementary teachers in the county or state regarding the effects of HST. Quantitative studies could be considered to compare the amount of time spent on tested subjects to untested subjects. Quantitative data analysis should look at the frequency of small group instruction, student-centered learning, creative teaching strategies, scripted curricula, and differentiate instruction since the increase in accountability demands due to high-stakes testing.

Reflection of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers need to identify their biases within their study. Creswell (2003) found that researchers have the responsibility to express their personal beliefs, values, and interests. Merriam (2002) stated, "rather than trying to eliminate these biases or '*subjectivities*', it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of the data" (p. 5). I am a fifth-grade teacher in a neighboring school district. I have my own perceptions of the effects of testing within my classroom. The topic of study was interesting to me. I have worked in other school districts where high-stakes testing has had negative effects on curriculum and instruction. I believe that elementary teachers are not enabled to be active participants in curricular and instructional decisions that are affected by high-stakes testing. I care about the students in the RES and want teachers to have an opportunity to share their experiences.

When I began the interview process I had preconceived ideas about what the teachers might say about HST. The most interesting part of the interviews and the data analysis was the information the teachers provided about the SFA program. My interview questions did not specifically ask about the SFA program, but teachers openly talked about this topic when answering the broad questions about curriculum and instruction.

I think if I would have asked the teachers how they felt about SFA the comments would have been negative, but as they discussed how and what they taught, they mentioned several positive aspects of the program. I do not think the teachers realized all of the good qualities they described about the program. Even though teachers previously

expressed frustration and dislike for rigid curricula and scripted programs in the beginning of the interview, as they mentioned the strategies and teaching practices they used in reading, they expressed positive and effective traits of their scripted reading program. This has changed my perceptions of the scripted reading program used within the ZASD. I have never used a scripted reading program but without this information from this study I may have been more hesitant to accept having to use such a program.

This process has reinforced my opinion that it is crucial to allow teachers a say in educational decision making. In the future, when I secure an administrative position, I will be sure to involve my teachers in curriculum mapping and instructional decision making. I will also encourage school leaders to provide time for my teachers to meet, plan, shadow, model, and most importantly share effective teaching strategies.

One effect of this research on the participants is that they had an opportunity to be heard. Results of this study will be shared through email with the ZASD's superintendent. If the recommendations and suggestions for action are followed, this will increase professional development in areas of need for teachers at RES. Teachers will also be given more time to meet, shadow, model, and share effective teaching strategies. Most importantly, teachers will be included more in the curricular and instructional decision making in the ZASD.

The results of my study surprised me. Not one teacher mentioned drill and skill activities, memorizing, or using practice books in their instructional strategies. Several teachers enjoyed knowing exactly what they had to teach and that HST defined clear expectations for them. That surprised me because all of the teachers referred to the

curriculum mapping as rigid, too fast, and unrealistic. I was also surprised that most teachers explained that HST has negatively impacted their instructional strategies, but when asked to describe their strategies, teachers provided examples of engaging and effective teaching strategies.

Conclusion

This study has raised awareness to the effects of HST on curriculum and instruction. The focus on state tests and assessments has increased in elementary education. It is necessary for school leaders and administrators to know the effects of HST on the lives of the children in their district. Educators, school leaders, and administrators can learn and make changes based on the results of this research. The superintendent, school board, administration, teachers and students must work together to produce positive curricular and instructional changes in the ZASD. The results of this study demonstrate how crucial it is that teachers have a say in education decision making. Allowing teachers an opportunity to decide what they will teach and how to teach it will minimize the negative effects of HST.

High-stakes testing impacts curriculum at RES by resulting in a rigid, narrow, and unbalanced curriculum. Teachers are unable to meet the needs of the students because the district has mandated a broad and shallow curriculum that has little wiggle room. Teachers have little autonomy in what they will teach and how long they can spend on each topic. Although a few teachers appreciate knowing exactly what is expected of them, most teachers in the ZASD feel HST has negatively impacted science, humanities, and the quality of the math curriculum.

High-stakes testing negatively impacts instruction at RES by affecting teachers' creativity, differentiation, and freedom to teach how they want to in the classroom. Teachers expressed that HST has resulted in more teacher-centered, whole class behaviorist approaches to instruction. Although teachers' attitudes were negative about the impact testing had on instruction, they provided several positive aspects of their mandated reading program and instructional practices they used in the classroom. This study demonstrated that although HST can impact teachers' use of effective teaching strategies, good teachers will do what they have to in order to present effective lessons to their students.

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Appendix A: Interview Topic Guide

1. High-stakes testing
2. Curriculum used within your classroom.
3. Tested curriculum versus untested curriculum
4. Time spent on state tested and untested subjects
5. Depth of curricular content
6. Positive curricular effects of high-stakes testing
7. Daily instructional practices
8. Instructional practices of tested and untested subjects
9. Teacher-centered and student-centered teaching
10. Whole class and small group teaching
11. Differentiated instruction in your teaching practices
12. High-stakes testing's positive effects on instruction

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Describe your understanding of high-stakes testing.

2. Describe your daily curriculum used within your classroom.

3. How would you compare the curriculum you use on a daily basis for subjects taught on the state assessment to the curriculum used for untested subjects?

4. Do you feel high-stakes testing has an effect on the time you spend on tested subjects compared to untested subjects? Why or why not?

5. Do you feel high-stakes testing has an effect on the depth of curricular content covered? Why or why not?

6. Do you feel high-stakes testing has had positive effects on curriculum within your classroom? Why or why not?

7. Describe the instructional practices you use on a daily basis in your classroom.

8. How would you compare the instructional strategies you use with subjects that are on state assessments to untested subjects?

9. Do you feel high-stakes testing has an effect on your use of teacher-centered practices in your classroom? Why or why not?

10. Do you feel high-stakes testing has an effect on your use of student-centered teaching practices in your classroom? Why or why not?

11: Do you feel high-stakes testing has an effect on your use of whole class compared to small group instructional practices in your classroom? Why or why not?

12. Do you feel high-stakes testing has an effect on your use of differentiated instruction in your teaching practices? Why or why not?

13. How would you compare your teaching time spent on curricular content compared to time spent on teaching test-taking strategies?

14. Do you feel high-stakes testing has an effect on your use of creative teaching strategies? Why or why not?

15. Do you feel high-stakes testing has had positive effects on instruction within your classroom? Why or why not?

Appendix C: School District Letter of Cooperation

May 19, 2011

Dear Sir,

I am currently enrolled as a graduate student at Walden University. As a requirement for my doctoral of education degree in K-12 educational leadership, I will be conducting a research study titled *A Case Study of Teacher's Perceptions of the Effects of High Stakes Testing.* The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction. I am requesting your permission to interview teachers of grades 3-6 from Elementary School. These teachers were selected because they teach a grade that is assessed on the Pennsylvania state assessment. The data collection process of interviews will take place during the months of May and June 2011. Teachers will be asked to participate in one 50-60 minute audio taped interview in their classroom before or after school hours. A possible benefit for the participants of this study is that they will have the opportunity to share their experiences regarding high-stakes testing. Teachers' participation in this project is voluntary and a catered dinner will be provided as compensation for their participation in this study. They will not be penalized or lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to if you decide that you will not participate in this research study. If they agree to participate in this study, they may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Some minimal risks of their involvement in this study may include some stress in answering questions about their experiences with high-stakes testing. They also do not have to answer any questions that they feel are stressful. The teachers' names and all other personally identifiable

information will be kept completely confidential. The name of Elementary School or the Area School District will also not be included in the final report. Pseudonyms of your school, school district, and assigned numbers will be used to protect your privacy. I want to assure you that all information will be kept confidential; therefore, only I will be able to associate teacher responses to their name. The results will be available per your request. Teachers will have the opportunity to comment on my interpretation of the data. They will be able to read my transcriptions to check for accuracy and correct interpretations of their interview. This process should take 15 minutes for each review of the data. If they feel changes are necessary, teachers will have the opportunity to read the new data. I appreciate your willingness to assist in the data collection for this study. A copy of this signed cooperation form will be given to you. If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please contact me at (570) 239-6965, or amy.shanahan@waldenu.edu If you want to talk privately about the rights of the participants, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott, Director of the Research Center, Walden University at 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Please complete the appropriate sections and electronically sign the attached form and return it to me at amy.shanahan@waldenu.edu Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Thank You,

Amy Pavia
Walden University
650 S. Exeter Street, Baltimore, MD 21202

Dr. Stacy Ness
stacy.ness@waldenu.edu
Contact person for college/university

Appendix D: Community Permission

Area School District
Superintendent
PA

May 19, 2011

Dear Ms. Pavia,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled A Case Study of Teacher Perceptions of the Effects of High-Stakes Testing within the Area School District. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview selected teachers from Elementary School. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official

Contact Information

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

Printed Name of Participant _____

_____

	May 19, 2011
Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature	
Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature	*Amy Pavia*

Electronic* Signature Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E: Invitation to Participate/Consent Form

May, 2011

Dear Colleague,

I am currently enrolled as a graduate student at Walden University. As a requirement for my doctoral of education degree in K-12 educational leadership, I will be conducting a research study titled *A Case Study of Teacher's Perceptions of the Effects of High Stakes Testing.* The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction. I am requesting your permission to include you as a participant in this study. You were chosen for this study because you teach a grade that is assessed on the Pennsylvania state assessment. You were also chosen for this study because you teach at Elementary School in the Area School District. The data collection process of interviews will take place during the month of June, 2011. You are asked to participate in one 50-60 minute audio taped interview before or after school hours. A possible benefit for the participants of this study is that you will have the opportunity to share your experiences regarding high-stakes testing. Your participation in this project is voluntary and a catered dinner will be provided as compensation for your participation in this study. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to if you decide that you will not participate in this research study. If you agree to participate in this study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Some minimal risks of your involvement in this study may include some stress in answering

questions about your experiences with high-stakes testing. You also do not have to answer any questions that you feel are stressful. Your name and all other personally identifiable information will be kept completely confidential. The name of your school will also not be included in the final report. Pseudonyms of your school, school district, and assigned numbers will be used to protect your privacy. You also have the right to review any materials related to this study. You will have the opportunity to comment on my interpretation of the data. You will be able to read my transcriptions to check for accuracy and correct interpretations of your interview. This process should take 15 minutes for each review of the data. If you feel changes are necessary, you will have the opportunity to read the new data. A copy of this signed consent form will be given to you. If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please contact me at (570) 239-6965, or amy.shanahan@waldenu.edu If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott, Director of the Research Center, Walden University at 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the bottom of this form and the attached participant demographic form and send it to amy.shanahan@waldenu.edu by _____, 2011. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration and I look forward to working with you. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-02-11-0079608** and it expires on **June 1, 2012.**

Thank You,
Amy Pavia
Walden University
650 S. Exeter Street, Baltimore, MD 21202

Statement of Consent

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

Researcher's Electronic* Signature _____ Amy Pavia

Date of Consent_____

Participant's Electronic Signature_____

Electronic* Signature Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Sincerely,

Amy Pavia

Appendix F: Demographic Profile of Participant

The purpose of this form is to report the demographic information of the participants in this study. Your name and all other personally identifiable information will be kept completely confidential. Pseudonyms of your school, school district, and assigned numbers will be used to protect your privacy.

Name:_____

Race/Ethnicity:_____

Gender:_____

Years of Service: _____

Highest Education Level: _____

Grade/Subject Taught: _____

Curriculum Vitae

Amy Pavia

EDUCATION:
Ed D. The Administrator Leadership for Teaching & Learning June 2012
Walden University
On line

Master of Education May 2006
University of Scranton
Scranton, PA

Bachelor of Science in Education May 2003
Kutztown University
Kutztown, PA

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:
Fifth Grade Teacher Sept. 2008 – present
Dallas School District
Dallas, PA

Fourth Grade Teacher Sept. 2006 - June 2008
Scranton School District
Scranton, PA

First Grade Teacher Sept. 2003- June 2004
Prince George's County Public Schools
Capitol Heights, MD

Student Teacher Oct. 2001-Dec. 2001
Allentown School District
Allentown, PA

Student Teacher Aug. 2001-Oct. 2001
Northwestern Lehigh School District
New Tripoli, PA

CERTIFICATION:
Pennsylvania State Advanced Professional Certificate
Administrative I
English as a Second Language