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Countering Student Apathy to Increase Student Engagement

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Countering Student Apathy to Increase Student Engagement

by

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MA, Loyola College of Maryland, 1988

BS, Slippery Rock State University, 1974

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

At a suburban elementary school in Maryland, 3 years of data revealed that the school is grappling with the problem of student apathy. While there is a growing body of research on apathy and its effects on student achievement, few researchers have examined the problem from the perspective of the apathetic student. The purpose of this qualitative case study, grounded in the social learning and cognitive development theories of Vygotsky and Piaget, was to explore student apathy and the learning environment at the target school through the perspectives of 8 former students and their parents. The research questions focused on understanding the experiences of these former students, all of who manifested a high degree of apathy in 5th grade, to determine possible sources of the problem and identify strategies to address it. Participant interview transcripts, field notes, and attendance, and archived discipline and report cards constituted the data. Coding and categorical aggregation were used to organize, condense, and analyze these data into themes. Member checking, triangulation, and peer review ensured trustworthiness of the interpretations. The findings revealed 3 themes: students had little choice and input in their schooling, there was a lack of curricular rigor and relevance, and inadequate support for students who struggled academically and/or behaviorally. As a result of these findings, a project was developed to provide the target school with the professional development needed to deliver relevant, engaging, and differentiated instruction and to create legitimate opportunities for student choice and input about their schooling. It is expected that these findings and the resulting project will affect social change by giving (a) the apathetic students a voice, (b) the target school a research-based plan and (c) other schools and districts a set of initiatives to address student apathy.

Countering Student Apathy to Increase Student Engagement

by

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrative Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral study to my husband, Ken Schou, who has supported me

throughout this entire process and to my father, Bob McCreary, who, while he was alive,

always told me that I was capable of accomplishing anything I set out to do. Thank you,

Ken, so many times I would have given up without your support. I never could have

accomplished this without you!

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Student apathy, the antithesis of student engagement, is a serious and growing

problem in schools around the United States. While it is largely manifested in middle and

high school (Rudduck, 2007), it is ever-increasing with students at the elementary school

level (Baines & Slutsky, 2009; Thompson & Allen, 2012), including a suburban

elementary school in central Maryland, this study's target school. The local school

district administers an annual climate survey that uses a Likert-type scale to rate both

individual students' attitudes and the schools' climate as "*highly engaged*," "*engaged*,"

"*apathetic*" or "*highly apathetic*". Analysis of the 2009 climate survey for the target

school revealed that 43% of the student body and 62% of the fifth graders scored in the

highly apathetic range (Maryland State Department of Education, 2009).While growing

apathy most immediately has the potential to impact students' academic achievement in

school, its future ramifications are even more disconcerting. Once students leave the

education system, they must compete in a 21st century global marketplace that demands

fully engaged and creative workers, who possess both the drive and will to navigate

complex problems and collaborate effectively with peers (Pink, 2009). Perhaps of equal

or even greater importance is that these apathetic students will, once they are 18 years

old, need to step forward and become active and informed citizens of a democracy

(Rehnfield, 2011). Developing the attributes needed to successfully compete in the global

workforce and assume their places as citizens requires time, support, active engagement,

and personal investment. When students are apathetic and disengaged in school, the

opportunity to lead them to develop these crucial attributes is lost, and they and this country could be diminished.

An analysis of 3 years of data revealed a serious problem with student apathy at a suburban elementary school in Central Maryland. All schools in the district administer an annual climate survey that rates both individual student attitudes and the cumulative school climate as *highly engaged, engaged, apathetic, or highly apathetic.* Analysis of the 2009 climate survey for the target school revealed that 43% of the school's total student body and 62% of the fifth graders scored in the "highly apathetic" range (Maryland State Department of Education, 2009). Each year, using student identification numbers, the school reviewed several sets of data points on each student. This was of concern to the target school, and especially when the school's leadership team combined the student's survey responses with the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) scores. MSA is the state accountability assessment used to measure both student achievement and school effectiveness. This analysis showed that many of the students who expressed apathy on the survey also had lower levels of performance on the MSA (Maryland State Department of Education, 2009) than their peers. While test scores in the White, Hispanic, Asian, and African American subgroups have remained level over the last 5 years (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010); there has been a steady decline in test scores of the students in the Free and Reduced Meals Program (FARMS) and special education student groups. The students who manifested the highest levels of apathy on the survey were largely clustered in either one or both of these subgroups. Low scores on these state assessments were of great concern, because these scores were the primary

determinant of placement in middle school language arts and math courses and can lead to a lack of preparedness for both future schooling and the complex global workplace of the 21st century, where literacy and problem solving skills are only the most basic of requirements (Pink, 2009).

The school's leadership team, which was comprised of teachers, parents, and school-based administration, were well aware of the seriousness of this apathy. Over the past 5years, the team devoted considerable effort to investigating contributing factors and potential solutions. They read current research, created student incentive programs, and even discussed their concerns with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Most recently, the school created a collaborative community of practice, which is defined by Wenger (2010) as a group of individuals committed to working and learning together to address an issue. At the target school, the community of practice on student apathy was comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. However, none of these groups and their initiatives, singly or combined, had an impact. The community of practice then looked more closely at the learning environment of the target school to examine factors that could contribute to the problem as well as strategies that could improve student engagement in academics. Exploration of the school's internal learning environment from former students' perspectives could illuminate previously unknown factors and point the way toward developing solutions for student apathy. Examining the factors that contribute to the high degree of apathy at the target school could provide information and options to schools and students throughout the state of Maryland and the country, where research shows that approximately 12% of elementary school students

nationally manifest apathy about school (Skinner, Furrer, Marchland, & Kindermann, 2008; Carter, Reschly, Lovelace, Appleton, & Thompson, 2012).

This project study used a qualitative case study to explore the factors that contribute to the high level of apathy among the students at the target school. Data were gathered by conducting interviews with eight former students and their parents. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling, based on their fifth grade climate survey scores. Additional data was collected through a review of archived records. The intent of this study was to explore the school's problem of student apathy by listening to the voices of the students who manifested apathy when they attended the target school and hearing from their parents about their child's experiences in fifth grade, and then to develop a project to help address the issue.

In the following sections, the problem of student apathy is defined and school-based information student achievement is examined. In addition, a review of measures already taken to decrease student apathy by the stakeholders of the school is addressed. Finally, the review of the literature discusses the factors arising from the school and learning environment that have been shown to contribute to student apathy.

It is anticipated that this study will contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address student apathy and increase student engagement by giving former students the chance to talk about the factors that contributed to their feelings of apathy when they were enrolled in the target school. The study's findings and the resulting project can affect social change by giving this school and other elementary schools in the district information on the factors that contribute to student apathy and a comprehensive

professional development plan to address these factors. By implementing the professional development plan, it is expected that the target school can reduce student apathy, increase student engagement, and provide a road map for other schools plagued by student apathy.

Definition of the Problem

Student apathy and lack of engagement present as a significant problem at the suburban elementary target school where the overall school climate was characterized as "highly apathetic". Of greatest concern was the fact that 62%, of the fifth grade students rating themselves as "highly apathetic" and therefore disengaged from the academic program in school. In 2010, the demographic representation of the 465 student body was 79% White, 13% Hispanic, 5% Multiracial, 2% Asian, and 1% Black and 22% of the families were eligible to participate in the Free and Reduced Meals program. This issue of student apathy, as seen in Table 1 (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010) has been an ever-increasing concern since 2007. Individual student surveys reviewed revealed that specific questions related to academics yielded particularly "apathetic" responses. Another indicator of apathy was manifested in a lower attendance rate than the district's average of 97% (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010).

Table 1
2007-2009 Student Climate Survey Responses:
Percentage of Students Scoring "Highly Apathetic"

	2007	2008	2009
School-wide			
	33	40	43
Fifth grade	47	58	62

The data in this table show a statistically significant school-wide increase in student apathy, and most markedly a 15% increase in the fifth grade. By using student identification numbers, individual survey responses were reviewed and matched with students' district and state assessments. This review indicated that the pervasive apathy was also impacting school-based, district, and state measures of academic achievement. Homework completion dramatically declined in fifth grade as documented in the 2009 school improvement plan; the school's fourth and fifth graders' reading and math academic achievement declined from 2005-2009 as measured by district quarterly benchmark assessments. Perhaps most important to the overall success and reputation of the school, the MSA reading and math scores of students receiving special education services and/or participating in the FARMS program also declined (Maryland State Department of Education, 2009). See Table 2 below.

Table 2

2005-2009 MSA Reading: Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficient Level

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Special Education	78	80	68	67	64
Free & Reduced Meals	87	86	80	75	72

This decline was of great concern because some of the students in these two student groups were also those who manifested apathy on the climate survey and presented the greatest challenge to the target school because of their significant needs and because their failure to progress had the potential to prevent the target school from achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 2002) and beginning in 2014 meeting the demands of the Race to the Top Initiative (United States Department of Education, 2011).

It is important to note that the school's leadership team worked to address the problem of student apathy and its effects. For example, the teachers at the target school were implementing the required Maryland State Department of Education curriculum with fidelity (Maryland State Department of Education, 2009). They were using Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) to improve student behavior and investment and had created student incentive programs to recognize and support positive change. The leadership team discussed its concerns with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). In an effort to address the issue, the school created a collaborative community of practice, which is defined by Wenger (2005, 2010) as a group of individuals, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members who are committed to working and learning together to address an issue to address the school improvement goals and objectives. All of these efforts and initiatives did not decrease the level of student apathy. Hence, the leadership team actively pursued other avenues of investigation.

While there are factors outside of school that can influence students' level of engagement in their education (Boutte, 2012; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Sheppard, 2010),

this study was limited to factors within the schoolhouse, as it is the learning environment that the school's collaborative community of practice has the ability to control.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Student Apathy. The phenomenon of student apathy was clearly evident at the target school where, 62% percent of fifth grade students, and 42% of the total school population identified themselves as "highly apathetic" on a Likert scale that ranked responses from *highly engaged* to *highly apathetic*, as seen in Table 1. The 2009 student attendance rate of 95.2% was lower than the 97% enjoyed by other schools with similar demographics in the district (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010). The students at the target school communicated their apathy toward school both in their responses on the school climate survey and in their lower than expected attendance.

The problem of student apathy is evident in other schools throughout the United States. More and more students see school as something they are coerced into doing, using bribes, threats, and bargains (Baines & Slutsky, 2009; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011), rather than an enterprise in which they actively participate. Students typically have few options for demonstrating how they feel about school, but the one avenue they always have, and increasingly use, is opting out of the process by being apathetic and disengaged (Fullan, 2007).

Academic Performance. Despite a school-wide commitment to teach all students the required state curriculum content, deliver research-based interventions, and collaborate to effectively use. Response to Intervention (RTI) Maryland State Department

of Education, 2009), the target school's state accountability test scores in most sub-groups remained flat over the last 5 years while the scores at other schools rose (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010). Of even greater significance was the fact that the accountability test scores of the students participating in the Free and Reduced Meals program (FARMS), and those identified as needing special education services declined over the past 5 years, as seen in Table 4. It is important to note that all of the students receiving special education services and participating in the FARMS program were being taught the required state curriculum content (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010) and receiving approved interventions (United States Department of Education, 2010). Their teachers were rated "Satisfactory" or "Highly Effective" by the target school's principal (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010) and each teacher was designated as " Highly Qualified" as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (United States Department of Education, 2010)..

Another area of academic concern emerged from an analysis of the 2009-2010 quarterly summative assessment scores of fourth and fifth graders reading and math. This analysis showed an overall decline of 15% in reading and 7% in math when compared to the scores in 2008. These indicators of diminished academic performance were particularly puzzling and disturbing to the school's leadership team because the teachers were teaching the curriculum content on which the assessments are based and were implementing targeted interventions. Based on these indicators of poor academic performance each grade level developed and implemented a plan and process for addressing the school improvement goals and objectives. These same indicators and

grade-level initiatives were an integral component of the school's collaborative community of practice, which was comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. The combination of all efforts did not address the issue of apathy in order to improve academic performance.

The academic performance of all students is a national priority. The United States is depending on its future work force and citizens to maintain or improve its place in the global marketplace. To live up to this obligation, the graduates of the public school system must enter adulthood well prepared, not just with basic skills, but with the desire and commitment to perform at higher levels than the students in other countries. Apathy has no place in this plan. It is a deterrent to both acquiring skills and possessing the will and commitment they will need (Pink, 2009).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Student apathy, not student engagement, is on the rise in many schools throughout the United States (Goodman, 2010), and its effects can be seen as counterproductive to the education community's increased focus on improving the achievement of all students, especially those being identified as "at risk" (United States Department of Education, 2010). Today, as a result of the regulations in the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) as well as the more recent demands of the Race to the Top Initiative and the Common Core Content Standards (United States Department of Education, 2010), all students are expected to demonstrate not only basic skills but also to perform at high levels of mastery. Teachers are expected to connect with all children in their classroom; to diagnose their academic needs; to teach them rigorous content; and to lead them to

display mastery of this content on challenging state assessments. To accomplish this, considerable effort and resources need to be channeled into remediating deficits and teaching the required curriculum content on which the accountability assessments are based. A growing body of research is supportive of examining the instructional practices teachers are using to teach the required curriculum and, as an antidote to student apathy, the relationship teachers create with their students (Marzano, 2006, 2011; Mitra, 2008). According research by Marzano (2011), Mitra (2008), and Jensen (2014) student apathy creates a major obstacle in a school's quest to ensure a successful academic experience for every student.

In the pursuit of improving student achievement and meeting the requirements of the Race to the Top Initiative (2010), teachers may be concerned that taking the time to engage apathetic students, examining the instructional methods they used, or engaging students in decisions that affect their education will not yield the timely and significant results they need and thus feel compelled to cover under curriculum content and even "force their students to be successful" (Olson, 2007, p.39). However, research dating back to Piaget (1971), Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1966) combined with current research on student apathy and engagement, research based instructional practices and brain research assert that the learning level of learning required to meet with success in the 21st century is a complex collaborative process that requires an engaging partnership between teachers and students (Jensen, 2008; Marzano, 2011; Willis, 2006). This research offers a compelling rationale for teachers to consider the use of research-based and differentiated instructional practices and actively engage students in daily classroom

instruction as a path toward reducing their students' apathy and as even improving their academic performance (Mitra, 2008). Utilizing research-based and differentiated instructional practices (Marzano, 2012; Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008), and creating a process for students to actively participate in this process (Mitra, 2007, 2008) can support schools in reducing student apathy and opening the door for all students to meet with success.

Another arena of research that speaks to the problem of student apathy and student engagement is that of achieving the larger goals of the American education system. One of these goals is to prepare students to be fully informed, participating members of a democracy (Spring, 2008). A second and equally important goal is for schools to graduate students who are culturally proficient adults who advocate for higher levels of equality and social justice (Spring, 2008; Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbell Jones, 2005). These worthy goals cannot be achieved by apathetic students who view education as a meaningless endeavor, something they must endure rather than an important building block for their future life (Fullan, 2007, 2011). Past and current research affirms the notion that the years children spend in school have the potential to launch them on the path to a bright future or condemn them to a life of unrealized potential (Mitra, 2008). Ensuring a bright future for today's students is important not only for them, but for the United States democracy by furthering its goals of an informed electorate and social justice.

Definitions

The following terms, concepts and are critical to understanding this study.

Community of Practice: A community of practice can be defined as a group of stakeholders, teachers, administrators, parents, community members and even students who work together to improve the academic performance of all students who attend the school.

Differentiated Instruction: **"**To differentiate instruction is to recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interests; and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process to teaching and learning for students of differing capabilities in the same class. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is and leading them toward achieving the identified standard." (Tomlinson, Brimijoin& Narvaez, 2008).

No Child Left Behind Act: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a United States law that is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB advocates setting high standards and measurable goals to improve individual students' academic performance. Under NCLB states are required to develop assessments in basic skills and set standards of performance. "Each state must give these assessments to all students at select grade levels in order to receive federal funding. NCLB has expanded the federal role in public education through annual testing, annual academic progress report cards for schools, school districts, and states, teacher qualifications, and funding." (United States Department of Education, 2002).

Race to the Top Initiative: The Race to the Top Initiative expands the efforts of NCLB, provides a $4.35 billion dollar fund to support five areas of focus. The first is

centered on creating and implementing rigorous standards that are measured by reliable and valid assessments on an annual basis. The second speaks to teacher and principal quality through revising preparation and evaluation and offering rewards for effectiveness. The third theme centers on using data statewide to inform instructional decisions. The fourth area of focus charges states to use innovative methods to lead struggling schools to meet with success, and the fifth speaks to collaborating with the total community to improve schools, expand science and math education, and learn from effective charter schools (www.ed.gov).

Reciprocal Teaching: The reciprocal teaching/learning process is the collaborative construction of meaning between teachers and students that leads students toward greater depth of understanding and higher quality learning (Palinesar, 1986).

Research-based Instructional Practices: "Research-based instructional practices are those that meta-research analysis has shown to have a high probability of enhancing student achievement for all students, in all subject areas and at all grade levels" (Marzano, Pickering & Heflebower, 2010, p.29).

School Culture: For the purposes of this study, school culture is defined as ". . . a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It is the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act and perform" (Barth, 2002, p.7).

Social Interaction in Learning: Social interaction in learning is a structured instructional strategy, based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978) which

emphasizes active learning through interpersonal interaction. Students act as partners with the teacher and each other (Vygotsky, 1979).

Student Apathy: Student apathy, for the purposes of this study, is defined as an expression of disinterest and lack of engagement in academic experiences (Emmerson-Pace, C. 2012)

Teacher-Student Co-collaboration: This type of teacher/student relationship is characterized by shared decision-making and shared responsibility (Mitra, 2007, 2008).

Zone of Proximal Development: This is the range of cognitive tasks that children can perform only with the support of adults or more skilled peers. Through this collaborative interaction, the child develops strategies that lead to them being able to perform these functions independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

Significance

Understanding the factors that have contributed to student apathy at the target school will be of significance to individual students, the target school, and other schools struggling with the problem of student apathy. As the United States seeks to maintain its competitive presence in the global marketplace, it is the students of the 21st century who will make this possible. To accomplish this, students must graduate from school and demonstrate to their employer that that they possess the necessary skills. Equally as important, they must be fully vested in their own work and the collective work of their division or company (Pink, 2009). Apathy has no place in the workplace these students will enter and as a result, and so it has no place in schools. As a result, this study will be of significance to elementary schools facing the issue of student apathy because it

carefully and deeply examines the factors that contribute to high levels of student apathy. At the target school, this qualitative study provided an additional lens through which the school could view both the issue of student apathy and its continuous improvement efforts designed to reduce it. The voices of the students reflected their unique perspective and provided the leadership team with information they were unable to gather from any other source (Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2010). As a result, this study may be of the greatest significance for the students currently attending the target school, who will benefit from the voices of former students being included in conversations that shape their education, and their lives.

Guiding/ Question

This qualitative case study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are former fifth graders' perceptions concerning their experiences at the target school?

2. What factors contributed to the high degree of apathy among the fifth grade students at the target school?

3. What strategies could the target school utilize to address student apathy and increase student engagement?

These guiding questions led me to learn about the school experiences the participants and their parents and create a project to address the themes identified. Armed with the data collected in this study and comprehensive professional development plan based on the themes, the school's leadership team has the tools it needs to move forward and create a learning environment that embraces growth mindset and employs differentiated instructional practice to address the student apathy that has plagued the school for several years.

Review of the Literature

Student apathy is a complex and multifaceted problem, and intricately tied to the attribute of student engagement. There are factors outside the school environment that may contribute to a high degree of apathy toward, and a lack of engagement in, school. Two such factors include socio-economic background and parental involvement (Boutte, 2012; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Sheppard, 2010). However, the purpose of this literature review was to examine the literature on student apathy and engagement factors—those

that come from the school and learning environment—because those are the focuses of this study. It presents a brief overview of

- Apathy in schools

- The social learning theory tenets of Piaget (1971) and Vygotsky (1978)

- The democratic principles of Dewey (1966);

- Educational research in both the United States and around the world that focuses on research-based and differentiated instructional practices;

- Research on the inclusion of students and families in a school's collaborative community of practice.

- Applicable research in the fields of neuroscience, organizational theory, and educational psychology are also included in the review

In conducting the literature review, I searched the EBSCO, PsychINFO, SAGE Multidisciplinary Premier, SAGE Education Journals databases and Google Scholar, using the following keywords: *engagement, apathy, school culture, communities of practice, zone of proximal development, democratic principles, student/teacher co-collaboration, research-based instructional practices, differentiation, neuroscience, organizational theory, motivation, reciprocal teaching/learning, qualitative research, children in research,* and *case study research.* This search also led me to other websites including, United States Department of Education, The Learning and the Brain Society, Jensen Learning, Marzano Research Laboratory, What Works Clearinghouse, and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Apathy in Schools

A review of the literature on the topic of student apathy consistently yields a connection between apathy and engagement, as though these two attributes are two sides of the same coin, dichotomously connected. This dichotomy is consistently evident when researchers speak about the issue of student apathy as a growing problem in of schools throughout the United States (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). The construct of academic engagement speaks to student engagement on a continuum from highly apathetic to highly engaged (Christenson et al., 2008). The problem of student apathy is evident in high schools and is increasingly becoming a problem in elementary schools (Baines, Slutsky, 2009).In their qualitative study Thompson and Allen (2012) posit that with the onset of high-stakes testing in the past decade learners in some the most vulnerable student groups, including African Americans and those who live in poverty, feel apathetic and disenfranchised toward school for the majority of the time. These students see little value in what is being asked of them and the methods of coercion and bribery teachers resort to does little to reduce apathy and increase engagement. Many of the teachers interviewed who encounter this apathy feel like they are doing everything they can do. They lay the blame for the high degree of apathy at the feet of the students and their families, but students see the situation very differently. In interviews, the students shared that they believe that their school sees them less as learners and more as a means to an end since schools are rewarded or sanctioned based on the achievement levels of the students (Thompson, Allen, 2012). The apathy these students feel toward school leads

them away from engaging in the enterprise of learning, which both immediately and in the future hurts their opportunities for a full, productive life (Kennedy &Datnow, 2011).

Apathy is not just an issue for student groups traditionally viewed as vulnerable. It also has become a problem for those students identified as gifted. These students are seen by their teachers as having the potential to achieve at high levels throughout their school career and in life. Their scores on standardized achievement tests are at or above 95% - 97% (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012).Their future in school should be full of promise, but these students are ever increasingly opting out of the learning process. In their meta-analysis of the research, Landis and Reshly (2013) found that this disturbing phenomenon is often less noticeable because gifted students can be apathetic and disengaged while still receive passing grades. However, the phenomenon of apathetic gifted learners has gained growing attention because of the rise in their rate of dropping out of school (Landis, Reshly, 2013) over the last decade. Among those gifted students who drop out, about half cite boredom as the primary factor contributing to their decision to leave school (Azzam, 2007).

Student apathy has been creeping into the academic disposition of younger and younger students over the past decade. The unyielding emphasis on test scores has reshaped pre-school and elementary school programs. The school experience for many four, five, and six year-olds has shifted from being equally focused on social and academic development to being predominantly focused on discrete academic skills, with purposeful play nowhere to be seen despite the fact that research clearly shows that purposeful play positively affects cooperation, creativity and intelligence (Baines,

Slutsky, 2009). As purposeful play has decreased in pre- and elementary schools, student apathy has risen. In their review of the literature on apathy and engagement as they relate to play, Baines and Slutsky (2009) revealed that student apathy may be one of the reasons why the more traditional approaches to instruction employed during the last decade have yielded such lackluster results. If children don't care about what they are learning and how well they are performing, they will, at best, only meet with a moderate degree of success (Marantz, 2008). Students who see school as something they are coerced into doing, with bribes, threats, and bargains, rather than an enterprise in which they actively participate, become apathetic and experience great difficulty realizing their full potential (Fullan, 2007, 2001; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011).

Piaget's and Vygotsky's Social Learning Theories

The works of Piaget (1971) posit that from a very early age the children he studied naturally demonstrated a desire to engage in the experiences life presented them. His extensive observation and analysis of children's behavior revealed that throughout his or her infancy and childhood a child builds cognitive structures to engage in, understand and respond to experiences. Their cognitive skill level increases in sophistication, moving from reflexive responses in infancy to increasingly complex learning (Piaget & Inhelder, 1971; Fox & Riconscente, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including detailed descriptions of observations, to build on to these theories by offering that this process of cognitive development is greatly enhanced by frequent and sustained interaction with peers and adults, beginning with their family and continuing throughout their school and play experiences. In fact, without

meaningful interaction with other human beings, cognitive development is severely

compromised. This sustained interaction also increases the child's interest and

engagement (Piaget & Inhelder, 1971; Dunleavy & Milton, 2008). Social interaction

plays an important role in building a child's basic cognitive structures, but it is when a

child engages in more complex learning, like that required in intellectual tasks, that social

interaction and targeted support becomes even more crucial. Interaction with and

scaffolding by supportive adults must play a major role in the learning process (Gredler,

2009). The adults that surround children must both lead and collaborate with them in

making meaning of their world so they can make the next great leap in their development.

While this collaborative, targeted interaction and instruction is always important, it is

especially crucial during the zone of proximal development, a time when a child is poised

and ready to master a new concept or advance cognitively (Vygotsky, 1978; Jadallah,

Anderson, Nguyen-Jahiel, Miller, Kim, Kuo, Dong, & Wu, 2011). While this phase

begins with imitation and nurturing instruction, the relationship between teacher and

student must evolve into a collaborative one in order to support deeper and more complex

cognitive development. This stage embodies reciprocal learning at its best, and as such is

the process children must participate in to become truly engaged in their own learning

(Earl, 2007; Lutz, Guthrie & Davis, 2006). Schools that hope to achieve high academic

levels for all students need to create a reciprocal learning environment in which all

students play an active role in shaping their learning in the classroom. Through this

process both their instruction and relationships will be informed by a relationship

between teacher and student that has evolved into one of co-collaborators, with the

teacher serving as a facilitator and guide, listening to the students' perspectives and ideas, using research-based and differentiated instructional practices to support them in learning rigorous content and constructing meaning, and providing them with opportunities to take all they learn in the classroom and use it to make their school and perhaps even their community a better place (Mitra, 2007) . When this level of collaboration occurs students are fully engaged and learning truly takes place.

Dewey's Democratic Principles

Seizing on the opportunity presented by the zone of proximal development with research-based and differentiated instruction and collaboration between adults and students schools can both provide an anecdote to disengagement and apathy and lay the foundation for the challenging and complex journey toward becoming well-educated, fully equipped, and highly functioning citizens of a democracy. Dewey put this philosophy into practice at his Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, and the research he conducted there led him to posit that making sure students reach this point of development is of critical importance to this country's democracy's collective well-being (Stuckkhart & Glanz, 2010). The health of a democracy depends on an electorate that has the ability to make decisions and choose candidates based on what is in the best interest of the common good, not just what furthers their own interests. Because of this, a democracy has to be renewed and regenerated with each generation (Dewey, 1966; Rehfeld, 2011). This need is especially critical in the 21st century when citizens are bombarded with conflicting information from a wide variety of media sources. Making sense of all of this information requires a high degree of skill, interest, and investment.

To prepare for the responsibility of being fully engaged, voting members of a democracy, students must be given the opportunity of being fully engaged in their own learning experiences. They must develop not only the skill but the will to be a member of an informed electorate. Accomplishing this requires both time and tutelage. Students must have both the opportunity to develop a strong academic foundation and repeatedly collaborate with teachers and fellow students to learn challenging material; solve problems; reflect on their academic experience and performance; and assume an active role in both shaping the school culture and making decisions that directly affect their learning (Thayer-Bacon, 2012; Jackson, 2012). It is through these experiences that students develop and mature intellectually and cultivate the skills and dispositions they need to be able to choose elected officials who will represent their interests and hold these officials accountable for the decisions they make. For democracy to survive and thrive, schools must lead students to learn all the content and skills they need to possess, and just as importantly, empower them to be actively engaged in their own education. By making sure the first experience the children of the United States have with one of democracy's primary institutions is one that actively engages them in the life-shaping experience of their education, schools begin the important work of preparing children to become knowledgeable, contributing members of this democracy.

Research-Based and Differentiated Instructional Practices

Apathy and its negative effects have long been anecdotally recognized as a critical factor in a child's schooling (Tomlinson, 2007). The relationship of this apathy to the instructional practices their teacher's employ has become the topic of considerable

research (Marzano, 2006, 2009; Tomlinson, 2008). This research began in the end of the 20th century when educational researchers began examining not just what teachers were teaching their students, but in equal measure the methods they were using to lead them to learn what was being taught. In quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies, one of the key findings was that how teachers teach has a powerful impact on how students engage in their learning and ultimately what they learn (Jensen, 2008; Marzano, 2006, 2011; Willis, 2006). These findings opened the door for researchers, schools and individual teachers to examine how they are engaging and teaching each of their students and equipped with this knowledge, consider using instructional practices that have shown to yield heightened engagement and increased achievement.

In examining instructional practices, many researchers have conducted and reviewed research in search of instructional practices that increase engagement and achievement. While many have contributed to this body of information and research, this literature review will focus on the work of the Marzano Research Laboratory and their Classroom Strategies Series (2001, 2005, 2011), instructional practices based on brain research findings (Jensen, 2008; Willis, 2006), and differentiation principles (Roberts, Inman, 2007; Tomlinson, Brimijoin, &Narvaez, 2008) For over a decade, the work of Marzano and the Marzano Research Laboratory has offered educators practical recommendations to increase engagement and improve achievement that are firmly grounded in quantitative research. Through his meta-analysis review of instructional practices, Marzano (2010) illuminated nine strategies that when employed in the classroom, improve student achievement. In the process of examining these strategies it

became clear that much more needs to be in place in a classroom than just these nine strategies. In future books in the Classroom Strategies series Marzano and associates make the connection between these strategies, classroom management, school leadership, and finally student engagement. In this most recent publication, The Highly Engaged Classroom (2011) Marzano, Pickering and Heflebower highlight the importance of engagement in learning and conversely the detrimental effects of disengagement and apathy. By translating quantitative research into classroom practice, the authors provide schools and classroom teachers with specific, research-based instructional practices that will lead to the creation of a highly engaged and instruction-focused classroom. These practices are broken down into four topics: (a) emotions, (b) interest, (c) perceived importance, (d) perceptions of efficacy. Within each of these topics the authors offer specific and research-based instructional practices that teachers can use to address apathy, increase engagement and improve achievement. A review of these practices illuminated a strong connection and overlap with Marzano's original nine strategies (2007), brain-research findings and instructional recommendations, and differentiation principles and practices, the other two areas of research discussed in this section of the literature review.

Instructional practices based on the findings of neuroscience research are ever increasingly emerging as strategies to both address apathy and improve achievement. Understanding the structure of the brain, what it needs and how it works provides educators with a solid foundation on which to build a set of instructional practices that address apathy, increase engagement, and even improve achievement (Jensen, 2008; Sousa, 2010; Willis, 2006). These researchers and others are providing schools with

recommendations of specific instructional practices that can be used to increase memory and capture and maintain student engagement. This area of current research offers enough significant research on reducing student apathy that it will be examined in greater detail later in this literature review.

Proponents of the use of differentiation principles and practices, argue that these principles and practices are grounded in educational theory and research. Differentiated instruction has its foundation in the work of Vygotsky (1978), and the zone of proximal development he advocates as the optimal point at which learning takes place when supported by appropriate instruction and collaborative relationships. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) and Maslow's (1962) research on needs and interests, combined with Sternberg's (1998), Dewey's (1916) research on aligning instruction to student needs and preparing them for democracy provide a theoretical base for differentiation. Jensen's (2008) and Willis's (2006) research on the findings of neuroscience and brain-based learning, and Gardner's (2006) continued research on multiple intelligences offer additional support for differentiation principles and practices. This collective body of research supports the maximization of student engagement and learning through the recognition that instruction should be differentiated in relation to individual strengths and needs (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, Brown, Bracken, Stambaugh, French, McGowan, Worley, Quek & Bai, 2008). Even though differentiated instructional practices are grounded in what is believed to be best practice research, it is important to note that empirical studies have not been conducted that support and validate the collective set of practices as a set of practices that significantly increase student achievement. However, qualitative research studies exist

that clearly illuminate its connection to reducing student apathy and increasing levels of engagement (Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008). In each piece of research conducted and reviewed, utilizing differentiated and responsive instructional practices clearly emerges as an effective strategy to address student apathy.

Collaborative Communities of Practice

Apathy affects every aspect of a student's school experience and each facet of the school's culture. Schools are complex entities composed of a myriad of perspectives and dispositions all charged with a singular purpose, educating every child. To achieve this daunting task, schools are ever increasingly employing a wide variety of scientifically based initiatives, including establishing collaborative communities of practice that include the perspectives of its stakeholders. A community of practice is broadly defined as a group of individuals committed to working and learning together to address an issue. It examines salient data; collects input from their stakeholders; and uses all of this to develop a well-articulated and monitored plan of action that includes the perspectives of all stakeholders (Wenger, 2009). Specifically in schools, a collaborative community of practice is a group of stakeholders, including administration, teachers, parents, and community members who focus sustained effort on addressing identified needs for the sole purpose of improving the engagement and academic achievement of all students. These school-based communities of practice are charged with this sometimes daunting and always humbling responsibility, and as such are always evaluating the effectiveness of their practices and plans. Throughout this process they must work diligently to consider all options and include the perspectives of all stakeholders (Jerald, 2006;

Marzano, 2006, 2010). The efforts of each school's collaborative community of practice are ultimately focused on improving student achievement and preparing young people to meet with success as adults. However, despite their commitment to doing the right thing for the students they serve, it is important to note that the perspectives of parents are often minimally represented and those of the students are often noticeably absent from this influential process. In fact, the notion of including students in the school's community of practice is seldom given even cursory consideration. This thoughtless yet seemingly deliberate act of exclusion of student perspectives can and does foster disengagement and contribute to student apathy (Cook-Sather, 2007). By wrapping these important stakeholders in this process and including their perspectives they can begin to understand the power they have over their education and future destiny.

When students' voices are heard and they are actively engaged in their school's conversations and reform efforts, apathy can be addressed and student achievement can increase. Students have a unique perspective to offer, one no other stakeholder can provide, not even their parents; and research, including Mitra's 2007 mixed method's study with middle school students shows that including students in the continuous improvement process yields powerful results including heightened engagement and even improved academic achievement (Yonezawa & Jones, 2007; Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2010; Mitra, 2007). With these identified benefits, one can't help but wonder why most schools choose to minimally involve or even exclude students from contributing to and shaping the school that serves them.

Perhaps one contributing factor is that including students in the school's collaborative community of practice requires a shift in the perceptions of the school's adult power brokers. These adults have, by in large, established a hierarchical notion of the roles they and their students should play. These relationships are largely unauthentic, with the teachers and students playing roles, largely defined by the school. The teacher plays the role of the all-knowing sage while the student plays the role of dutiful pupil, whose only job is to give the teacher what she wants to hear. These types of relationships do little to advance the cause of increased student engagement and achievement (Smith, 2006; Jadallah, Anderson, Nguyen-Jahiel, Miller, Kim, Kuo, Dong, & Wu, 2011). However, shifting this paradigm will certainly present challenges. Not the least of these is changing the power structure and status of the relationships between students and the teachers who are responsible for teaching them (Skinner, Furrer, Marchland, & Kindermann, 2008). These carefully crafted hierarchical relationships have been established partly because this is how the relationships between teachers and children have always been structured, and partly because schools believe they need this structure to maintain order in the classroom, teach students everything they have to learn and maintain the balance of authority required to earn the respect of the community.

Given these factors, shifting to a collaborative relationship will necessitate examining current belief systems and structures. Despite these challenges, the end results of student/teacher collaboration are well worth the efforts inherent in restructuring the traditionally passive, disaffected role the students play in their education (Goodman, 2010; Gunter & Thomson, 2007). This process will undoubtedly be difficult, but by

making this change, the school has the potential to make a tremendous difference in their students' level of engagement and personal investment in all elements of their school experience.

If schools are going to successfully engage in the complex process of school reform required by the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the tenets of Race to the Top (2011), they must include all stakeholders, including students and their families in the collaborative school improvement process. The central office, building administrator/s, teachers, and to a lesser degree parents and the community have input, but students do not. It is the students who are the school's primary stakeholders and it is the students who are most directly impacted by its policies and programs. Allowing their voices, with the support of their families, to be heard throughout the schoolhouse, both in the classroom and the school-wide community of practice will give their improvement efforts added legitimacy and momentum.

International Research on the Rights of Children

The problem of student apathy is also evident in other countries. As a result, international studies offer the inclusion of students and families in the school's community of practice as a strategy to address apathy and increase engagement (Cook, 2007; Fullan, 2011; Leitch, 2007). A contributing factor in this international focus can be found in the recommendations and Declaration of the Rights of the Child from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). These recommendations focus on the importance of providing children with the right to be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them, and have been receiving considerable attention in United

Kingdom, Finland, Netherlands, Canada, and Australia (Cook-Sather, 2007; Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2010; Fielding, 2010). Specifically, Article 12 of the Convention offers that children have the right to be fully engaged and included in the organizations and decisions that affect them. This particular recommendation has sparked research, discussion and action throughout the international research community, and as a result, curriculum, school structures, and even school-wide decision-making processes are being reviewed and revised to include students and their families in real and meaningful ways.

This international research offers creating and maintaining a collaborative community of practice where teachers, parents and students are not islands but in fact support and learn from each other as a strategy for schools who want to increase engagement and address the needs of all students. Building this level of collaboration leads students to begin to see the value in attending school. They can make positive contributions to their school, not just for themselves, but also for their classmates and parents. Once engaged, students begin to comprehend the important role they play in their own education. In an ethnographic study that captured post-primary students' perceptions about the role they play in their school's decision-making process through drawings and interviews, Leitch and Mitchell (2007) found the student participants' responses reflective, and realistic. They didn't ask the school to let them be in charge of everything, but their responses and drawings did indicate that they want to be an integral part of developing and understanding of what is being asked of them. They want to know what they need to do in order to be successful, and how their teachers and parents can support their efforts. It's important to acknowledge that even though collaborating with

children is widely advocated in international research, creating these collaborative communities of practice is not easily accomplished (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). In addition to the fact that fostering collaboration between students, families, and teachers is at odds with the hierarchical power structure inherent in most adult/child and school/home relationships, there is a prevalent belief that students may not possess the level of maturity needed to meaningfully participate in complex decisions regarding their education and life. This concern is a significant factor because if children are to be included in making meaningful decisions they must be objective, trustworthy, and have the ability to engage in complex problem- solving. Despite these reservations, studies including Watts and Youens' (2007) qualitative study revealed that students possess these attributes and more. They found that students have a greater capacity to be objective, honest, and self-evaluative than many educators believed was possible. Their results were supported in a mixed methods study conducted by Bergmark and Kostenius (2009) that found that students as young as those in elementary school are willing to put their personal needs aside for the greater good, and they quickly learn the value of being reflective and self-evaluative and have proven their ability to serve as valuable agents to increase parental involvement. In addition to possessing each of these crucial attributes it's important to realize that children have the same need for a degree of self-determination as their adult counterparts. When provided with the opportunity to offer input, demonstrate responsibility, and exercise autonomy, international research (Cook-Sather, 2007; Covell, Howe, & Fielding, 2010; Leitch & Mitchell, 2007; McNeil, 2010) has found that students are more invested and engaged in everything they are charged

with doing. They can solve complex problems; act with integrity and impartiality; and demonstrate that they care deeply about their educational experience and that of their classmates. Students clearly demonstrate they deserve to be involved in the decisions their school is making about their education, and that their and engagement provide their families with an authentic reason to be engaged in their educational experiences (Leitch & Mitchell, 2007). Navigating the challenges inherent in crafting this collaborative relationship with students and their families is well worth the effort. Students deserve the opportunity to take their rightful place in the school's collaborative community of practice, the team that shapes all of their educational experiences. They have shown they are more than capable of accepting the challenge (Mitra, 2012).

Neuroscience

Educators, like the faculty at the target school who are wrestling with a high degree of student apathy, can benefit from developing an awareness of how the brain functions and considering the recommendations of the burgeoning field of neuroscience. Learning is a brain-changing activity that requires focused attention and sustained engagement (Willis, 2006). To understand how the brain functions during the learning process, there are several important factors for educators to consider. First, the brain functions and learns best in an environment that both reduces stress and increases challenge. Active involvement in making meaning of what is being taught is critical for students to learn new and/or complex concepts. Another important factor to consider is that connecting new learning to personal perspectives and experiences is crucial to retention. Finally, collaborating with others serves to solidify and extend knowledge. The

implications of the workings of the brain can provide schools with scientifically-based practices to use in their quest to increase engagement and learning. Based on this, when a teacher creates a classroom environment that balances stress reduction practices with engaging and meaningful challenges that support collaboration with them and each other, they lay the foundation for high levels of learning. Since the brain is always searching for meaning (Sousa, 2011), teachers who actively engage students in connecting what they are learning to their own perspectives or life experiences open the door for deeper and more complex learning. The results of quantitative studies reviewed found that deeper and more complex learning reduces apathy and increases engagement. Finally, since the brain thrives on interaction and learns best when collaborating both with adults and peers, including students in conversations and decisions about their learning offers a promising path to leading students to become the high functioning adults they must become (Jensen, 2005, 2008). To become successful adults in the 21st century students will need to learn how to balance their brain's need for challenge and interaction with the inevitable stresses life brings. Learning to create this balance requires a high degree of engagement and self-awareness. This engagement and self-awareness must to be carefully cultivated, beginning at a young age, and developed through repeatedly opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect their education and future life experiences.

Neuroscience research reveals that to successfully learn and retain what is learned, students must be connected with and to others. Scientific research studies ranging from rhesus monkeys to young children and teenagers show that human beings are born primed to connect and stay connected to each other (Jensen, 2009). It is through

these connections that children see themselves and their capability to learn, grow, develop resiliency, and adapt to their environment. This brain-based attribute of connectedness accounts for the fact that social interaction can alter how the brain views the world; effects brain circuitry; and serves as vehicle to increase student engagement (Sousa, 2011). Considering the powerful impact social connections have on the brain, especially the young brain, schools must consider how to maximize the positive effects of connectedness both with teachers and students and students and their families. In addition to nurturing, supporting, and encouraging, schools must provide children with meaningful opportunities for self-agency. These opportunities need to be embedded in an environment that guides the brain's need for challenge, risk, novelty, excitement, peer approval, and engagement in the decision-making processes (Jensen, 2009). Creating this high level of engagement requires teachers to, among other things, work collaboratively with their students. Just as carefully as they provide appropriate materials of instruction and use research-based and differentiated instructional strategies, they must provide them with opportunities for meaningful input. No element of the school experience is too large or too small for this combination of collaboration and input. The brain thrives on both. By using positive social connections to address apathy and enhance engagement, teachers, parents and students can create a school culture that provides opportunities to include students in the school's collaborative community of practice. This involvement in and connection with the members of the school's collaborative community of practice supports the innate need all human beings have to make and maintain meaningful connections with others(Sousa, 2011). These connections have the potential to support

students in expanding their learning; connecting with significant adult models; and understanding what they need to know and be able to grow into successful adults.

Organizational Theory and Educational Psychology

The issue of student apathy and its effects are also discussed in other fields of research including organizational theory and educational psychology. Both of these fields of research illuminate the notion that everyone, no matter what role they play in a group or organization has the need to be actively involved, contribute, provide input in determining their fate, and make things better for themselves and others (Goleman, 2007; Pink, 2009; Senge, 2010; Wenger, 2006). In interviews and focus group discussions, researchers find that more than money or even recognition, this level of involvement is what motivates human beings to keep working, keep contributing, and keep learning (Pink, 2009). Engaging all stakeholders, including students, in both the act of learning and the school's collaborative community of practice has the potential to play a major role in reducing apathy and in creating a culture of excellence. The qualitative and quantitative research reviewed (Goleman, 2007; Pink, 2009; Senge, 2010; Wenger, 2009) is clear that any organization, and perhaps especially a school, should consider developing systems that tap into all stakeholders' skills and employing instructional practices that actively engage students in their learning. In other words, the organization must establish a collaborative community of practice that includes the talent and input of everyone because the power and success of a community of practice is, at least to a degree, dependent on the legitimacy of the members and their contributions. Every day and in every setting, schools must support each individual in developing his and her skills

and competencies and making the connection between their role and the collective success of the organization (Senge, 2010). A school can establish effective systems to handle day-to-day operations; provide professional development for teachers; monitor curriculum implementation; and improve student behavior and achievement. It may even have a well-organized and fully functioning community of practice that includes teachers, parents and community members, but if it does not include the students, for whom all of these systems are designed, it is missing crucial perspectives. This missing perspective potentially compromises the legitimacy of the systems established, including the school's community of practice, and the decisions this community of practice makes.

The field of educational psychology offers important considerations for schools facing the problem of student apathy. Interactions, engagement, and investment are crucial in creating experiences that affirm and empower. It is through these interactions that, "we create one another." (Goleman, 2007, p.1).   This is especially important to children and their school experiences because many children spend as much if not more time in school-based activities as they do with their families. Therefore, it is not surprising that the individuals in schools who interact with young people contribute greatly to shaping who they are and who they will become (Fullan, 2011). Among many other ideas, the American Psychological Association's learner centered principles offer that engagement supports and deepens children's development (Murphy & Alexander, 2007). As a result, each time a teacher reaches out to support children in becoming more competent, the children's belief in their value expands. When a teacher employs research-based instructional practices they have the opportunity to be engaged in learning rigorous

content and developing competencies. Every time a school listens, really listens to students' ideas and perspectives, the students believe they have something important to say. Conversely, disengagement breeds apathy, as seen through the interviews and survey responses in the mixed methods study conducted by Gunter and Thompson (2007). With each opportunity a school misses to employ research-based practices and wrap students into their education they deepen the child's belief that school has little or nothing to do with who they really are. These missed opportunities leave the student with two options. They can do what they are being asked to do in order to please their teachers and parents or they can step back and withdraw from the entire experience. Neither option offers opportunities for true engagement, so it is not surprising that some children choose to step away and begin the journey from disengagement to apathy. To address apathy, research offers the notion that employing instructional practices and collaborative endeavors offers students "choice and a sense of agency" (Murphy & Alexander, 2007, p. 17). This level of engagement and collaboration is fundamental to developing and maintaining motivation and affect. Leading students to be connected to their learning and the adults and students in the school fosters engagement, supports strategic processing, and helps them use their own unique skills and strengths to enhance their own learning.

The young people who graduate from school need to present their employers with much more than the ability to read, write and compute. In the 21st century it goes without saying that workers need to possess highly developed skills and competencies, but equally as importantly, they will need to take full ownership of their learning and performance, develop the ability to think creatively, and function successfully in a

collaborative work environment (Pink, 2009). Each of these attributes is complex and must be learned and practiced long before they are able to be applied in the workplace. They need to be modeled, developed, coached, and evaluated with ever increasing accountability. Schools need to make the most of every opportunity they can to reach out to their students, wrap them into each aspect of their school experience and listen, really listen to their perspectives. Decreasing apathy and increasing engagement is of paramount importance, not just for a child's success in school, but for an adult's success in life (Mitra, 2008; Pink, 2009).

Implications

The social change potential of this study is significant. In many schools, including the target school, education is often something done to students, with little consideration as to what they need, think, or feel about their school experiences, rather than a responsive, collaborative enterprise that supports them in being actively engaged in their learning (Fonseca, 2008). In this study, the examination of the factors that contribute to the high degree of apathy and the resulting project that was designed to support the school in addressing these factors have the potential to create a school that supports and fosters positive student achievement. Participation in this study provided student participants, the school's true stakeholders, with the opportunity to speak and be heard through a collection of their thoughts concerning their experiences and documenting them within this study. These student voices established the foundation of the project.

Analysis of the qualitative data collected in this study from former elementary students and their parents revealed factors that, from student and parent perspectives,

contributed to the high degree of student apathy at the target school.   To support the target school, a comprehensive professional development plan was developed to address the identified factors. The initiatives imbedded in the professional development activities are designed to help reshape the school's learning environment and provide students with positive learning experiences that reduce students' apathy and increase the level of engagement in their educational experiences.

Summary

Student apathy and disenfranchisement can negatively impact every stakeholder and initiative in any school. This is especially true at the target school, a suburban elementary school in Central Maryland, which has a highly apathetic, disengaged student body. Student apathy had been on the increase for at least three years, culminating in 2009 with 43% of the total student body and 62% of the fifth grade declaring they see little value in performing well in school. The school's leadership team attempted to identify root causes and develop solutions, but none of these initiatives were successful. The students continued to exhibit apathetic attitudes and behaviors. The faculty consistently taught the required state curriculum content and interventions and recently established a collaborative community of practice that included administrators, teachers, parents and community members. However, these efforts had no effect on the pervasive student apathy. The literature on reducing student apathy reveals a clear historical foundation as well as a significant body of current research in the fields of education, neuroscience, organizational theory and educational psychology. By resisting the temptation to blame the students for the apathy they manifest, the researcher and faculty

at the target school had a unique opportunity to learn about some of the real factors at play in this pervasive problem.

To further examine the problem of student apathy, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are former fifth graders' perceptions concerning their experiences at the target school?

2. What factors contributed to the high degree of apathy among the fifth grade students at the target school?

3. What strategies could the target school utilize to address student apathy and increase student engagement?

This qualitative study provided eight former students and their parents with the opportunity to assist the target school's leadership team in addressing the school's pervasive student apathy issue. By participating in the study, the voices and reflections of these former students and parents were heard during an interview session and corroborated through a review of archival records. The data gathered shed light on the research questions and provided a road map to create a project that supports the faculty in implementing an instructional program that can lead students to become more fully engaged in their education. This heightened engagement should support the school's current and future students in successfully navigating their education, competing in the global marketplace, and perhaps most importantly, assuming their rightful place as informed and fully committed citizens of a democracy.

Section 2 explains the methodology, including a detailed description of the

participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques and process.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore student apathy and the learning environment at the target school through the eyes of former students and their parents. After the data were gathered and analyzed, the results were used to design a project that was expected to lead to increased student engagement. The study focused on eight former students who expressed apathy on the annual school climate survey when they were in fifth grade. The parents of these eight students also participated in the study. Their gender and ethnicity, for the most part, reflected the overall demographics of the school.

As appropriate for a case study (Creswell, 2009), data were collected through individual, face-to-face interviews with each of the students; a review of their archived records/data; and an interview with their parents. Interviewing the students who manifested the apathy supported me in developing a deeper understanding of their complex school experiences and revealed insights that would not be available had I interviewed their parents or teachers (Angelides & Michaelidou, 2009; Leitch & Mitchell, 2007). The combination of these data collection techniques provided the variety and depth needed to develop a working understanding of the factors that contributed to the student apathy at the target school and thus to create a project to address this apathy.

The paradigm and design were chosen because they allowed for multiple sources of data about each participant's experiences and opinions about their experiences at the target school. Hatch (2008) advises the use of multiple data-gathering activities as a

tactic to enter the world of the participants. By gathering data that provides a multidimensional picture of the case, a researcher can develop a better understanding of the participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. This is especially crucial when children are the participants because often adults speak for and speculate on the thoughts and opinions of children rather than going directly to them. In this study, the students' voices and perspectives were essential to understanding the complex nature of the factors behind their attitude of apathy and disengagement toward school (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, E., & Robinson, 2010; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). Their views were directly explored. The collection and analysis of data gathered in the student and parent interviews and in the archived data provided sufficient breadth and depth of information to develop a descriptive representation of the participants' high degree of apathy toward school.

Qualitative Design and Approach

This qualitative project study used a case study design to address the following guiding questions:

1. What are former fifth graders' perceptions concerning their experiences at the target school?

2. What factors contributed to the high degree of apathy among the fifth grade students at the target school?

3. What strategies could the target school utilize to address student apathy and increase student engagement?

A qualitative research strategy was chosen to answer these questions because the problem of student apathy at the target school requires deep exploration, and according to Creswell (2007), the qualitative strategy is an appropriate choice for this type of problem because it made it possible for the researcher to be situated in the environment of study and gather multiple and varied data sets, including student and parent interviews and a review of records and archived data. The data gathered supported the development of a deeper understanding of the complex problem of student apathy, and analysis of that data will support in creating a detailed analysis of several potential themes embedded in the issue of student apathy. To accomplish this, it is crucial to enter the world of the apathetic students and hear their perspectives directly (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009). Walking in students' shoes, hearing their thoughts and those of their parents, combined with a review of records and archived data should offer a multifaceted view of their educational experiences.

A case study is used to delve deeply into an issue or problem by collecting and analyzing multiple data points such as interviews, observations, and documents gathered over time about single or multiple cases within a specific context (Creswell, 2007). Hatch (2008) advises that researchers who choose to conduct case study research need to carefully and thoroughly describe how the study differs from an ethnography or participant observation. The single factor that distinguishes a case study from an ethnographic study is that it "investigates a contextualized contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomenon within specified boundaries (p 30)." Drawn from the social sciences, including psychology, anthropology and sociology as well as the fields of

medicine and the law, educational researchers can use these resources to support their efforts in designing and implementing a case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This particular case study will examine the contextualized phenomenon of student apathy at the target school from the view of former students and their parents and will utilize the strategies from the fields of psychology and medicine to collect and analyze the data gathered.

A case study uses multiple sources of data to, as thoroughly as possible learn about the beliefs, perspectives and realities of the study participants as they relate to the topic and research question. Using the analysis of the data collected, the researcher identifies themes to create a deep and substantive description of the research question in bounded case study. In this study, using a case study design supports the development of a better understanding of some of the underlying themes behind the issue of student apathy and lack of engagement within the bounds of the target school and within the time of data collection (Hatch, 2008). Through the format of a case study design, which will include student and parent interviews and a review of records and archived data, I will also be able to provide a detailed description of the setting. This description, along with interview and archived data analysis will provide information needed to develop a project that will support the leadership team at the target school as they work to address student apathy and increase student achievement.

It is important to recognize that there are other qualitative designs including narrative research, phenomenology and ethnography that focus on addressing a research problem by examining the perspectives and experiences of participants; use similar data

collection forms and processes; and as a result would yield similar data as a case study. However, none of these qualitative approaches would lead me to develop as deep an understanding of the problem and create a project with as deep and "detailed analysis of one or more cases" (Creswell, 2007, p.78) as the case study design. This deep and detailed analysis is precisely what I needed to design a project to support the school's leadership team and faculty in addressing the school's alarmingly high degree of student apathy.

Participants

Determining the student and parent participants in this qualitative study requires the use of a multi-step process. The pool of potential participants in this study was comprised of former students from the target school who were in fifth grade in 2009 and scored in the "Highly Apathetic" range on the annual climate survey. The parents of the students expressing this high degree of apathy were included in the pool of possible participants. These former students are now 14 and entered high school in August 2013. Before contacting potential participants, I followed the procedures required to apply for and obtain IRB approval from Walden University. After receiving Walden University IRB approval (12-06-13-0140575), a Request to Conduct Research form was completed and submitted to Anne Arundel County Public Schools' Institutional Review Board. Subsequent to obtaining Anne Arundel County Public Schools Institutional Review Board's approval, I contacted the principal of the high school the students now attend and asked permission to include a letter in the weekly guidance office e-mail news-blast to the ninth grade families whose children attended fifth grade in 2009 at the target school.

This letter informed potential student participants and their parents about the study. Since I didn't yet have permission to access the educational records of these former fifth graders, the letter was sent out to all students who were in the fifth grade in 2009 at the target school. The letter informed the families that any family who still had children attending the target school would not be selected to participate in the study (Appendix C).

As families responded to the letter, I provided them with the opportunity to both receive information about the study and ask any questions they may have through a scheduled telephone conversation. Taking the time to talk with the families so they can learn more about the study was critically important. This is especially true when conducting research with children (Bray, 2007) because children, even teenagers, are a vulnerable population and deserve an extra measure of protection when they are asked to participate in a research study. In this phone conversation I was sure to verify that fact that they did not have children who currently attend the target school. If, in the phone conversation they indicated they are interested in participating, I mailed them an informed consent packet (Appendix C). This packet contained written consent/assent forms for the parent and student, an information/assent document for the student, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. I asked the parents to mail the signed forms back to me within one week. Even though the parent was responsible for giving permission for their child to participate, I added a Student Information/Assent Document to the packet to provide students with specific information about their role in the study and to assent to participate. Adding this extra step made it possible for me to feel more confident that the students had a full understanding of the research project and the role they played in it

before they assent to participate. In both the phone conversation and the informed

consent/assent packet, the potential participants were assured that choosing not to

participate or dropping out of the study is their choice and will not result in any negative

action being taken against them. Finally, I explained that once all the signed

consent/assent forms were returned to me, only eight students and parent pairs will be

selected to participate and the final selection will be based on the student's 2009 survey

responses and the order in which the consent forms were received.

As the consent forms were returned, I stamped them with the date received so I

could keep track of the order in which I received them. Then after one week, I followed

up with the two families who had not yet returned the packet to answer any questions

they might have and eliminate them from the list of potential participants if they informed

me that they are not interested. Once I was confident that I obtained the consent forms

from those who were interested in participating, I employed purposeful sampling to

create the list of eight participants by accessing the 2009 school climate survey responses

of all the students for whom I have permission. I then culled out the surveys of all the

students who scored in the "highly apathetic" range. Among these selected surveys, I

checked one final time to make sure I did not choose the surveys of students with siblings

who are still attending the target school. While students' academic records, socio-

economic background, and ethnicity were not considered as selection factors, gender was

included as a selection factor so the sample selected was as representative as possible of

the target school's 2009 fifth grade gender demographics. Creating a sample that was

representative of the target school's gender demographics supported my need to develop

an evocative understanding of the academic environment factors that created such a high degree of apathy at the target school (Dana, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). After I worked through this selection process I had more than eight participants, so I made the final selection based on the order in which I received the consent forms. The final number of participants, while not a large sample, enabled me to focus on acquiring a deep understanding of the perspective of each of the students and parents, which supported me in responding to the research questions (Creswell, 2007) and developing a project to assist the target school in addressing the problem of student apathy.

The inclusion of former students as participants required an extra layer of attention and due diligence (Merriam, 2009; Vitus, 2008). While there is an increased emphasis in current research on the importance of providing children with the right and responsibility to be included in decisions and actions that directly affect them (United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, 1990; Mitra, 2009), the movement toward making this a reality has, at best, been slow and halting partially because of adults' belief that children may not possess the maturity to know what is in their own best interest. There is concern that children may be exploited or have their views misrepresented. While both of these points might offer reasons to refrain from including former students in a study that directly involves students' perceptions and beliefs, there is no substitute for hearing them directly from the students themselves (Campbell, 2008). The benefits of providing former students, who now have the perspective of three years in middle school with the opportunity to be heard without filter and adult interpretation, clearly outweighed the extra steps and precautions I needed to take to ensure their protection.

Another important factor considered was that particular care had to be taken to establish a positive, collaborative relationship with each of the participants. This is always an important consideration, but in the case of this study and these participants, structures and opportunities must be established to mitigate any inherent imbalance of power that might exist (Goodenough, 2007). Even though I became the principal of the target school in the spring of 2010, I do not have a relationship with these former students or their parents. However, my position at the school at the time of the interviews had the potential to make it more challenging to establish a focused and collaborative working relationship with the students and their families both as a group and as individuals (Danby, Ewing, &Thorpe, 2011). Because of this, I worked to diminish this imbalance so that I could create the type of collaborative relationship necessary to investigate the factors that contribute to the participants' apathy toward school. I worked to accomplish this by employing a multistep process. First, I fully explained the study and the reasons for conducting it to both the students and their parents before obtaining their consent/assent to participate. Next, I explored the benefits of participating in the study with the students by brainstorming the ways this study can be of service to both to themselves and their former school. Finally, I discussed with them how sharing what their experiences at the target school were like could support the leadership team at the elementary school they attended to work together and make school a more meaningful experience for all of the students at the school.

Data Collection

Collection of data took place in the winter and spring of 2014. Data collected for this qualitative case study included: (a) taped and transcribed student interview (b) taped and transcribed parent interview (c) field notes from each of these interview sessions, and (d) a review of student archived data. These specific forms of data were chosen because a case study requires multiple and varied sources of data to develop a detailed, in-depth picture of the case being examined. The data gathered in this study explored the research questions and described the factors that contribute to the high degree of student apathy at the target school through the eyes and voices of the former students who manifested this apathy when they were in fifth grade, as well as their parents who observed and participated in their child's experiences at the target school.

All interview sessions were carried out at a mutually agreed upon time and in a location that provided a measure of privacy. In the end, the participants chose either the local library conference room or the target school conference room. I taped (audio only) and transcribed each session. I began the both the student and parent interview by gathering general information to establish the collaborative relationship needed to enter the students' and parents' world and begin to understand their thoughts, beliefs and perspectives about their experiences at the target school. I also needed to address and accommodate the potential impact of my nervousness, personality, opinions, and biases in order to establish a positive and collaborative working relationship with each of the participants. To make sure I accomplished this, each of the interviews were guided by an interview protocol (Appendix D & E).

The student interview questions (Appendix D) focused on learning about students' experiences and the factors that contributed to the high degree of the apathy these fifth grade students expressed on the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Climate Survey (2009). These questions led the student participants through a sequence that opened by reviewing the study's topic and purpose. From there the interview began with questions that were comfortable to answer, moved to more difficult or sensitive questions that may have elicited strong emotional responses, and then returned to questions that are less stressful. As recommended by Creswell (2007) and Hatch (2008), I used a field notes organizer that allowed me to capture observations and reflections (Appendix F) as well as audio-taping and transcription by Dragon Dictation of the interviews. These steps made it possible for me to open the door for the students to feel comfortable and ask any questions they may have. The interview ended by thanking the student and discussing what the next steps in the process are (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Danby, Ewing & Thorpe, 2011). If needed, I scheduled a follow-up session to gather additional information, achieve better balance, or address any new issues that emerged during the interview.

The next element of data collection included engaging the students' parents in an interview that mirrors the student interview both in process and content. Just as with the students, I began the interview by gathering general information to establish the collaborative relationship by asking questions that led me to begin to understand their thoughts, beliefs and perspectives about their child's experiences at the target school. I also needed to address and accommodate the potential impact of my nervousness, personality, opinions, and biases in order to establish a positive and collaborative

working relationship with each of the parents. To make sure I accomplish this, the interview was guided by an interview protocol (Appendix E). The interview questions focused on learning about the parents' perspective on their child's school experiences, including the high level of apathy they manifested during their fifth grade. The interview questions led the parents through a sequence that opens by reviewing the study's topic and purpose, followed by questions that were, at first, general and comfortable to answer, then move to more difficult or sensitive questions that may elicit strong emotional responses, and finally return to questions that are less stressful. As recommended by Creswell (2007) and Hatch (2008), I used a field notes organizer that allowed me to capture observations and reflections (Appendix G) as well as audio taping and transcription by Dragon Dictation of both the student and parent interviews. This progression made it possible for me to open the door for the parents to feel comfortable answering the interview questions, and ask any questions they may have had. The interview ended by thanking the participant and discussing what the next steps in the process are (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Danby, Ewing & Thorpe, 2011). If needed, I scheduled a follow-up session to gather additional information, achieve better balance, or address any new issues that emerged during the interview.

The third element of data collection took the form of a review of archived student data from the students' time at the target school. This archived data included achievement data including report cards and district and state assessment data, as well as attendance and discipline data. This record review provided me with school-based data about the students' experiences in fifth grade at the target school, which can then be compared to

the more subjective data provided by both the students and their parents. Having both personal and third party data supported me in developing a deeper understanding of the apathy these fifth graders expressed.

All data collected was stored and maintained in ways that protect the identity of the participants. Student and parent interview transcriptions and field notes, as well as archived records analysis notes were encrypted and saved on both on my personal computer and on a securely stored external hard drive at my home office which is always locked. Both my computer and external hard drive are password protected. A master list of all the data collected was created, encrypted, and saved on my computer and an external hard drive, both of which are password protected and located in my locked home office. To protect the identity of the participants, their names and other identifying factors were removed immediately upon collection. Each participant was assigned a number, and all data collected from that participant was encrypted and identified with that assigned number. All participants had the opportunity to participate in member checking to verify the accuracy of the data and add any additional information they felt was pertinent. When creating the final report and any time the results are published, all information will be statistically summarized so that individual responses and contributions are indistinguishable.

Every researcher brings to their study prior experiences and a level of bias. I am no exception. It is important to note that my experiences prior to being appointed principal of the target school in the spring of 2010 include classroom teacher, reading specialist, assistant principal, principal at two other schools, and professional

development consultant. Immediately after my arrival, the faculty at the target school

expressed to me that their greatest concern was the high degree of apathy manifested by

the fourth and fifth grade students. In taking on this problem and making it the focus of

my research study I realize that my past experiences and the fact that I am the principal of

the target school will be reflected in each aspect of the study (Dockett, Einarsdottir, &

Perry, 2009). However, the fact that I was not the principal when these students were in

fourth grade and only very briefly in fifth grade could mitigate, to a degree, my

investment in the school's culture, structures, and academic initiatives. The fact that the

student participants were no longer members of the school's community reduced any

need they might have had to provide me, as the principal, with information they may

have thought I wanted to hear.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data gathered in a qualitative study is a multistep process that

includes organizing, reviewing and identifying themes, and eventually representing the

data in a way that is specific to the qualitative approach. Case study data analysis leads a

researcher to create a "description of the case and its setting" (Creswell, 2007, p.163). To

accomplish both of these important elements I engaged in a data analysis process that

dissected the data gathered; examined the themes that emerged; and reassembled the data

into a detailed representation of what was learned about the factors that contribute to the

high degree of student apathy at the target school. This data analysis process supported

me in conducting a systematic search for the answer to the research questions.

To accomplish this, data analysis needed to begin at an informal level as soon as

data collection began and continue throughout the entire collection process (Hatch,

2009). In the interviews I kept track of observations, reactions and reflections in a field

notes journal, which Hatch (2009) suggests are "forms of informal data analysis as well"

(p. 149). These informal notes provided me with a basis of support for the more formal

data analysis process that occurred after all the data had been collected. Once the

interviews were conducted and transcribed, I used coding to analyze and condense the

data into identifiable themes. The same process was conducted with the data gathered

during the archived records review. This data were then coded and included with the

coded interview and observation data so that collectively I was able to use it to create a

combination of visual representations, tables, figures, and drawings, and discussion to

create an in-depth depiction of what was learned about the factors that contribute to the

high degree of student apathy at the target school (Creswell, 2007).

A coding process was at the heart of my data analysis process. As both Creswell

(2007) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) advised, I will needed to read and reread each

interview as well as my field notes to identify concepts and themes. To keep this from

becoming an overwhelming process I continuously returned to and reground myself in

the research questions. I had to remember that the number of codes used needed to be

carefully crafted to create a balance between capturing important information and

creating confusion (Creswell, (2007). It was equally as important to establish clear,

consistent code definitions, and a system to physically code that data. Once I got to the

point in my study when I was coding multiple sources of data, including student and

parent interviews as well as archived student records, I realized that there was a need to

move through a multi-phase coding process (Merriam, 2009) and utilize a BM11software

system to make the process more manageable and efficient.

After a review of three software systems, Atlas.ti, QSRNVIVO, and

HyperRESEARCH, I chose to use HyperRESEARCH to assist me in the qualitative data

analysis process. As a first time researcher, I chose HyperRESEARCH for several

reasons. First, the instructions are straightforward and easy to follow. Shortly after I tried

the demonstration session, I felt fully comfortable using it, which will enable me to focus

on the data collected, not on navigating the program. HyperRESEARCH analyzes data

using a case-based approach, which means that the data will be analyzed in the order in

which it was collected. Of equal importance is that both text and images are easily

analyzed which is crucial since I will be collecting both types of data in my study.

Initially, HyperRESEARCH was used to assist me in organizing and storing the data

collected. As the analysis progressed, the program helped me create a template for

coding; link text or image to specific codes and/or themes; store memos within the

established codes; make comparisons between different code labels; conceptualize

multiple levels of abstraction; and create a visual of the codes and themes.

This data analysis process contains the elements recommended for a case study

(Creswell, 2007). Engaging in this process led me to develop a deeper understanding of

some of the factors that contribute to the high degree of apathy toward doing well in

school expressed by the participants. However, before moving to this phase of conducting

the study, appropriate measures had to be taken to create a high quality study by ensuring

accuracy and credibility. Accuracy of the data gathered and analyzed was addressed

through member checking and triangulation (Creswell, 2007). As soon as the data were collected and transcribed, the participants were contacted and engaged in member checking to review the data they contributed to the study and verify that their contributions are accurately represented. At this time they also had the opportunity to offer clarification and/or additional information. To further ensure accuracy and internal validity I used triangulation of the three sources of data each to corroborate the themes that have emerged.

Establishing credibility is essential, and must begin by revealing and clarifying researcher bias through a thorough description of both my current role as the principal of the target school and prior experiences as a teacher, principal and professional development consultant, and how these experiences have shaped my beliefs and practices. Peer review was used to further address researcher bias, reinforce objectivity by asking difficult questions, and support reflection on the data collection and analysis process (Creswell, 2007). Discrepant data were fully integrated into the study and their impact is reflected in the final report and project. I chose a colleague to review my study to examine for bias. Finally, by creating a deep and rich description of the case supported establishing credibility and transferability.

This data analysis process informed the creation of a project that seeks to addresses the identified factors and support the school's leadership team in reducing student apathy and increasing engagement. Once the factors within the academic environment were identified, the project developed involves the school's stakeholders, especially teachers and students, in working collaboratively to reshape the academic

environment and school structures. The project's initiatives include, but are not limited to professional development for teachers, leadership opportunities for students, and a specific plan the leadership team can use to reshape the school's culture to one of high levels of student engagement and achievement.

Qualitative Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the factors in the school environment that contribute to the high degree of apathy among the fifth grade students at the target school. The findings were used to support the school's leadership team in creating targeted initiatives to reduce apathy and increase student engagement. The data collected from interviews with eight former students and their parents, as well as a review of the students' academic, attendance and discipline records are represented here. All three sets of data were analyzed and coded using HyperRESEARCH. The data analysis process revealed three themes: (1) lack of choice and input, (2) lack of curricular rigor and relevance, and (3) lack of support for students who struggle academically or behaviorally.

As I analyzed and coded the interview data from both students and parents, I discovered that while all of the interview questions revealed the same three themes, the answers to specific questions were closely aligned with one of the three themes and consistently yielded a substantial response. For Theme 1, Lack of choice and input, Questions 3, 4, 13, and 14 elicited the most substantial responses, while for Theme 2, Lack of curricular rigor and relevance, the probing questions in Questions 5, 14 and 15 yielded a plethora of responses and specific examples. Finally, the most substantial and

emotional responses centered on Theme 3, Lack of support for students who struggle academically or behaviorally, arose from questions 9, 12, and 15. Utilizing participants' own words in a qualitative study provides a level of confidence that the data being reported is representative and accurate (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2012). Therefore, the data in this study are at times, reported through direct quotes to increase the level of validity in the research findings.

The research findings are presented below. The eight student participants were assigned a number and their parents were also assigned the same number so I could match them up for the purposes of triangulation. In the text below student participants are identified as SP and their number, for example SP1 and parent participants are identified as PP and their number, for example, PP1. I chose to report the finding in the following order, based on the three identified themes☹a) lack of choice and input, (b) lack of curricular relevance, and (c) lack of support for students who struggle academically or behaviorally, but it's important to note that none of the themes was more or less prevalent in the responses of the participants.

Theme 1: Lack of Choice and Input

Without exception, the student participants (SP) stated that in their least favorite class and or subject they had little or no choice or input. One student (SP3) reported "I don't know why I bothered to show up. I never got to offer an idea or an opinion." Another student (SP5) said, "Mrs. _____ had everything run off for the whole year. We all did exactly the same thing whether it was too easy or too hard for us. It was mind numbing." A third student participant, (SP8) commented that "everyone knew" that the

students' role in class was to "sit up and shut up". Each of the eight participants spoke passionately about how in these classes the teachers structured the time to maximize their own input and choice, and minimize the students' choice and input, including simple things like the order in which they completed assignments or where they sat. One participant (SP1) shared that from his perspective, Mrs. _____ went out of her way to deny all but "the goody-goody kids" any element of choice in what they did and how they did it. He said, "Mrs. _____ always cut me off if I tried to answer a question or contribute to a discussion. One time she even rolled her eyes and said to the class 'Can you believe him?'" Six of the eight students (SP1, 4, 5, 7, and 8) reported that even though one of the three fifth grade teachers was pleasant and even kind, she still never accepted student input or offered choice. "Things never made much sense to me because none of what she did with us had anything to do with what I knew or wanted. I was just a kid but even I knew that people do better if they have a chance to make something their own (SP1)." When asked to use one word to describe their experience in fifth grade, SP1, SP3, SP4, SP6, and SP8 responded, "Boring." SP 2 said "Useless.", and SP5, and SP7 stated that their fifth grade year was "A waste of time." As the students explained why they chose these words to describe the fifth grade year, their collective comments centered on their belief that given the lack of input and choice, it didn't matter if they showed up. Nothing would have been different if they had skipped that year. SP5 shared, "I could have put a blow-up doll in my seat, and as long as it looked like the doll wasn't causing trouble, Mrs. _____ wouldn't have cared."

Parent participants (PP) told a strikingly similar version of their child's experience in the fifth grade at the target school. In responding to the interview questions, one parent (PP3) that throughout fifth grade, their child was unhappy and complained often. She said, "He never loved school, but in fifth grade he hated it. He said that the teachers just talked and talked and all they ever did was dittos – BORING!!" Another parent (PP6) became visibly angry as she talked about her child's year in fifth grade. "What a waste of time that year was! She didn't learn anything she'll need to do better in life than I've done. Mrs. _____ wasted her time doing dittos and outlines and never even involved her in her own education. It makes me really p….d! How will she get to college if she just goes through the motions?" Most of the parents (PP2, PP4, PP5, PP7, and PP8 couldn't identify a subject their child would choose as their favorite. PP7 stated, "NOTHING was good about that year! It was mindless! I thought it was bad when I was in school, but this was even worse." Two parents, PP1 & PP6 indicated that their children liked the art class. To gather more information, I asked the probing questions: What was that teacher like? How would you describe the class and their assignments? PP1 responded, "Mrs. _____ involved my son in his artwork. She asked his opinion and let him make choices." PP6 spoke about the way the art teacher led her daughter to review her projects and make them better. She commented, "My daughter knew that Mrs. _____ cared what she thought about her projects, and so my daughter cared about art."

In summary, all of the student and parent participants indicated that throughout their fifth grade experience, students had little or no opportunity to provide input or

engage in even the smallest degree of choice in their academic experiences. The student

participants were, at times, somewhat apologetic for wanting input and choice and

seemed quite able to separate the fact that a teacher might be kind and likeable from her

willingness to offer input and/or choice, and they saw the latter as being more important.

Without exception, they expressed that their desire for input and choice was not so that

they could "get off easy" (SP1), but instead so that they could be more invested in their

educational experience. While parent participants acknowledged that when they were in

school, they had little or no input or choice, they strongly believed that in the 21st

century, their children needed to do more than "just go through the motions" (PP5) and

do what their teachers told them to do so they are prepared for the demands of adulthood

and the high level of autonomy required in the 21st century global workplace (Pink,

2009). The theme of input and choice emerged clearly as a factor in the students' high

degree of apathy.

Theme 2: Lack of Curricular Relevance and Rigor

All eight of the student participants used the following adjectives and several

others to describe their classroom assignments: meaningless, useless, mind-numbing, and

of no use. They reported concern over the disconnectedness between what they did in

fifth grade and what they were expected to be able to do when they went on to middle

school. "Nothing we did in fifth grade got us ready for middle school." (SP2) stated. This

sentiment was echoed by SP 5 with an additional area of concern about, "little or no

writing". SP1, 6, and 8 spoke about the "piles of worksheets" (SP6) they did and how

these worksheets were nothing like what they had do when they entered sixth grade. SP1

commented, "We could whip through those worksheets and not even think. I think we all knew that by the time we were in fifth grade it should be harder, but hey, we were kids, and we just went through the motions. Then we hit sixth grade and couldn't even breathe there was so much work and it was so hard. The middle school teachers talked about how the kids from our school were never prepared. They actually blamed us, like we were stupid losers. It made me so mad!" This sentiment was echoed by SP7, but from a slightly different angle. "I just hated those stupid worksheets, and Mrs. _____ knew it! I don't learn that way, I need to talk, I need to work with people, and she didn't even care. Every time I tried to talk with a friend, I got in trouble. One time I just lost it and told her to F-off. That's when I got suspended. So unfair!!"Four of the student participants (SP2, 4, 7, and 8) shared their concern over the fact that in fifth grade since they spent their time completing worksheets, they never had to do a research project or any long-term assignments. This was problematic for them because when they went to middle school they were frequently assigned long-term projects that involved both research and writing. SP 9 recounted, "I had to stay after school for a week to work with my English teacher. I was really lucky that she was willing to do it for me or I would have failed. Once I understood how to do research and write things up, I did great-even got a B on one of my papers!"

The lack of hands-on science instruction was also discussed. SP5 spoke at length about how science class was, "all about doing worksheets and reading long chapters in the science book." She went on to describe how much she disliked science until she went to middle school. "In middle school we did a lab each week. We did experiments and

dissections and it was so cool. I even got into the STEM program at the high school, but I sure wouldn't have done that if things hadn't changed in middle school." The student participant responses on the questions that illuminated this theme were the most strongly voiced. Without exception all eight participants expressed deep dissatisfaction, frustration and even anger about how the perceived lack of relevance and rigor left them unprepared for middle school. It should also be noted that all of the student participants commented that this lack of relevance and rigor began in fourth grade and just continued to get worse in fifth grade.

Parent participants were less spiritedly vocal on the subject of academic rigor and relevance. Most were aware of their child's frustration with the academic program while they were in fifth grade, but since four of the eight parents went to the target school, and had some of the same teachers, they expressed that they expected that this is how fifth grade would be and only began to understand the significance of the lack of rigor and relevance after their child went to middle school. PP6 perhaps best summed up the sentiments of the parents (PP2, PP4, PP6, and PP7) who attended the target school when she said, "Yeah, we did lots of dittos too. They sure smelled good, but I couldn't tell you one thing I learned in fifth grade. Mrs. _____ just wanted us to stay in our seats and stay out of her way so she could read the newspaper. Guess I thought that this was just how school was. Back then middle school and even high school were like that too. You just went through the motions. What can you expect? I can't change what schools do, I can just hope my kid gets through high school and does something good."The other four parents who did not attend the target school expressed frustration and concern, about the

lack of academic rigor and relevance, comparing their child's academic experiences to their child's friends who went to other schools nearby. "Kids who went to _____ Elementary School read novels, wrote papers, did math projects and competitions, but my kid did nothing but a bunch of dittos. I was NOT happy, but what could I do?" (PP1). Another parent (PP8) spoke about her attempts to get the principal to improve the quality of the academic program. "Before the end of the first marking period I went in to meet with Mr. _____ to discuss my concerns, but he blew me off. When I compared what our students were doing with what the students at _____ Elementary School were doing, he actually had the nerve to say that our kids weren't as smart, didn't have parents who supported them as much, and he was just hoping to get everyone through fifth grade. I was furious, but what could I do? He was such a jerk! I just couldn't wait to get my kid out of there!"

In summary, both student and parent participants expressed grave concerns about the lack of academic rigor and relevance. All student participants believed that this deficiency negatively impacted their ability to successfully transition to middle school and they expressed both anger and frustration over their lack of preparedness. Since parent participants were evenly divided between those who attended the target school and those who did not, their responses were somewhat different. Those who attended the target school viewed the fifth grade experience in a slightly more benign manner than those who attended other schools. Both groups of parents expressed concern about their child's transition to middle school, their ability to successfully transition to high school, and chances for success in college or the world of work.

Theme 3: Lack of support for students who struggle academically and/or behaviorally.

A common response from the student participants (SP1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8) when asked to describe what they were like in fifth grade was "I was bad". SP3 shrugged his shoulders and said, "I was a loser.", and SP6 stated that she was "the weird girl". SP8 described several events where he was sent out of the room for refusing to complete worksheets. He commented, "Mrs. _____ asked me if I was stupid and that was why I wouldn't do the work. Mrs. _____ was nicer and even though she still gave us all the same worksheets, she at least didn't give me a hard time if I didn't finish." SP5, who had been identified in third grade as having a learning disability and received special education services until she was in seventh grade when it was determined that she no longer needed services, recounted multiple times when she was singled out for "being different". "I was told to just hang out until the special education teacher came to pick me up because the teacher said she shouldn't have to do anything different for me. Can you believe that? Isn't that against the law?" Another student (SP2) shared that his parents were going through an acrimonious separation and divorce when he was in fourth and fifth grade and he was sad and angry. "My teachers knew what I was going through, but no one asked me if they could help. Actually, Mrs. _____ told me to suck it up and pay attention and not to bring my personal problems to school. Crazy, huh? And then she wondered why I didn't do homework or blew off tests."

Students who perceived themselves as having behavior problems and had received an office referral and/or a suspension (SP1, 3, 5, 7, 8) saw themselves as largely

helpless to change their reputation because "Once you're a bad kid, you're always a bad

kid. Nobody thinks can be anything else (SP3). SP 7 shared that once he made a deal with

his mother that he wouldn't get in trouble for two weeks. At the end of the two weeks, his

mother was proud of his accomplishment and he earned a video game. When asked how

his teacher responded, he reported, "She didn't even notice, didn't say a word. Just kept

picking at me until I snapped and then she sent me out of the room. I didn't bother to try

again." Another student (SP5) recalled that one of the fifth grade teachers tried to create a

behavior plan to support him, but the other two teachers were not interested in

implementing the plan. "Mrs. _____ and my mom met and came up with a plan that let

me earn points for doing my work and listening to the teacher. She did it, and Mrs.

_____ kinda did it, but Mrs. _____ told me that she wasn't going to take the time to

do it because it wouldn't make any difference. I took the form and tore it up. Why did she

hate me so much?" All the remainder of this group of students had similar thoughts about

the lack of support they received in addressing their behavior issues.

These questions elicited strong emotions from the parent participants. The parents

of the students who were perceived as struggling academically (PP 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8) made

statements about the teachers' unwillingness to provide additional support and/or offer

needed accommodations and modifications. PP5 discussed at length her frustration and

sadness over the way her daughter, who had been identified as having a learning

disability was especially vocal about her concerns and frustrations. "My daughter almost

didn't survive fifth grade. Mrs. _____ didn't want her in the class and all the kids

treated her like dirt. Guess when they see the teacher act that way they think it's okay to

be mean to her too. She used cry every day and after she went to bed, I cried too. I went to Mr. _____, the principal, but he just said that Mrs. _____ shouldn't be expected to "coddle" my daughter. I should have punched him, but I just walked out and told my daughter that she didn't have to listen to or do anything that teacher said. I know that's wrong, and it got her into some trouble, but f_ _ _ _ it, I was done with her being a victim."

Parents of students seen as having behavior issues (PP1, 3, 5, 7, 8) were just as concerned about the lack of the teachers' and school's responsiveness to their child's behavioral needs. Their responses indicated that they believed that once a student was perceived as having behavior problems that they were "always seen as the one causing trouble" (PP7). PP5, the parent of the SP5, shared her perspective of the incident with the behavior contract. "You know how fifth grade boys are-they don't want to have a fuss made over them so it took a whole lot of convincing to get him to buy into the behavior plan, so when Mrs. _____ didn't want to be bothered, I wanted to choke her! All the times she bugged me to do something about him and then one time I ask for her help she blows him off. It took me a week to get him to tell me what happened and by then it was too late to try to do something again. We just gave up and tried to get through the year." Parents believed that both they and their child had little or no support in taking steps to improve a student's behavior.

The interview questions that illuminated this theme elicited a high degree of emotion from both students and parents. Whether students struggled academically or behaviorally, the student and parent participants felt a dearth of assistance and support

from the teachers and administration at the target school. Students recounted times they felt humiliated and embarrassed, and parents, who expressed an even higher degree of emotion than their children, believed that at times their child didn't stand a chance of being successful.

Record Review

A review of the eight student participants' archival records was conducted. This review focused on the time the students attended the target school. Seven of the eight students attended the target school from Kindergarten through fifth grade, and the eighth student attended the school from first grade through fifth grade. In addition to examining their responses on the 2008 climate survey, the review included a careful examination of the students' report cards, their attendance history, and any office referrals and suspensions. This review revealed some commonalities among the student participants. The first commonality was seen in their responses on the 2008 climate survey, while their overall rating of "Highly Apathetic" was the main selection criteria, a closer examination of their responses revealed that they responded most negatively to questions about the following topics: interactions with teachers, quality of instruction, and engagement of students. Another commonality noted was that during their year in fifth grade, six of the students had at least one office referral and two of the eight student participants were suspended for "Insubordination". The attendance records revealed that during their fifth grade year, five of the eight student participants missed more than 12 days of school, which is considered "Excessive" by the school district. The other three students missed more than seven days of school, but less than ten. This range of absences is considered

"Of Concern". Further, it was found that all eight students had at least one "D" on their report card during their year in fifth grade, and three of the male students received at least one "E". A thorough review of the students' report cards from kindergarten through fifth grade revealed that while none of the students had ever been on the honor roll, they all demonstrated satisfactory progress in grades K – 3. None were retained, and even the two students who were receiving special education services were meeting with success through third grade, but their grades began to decline in fourth grade and continued to decline in fifth grade.

The results of the record review proved a longitudinal perspective on each of the student participants and provided additional data to support or refute the data gathered in the student and parent interviews. The record review painted a picture of the students during their fifth grade year that was consistent with the student and parent interview responses. The one piece of discrepant data were found in the fact that all of the students had experienced a degree of success earlier in earlier grades at the target school, but this success diminished as students entered the intermediate grades. There was further support for the three themes identified based on the data collected in the student and parent interviews.

Discrepant Data

While the data collected in the student and parent interviews consistently illuminated the themes, the record review revealed some information that did not fully confirm the identified themes. Since qualitative case study research seeks to capture the complexity of the case study, it is important to report discrepant data to enhance the

credibility of the research findings (Creswell, 2008). One item of discrepant information was that while the students reported that they never did well in school, the record review revealed that their academic performance was satisfactory in grades K-3. Another point of discrepant data involves the students' attendance in fifth grade. Five of the student participants missed more than twelve days of school the other three students missed less than ten. However, this pattern of absences was not evident in earlier grades. A final piece of discrepant data were seen in the fact that while all eight of the student participants reported they were always in trouble, six out of eight of the student participants received an office referral and only two students were suspended.

Research Findings Summary

The study' findings from all three sources of data, student and parent interviews and a review of archived student records revealed and supported the following three themes as factors contributing to the high degree of student apathy at the school study, and especially in the fifth grade: lack of student choice and input, lack of curricular rigor and relevance, and lack of support for students with academic and behavioral issues. The student participants and their parents shared similar perspectives about their experiences. They shared their concern over the lack of student input and choice, largely because both are important factors in secondary education and the work world. Students, even more than their parents expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of rigor and relevance in the fifth grade academic program they experienced. Parents were concerned too, but it was the students who spoke about not being academically prepared for middle and high school. Finally, parents, even more than the students, conveyed their pain, dissatisfaction,

and even anger over the way in which the target school handled students with academic and behavioral challenges. The record review, including climate survey responses, attendance records, report cards, and discipline records also revealed patterns that were in line with the three themes identified. Thus, these findings support the creation of a project designed to assist the leadership team of the target school in both improving teacher efficacy in providing rigorous, relevant and differentiated instruction and developing authentic opportunities for student choice and leadership.

Evidence of Quality

Triangulation of data, member checking, and peer review were used to increase the validity of the research findings. According to Creswell (2012), researchers often triangulate data sources to enhance the accuracy of a study. The three data sources for this qualitative project study included eight student interviews, interviews with the parents of the eight students, and a review of the academic and discipline records of all eight-student participants. Through the triangulation of multiple data sets, including student interviews, parent interviews, and a review of students' academic and discipline records, validity was enhanced.

I utilized the practice of member checking to ensure data quality. Member checking, the practice of asking participants to check the accuracy of the data they provided, is an appropriate practice to use to increase a study's level of validity (Creswell, 2012). Subsequent to the student and parent interviews, I mailed each participant a transcription of the interview for their review and reached out to them via phone to go over their responses, answer any questions and/or address any concerns they

may have. There were no interview discrepancies noted or reported by any of the student or parent participants, and the only concern expressed was by a parent who wanted to make sure that her child's identity would not be revealed. She felt comfortable once I reviewed with her the procedures I have in place to ensure participant privacy.

Finally, I employed peer review to more deeply address researcher bias, reinforce objectivity by having to respond to probing questions, and support me in reflecting on the data collection and analysis process (Creswell, 2009). I chose as my peer reviewer a colleague I have known for over a decade. She is someone who I have always been able to count on to provide me with objective and honest feedback. I began having her review the study and my interview questions over a year ago, so I was able to fold any questions or thoughts she had into aspects of the study before I began the data collection and analysis process. Peer debriefing sessions supported me throughout the data collection phase and as I worked through my data analysis. She was a great sounding board as I began identifying and refining my themes. Her input in how to report the themes and supporting data helped me keep my language objective and work to eliminate any bias I may have.

Role of the Researcher

Until June 2014 I served as the principal of the target school, but was not the principal when the participants attended the school. Research integrity and participant privacy was uppermost in my mind as I conducted the study. Both of these practices are especially important when research is conducted within a familiar setting. Despite my role as principal of the target school, I had no biases toward the study design,

participants, or study findings. My participant relationship did not include the role of complete observer or complete participant (Lodico, Spaulding &Voegtle, 2010). Throughout the study, the only role I assumed was that of the interviewer.

Limitations

Limitations are generally defined as factors that might have an influence on the findings, and are usually beyond the control of the researcher (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Limitations can also be seen as potential problems identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The limitations with this study were based on the fact that the study exclusively involved former students and their parents from one elementary school in one school district. The target school may not be representative of all elementary schools in the district and these findings may not be generalized to all elementary schools. All students interviewed had attended the target school from first through fifth grade. Although random selection of participants was implemented, the group of participants selected did closely represent the demographics of the target school. Five of the participants are male and three are female. Six of the participants are White and two are Hispanic. Finally, the demographics of the target school are not necessarily representative of other elementary schools.

Implications for the Project

The three identified themes revealed several implications for the project developed to address the student apathy at the target school. These implications centered on the classroom culture and the instruction practices the teachers employ. The first implication for the project was that in order to reduce student apathy, the culture of the

fifth grade classrooms needs to become more responsive and inclusive so that students

see themselves as contributors and integral members of the learning environment. The

instructional practices employed need to provide a higher degree of rigor and relevance

so that students are well prepared for middle school and beyond. Finally, teachers need to

employ differentiation practices to support both highly functioning students and those

who struggle academically or behaviorally.

As a result, the project developed focused on a systemic professional development

plan for the teachers at the target school to build a responsive, student-centered culture

and employ research-based and differentiated instructional practices. A set of student

leadership initiatives for the fifth grade students was included to support their need for

input and agency.

Conclusion

This project study is centered on a qualitative case study design. The data gathered

through student and parent interviews and a review of archived records shed light on

factors that contributed to the high degree of apathy and disengagement expressed by

62% of the fifth graders at the target school in 2009, a suburban school in Maryland. This

was accomplished by examining the data gathered in response to the research questions:

1. What are former fifth graders' perceptions concerning their experiences at the

   target school?

2. What factors contributed to the high degree of apathy among the fifth grade

   students at the target school?

3. What strategies could the target school utilize to address student apathy and

increase engagement?

As a part of their school improvement efforts, this school has been investigating possible causes of the high degree of student apathy in order to develop a set of interventions to increase the level of student engagement, but their efforts have thus far been unsuccessful. Eight former students who were largely representative of the students who expressed a high degree of apathy on the school's comprehensive school climate inventory will be selected for this study. The data gathered and analyzed revealed three themes: a lack of choice and input, a lack of curricular rigor and relevance, and a lack of support for students who struggle academically and/or behaviorally. These findings and the project developed to address them have the potential to illuminate a path through which the school can move forward and address student apathy and increase student engagement.

Section 3 will include further discussion of the data gathered, the concepts and themes that emerged, and how those themes led to the project design. A description of the project, a review of the literature used to guide the development of the project, and the implications of social change imbedded in the study will be an integral part of this section.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore student apathy and the learning environment at the target school through the eyes of former students and their parents. The following project supported that purpose and was created in response to the three themes identified in the research findings: little student input and choice, lack of curricular rigor and relevance, and inadequate support for students who struggle academically or behaviorally. This section provides a description of the project, including goals, rationale for the format, a review of the literature that supports the rationale for the project genre chosen, its theoretical foundation, and the project evaluation. Supporting artifacts and the project itself are included in the appendices. The implementation process, next steps, and implications for social change are discussed. For each component of the project, a direct connection to the research findings is made.

Description and Goals

The findings of this qualitative case study on student apathy illuminated the need to develop a project that would support the target school's faculty in systematically addressing the problem through the lens of the three identified themes: little student choice and input; lack of curricular rigor and relevance, and inadequate support for student who struggle academically and/or behaviorally. After a thorough analysis of the four basic project genre options and current research (Poekert, 2013; Sanders, 2014), which will be described in greater detail in the project rationale, I determined that the

most comprehensive genre was a comprehensive professional development action plan (CPDAP).

The goals of the CPDAP were two fold. The first goal was to equip the teachers at the target school with the tools and strategies needed to reshape their classroom culture and instructional practices in order to reduce student apathy by engaging them in focused and sustained professional development on growth mindset and differentiated instruction and assessment. The second goal was to increase the frequency and depth of teachers' collective reflection practices because collaborative reflection will support the implementation of growth mindset and differentiated instruction for reducing student apathy (Liu & Zhang, 2014; Ohlsson, 2012).

Since this school and the local district already saw the urgency of addressing the problem and had made it the focus of their school improvement plan and professional development days, it was relatively easy to garner the degree of support needed to create and implement a CPDAP that could bring the full faculty together for 4 days to learn and to plan for the new school year. Throughout the school year, teams would come together during weekly collaborative planning sessions and monthly school system early release days to reflect on and deepen their effectiveness as teachers. The year-long CPDAP would conclude with both teacher and student evaluations and determining the next steps the school would take.

Rationale

I began the process of choosing the project genre by reviewing the themes revealed in my analysis of the research data. Next I examined the critical features of the

four basic project genres to determine which genre would provide the most effective match. I quickly realized that an evaluation report was not appropriate project option since my study is not an evaluation study. However, as I looked at the other three project options, I realized they merited closer examination. Even though the targeted audience for a curriculum plan is most often students, developing a curriculum plan as my project could potentially address the identified themes. A curriculum plan that included both differentiated instruction and growth mindset content would support the faculty in developing a working understanding of the content of each of these instructional initiatives. However, a curriculum plan project would not provide teachers with the professional development needed to implement these initiatives in their classroom (Sanders, 2014; Poekert, 2012). For the target school to change the classroom and school culture and redefine daily instruction and assessment, the teachers will need to engage in comprehensive and sustained professional development (Dixon, Yessel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014).

I next considered creating a policy recommendation, or position paper. This project genre would enable me to use the identified problem and the themes revealed in the research findings as the basis to create a proposal, including focused and sustained professional development, for the target school to address the problem of student apathy. The considerable research base on differentiated instruction and assessment as well as the growing body of research on the power of an individual's mindset would provide a strong and solid base on which to build the position paper (Wells & Feun, 2012). A position paper would allow me to customize my recommendations to the specific problem and

audience, rather than just a set of general recommendations that might or might not support the school in comprehensively addressing student apathy through the specific themes revealed in the research. A position paper would also make it possible for me to make specific recommendations for professional development activities, and since the target school is seeking a well-articulated path for their teachers, and a position paper would provide them with the information they need to create a comprehensive professional development plan that addresses the research themes. However, a position paper, no matter how detailed, would require the school to use the recommendations to develop their own professional development plan and secure their own partners and presenters. Therefore, the potential impact of the project on the problem of student apathy would be largely dependent on the school's leadership team's success in securing partners and presenters and the quality of the professional development plan created and delivered by the target school. For this reason, I decided that a position paper was not the best project option.

The final project option, a professional development/training curriculum would offer the target school the curriculum plan content on growth mindset and differentiation, the recommendations of the position paper, and a comprehensive professional development action plan. The addition of a CPDAP provides a medium through which the target school can work collaboratively to reshape the school culture and classroom instruction (Dixon, Yessell, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014) and reduce student apathy. Because it combined the best of three of the project options, I chose to develop a CPDAP for my project.

The literature review that follows further supports my choice and the need to engage the total faculty in school-wide professional development that leads them to reshape the school's culture and retool the instructional practices being used (Desimone, 2011; Wu, 2014). By implementing the research-based CPDAP, the target school will engage in a collaborative learning process that can lead them to address the research themes and reduce student apathy through the creation of a culture that provides students with input and choice using growth mindset practices (Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010; Yeager, Dweck, 2012). A significant body of research shows (DeJesus, 2012; Ghamrawi, 2014; Manning, Stanford, Reeves, 2010; Nelson, Demers, & Christ, 2014) that by implementing differentiated instructional practices with all learners, the target school will address the other two research themes by supporting students who struggle academically and behaviorally and providing increased opportunities for academic rigor and relevance.

<p style="text-align:center;">**Review of the Literature**</p>

Since the study's project is a CPDAP, this literature review focuses on the following three areas of research: professional development best practices, growth mindset strategies, and differentiated instruction and assessment practices. The findings of this study revealed three themes, little student input and choice, lack of curricular rigor and relevance, and inadequate support for students who struggle academically and/or behaviorally. For the target school to reduce student apathy, all three of these themes need to be addressed in each classroom and at every grade level. Therefore, the CPDAP needs to be imbedded in the school improvement plan and focused on creating a growth

mindset culture that supports student engagement and differentiated instruction and assessment practices. Implementing the CPDAP will provide the target school with a clear path to reduce student apathy and increase student engagement.

In conducting the literature review, I carried out Boolean searches in the following databases: EBSCO Multidisciplinary, PsychINFO, SAGE Multidisciplinary Premier, SAGE Education Journals, and Google Scholar. The following terms were used: *professional development; professional development + growth mindset; professional development + differentiated instruction; and professional development + student engagement*. The search also led me to include research in my literature review from other websites including, The Learning and the Brain Society, Jensen Learning, Marzano Research Laboratory, What Works Clearinghouse, and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Professional Development

According to the research conducted in this study, the root of much of the student apathy rests in both the classroom culture and the instruction provided. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive and sustained professional development to modify teacher practice (Poekert, 2012; Wells & Feun, 2013). Professional development is widely viewed as one of the key steps to effect change in schools; yet it is vital for professional development to include certain substantive features to yield the desired results (Desimone, 2011; Liu & Zhang, 2014). To ensure the creation of an effective and comprehensive professional development plan, this part of the literature review focuses on the characteristics of effective professional development.

Professional development is, by nature a complex web of learning opportunities. For the past few decades the focus has been on creating professional development opportunities that produce change and positively impact student engagement and achievement. Petrie and McGee (2012) noted that for comprehensive change to occur professional development must both increase knowledge and employ methods that embody adult learner principles and model research-based instructional practices. Sappington, Pacha, and Baker (2012) noted the importance of creating professional development opportunities that are continuous and systematic. These qualities are essential if professional development is to affect student engagement and achievement. Professional development should connect "the collective effort to improve a school with the committed professional learning of the educators that work there" (Guskey, 2012, p. 10).

Desimone (2011) indicates that there is now a consensus on the core features common to effective professional development. These features include being rooted in curriculum content and best practices for teaching that content; engaging teachers in active learning and providing time for collaboration; providing coherence with school, district, and state reforms and initiatives; creating a comprehensive plan that provides a variety professional development activities and is embedded in the school's strategic plan; designing an interactive learning community by providing the opportunity to work as grade level/content teams. Implemented with these principles in mind, the content and initiatives imbedded in a professional development plan have a significantly higher likelihood of increasing student engagement and achievement (Ohlsson, 2013).

When a comprehensive professional development plan embodies these core features, there are potential issues and barriers a school needs to consider. One of these issues is that teachers are sometime resistant to the change imbedded in the professional development. It is important to note that change is an individual process and each person will need to make the learning his or her own in order to truly embrace lasting change (Dixon, Yessel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014). It's also important to note that if, in addition to the initiatives in the comprehensive professional development plan, the school attempts to take on too many other new programs or initiatives, the teachers can feel overwhelmed and confused (Guskey, 2012). If teachers feel overwhelmed, it is less likely they will successfully implement the new initiative. Finally, availability of resources, including time, can be a significant barrier. Without the resources needed, a comprehensive professional development action plan will have little or no chance of succeeding (Saphier, 2011).

While including these substantive key features (Desimone, 2011) in a comprehensive professional development action plan and addressing the barriers that arise are important factors to consider, recent research shows (Desimone, 2011; Ghamrawi, 2013; Overbaugh & Lu, 2008) that it is equally, if not more important to craft an effective method for evaluating the short-term and long-range effects of the professional development initiative. This evaluation should not be a single event or action, but rather a process, and should include a variety of tools implemented over an extended period of time. Beyond the rudimentary exit tickets and surveys, evaluation tools can and should include site-based observations of the desired outcomes, interviews

of teachers and students, and a review of student data, as well as personal growth reflections, and personal action plans for job-imbedded professional development. Saphier (2011) also posited the importance of implementing ongoing, continued support and evaluation, both for the professional development initiative, and the effectiveness of the implementation. Finally, unleashing the power of teacher reflection, collaboration, and leadership are crucial elements to imbed into any comprehensive professional development plan (de Vries, Vandegrift, & Jansen, 2013). Taking the time to engage teachers in collaborative reflection practices is an element of professional development too important to overlook.

Growth Mindset

Two of the themes, little choice and input and inadequate support for students who struggle behaviorally or academically, revealed in the research findings speak to the need to create a classroom and school culture that embraces students' potential by viewing them through a growth rather than fixed mindset. This growth mindset is then revealed in students as a willingness to persevere and take risks and in teachers as believing that every student possesses the ability and potential to learn and become an enabled learner (Dweck, 2012; Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, & Beechum, 2012). When teachers lead students to understand that intelligence and ability are not fixed; but rather are and can be developed through effort and perseverance, they build a culture of engagement, resiliency (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015) and long-term achievement (Dweck, 2010, Paunesku, 2014). Because of this, the work of establishing a growth mindset culture through deliberate and intentional

classroom practices including process praise, effort rubrics and reflection tools needs to be an integral part of the target school's CPDAP.

Large scale research on growth mindset and its potential to impact behavior and achievement has been conducted over the last few decades, especially among researchers in psychology (Gunderson, Gripshover, Romero, Dweck, Goldin-Meadow, Levine, 2013; Paunesku, 2014). Taking the results of this research into schools and classrooms is a relatively recent movement and much of the research being conducted on the benefits of using growth mindset to improve student engagement, efficacy, and achievement still rests largely in the hands of Dweck and her associates at Stanford University (Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2011). Their research and the classroom and school practices they advocate are gaining momentum in schools throughout the United States and can provide an effective vehicle to build a responsive, growth-focused, and empowering culture at the target school. The research of Mitra, Lewis, & Sanders (2013) offers additional support to building collaborative, competency-based relationships between students and their teachers as a tool to reduce student apathy and increase engagement.

The growth mindset portion of the CPDAP will be based on best practice research and is applicable to children as young as five and as old at 18. The practices recommended for creating a growth mindset include developing an understanding of the difference between fixed and growth mindsets through activities, books, and surveys. This step is critical in reshaping the culture of a classroom and school (Farrington, et al., 2011; Sevincer, Kluge, & Ottingen, 2014). Research recommends that schools create a culture of risk-taking by celebrating challenges and mistakes as much as successes

(Fitzakerley, Michlin, Paton, & Dublinsky, 2014; Tough, 2012). Pretests and growth and

effort rubrics need to be used to support students in seeing their progress toward the

standard, and students need to be engaged in frequent reflection and goal-setting

(Duckworth, & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013). Also, classroom instruction and assignments

should reflect a level of challenge and rigor, but made accessible to all through

differentiated instruction (DeMeuse, Guangrong, & Hallenbeck, 2010; Dweck, 2010).

Finally, a language supportive a growth mindset needs to permeate the school. This goes

beyond the use of affirmations, which are helpful, don't yield the results a school's

collective commitment to using and teaching the language of growth mindset (Miller,

2013). Statements like, "I'm not good at math." are replaced with I'm not good at math

YET." The difference between these two statements may appear simple and even trite,

but the change in the way the brain perceives the difference is significant (Jensen, 2011;

Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Including school-specific initiatives to create a responsive

culture based on the principals of growth mindset, including growth mindset language in

the CPDAP will lay the foundation for students to be engaged and successful.

Differentiated Instructional Practices

The second and third themes revealed in the research results are closely linked

and perhaps even seemingly dichotomous. On one hand the second theme revealed a lack

of rigorous and relevant instruction, while the third theme pointed to inadequate support

for students who struggle academically and/or behaviorally. A CPDAP designed to

reduce student apathy and increase student engagement must have at its core instructional

practices that address both of these important issues. Knowing students' strengths is a

crucial element of student success and a cornerstone of differentiation (Shirley, 2012) because it makes it possible for a teacher to know the learner so they can support, enrich and extend their learning. All students, especially those who are expressing apathy toward school, need to be supported in understanding they are capable of learning all they need to know, and have the opportunity to participate in daily instruction that meets them where they are and skillfully leads them where they need to go (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, Hardin, 2014; Yanghee, 2012).

Research conducted over the past two decades has revealed that not only curriculum content but the instructional practices teachers utilize have a profound effect on the level of students' engagement and achievement (Little, McCoah, & Reis, 2014; Marzano, 2006, 2009, 2011; Tomlinson, 2008, 2014). Differentiated instructional principles and practices are based on Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. This foundation is further supported by research on needs and interests (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Maslow, 1962) and the findings of brain-based learning (Jensen, 2008, 2103). Researchers have continued to build on the body of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in every content area and with all ages of students (Oliveira, Wilcos, Angelis, Applebee, Amodeo, & Snyder, 2013; Chien, Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Ritchie, Bryant, Clifford, Early, Barbarin, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014). The literature review for this CPDAP largely concentrates on research that supports utilizing the major components of differentiation; illuminates effective differentiation practices and strategies, and highlights assessment practices that support increased student engagement.

There is little debate over the notion that effective differentiation begins with developing a thorough knowledge of the learner and her unique strengths and needs (Ghamrawi, 2014). Armed with this knowledge, the teacher can then begin to examine ways to create a responsive and inclusive learning environment. Knowing the learner and creating an inclusive learning environment is crucial because it creates the basis on which all other instructional differentiation structures are built (Floriana & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The process of a teacher getting to know her learners is much more than just examining instructional data. Instead, the process needs to focus on the whole child, including taking the time to understand student preferences and strengths (Little, McCoach, Reis, 2014; Kim, 2013). The information gathered in this initial phase of differentiation should be periodically re-examined as students' emotional, academic, and social attributes develop and mature.

In conjunction with knowing the learner and creating a responsive, inclusive learning environment, providing differentiated instruction and assessment requires a teacher to examine the curriculum outcomes through three lenses: content, process and product (Kaplan, 2011; Robb, 2013). Differentiating content should never be seen as lowering standards, instead should be viewed as scaffolding either up to or beyond the curriculum standard (Serravallo, 2010). Differentiating content provides students with many entry points and alternate pathways and is always based on the effective use of pre- and formative assessments (Swinke, 2012). Differentiating for process is another important element teachers need to incorporate into their daily instruction. Differentiated process practices provide students with a wide variety of learning activities that support

them in developing a deep and meaningful understanding of the curriculum content. These processes can include, but are not limited to small group instruction, peer to peer collaboration, and online programming (Connor, Morrison, Fishman, Giuliani, Luck, Underwood, & Schatschneider, 2011; Light & Pierson, 2014). Perhaps most importantly, teachers need to differentiate for product, which are the methods students participate in to demonstrate their understanding of the curriculum content. Not only does the notion of assessment need to be examined and framed in terms of formative and summative assessment, but assessment formats need to be varied and take into account students' strengths (Esperance, Lendker, Bullock, Lickamy, & Mason, 2013; Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010). Finally, including students in designing their own learning activities, giving them voice and choice in the classroom, and engaging them in individual and peer reflection should also be an important component of any differentiation initiative (Nelson, Demers, & Christ, 2014). In each piece of research reviewed, utilizing differentiated and responsive instruction and assessment practices clearly emerges as an effective strategy to reduce student apathy. Each element in this differentiation process is crucial to put in place to ensure maximum student engagement and achievement (Tomlinson, 2014).

School-wide implementation of differentiated instruction and assessment is a complex process that requires teachers to engage in interactive professional development, supportive implementation, and ongoing reflection. To support this, the comprehensive professional development plan is designed to immerse the faculty of the target school in a year-long series of professional development opportunities that continuously build on

their understanding of the tenets of the learner and learning environment, content, process, and product differentiation (Tomlinson, 2014). These professional development sessions will also provide multiple opportunities for participation in collaborative book studies, personal reflection, and peer coaching. Once the initial professional development sessions are conducted, subsequent professional development sessions will be differentiated for the faculty members to both build on their strengths and model differentiation practices they have been using with their students.

Implementation

The year-long CPDAP will be implemented at the target school with the support of the district's curriculum and equity offices. The curriculum office will provide the training for differentiated instruction and the equity office will provide the training for growth mindset. The CPDAP will engage the total faculty in a variety of sessions beginning with an overview at the end of the 2014-2015 school year and continuing with a book study expert group in July to support planning the opening professional development days in late August. Substitute days and stipends for after-school planning will be utilized for both unit planning and peer coaching. Throughout the school year, each of the district's bi-monthly 2-hour professional development sessions will be devoted to the CPDAP. Teachers will, in expert groups, participate book study sessions, coaching activities, and reflective self-evaluation of their practice. As the school year draws to a close, the leadership team, with input from the faculty, will evaluate progress and plan for further implementation the following year.

The professional development sessions focused on growth mindset research and practices led by the equity office, will engage teachers in developing a working understanding of the tenets of growth mindset and the research supporting its use (Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). To further bring growth mindset into the classroom practice, the teachers will work together in teams to develop an action plan with specific strategies to support developing a growth mindset in their classroom and grade level. These strategies will include: the power of YET, process praise, growth and effort rubrics, reflections, and classroom structures and visuals. To fully contribute to the CPDAP, the administration, guidance counselor, and other support staff will work together to develop an action plan for school-wide initiatives to support the implementation of a culture of growth mindset. The book used for the faculty book study, *Mindset,* by Carol Dweck, will provide the basis for cross grade level discussions and planning. As the school refines its implementation, a team will be formed to plan and implement growth mindset training for parents.

The differentiated instruction professional development sessions, led by the curriculum office will immerse the full faculty in the constructs of differentiation and its ramifications for classroom instruction and assessment. The initial sessions will lead teachers to develop understanding of the importance of knowing their learners and provide them with a set of tools to accomplish this important first step of differentiation (Nelson, Demers, & Christ, 2014). Teachers will explore a wide variety of learning activities that support students in developing a deep and meaningful understanding of the curriculum content through pretests and differentiation of content and process (Cengiz,

Kline, Grant, 2011). Finally, the teachers will focus on ways to differentiate the methods they use for students to demonstrate their understanding of the curriculum content. These formative and summative assessments should include a variety of formats be at least partially informed by students' strengths (Esperance, Lendker, Bullock, Lickamy, & Mason, 2013; Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010). Student choice and reflection will also factor significantly in the professional development sessions. Subsequent sessions will focus on unit planning with differentiation best practices imbedded in instruction and assessment. Substitutes will be provided to support teachers in lesson planning, peer coaching, and self-reflection. The *Differentiated classroom*: *Responding to the needs of all learners* (2014) by Tomlinson will be the book used for the differentiated instruction book study.

As the target school works through the year-long CPDAP, in addition to their monthly meetings, the leadership team will host quarterly debriefing sessions. These debriefing sessions will be held at the target school. In addition to all the members of the leadership team, representatives from the curriculum and equity offices will be in attendance. The purposes of these debriefing sessions are to reflect on previous professional development sessions, review teacher input and evidence of implementation, revise sessions and timelines as needed, and plan for implementation next steps.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The resources needed to fully and effectively implement the CPDAP include support from the equity and curriculum offices in leading the growth mindset and differentiation professional development sessions and the funds needed to pay substitutes

and teacher stipends for planning and coaching provided. All of these funds will come from the district's professional development office. The books on growth mindset and differentiated instruction for the book study groups need to be purchased for all faculty members, and the funds for these materials will come from the target school's budget. This is the only fiscal expenditure required of the target school. The target school will also need to commit to devoting the time required for all of the professional development sessions by building their professional development calendar around the CPDAP.

The required resources and supports needed to implement the CPDAP are available and earmarked at both the school and district level. At the target school the principal and the leadership team are committed to implementing the CPDAP and have allocated the time and funds to implement it with fidelity. The district office is also committed to implementing the CPDAP and will supply both the personnel and funds to implement it with fidelity in order to support the school in addressing the problem of student apathy. The district has recently formed a partnership with a local college and several professors have taken an interest in supporting the target school in implementing the growth mindset portion of the CPDAP. Armed with these resources and supports, the target school has what it needs to implement the CPDAP.

Potential Barriers

There are several potential barriers to the successful implementation of this CPDAP and some reside at the target school while others are the responsibility of the district offices. First, the target school's leadership team must fully commit to devoting the amount of time needed to implement the CPDAP, which includes full-faculty training

sessions, small group lesson planning sessions, structured book study sessions, and collaborative coaching sessions. Daily, weekly, and monthly planning time needs to preserved and utilized, on a scheduled basis, to further the initiatives of the CPDAP (Shady, Luther, & Richman, 2013). Secondly, the school district must commit to providing the funds to hire substitutes for teachers to participate in professional development and planning sessions. Both of these barriers must be addressed for the target school to successfully implement the CPDAP.

Another potential barrier is the attitude of the teachers toward the CPDAP and its genesis, the perceptions of former students and their parents. As the results of the study are reviewed with the faculty, teachers could become defensive, resort to blaming students for the apathy they manifested, and resist implementing the CPDAP. It's also possible that teachers' perception of and belief in both differentiated instruction and growth mindset could act as a barrier to the successful implementation of the CPDAP (Wells & Feun, 2013). However, if the survey results and the tenets of the CPDAP are rolled out respectfully, collaboratively and in line with the school's plan for improvement, the teachers will be less likely to resist implementing the initiatives presented in the CPDAP. As the CPDAP is implemented, it is crucial for the school's leadership team to implement the initiatives in a collaborative manner that models the differentiated instruction and growth mindset practices teachers are being led to implement.

A third potential barrier is the possibility of competing school and/or district priorities. These competing priorities may diminish or even derail the CPDAP. Every year districts and schools are required to implement new initiatives, some of them related

to state and national mandates (Wells & Feun, 2013). If the CPDAP is seen as disconnected to the needs of the school or competing with district, state or federal mandates, the faculty will become confused and feel overwhelmed. This disconnect could, potentially, lead to the CPDAP being seen as just one more thing for the teachers to do rather than a vehicle to address the problem of student apathy.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Full implementation of this CPDAP would be the focus of the school's long-range improvement plan. The initial phase of implementation would take place throughout one school year, with next steps and further initiatives continuing throughout the following year. The first professional development session, an introduction to the project, would take place at the end of the school year and would outline the goals and processes of the plan. Summer reading materials would build background knowledge and establish the focus for the upcoming year. The opening professional development days in late August would provide the first professional development sessions on both growth mindset and differentiation. Throughout the school year, each of the bimonthly 3-hour professional development sessions would be devoted to the CPDAP. Finally, teachers would, in teams, be engaged in bi-weekly collaborative planning; book study sessions, coaching activities, and reflective self-evaluations of their practice.

The implementation of the CPDAP would be monitored and revised as needed at the monthly leadership team meetings. To support their efforts, the leadership team would meet with the leader of the professional development at least once per month and more often at individual teacher or teams' request. Quarterly debriefing sessions will be

held with the leadership team and members of the curriculum and equity offices. At the end of the school year, the faculty would meet to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program and determine next steps and professional development priorities for the following year.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders and professional development leaders are outlined in this section to ensure clear delineation of resources and personnel. The school-based leadership team is responsible for providing the logistical support needed to successfully implement the CPDAP. This support includes: providing dedicated time for professional development and funds to purchase the books for the book studies. The district offices of curriculum and equity will provide the personnel and materials for the professional development in differentiation and growth mindset as well as the funds for substitutes and stipends for planning and coaching. The district office will also support the leadership team in monitoring the implementation and evaluation of the CPDAP. The role the local college will play in the CPDAP is, at this time, centered on growth mindset, but could be expanded to include other aspects of the CPDAP if necessary.

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Project Evaluation

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The project evaluation has three components. The first component focuses on measuring teacher perceptions, and changes in practice. The second component measures the changes in the school culture and structures, and the third evaluation component focuses on measures of student engagement since the ultimate goal of the project is to

reduce student apathy and increase engagement. These components are in line with

developing reflective practices (Liu & Shang (2014) and Guskey's (2002) five levels of

professional development evaluation. Guskey's evaluation recommendations include: (a.)

participants' reactions, (b) participants' learning, (c) organization support and change, (d)

participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and (e) students learning outcomes. Each

of these levels will be addressed, but since this study does not purport to impact student

achievement, the student outcome this project evaluation will measure is student

engagement.

The first evaluation component focuses on teacher participants' reactions,

learning, and changes in practice. The evaluation information will be collected using

several methods, including survey responses, self-reflections, and artifacts of classroom

implementation. This evaluation information is important to include in the overall project

evaluation because it is through change in teacher practice that the level of apathy is

reduced and engagement is increased. The second evaluation component examines

organization support and change. This component focuses on examining how the CPDAP

is supported by the target school and what organizational changes can be observed and

captured. Evidence of organizational support and change can and should be gathered

throughout the year and will include meeting agendas, minutes; teacher reflections; data

reviews, and surveys. The last and perhaps most important evaluation component is the

students' level of engagement. The impact of the CPDAP on students' level of

engagement is crucial and the process for determining students' level of engagement

should be both accessible and descriptive. A survey will provide the researcher and

leadership team with an accessible and efficient method for determining levels of engagement, but it will not be descriptive. However, adding a journal entry or drawing component will support making their element of evaluation both efficient and descriptive.

Finally, a monthly review of the school improvement plan with the school's leadership team will provide an overarching structure to guide the project evaluation. These monthly meetings will be used to celebrate what has been accomplished that month, discuss problems encountered, review the plans for the upcoming month, and determine what resources are needed to successfully implement those plans. Once in each quarter the leadership team will include a full review of the CPDAP and representatives from central office will attend. In the final quarter of the school year, the leadership team will lead the full faculty to gather and review all of the evaluation data to determine the priorities for the following year. Currently, the leadership team is comprised of teachers, administrators, and parents. For the purposes of the study, I will encourage the leadership team to include one or two students in these monthly review sessions.

Implications, Including Social Change

Local Community

This project addresses the problem of student apathy through the implementation of a CPDAP focused on differentiated instruction and growth mindset practices. The results of the study's qualitative research gleaned from interviews with former students and their parents revealed three themes: little choice and input, lack of curricular rigorous and relevant, and inadequate support for students who struggle academically and behaviorally, so a CPDAP that leads the faculty to create a growth mindset culture and

implement responsive, differentiated instruction and assessment will benefit both current and future students. The review of literature revealed that combining these two initiatives has significant potential to reduce student apathy and increase student engagement (Dweck, 2008; Jensen, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013). Therefore the social change potential of this study is significant. In many schools experiencing high levels of student apathy, including the target school, education is often perceived as something done to students, with little consideration given to what they need, think, or feel about their school experiences (Fullan, 2011). This approach is utilized despite research that reveals that a responsive, differentiated learning environment leads students to be actively engaged in their learning (Fonseca, 2008; Marzano, Pickering, & Hefflebower, 2010). The elements of social change extend to the study's student participants, the school's true stakeholders. They were able share their own experiences at the target school and their parents were able to add their own perspective. The experiences and voices of these former students established the foundation of a project that has the potential to create positive changes at the elementary school they attended.

Far-Reaching

The need for students to be engaged and successful goes well beyond elementary school. Engagement in elementary school creates the blueprint and sets the stage for students' future experiences in middle school, high school, and beyond. Being a successful adult in the 21st century requires much more than basic skills. Employers need employees who are actively engaged participants in an increasingly collaborative setting (Pink, 2006, 2009), and becoming an informed member of an increasingly

complex democracy requires a high degree of engagement and inquiry (Stuckkhart & Glanz, 2010).So decreasing apathy in one elementary school can positively impact the future of each student who attends that school. The implications of this project have the potential to go far beyond this one elementary school. As the target school implements the project and student apathy decreases and engagement increases, the project has the potential to be implemented in other schools and school districts. A broader implementation has the potential to decrease apathy and increase student engagement and perhaps even student achievement in other elementary schools in Maryland.

Conclusion

The study's project, a comprehensive professional development action plan (CPDAP), based on the three themes revealed in the research findings, provides the leadership team at the target school with a course of action and the resources to address the school's high degree of student apathy and pave way for increased student engagement. The goals of the project center on providing focused, comprehensive professional development rooted in research-based best-practices. The CPDAP leads the faculty to create a growth mindset culture, and implement differentiated instruction as a path to reducing student apathy. The design and content of the CPDAP is supported by the literature review and the specific needs of the target school. This project has the potential to impact social change by providing the target school with a road map and resources to address the high degree of student apathy it has been experiencing. The project has the potential to support other schools in the district and state experiencing the problem of student apathy. Finally, the project reveals the value of including student

voice in initiatives that directly involve them and their future success or failure. Having

the opportunity to hear students and their parents speak about the apathy they were

manifesting revealed the research themes that led to the development of a project that

directly addressed the identified issues.

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Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of the project, a comprehensive professional development action plan (CPDAP) outlined in Section 3, is designed to provide the target school with the process and resources needed to reduce student apathy by implementing differentiated instructional practices and growth mindset strategies to develop a culture of empowerment and engagement. Student apathy is serious problem with far-reaching and long-lasting effects. Students who manifest apathy toward school perform at lower levels than their more engaged peers (Mitra, 2009). Schools that are experiencing high levels of student apathy, such as the target school, need to take action. They need to lead their apathetic students to become engaged in their learning so they can be successful in school and become productive members of a complex democracy and the 21st century global workplace.

This section includes a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the project as well as my personal reflections. These reflections include an outline of my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. The section suggests potential social changes that could occur as a result of implementing this project. It concludes with implications for social change, applications for other schools and districts, and suggestions for future research.

Project Strengths

Guided by the study's research questions, the deliberately open-ended interview questions served as a flexible conduit to obtaining data and supported the interviewees,

eight students and their parents, to speak freely and provide extensive detail. Data analysis revealed three themes: little choice and input; lack of curricular rigor and relevance; and inadequate support for students who struggle behaviorally or academically. These three themes provided the foundation of my analysis and choice of project genre and ultimately as the process unfolded, led to reveal the project's greatest strengths. As I examined the four project genre options, the components of both a position paper and professional development plan provided the closest match to the research themes. The defining factor in choosing to develop a CPDPA was the fact that a comprehensive professional development plan both addressed the themes and fully outlined the critical components, materials, and supports while creating the structures to collaboratively engaging teachers in reshaping the culture and instructional practices in their classrooms and throughout the school.

A major strength of the project is that the (CPDPA) addresses all three of the themes revealed in the research. Implementing growth mindset practices will reshape the classroom and school culture to provide more student choice and input (Dweck, 2010; Paunesku, 2014). Using differentiated instruction and assessment practices will address both the curriculum rigor and relevance theme and the need for greater support for students who struggle academically and/or behaviorally. An additional strength of the project is that the multi-dimensional nature of the plan requires the CPDAP connect all three themes in a manner that makes it possible for teachers to understand the connections between the themes and view embracing growth mindset and differentiated learning as a path to reduce student apathy and increase student engagement (Dixon,

Yessel, McConnell, Hardin, 2014). Finally, significant strength of the project is that through the partnership with the central office curriculum and equity offices as well as the local college, the teachers will receive high-quality professional development and ongoing support in becoming more reflective practitioners.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

The project's limitations include the potential barriers of time, teacher investment and efficacy, as well as the possibility of competing school or district priorities. Each of these limitations can be mitigated through the collaboration and support of the target school's leadership team and the district's curriculum and equity offices. This project, while grounded in research and based on data collected from the target school, only represents the perspectives of a small group of students and parents. For the purposes of the study, this was the targeted population and process, so the data yielded was valuable. The effects of these limitations could be mitigated by providing an opportunity for further research into the subject of student apathy with a larger sampling. Despite this limitation, the present study and project support positive social change by providing students and their parents with a voice in addressing the problem of student apathy and the target school with a path to reduce student apathy and increase student engagement.

Alternative project genres were considered, but the one element of the solution that needed to remain constant was that the genre chosen had to address the themes and the fact that all of these themes were rooted in classroom practice. Even though I could quickly rule out an evaluation report since I had not conducted an evaluation study, the other three options deserved careful consideration. A curriculum plan focused on both

differentiated instruction and growth mindset content would possibly support the faculty

in developing a working understanding of the content of each of these instructional

initiatives. However, it would not provide teachers with the professional development

needed to implement these initiatives in their classroom (Sanders, 2014; Poekert, 2012).

I also considered a position paper. This project genre would enable me to base my

recommendations on the themes revealed in the research findings and the research base

for both differentiation and growth mindset. I could include in the proposal focused and

sustained professional development (Wells & Feun, 2012). A position paper would

support the need to customize my recommendations and make it possible for me to make

specific recommendations for professional development activities. However, the position

paper, no matter how detailed, would require the target school to take my

recommendations and create a comprehensive professional development plan, which

could potentially reduce the likelihood of the plan being developed and successfully

implemented. Because of this, I decided that a position paper was not the best project

option.

Therefore, I determined that the best project genre for the target school was a

CPDAP. This project would enable the school to address both the culture of the school

and the instructional practices utilized in the classrooms. After conducting a significant

amount of research and consulting with the school, district, and the local college, I chose

to focus the CPDAP on developing a culture of growth mindset and implementing

differentiated instructional practices. Another option might have been to focus on brain

research and differentiated instructional practices, but the growth mindset practices on

which the CPDAP focuses were a better match for the current school and district philosophy and initiatives. By making sure the CPDAP's initiatives are in line with the school and district philosophy and initiatives, the likelihood of implementation and adoption are increased.

Scholarship

Creating this project provided me with another opportunity to deepen my understanding of scholarship. I realize now that during the early stages of my doctoral coursework my understanding of scholarship was limited. I specifically researched and reflected on topics and articles in the courses I was taking, and while this was significantly more scholarly research and writing than I had ever done before, it still was somewhat limited. As I moved into developing my study and conducting research my understanding of scholarship began to expand. I came to understand that scholarship is an outgrowth of research, discovery, and collaboration. Through my work with fellow students and my committee members I have been able to deepen my understanding of the iterative nature of scholarship. As I began to analyze data and develop themes, I learned that reflection is essential to scholarship. Each theme that emerged made me reflect back on the data collection process and evaluate the quality of the questions I asked and data I captured. As I wrestled with the decision of which project genre to choose and the final development of my project, I came to understand that scholarship also includes synthesizing many pieces of research and practice to create a viable plan to solve a problem of practice. Finally, I have learned that scholarship takes effort, persistence, and

passion. Scholarship led me to listen to the participants' voices, address the themes revealed, and create a project based on sound research and grounded in best practice.

Project Development and Evaluation

During the development of this project study, I realized that I needed to shift my perspective. Rather than approaching the problem as the former principal of the target school, I needed view the situation first as an outsider and then as an evaluator so that I could determine who my participants should be and the type of data I needed to collect. I learned that a problem with student apathy existed in the target school early in my tenure as the newly appointed principal and heard many opinions from teachers about what they believed were the origins of the problem. However, at that point I was still viewing the problem as a practitioner, not as a researcher, so I was looking at the problem through a narrow and adult-focused lens.

Once I began to craft my study, I shifted into the role of a researcher and my view of the problem became more objective and analytical. As I listened to teachers and parents talk about the problem of student apathy and discuss the frustration they felt about implementing initiatives that never fully addressed the problem, I realized that for the school to achieve true success, the voices of vital, and yet unheard, stakeholders must be included in any attempt to solve the problem. The unheard voices were those of the apathetic students and their parents. At that moment I knew I had to understand their experiences and perspectives. Once I conducted the research and analyzed the data, the themes that emerged confirmed my belief. The inclusion of these voices increased and improved the value of the data collected and analyzed. A clear vision and understanding

of needs and beliefs of students and their parents was needed to develop a project and evaluation that would address the problem of student apathy.

The next step in developing the project to address the problem of student apathy required me to again become a researcher, but this time, a researcher of project genres that could potentially address the three themes, all of which I knew emanated from the classroom. As I looked at each genre, I carefully researched the components and examined both the matching and missing elements. Of the four project genres, an evaluation report was quickly eliminated because I had not conducted an evaluation study. A curriculum plan was not a good fit because it didn't directly specify the inclusion of professional development for teachers. I seriously considered a policy paper because it would support me in making recommendations and outlining the next steps the target school should take to eliminate student apathy. However, a policy paper would only make recommendations and even though it could include recommendations for professional development, it would not provide a fully detailed and well articulated plan which would reduce the likelihood that the recommendations would be implemented. Therefore, my role as researcher, led me to examine and choose the project genre of a professional development action plan. With this genre I could use the research on growth mindset, and differentiated instructional practices to craft a comprehensive plan that would lead the target school through a year of collaborative, reflective, research-based professional development designed to reduce student apathy and fully in line with their school improvement plan. Creating an evaluation plan for the project was an outgrowth of addressing the themes through the project goals. The evaluation plan contains three

components. The first focuses on examining teacher perceptions and changes in practice.

Included in this first component are both surveys and reflection journals. The second

considers changes in school structures and culture, and the third evaluation component

focuses on student engagement since the ultimate goal of the project is to reduce student

apathy.

Leadership and Change

Before beginning my doctoral program at Walden, I believed that I had, at the

very least, a strong working understanding of leadership and change gained through my

master's degree program and my work as an elementary school principal. As I went

through the Walden coursework and began working on my study, I realized how little I

really knew. In my coursework I deepened my understanding of what research teaches us

about leadership and learning. This learning influenced and shaped my work as a

principal. A leader needs to be a learner, a supporter, and model the facilitative approach

she wants teachers to utilize in their classrooms with students. As I navigated through the

process of conducting my study I learned that as a leader it is critically important to

listen. An effective leader must have strong relationships with all stakeholders and listen

to their perspectives. Perhaps most importantly, I learned that a leader must lead for

social justice, even when those she leads don't see a problem. Because a good leader is

moving toward what needs to be, not what is right now.

Being this kind of leader inevitably means leading organizational change because

for an organization to function in a way that meets the needs of all stakeholders, it needs

to be ever evolving. I learned, sometimes the hard way, that comprehensive

organizational change must be the result of the collective commitment of all stakeholders and guided by an effective leader. Equally as important, comprehensive change is a process that must be carefully managed. All components of the change initiative need to be in place for the change to occur. Vision guided by an action plan supported with resources, skills, and motivators can yield the desired change. However, if any of the pieces are missing, the results are diminished. Leading change is a complex dance that requires listening, supporting, and yet abandoning the desired change. Change spreads, evolves and becomes widespread when leaders act on opportunities to acknowledge successes. All of these factors were critical to consider in creating the project to address the target school's problem of student apathy. Finally, I needed to consider the ramifications of the recent change in leadership at the school study and the impact it could potentially have on the school's capacity to implement the comprehensive professional development plan as well as any additional support the school may require to meet with success.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

I have always loved learning and being in school. Participating in this doctoral program, conducting my study, and creating the project have been the ultimate learning experience for me. Working through this degree process has taught me that being an educational scholar is much more than possessing information, it's using that information to improve teachers' practice to enhance the education of children. Navigating the Walden doctoral process has been a humbling experience many times but through it all, the experience has enhanced my confidence and inspired me to continue learning and

sharing all I learn with others. The process has taught me to persevere even when others believe what I am trying to do is not possible, to reach out to my committee chair who has championed my efforts, and move forward with confidence and courage.

Conducting my study has confirmed my belief that students have more to offer than even I believed, and making sure their voices are heard is of critical importance. Their honesty, graciousness, and desire to do and be better, humbled and led me to redouble my commitment to be a life-long learner who always reaches out and listen to others. Their inspiration revitalized my aspirations to expand my sphere of influence beyond the schoolhouse. Because of this I took a risk and applied for and was granted a district level position in the newly created Office of Equity and Accelerated Student Achievement. I have now embarked on a steep learning curve in areas of education in which I have had relatively little experience. This process has been both humbling and energizing. I exist in a state of positive stress each day and am grateful for the guidance I receive from the district leadership, principals and teachers. Each day I realize just how important this collective and collaborative work is.

Conducting my project study and creating this project has supported me in deepening my understanding of current research on my topic. I have read dissertations, articles, and journals that I had never read before. I delved into the theories of Vygotsky, Dweck, Marzano, and Tomlinson in detail. Through working with colleagues at Walden and in my district I have grown professionally; have a deeper level of respect for the world of academia; and gained the confidence to step out and take on a new challenge

within my school district. My Walden doctoral journey has deepened my commitment to social justice and made me an even fiercer advocate for the education of all children.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

I have always believed that providing children with the education they deserve requires educators to continuously develop and reflect on their beliefs and practices. Through taking risks, working hard and reflecting on my practice, I have, throughout my career, worked to embody my beliefs. Now, as a result of participating in this doctoral program, I see myself as someone who can objectively and reflectively look at a problem a school is facing and support them in understanding how research can inform their practice and lead to positive changes for students. This skill has become particularly valuable in my new role in the Office of Equity and Accelerated Student Achievement.

Utilizing this reflective, research-based approach is especially crucial for a leader. As a result of my doctoral work I feel confident about supporting schools in examining their practice and enhancing their collective effectiveness. I more fully understand just how important it is to listen to the needs and beliefs of others to move forward in a productive way. Without their commitment and efforts, the best initiative will fail, and failure is not an option. Children are the key to the future, and I have learned that by using facilitative leadership skills and advocating for what I know is right and just, I can support a school in eliminating a problem that has been blocking its success for many years.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

While my many of my professional experiences have led me to work with teachers and schools to implement professional development initiatives, the process of designing this comprehensive professional development action plan was different at so many levels. It required me to think and act in a deeper more collaborative way than I had ever done before. Rather than being shaped by external priorities, this professional development action plan was developed based on specific needs identified by my research. This shift is exciting, but laden with the responsibility to develop a project that was both true to the study's findings and grounded in current research.

For the first time the professional development plan I was creating was directly based on current best practice research. Previously, the professional development I was developing may have been based on basic research principles, but this time the professional development is based on the results of the research I conducted. Because of this, my professional development project is both based on research and focused on the themes my study identified. Developing this professional development action plan project required me to read, research, and assimilate my findings and the information I had gathered. I learned to listen to the input of colleagues and use my research findings and literature review as the yardstick by which I measured the project I was developing. Finally, I reached out to my peer reviewer and the study's participants to share an outline of the project to seek their input and incorporate their feedback.

By engaging in this process I have learned that developing a project to address research themes is a complicated process because thinking you know what to do and how

to do it isn't enough. Considering all options and conducting thorough and exhaustive research is crucially important. I learned that incorporating professional development best practice research in not enough to ensure the desired student outcomes. Without making sure the professional development action plan is rooted in both the needs and perspectives of the school's stakeholders, including students, it will, at best, only be marginally successful. Thoroughly understanding the "why" is as crucial as determining the "what" and outlining the "how."

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

There are several ways the results of this study have the potential impact social change. One of the most significant is the potential to increase the recognition of the importance of understanding the perspectives and beliefs of students. Including their voices and wrapping their perspectives into the efforts of the school and district can provide valuable and unique information to guide professional development; inform school improvement planning; increase student engagement, and even improve student achievement.

Another potential impact is that the leadership team at the target school may see that the findings of this study have shown how important it is to have student voice imbedded in their school improvement efforts. Rather than trying to understand student apathy through the ideas and perspectives of other stakeholders, perhaps they will factor their students' perspectives into their future school improvement efforts and continued professional development opportunities to further increase student engagement and differentiate teaching practices.

The district administration may benefit from the findings in this study and the resulting project by recognizing the value of soliciting and listening to the voices of students and their parents in the process of school improvement. Listening to and taking into account student perspectives can increase self-efficacy, which in turn can create a positive change in instruction and learning. The content and process outlined in the project's comprehensive professional development action plan can be utilized by the district as they lead other schools to reduce student apathy and increase student engagement.

The research results, gained from student and parent interviews, provided invaluable insight about the beliefs, needs, and attitudes of students and parents towards their experiences at the target school. The application of this qualitative case study can be of significance to the target school, educators, researchers, community stakeholders, the district, but perhaps most importantly, to the student participants and their parents. Their experiences and voices informed each element of the project.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Conducting this study has been a simultaneously uplifting and daunting experience. I have been inspired by the collaboration I have been able to engage in with my colleagues in searching for the answers to my questions and the generosity of the student and parent participants in sharing their perspectives. The process of having minors as my participants was daunting, but the results of persevering were well worth it. It is my hope that the results will change the way the school sees students and their voice in school improvement planning and professional development. I learned that students

have well-defined and well-considered beliefs about their schooling and those beliefs need to be considered as an important factor in their schooling. Since students are required to attend school, they should have the opportunity to express what they think would benefit them rather than just having their education something done unto them (Fullan, 2011).

The results of this study could be made available to other schools in the district or state that are experiencing student apathy to illustrate the benefits of including student voice in developing a path to reduce apathy and increase engagement. Potential future research might include conducting similar study in another district elementary or middle school experiencing high levels of student apathy with a larger group of participants. Another possible path for future research would be to conduct a study with similar methodology at the target school after the comprehensive professional development action plan has been fully implemented.

Conclusion

This section provided me with the opportunity to reflect on both my project and my experiences throughout the entire Walden University doctoral study process. I began my reflections by analyzing the strengths and limitations of the project genre I chose. As I conducted this analysis, I realized that the greatest strengths emanated from the strongest matches between the project elements, the research themes and the solid research base on which they stood. I learned that the study's limitations were also tied to the research results and themes, but largely because of the potential implementation issues that may arise inside the school and at the district level. I explained what I have

learned throughout this process about scholarship, leadership, project development, and myself as a scholar and practitioner. Finally, I discussed the potential implications for social change and future research. This is a significant component of this section because the participants were students and parents, rather than teachers and school leaders. Therefore the results and the project reflect their unique perspective and the research results and the comprehensive professional development plan could be of considerable interest to schools that are struggling with the problem of student apathy.

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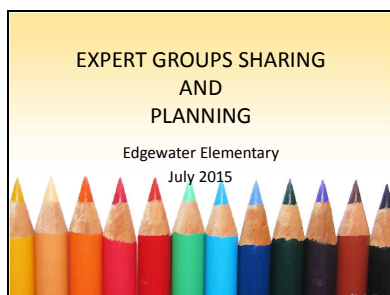
Appendix A: The Project

A Comprehensive Professional Development Action Plan

The project, a year-long comprehensive professional development action plan (CPDAP) is outlined below. The purpose of this professional development plan is to provide the targeted audience, the faculty at the target school, with the tools and practices they need to reduce student apathy. The project's goals focus on leading teachers to: establish a Growth Mindset culture in their classrooms; implement differentiated instruction and assessment practices, and reflect on and modify their practice to increase the level of student engagement in each of their classrooms.

Included in Appendix A: The Project are: the CPDAP power point presentations, which include the agendas, for each of the full-day professional development sessions; an outline of all the professional development activities for the entire year, and a description of the process being utilized and links to both the reflective practice teacher survey and the student engagement survey

SECOND SESSION: EXPERT GROUP SHARING & PLANNING

Slide 1

EXPERT GROUPS SHARING
AND
PLANNING

Edgewater Elementary
July 2015

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Slide 2

Our Objectives & Agenda

- OBJECTIVES:
- Work in our expert groups to deepen our understanding
- Plan the school-wide sessions on Growth Mindset and Differentiated Instruction and Assessment

- AGENDA:
- Expert Groups Planning
- Expert Groups Sharing
- August PD Agenda Development

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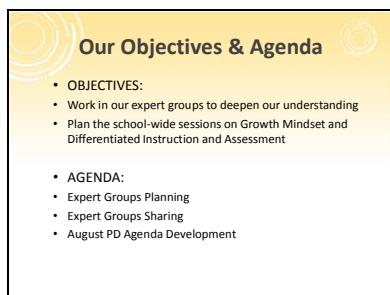
Slide 3

EXPERT GROUP PLANNING

- Capture what you've learned about your topic on a Bubble Map
- Choose what needs to be included in your group's full faculty session
- Meet with your district level partner to share your idea and begin planning
- Capture what you've planned on the chart paper and prepare your 3-5 minute presentation

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Slide 4

EXPERT GROUP SHARING

- Each Expert Group has 3-5 minutes
- As you listen to the other group's presentation, use the checklist to share your KUDOS and suggestions

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Slide 5

August Kick-off Agenda Finalization

- Now that each group has shared their plan . . .
  - How can we make sure each full-day session:
    - Is engaging and differentiated
    - Provides teachers with models and strategies they can use in their classroom
    - Gives teams time to plan for the first month of school
- What do each of us need to do to be ready for the August Kick-off?

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THIRD SESSION: GROWTH MINDSET

Slide 1

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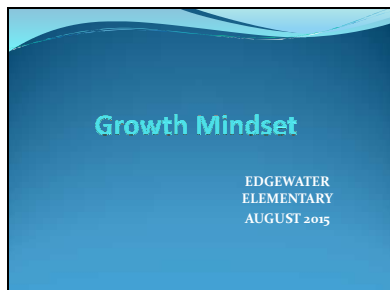
Slide 3

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Slide 4

Objectives

- Develop an understanding of growth mindset and its implications in building a responsive, equitable culture that supports higher levels of student engagement.
- Discover the power of using specific practices to develop a growth mindset in students

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Slide 7

Mindset:

- No death, destruction, or damage
- Sort of brushed off, not rejected
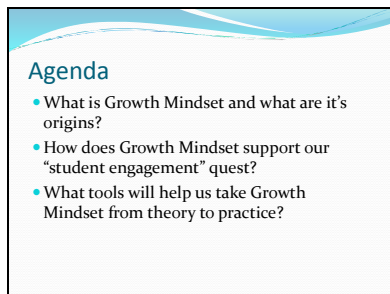- What do you believe about learning – "**One day, you go to a class that is really important to you and that you like a lot. The teacher returns the midterm papers to the class. You got a C+.**"

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Slide 8

GROWTH MINDSET
3 CORE BELIEFS

Students perform better in schools when teachers believe that intelligence is not fixed, but it can be developed.

Teaching students that intelligence can be grown is especially powerful for students who belong to typically stereotyped groups.

Growth mind-sets focus on effort and motivate students to overcome challenging work.

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Slide 11

Create a thinking map, concept map, or visual representation of the following terms. It should represent the relationship between and among the concepts.

- Growth
- Responsive
- Equitable
- Achievement
- Lived experiences
- Expectations
- Trust
- Students
- Teachers
- Administrators
- Equity Liaisons

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Slide 13

The power of yet…
- Carol Dweck on the Power of YET

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Slide 15

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Intelligence is static.	Intelligence can be developed.
Leads to a desire to *look smart* and therefore a tendency to	Leads to a desire to *learn* and therefore a tendency to
· avoid challenges	· embrace challenges
· give up easily due to obstacles	· persist despite obstacles
· see effort as fruitless	· see effort as path to mastery
· ignore useful feedback	· learn from criticism
· be threatened by others' success	· be inspired by others' success

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Slide 16

What now?

- Use the case studies to discuss and record the implications on building a responsive, equitable culture that supports higher levels of achievement?
- What are the big ideas that you can take back to your building?

Slide 18

All of this sounds great, but . . .

- How can I develop a growth mindset in my students??
- What tools can I use??

STAY TUNED!
AFTER LUNCH WE'LL DIG INTO ALL OF OUR TOOLS!

Slide 19

Your Favorite Thing!!
GROUP WORK!!
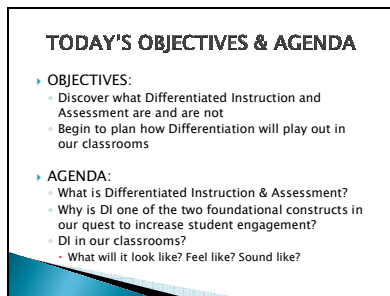
- Pick a card, any card!!
  - Process Praise
  - Rubrics
  - Goal Setting
  - Classroom Structures & Visuals
- Find the Corner Chart that matches your card and join the group!!
- Use your Capture Sheet to start building your Growth Mindset Repertoire

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FOURTH SESSION: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

Slide 1

Differentiated Instruction & Assessment

Meet Students Where They Are

AND

Lead Them Where They Need to Go

June 2015
Rebecca Schou
Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement

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Slide 2

TODAY'S OBJECTIVES & AGENDA

▸ OBJECTIVES:
  ◦ Discover what Differentiated Instruction and Assessment are and are not
  ◦ Begin to plan how Differentiation will play out in our classrooms

▸ AGENDA:
  ◦ What is Differentiated Instruction & Assessment?
  ◦ Why is DI one of the two foundational constructs in our quest to increase student engagement?
  ◦ DI in our classrooms?
    ‣ What will it look like? Feel like? Sound like?

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Slide 3

What Do Differentiated Instruction and Assessment Mean To <u>YOU</u>?

▸ Turn and Talk at your table and collaboratively create a Circle Map on the poster paper that represents your group's shared definition
▸ Post your Circle Map
▸ Armed with your colored dots, participate in the Gallery Walk and identify the common elements and create our definition

HOW DOES OUR DEFINITION COMPARE WITH CAROL TOMLINSON'S DEFINITION?

Slide 6

Differentiated instruction utilizes responsive instructional practices rather than one-size-fits-all instructional practices.

It means teachers proactively plan varied approaches to

• what students need to learn,

• how they will learn it,

• and/or how they will show what they have learned

to make sure each student learns as much as he or she can, as efficiently as possible.

Slide 7

At its most basic level, differentiated instruction means "shaking up" what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options to

• take in information,

• make sense of ideas,

• and express what they learn.

Differentiation begins with the teacher's mindset that students of any age need active involvement with and support from adults who care to help them construct a worthy life.

Now, how will we do that?

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Slide 8

At Your Table . . .

‣ Open the folder in the center of your table
‣ Distribute the differentiated instruction & assessment readings and classroom artifacts so that each person has 3 items to review
‣ Spend 7 minutes reading and reviewing the items you've chosen
‣ Share what you've learned with your group
‣ Create

Slide 10

In what ways can you differentiate/ modify your instruction and assessment?

Content – what students will learn

Process – activities through which students make sense of the key ideas using the required skills

Product – how students demonstrate and extend what they understand – your assessment tools

Learning Environment – the classroom conditions that set up the tone and expectations of learning

**DIVIDE UP THE CARDS AT YOUR TABLE
AND
DIG INTO DIFFERENTIATING!!**

Slide 12

What does a teacher need to know BEFORE differentiating instruction and assessment?
The teacher needs to come to understand her students by responding to their . . .

◦ **Readiness**

◦ **Interests**

◦ **Learning Profile**

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Slide 13

Readiness :
A student's
- **knowledge,**
- **understanding,**
- **and skill**

because when a student works at a level of difficulty that is *both challenging* and *attainable* learning take place.

Interest refers to those topics or pursuits that
‣ **evoke curiosity and**
‣ **passion in a learner.**
 Thus, highly effective teachers attend both to students' current interests and as yet undiscovered interests.

Slide 14

Learning profile refers to how students learn best. Including:
‣ **learning style,**
‣ **intelligence preference,**
‣ **culture and**
‣ **gender**

If classrooms can offer and support different modes of learning, more students will learn.

Affect has to do with how students feel about
‣ **themselves,**
‣ **their work,**
‣ **and the classroom / relationships** *(teacher / peers)*

Student affect is the path through which each student can become more fully engaged and successful.

Slide 16

Two Views of Assessment - What is YOUR view?

Assessment is For:	Assessment is For:
Gate Keeping	Nurturing
Judging	Guiding
Right Answers	Self Reflection
Control	Information
Comparison to Others	Comparison to Task
Use with Single Activities	Use Over Multiple Activities

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Slide 17

Preassessment Is...

A strategy or process to determine a student's *current level of readiness or interest* in order to plan for appropriate instruction.

Preassessment:
- *provides data to determine options for students*
- *helps determine differences before planning*
- *helps teacher design activities that are respectful and challenging*
- *allows teachers to meet students where they are*
- *identifies starting point for instruction*
- *identifies learning gaps*
- *makes efficient use of instructional time*

Slide 18

Formative Assessment Is...

Formative Assessment Cycle

A process of accumulating information about a student's progress to help make instructional decisions that will *improve his/her understandings and achievement levels.*

Formative Assessment:
- *is used to make instructional adjustments*
- *alerts the teacher about student misconceptions "early warning signal"*
- *allows students to build on previous experiences*
- *provides regular feedback*
- *provides evidence of progress*
- *aligns with instructional/curricular outcomes*

Slide 19

Summative Assessment Is...

A means to determine a student's *mastery and understanding* of information, skills, concepts, or processes.

Summative Assessment:
- *should reflect the formative assessments that precede it*
- *should match material taught*
- *may determine student's exit achievement*
- *may be tied to a final decision, grade or report*
- *should align with instructional/curricular outcomes*
- *may be a form of alternative assessment*

Slide 20

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COMPREHENSIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
ACTION PLAN OUTLINE

Topic	Description	Resources	Date
		JUNE 2015	
CPDAP Overview	-Provide faculty members with an overview of the CDAP	-CPDAP Overview Power Point	June 2015
Growth Mindset: Introduction	-Growth Mindset Overview -The Power of YET -"Trying out" Growth Mindset	-*Mindset*, Carol Dweck - *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman	Full Day: -The morning will focus on Growth Mindset -The afternoon will focus on Differentiated Instruction
Differentiated Instruction: Introduction	-Provide the faculty with an overview of the principles of differentiated instruction and it's connection to Growth Mindset	-*Mindset Work Educator Kit:*www.mindworks.com (Instructional resources to support implementing growth mindset in schools)	
Growth Mindset & Differentiated Instruction Book Studies	The members of each team will choose in which of the two areas they want to become the team's "resident expert". They will then receive one of two books (*Mindset*, Carol Dweck, or *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman	(Instructional resources to support differentiated instruction in schools) -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	
Coaching Opportunities	The faculty will choose a partner to observe and coach throughout the		

	year		
	AUGUST 2015		
Growth Mindset: School-wide and Classroom Practices	-Engage faculty in developing a working understanding of the Growth Mindset theory and practice and lead them to identify specific practices to use as they begin the year.	Growth Mindset Practices Power Point --Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	August 2015 Full Day: -The morning will focus on Growth Mindset -The afternoon will focus on Differentiated Instruction
Differentiated Instruction: School-wide and Classroom Practices	-Engage the faculty in a variety of differentiated activities to develop a working understanding and menu of the school-wide and classroom differentiated instructional practices to use as they begin the year	Differentiated Instruction Power Point -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	
	SEPTEMBER 2015		
Book Study Sessions	-Each book study group meets to discuss the identified section. The group is led by a school-based resource teacher	As the group discusses the section, they create a list of ideas to take back to their team to support the monthly focus -*Mindset*, Carol Dweck - *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All*, Gregory & Chapman	September 2015 (1 hr. after-school session)
Growth Mindset:	-In teams lead the faculty	-*Mindset Works*	September 2015

Goal Setting	to develop an understanding of growth goals and how they apply to and support their students in being engaged and making growth. - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the growth mindset book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	*Educator Kit:* Goal Setting -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	-2 hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
Differentiated Instruction: Learning Environment	In teams lead the faculty to learn about and identify specific learning environment differentiated practices to use to know their learners and create a classroom learning environment that supports every child's engagement and success - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the differentiated instruction book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	*- Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman Learning Environment -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	September 2015 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
	OCTOBER 2015		
Book Study Sessions	-Each book study group meets to discuss the identified section. The group is led by a school-based resource teacher	As the group discusses the section, they create a list of ideas to take back to their team to support the monthly focus -*Mindset*, Carol Dweck - *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit*	October 2015

		*All,*Gregory& Chapman	
Growth Mindset: Process Feedback	-In teams lead the faculty to develop an understanding of process feedback and how using process and effort feedback rather than product and attribute feedback supports students in being engaged and making growth. - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the growth mindset book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	*-Mindset Works Educator Kit:* Process Feedback -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	October 2015 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
Differentiated Instruction: Content Differentiation	In teams lead the faculty to learn about and identify specific ways to differentiate content while adhering to the content standards to support every child's engagement and success - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the differentiated instruction book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	*- Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman*:* Content Differentiation -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	October 2015 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
NOVEMBER 2015			
Book Study Sessions	-Each book study group meets to discuss the identified section. The group is led by a school-based resource teacher	As the group discusses the section, they create a list of ideas to take back to their team to support the monthly focus	November 2015 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning

		-*Mindset*, Carol Dweck - *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman	
Growth Mindset: Rubrics & Reflections	-In teams lead the faculty to develop an understanding of growth rubrics and accompanying reflection activities and how using this two-pronged approach supports students in being engaged and making growth. - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the growth mindset book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	*Mindset Works Educator Kit*: Rubrics & Reflection -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	November 2015 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
Differentiated Instruction: Process & Product Differentiation	In teams lead the faculty to learn about and identify specific ways to differentiate the learning process and provide options for differentiated projects that demonstrate students' understanding of content knowledge to support every child's engagement and success - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the differentiated instruction book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	*Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman*:* Process & Product Differentiation -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	November 2015 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning

DECEMBER 2015

Faculty Sharing, Celebrations, & Reflection on	-Teams will share artifacts of learning based on the areas of focus -The principal will share climate and academic data -The faculty will celebrate all they've accomplished since the year began -The faculty will engage in a Power Dotting activity to determine successes and issues to support the remainder of the year implementation	-Artifacts of Learning brought by teams of teachers -Climate and academic data -Process and materials to engage in celebrating all that the teachers and students have accomplished thus far -Power Dotting Materials to determine successes & issues	December 2015 -2hr early dismissal PD session

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JANUARY 2016

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Book Study Sessions	-Each book study group meets to discuss the identified section. The group is led by a school-based resource teacher	As the group discusses the section, they create a list of ideas to take back to their team to support the monthly focus -*Mindset*, Carol Dweck - *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman	January 2016 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
Growth Mindset: Goal Setting, Process Support & Feedback	-In teams lead the faculty to deepen their understanding of goal setting and process support and feedback and how this supports students in being engaged and making growth. - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the growth mindset book	- *Mindset Works Educator Kit*: Goal Setting, Process Support & Feedback -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	January 2016 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning

	study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates		
Differentiated Instruction: Learning Environment & Content Differentiation	In teams lead the faculty to deepen their understanding of their learners, creating a learning environment that supports engagement and risk taking, and utilizing content differentiation practices to support every child's engagement and success - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the differentiated instruction book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	- *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman*:* Learning Environment & Content Differentiation -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	January 2016 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
	FEBRUARY 2016		
Book Study Sessions	-Each book study group meets to discuss the identified section. The group is led by a school-based resource teacher	As the group discusses the section, they create a list of ideas to take back to their team to support the monthly focus	February 2016 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning
Growth Mindset: Rubrics & Self-Reflection	-In teams lead the faculty to deepen their understanding of rubrics and self-reflection supports students in being engaged and making growth. - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the growth mindset book study group share the	-*Mindset Works Educator Kit*: Rubrics & Self-Reflection -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	February 2016 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning

	ideas they gathered with their teammates		
Differentiated Instruction: Process & Product Differentiation	In teams broaden the faculty's understanding and repertoire of the specific ways to differentiate process and product to support every child's engagement and success - In weekly collaborative planning teachers from the differentiated instruction book study group share the ideas they gathered with their teammates	- *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman*:* Process & Product Differentiation -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	February 2016 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning

<div align="center">MARCH 2016</div>

Growth Mindset & Differentiated Support for Students during PARCC	-Work in teams to identify and design specific and differentiated strategies to support students as they prepare for and take the PARCC PBL and Content Knowledge assessments. These strategies will be based on growth mindset principles and grounded in differentiation best practices	-*Mindset Work*s Educator Kit: Rubrics & Self-Reflection - *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman: Process & Product Differentiation -Print and video resources at the Office of Equity & Accelerated Student Achievement Blackboard Site at www.aacps.org	March 2016 -2hr. early dismissal PD session -Weekly collaborative planning

<div align="center">APRIL 2016</div>

Review of Implementation	-The Leadership Team facilitates the faculty in reviewing evidence of implementation of the CPDAP to identify	-Teacher Data: Survey results & reflection journal excerpts -Student Data:	April 2016

	accomplishments and areas of need	Attendance, discipline, academic, and engagement survey responses -School-wide Data: Using the growth mindset indicators in *Mindset Works Educator Kit* and the differentiation rubric from *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All,* Gregory & Chapman	
	MAY 2016		
Planning for 2016 - 2017	-Using the data gathered in April, the Leadership Team will facilitate the faculty in establishing "next step" priorities. The faculty will identify necessary resources to support further implementation and develop an action plan that will become the basis of the school's Continuous Improvement Plan	-Implementation data *-Mindset Works Educator Kit* and *Pieces of Learning* continuum indicators and "next steps"	May 2016

TEACHER AND STUDENT EVALUATION PROCESS

Teacher Evaluation Process

Prior to returning to school in August, teachers will be sent the following email and link to the survey created on Survey Monkey.

Dear Teachers,

As you know, throughout this year we will be engaged in a CPDAP which is designed to address the issue of student apathy we've been grappling with for a number of years. The plan includes creating a Growth Mindset culture in each classroom and utilizing differentiated instruction and assessment to meet students where they are and lead them to where they need to be.

To help us examine the effectiveness of these efforts and support you in increasing your reflective practices we have a survey we need everyone to take before we begin the opening days of professional development. Please go to the link below and take the brief survey on Survey Monkey. www.surveymonkey.com .

Thank you & see you soon!

The Leadership Team

In May the teachers will be led to take the same survey as well as respond to the following short answer questions:

- Describe what you found to be most valuable this year.

- Describe what you found to be least valuable this year.

- What changes do you recommend for next year's professional development plan?

Student Engagement Survey

During the first week of school, classroom teachers will engage all students in grades two

through five in taking the school system's student engagement survey

(www.studentengagement.aacps.org) using the script below.

"It is important for your teacher and the school to know what you think about being in

school, so we are going to take a few minutes to take a survey. There are not right or

wrong answers, so just answer each question truthfully."

In May of the same year students will again take the same the survey and answer the

following short questions:

- What was the best part of this school year?

- What advice do you have for next year's students?

- What would you like your teachers to do differently next year?

Appendix B: Parent Information Letter

Dear Parents,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Rebecca Schou and I will be conducting a study in the fall of 2013 as a Walden University student and I am asking for your help. I have been granted permission by Anne Arundel County Public Schools to conduct this research study, but it is in no way connected to Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

The study is focused on learning about how some former students and their parents felt about their experiences in fifth grade at _____ Elementary School by conducting interviews with both students and parents, and reviewing the students' elementary school records. The data gathered in this study should help determine strategies to improve the education experiences for students at any school, and could help _____ Elementary School improve the educational experiences of all students at _____ Elementary School. If you are interested and no longer have children who attend _____ Elementary School, I would like to talk with you by phone to fully explain the study, answer any questions you have, and make plans to send you the informed consent permission forms.

As you are considering whether to agree to participate in the study with your child, it is important for you to know that participation in this study is voluntary. Choosing to be in the study will not impact your child's grades or class standing. Any information you and your child provide will be kept confidential.

If you would like to discuss the study further so you can make an informed decision about participating, please contact me at 443-852-2184 or via e-mail at rebecca.schou@waldenu.edu.   I hope you will consider talking with me about participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Rebecca A. Schou
Researcher

Appendix D: Student Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the study I am conducting. We will be

working together to learn about your experiences when you were a fifth grade student at

_____ Elementary School. The comments you make today will be held in strict

confidence. I will be recording the interview so that I can remember everything we said.

After the interview, I will listen to the recording and write out everything we have said

and share it with you so you can tell me if I have understood everything you wanted to

tell me. Also, after you read what I have written, you will have the opportunity to make

any additional comments you wish. Today's interview will last about 30 minutes. Do

you have any questions you'd like me to answer before we begin?

Interview Questions

RAPPORT BUILDING:

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

What are some of your favorite subjects in ninth grade?

What are some of your least favorite subjects in ninth grade?

EXPERIENCES AT THE TARGET SCHOOL:

Now let's go back to when you were in fifth grade at _____

Elementary School.

Tell me about your favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was your favorite subject.

Tell me about your least favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was your least favorite subject.

Think back to when you were in fifth grade at _____Elementary School and tell me about your experiences.

Probing questions:

What were your teachers like?

How would you describe your classes and assignments?

Tell me about what you were like in fifth grade.

Probing Questions:

Did you ever get in trouble in class? Why? Why not?

Were you ever sent to the principal's office when you were in fifth grade?

If you were, why were you sent to the principal's office?

How did you feel about being sent to the principal's office?

Tell me about your attendance in fifth grade.

Probing Questions:

Did you ever stay home from school even if you weren't sick? Why? Why not?

Did you ever skip school? Why? Why not?

Tell me about your grades when you were in fifth grade.

Probing Questions:

Did you complete and turn in homework? Why? Why not?

How did you do on tests?

What were your report card grades like in fifth grade? Did you make honor roll?

Principal's Honor Roll?

Were your grades like this throughout elementary school?

Please complete this sentence: When I went to _____ Elementary School,

I felt like_____. Why did you feel this way?

How would you describe the teachers you liked in 5th grade?

How would you describe the teachers you didn't like?

If you had to use one word to describe your experiences at _____

Elementary School, what would it be? Tell me, why you chose that word?

If you could change one thing about your experiences at _____

Elementary School, what would you change? Tell me why you would want to change

this.

If you could change one thing about _____ Elementary School, what

would you want to change? Tell me why you would want to change this.

_____ Elementary School is trying to improve the educational experiences

for its students. What advice would you give the school?

Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything you'd like to add?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will be in touch soon to share the

transcript of the interview so that you can make sure I accurately captured what you want

to say.

Appendix E: Parent Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the study I am conducting. As you know we will be working together to learn about your child's experiences when he/she was a fifth grade student at _____ Elementary School. The comments you make today will be held in strict confidence. I will be recording the interview so that I can remember everything we say. After the interview, I will write out everything we have said and share it with you so you can tell me if I have captured everything you wanted to tell me. Also, after you read the transcript you will have the opportunity to make any additional comments you wish. Today's interview will last about 30 minutes. Do you have any questions you'd like me to answer before we begin?

Interview Questions

RAPPORT BUILDING:

Tell me a little bit about your child.

What are some of their favorite subjects in ninth grade?

What are some of their least favorite subjects in ninth grade?

EXPERIENCES AT THE TARGET SCHOOL:

Tell me about their favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was their favorite subject.

Tell me about their least favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was their least favorite subject.

Think back to when your child was in fifth grade at _____Elementary School and tell me about their experiences.

Probing questions:

What were their teachers like?

How would you describe their classes and assignments?

Tell me about what your child was like when they were in fifth grade.

Probing Questions:

Did he/she ever get in trouble in class? Why? Why not?

Was he/she ever sent to the principal's office when he/she were in fifth grade?

If he/she was, why was your child sent to the principal's office?

How did you feel about your child being sent to the principal's office?

Tell me about your child's attendance in fifth grade.

Probing Questions:

Did he/she ever stay home from school even if he/she wasn't sick? Why? Why not?

Did he/she ever skip school? Why? Why not?

Tell me about your child's grades when he/she was in fifth grade.

Probing Questions:

Did your child complete and turn in homework? Why? Why not?

How did your child do on tests?

What were your child's report card grades like in fifth grade? Did he/she make honor

roll? Principal's Honor Roll?

Were your child's grades like this throughout elementary school?

Please complete this sentence: When my child went to _____ Elementary

School, he/she felt like_____. Why do you think he/she felt this way?

Tell me about the teachers your child liked at _____ Elementary School.

Tell me about the teachers your child didn't like at _____ Elementary School.

If you had to use one word to describe your child's experiences at _____ Elementary School, what would it be? Tell me, why you chose that word.

If you could change one thing about your child's experiences at _____ Elementary School, what would you change? Tell me why you would want to change this for your child.

If you could change one thing about _____ Elementary School, what would you want to change? Tell me why you would want to change this.

_____ Elementary School is trying to improve the educational experiences for its students. What advice would you give the school?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will be in touch soon to share the transcript of the interview so that you can make sure I accurately captured what you want to say.

Appendix F: Field Notes Organizer

The field notes organizer below will be used to capture observation data gathered in the

student and parent data collection sessions.

Notes to Self: Concurrent thoughts, reflections, biases to overcome, distractions, insights, etc.	Observations: Exactly what is seen and heard from the objects, people, and/or settings being observed.

Appendix G: Sample Interview Transcripts

Student Participant #2 (SP2) Interview Transcript

RAPPORT BUILDING:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. *Like what? Do you want to know about me or my family?* (Anything you want to tell me) *I have two brothers and one sister. I really love my little sister, she's kinda cute, but my brothers drive me nuts! I hang with my friends. I want a '67 Camaro for my first car. That's about it.*

2. What are some of your favorite subjects in ninth grade? *I like Art class and I like Civics. Crazy, huh? But Mr. _____ makes that government stuff really interesting! We get to role play and debate and all that stuff. I've never been able to argue in class before, it's cool. Maybe I can get a job arguing like Mr. _____ says lawyer do. Yeah, right, that won't happen for me (grimaces and shakes his head)*

3. What are some of your least favorite subjects in ninth grade? *OH, I don't know, I guess English. I don't think I was really ready for all that writing, but the teacher helps me, so I'm doing okay.*

EXPERIENCES AT THE TARGET SCHOOL:

4. Now let's go back to when you were in fifth grade at _____ Elementary School. *Do we have to??? (Grimacing)*

5. Tell me about your favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was your favorite subject. *I didn't have a favorite subject in 5th grade-well maybe art, but Mrs. _____ was my art teacher from the time I was in kindergarten so that might not count. Anyway, I liked art because she helped us do what we needed to do, but she also let us express ourselves as*

long as we were doing the project we were supposed to do. She never treated us like we were stupid.

6. Tell me about your least favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was your least favorite subject. *READING!! All we did was read those stupid stories in the reader and do worksheets. We never even read a real book. Not one thing we read was interesting. I hated it! It was a total waste of time! I read books at home but I they wouldn't have liked what I read.*

7. Think back to when you were in fifth grade at _____Elementary School and tell me about your experiences. *There was nothing good about fifth grade except field day-we got to plan it with the PE teacher. Everything else was so boring and babyish. The three fifth grade teachers treated us like we didn't have a brain. I don't think they were bad people, except for Mrs. _____, she was just mean! She went out of out of her way to give people crap-grrr I hated her!*

Probing Question: How would you describe your classes and assignments? *Meaningless and boring-nothing else to say. I can't remember a single good or fun thing we did-no field trips, no projects, nothing. They didn't even help us get ready for middle school-worksheets don't do it!*

8. Tell me about what you were like in fifth grade. *I was kinda not involved, I guess lazy. Teachers always told me I was wasting my potential. I got in trouble for not doing my homework or not completing classwork. My parents split with I was still in fourth grade. My teachers knew what I was going through, but no one asked me if they could help. Actually, Mrs. _____ told me to suck it up and pay attention and not to bring my*

personal problems to school. Crazy, huh? And then she wondered why I didn't do

homework or blew off tests.

Probing Question: Were you ever sent to the principal's office? *Yeah, I threw a pencil at*

another student. Didn't even hit him, but Mrs. _____ couldn't get me out of the class fast

enough.

Probing Question: How did you feel about being sent to the principal's office? *Made me*

feel like crap, but that was kinda how I felt all the time in fifth grade. The principal didn't

do much-just called my mom and she cried the blues to him about the divorce. He told me

to be good in school so my mom wouldn't be stressed out. Man, I was mad-what about

me??

9. Tell me about your attendance in fifth grade. *What about it? Oh, you mean was I*

absent a lot? I guess so, I remember being in the guidance office attendance club. I

actually liked that. When we met our goal we could take a friend to her office and play

with legos or jenga

Probing Question: Did you ever stay home from school even if you weren't sick? *Skip*

school? Yeah, sometimes. My mom was too busy to pay attention so sometimes I faked

being sick or even started to walk to school and then came home. When the school called

her at work, I just told her I threw up on the way to school and went home. After a while

she caught on and grounded me if I didn't go to school-so I went.

10. Tell me about your grades when you were in fifth grade. *I did okay-didn't flunk*

anything, but I didn't make honor roll either. I wasn't good about turning in homework

or assignments on time, but eventually I did get them in. I ever remember one of my teachers asking me to do better or showing me how I could do better.

Probing Question: Were your grades like this throughout elementary school? *No, I actually did pretty well in the beginning-maybe through third grade. It was more fun and the teachers were a lot nicer.*

11. Please complete this sentence: When I went to _____ Elementary School, I felt like_____. Why did you feel this way? *I felt bored, dumb and useless. I guess some of why I felt this way as because of what was going on at my house, but the teachers didn't help make it any better. They acted like I should bug them- it was all about them, not about us.*

12. How would you describe the teachers you liked in 5th grade? *The only teachers I liked in 5th grade were the art teacher and the guidance counselor. They were nice. It seemed like they liked kids-shocker, huh?*

13. How would you describe the teachers you didn't like? *Mean, like not nice to kids-snarl at you, not say hi-only the good kids were talked to nice.*

14. If you had to use one word to describe your experiences at _____ Elementary School, what would it be? Tell me, why you chose that word? *I guess I'd say embarrassing-like I felt like teachers were always calling me out and embarrassing me-not trying to fix things, just embarrass me.*

15. If you could change one thing about your experiences at _____ Elementary School, what would you change? Tell me why you would want to change this. *I'd change how the teachers acted when my parents were divorcing. It really messed*

me up that they didn't even care about what I was going through and that they even yelled at me for being messed up over my parents splitting up. Man-they were the ones who were messed up! I was just a kid and my whole world was falling apart.

16. If you could change one thing about _____ Elementary School, what would you want to change? *It's hard to choose one thing, but I guess I would say they need to involve us and believe in us.* Tell me why you would want to change this. *They need to do this because we need to understand and learn.*

17. _____ Elementary School is trying to improve the educational experiences for its students. What advice would you give the school? *Change everything-well keep the art and guidance-PE was okay too! Nothing we did in fifth grade got us ready for middle school and the teachers didn't like us or believe in us. Maybe they should go visit other schools.*

18. Do you have any questions for me? *Do you really think they'll listen? I sure hope so! It's too important. Is there anything you'd like to add? Nope, I think I said it all!*

Student Participant # 7 (SP7) Interview Transcript

RAPPORT BUILDING:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. *I am a fun person and like people. Is that what you mean? Oh, I also like animals, I might want to work in a vet's office or something like that. And I have two half-sisters and one real brother-but I never see him. He lives with my dad in Tennessee.*

2. What are some of your favorite subjects in ninth grade? *I like my English class-the teacher is cool. She doesn't treat us like dummies even though we are in the standard class not the honors class*

3. What are some of your least favorite subjects in ninth grade? *Math-I hate math! I don't think I ever got it back in elementary school and now it's caught up with me. I just want to pass with a C and my teacher is helping me-he lets me come at lunch for tutoring.*

EXPERIENCES AT THE TARGET SCHOOL:

4. Now let's go back to when you were in fifth grade at _____

Elementary School. *Okay*

5. Tell me about your favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was your favorite subject. *I didn't really have a favorite subject in fifth grade, unless you count art class. Mrs. _____ always was a cool teacher and we got to do a lot of neat stuff. My winter scene was even in the county art show. I got an award at the recognition assembly too. Wait, I remember that one of my fifth grade teachers, Mrs. _____ kinda acted shocked when Mrs. _____ called my name. She said something like – I didn't even know you could draw, I guess that's why you never finish your work. I hated Mrs. _____.*

6. Tell me about your least favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was your least favorite subject. *That would be math! I tried so hard to fake my way through it and even asked for help, but Mrs. _____ didn't want to hear it. She thought I was lazy since I wouldn't give up my recess to sit with her and go over the work in exactly the same way she taught it in class. Get real-I didn't get the first time, why would she think I'd get it when she was in my face saying exactly the same thing.*

7. Think back to when you were in fifth grade at _____Elementary School and tell me about your experiences. *What do you want me to tell, that it was great, awful, whatever? I don't like talking about it. It was just a rotten year.*

Probing question: What were your teachers like? *All of the fifth grade teachers were so nasty. So angry and critical-not just to me, but to just about everyone. It was like they hated being there and they wanted us to hate being there too. They always compared us to classes they had in the past and talked about how kids are so bad these days.*

8. How would you describe your classes and assignments? *Worksheets, worksheets, worksheets. That's all we did in every subject and all the time. They were really baby worksheets too-fill in the blank, copy words, copy sentences, do 20 problems. I can't remember one thing we did that mattered.*

9. Tell me about what you were like in fifth grade. *I just hated those stupid worksheets, and Mrs. _____ knew it! I don't learn that way, I need to talk, I need to work with people, and she didn't even care. Every time I tried to talk with a friend, I got in trouble. One time I just lost it and told her to F-off. That's when I got suspended. So unfair!!*

Probing Questions: Did you ever get in trouble in class? Why? Why not?

I got in trouble all the time. Most of the teachers always thought it was me, especially Mrs. _____. My mom was mad most of the time about it. She went to the guidance counselor and asked her to help. My mom, the guidance counselor and me made a contract to help me do good in class. My mom said for each day I didn't get in trouble I'd get a point and when I got 30 points I could get an X-Box. I was all about it! I worked hard, didn't get in trouble at all for at least a week or so. But it wasn't enough for Mrs._____. She didn't even notice, didn't say a word. Just kept picking at me until I snapped and then she sent me out of the room. I didn't bother to try again.

Were you ever sent to the principal's office when you were in fifth grade? *Yep! I had to leave the class a lot-for not doing work, for talking back, for talking and for cussing at the teacher. I got suspended that time.Yeah, the principal knew my name. I never hit anyone even though I wanted to hit Mrs. _____ a few times.*

How did you feel about being sent to the principal's office? *Really, being the office was better than being class so I really didn't care. At least I got to see what was going on and Mr. _____ wasn't too mean, just clueless.*

10. Tell me about your attendance in fifth grade. *What do you want to know? Like was I sick or something?*

Probing Questions: Did you ever stay home from school even if you weren't sick? Why? Why not? Did you ever skip school? Why? Why not? *OH yeah, sure I faked being sick. Everybody did. We even called each other when we stayed home after our moms went to work (laughing). Would you want to go to school if it was like it was for us? My mom finally started giving me crap about missing school so much so she and my friend's mom*

ganged up on us and made us go to school unless we had a fever. It sucked! What a rotten year that was.

11. Tell me about your grades when you were in fifth grade. *Not good-got some D's and even one E. Each day I cared less and less and didn't bother. I just wanted to be done.*

Probing Questions: *Were your grades like this throughout elementary school? Kinda-I never did this bad, but I never made honor roll either. It seemed like the longer I was at that school the less school work mattered. I just didn't care anymore by the time I got to fifth grade. Everyone lectured me, everyone shook their head at me, I don't know, it just all felt bad.*

12. Please complete this sentence: When I went to _____ Elementary School, I felt like_____.*I was stupid and bad.* Why did you feel this way? *What other way could I feel? My teachers thought I was a bad kid, the principal knew my name and shook his head every time I was sent to the office, and my mom so worried that she had me work with the guidance counselor to create a plan. I told you how that all went.*

13. How would you describe the teachers you liked in 5th grade? *I didn't like any of the teachers in fifth grade. The only person who I kinda like that year was the guidance counselor. She did try to help me. She even tried to get the teachers to work with me. She was okay with me coming in to talk with her when it was really bad. I wonder if she knows that she helped me?*

14. How would you describe the teachers you didn't like? *They were mean, never smiled, never cut you a break. It was like they thought it was all about them.*

15. If you had to use one word to describe your experiences at _____

Elementary School, what would it be? Tell me, why you chose that word? *Only one*

word? Let me think-how about rotten or maybe sad, or maybe crappy. I can't remember

one good thing about that year, I just wanted to get out!

15. If you could change one thing about your experiences at _____

Elementary School, what would you change? *I would have all new teachers. Teachers*

who didn't have in for you, teachers who wanted you to do good.

16. If you could change one thing about _____ Elementary School, what

would you want to change? *I'd want it to be a school that felt good to go to. Shouldn't*

schools be nice places to be? It was always a place that made me feel bad about myself. I

don't think that's too much to ask.

17. _____ Elementary School is trying to improve the educational

experiences for its students. What advice would you give the school? *They should get*

teachers who like kids.

18. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything you'd like to add*? I guess I'd*

like to say that it's wrong that some kids are just left out and made to feel like they're bad

or stupid. That's how it was in fifth grade for me.

Parent Participant #2 (PP2) Interview Transcript

RAPPORT BUILDING:

1. Tell me a little bit about your child. *What do you want to know? I don't know he's just a regular kid.*

2. What are some of their favorite subjects in ninth grade? *He likes biology-not really much else. He likes lots of his teachers but not the classes.*

3. What are some of their least favorite subjects in ninth grade? *He hates English-really hates it. Doesn't mind the teacher but he doesn't feel he is good at it.*

EXPERIENCES AT THE TARGET SCHOOL:

1. Tell me about their favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was their favorite subject. *I can't ever remember him talking about liking any subject. Yeah, he had no favorite subject.*

2. Tell me about their least favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was their least favorite subject. *He complained the most about reading. Not sure if it was the teacher or if he just hated reading.*

3. Think back to when your child was in fifth grade at _____Elementary School and tell me about their experiences. *It was a terrible year for him. It was bad enough that we were going through a lot at home-I was getting a divorce-but none of his teachers cared or wanted to hear about it. I just didn't get it, how can you be a teacher and now care about a kid going through a tough time? The guidance counselor tried to help but she could only do so much.*

4. Tell me about what your child was like when they were in fifth grade. *It was a bad year. He was sad about the divorce and he had crappy teachers. His friends were good, thank goodness.*

Probing Questions: Did he/she ever get in trouble in class? *Yes, he got in trouble a lot. One time he threw a pencil at another student and was sent to the office. The principal called me and it was so embarrassing. I tried to get some advice from the principal, but he kinda blew me off. Said he's talk to my son but I don't think he did, and if he did, it didn't help.*

5. Tell me about your child's attendance in fifth grade. *He tried to stay home from school even when he wasn't sick. It made it really hard for me. I had to either stay home from work or let him be alone. I finally got on him and didn't let him stay home unless he had a fever. That worked okay.*

6. Tell me about your child's grades when he/she was in fifth grade. *He didn't do well. He blew off homework, didn't study for tests, and didn't listen to me when I tried to get him to do better. I felt like it wasn't important. He said he was bored, he said the work was stupid and when I looked at what he brought home sometimes, I couldn't really disagree.*

Probing Questions: What were your child's report card grades like in fifth grade*? He didn't do too badly, but no honor roll which was disappointing since he was really capable of getting good grades.*

Were your child's grades like this throughout elementary school? *Nope! He did really well through 3rd grade – honor roll and everything. Fourth grade he didn't do as well, but still not badly. Then everything fell apart in fifth grade!!*

7. Please complete this sentence: When my child went to _____

Elementary School, he/she felt like _____. Why do you think he/she felt this way? *He couldn't win-nothing he did was right. Even when we tried a behavior plan, the teachers didn't notice his improved behavior and as soon as he slipped, they nailed him. His work was never good enough, and even when his art work was recognized by the art teacher and his homeroom teacher mocked him. Can you believe it?? Couldn't even give him credit for that.*

8. Tell me about the teachers your child liked at _____ Elementary School. *My son loved the art teacher. She really got him and he produced good work for her. She even tried to help him with the 5th grade teachers, but they didn't want to hear it. He also liked the guidance counselor-she tried to help too. He talked about the PE teacher too, but I don't know too much about why he liked him.*

9. Tell me about the teachers your child didn't like at _____ Elementary School. *He didn't like the teachers who disrespected him and didn't see him as a person. No one helped him deal with our divorce so he quickly began to tune them out. When you're 10 years old and a teacher tells you to keep your personal problems at home, you're not going to like them or do what they want you to do.*

10. If you had to use one word to describe your child's experiences at _____ Elementary School, what would it be? *Devastating and useless.*

Tell me, why you chose that word. *Those teachers devastated his self-confidence and the work was useless in preparing him for middle school. What a waste!*

11. If you could change one thing about your child's experiences at

_____ Elementary School, what would you change? *I would want him to have had the support he needed from the teachers in fifth grade. He has never been a bad kid, but that year he definitely was made to feel like he was.* Tell me why you would want to change this for your child. *That year really messed him up. It added another layer of hurt and pain. I had to send him to a therapist and he talked as much about those d___ teachers as he did about our divorce.*

12. If you could change one thing about _____ Elementary School, what would you want to change? Tell me why you would want to change this. *I would change the way they treat kids and teach. They think it's all about them and don't see that it's about what the kids need to do okay in high school and even in life.*

13. _____ Elementary School is trying to improve the educational experiences for its students. What advice would you give the school? *They need to make sure they think about the kids-all of them and not just the ones who are the goody-goody kids. My son felt left out and*

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will be in touch soon to share the transcript of the interview so that you can make sure I accurately captured what you want to say.

Parent Participant #7 (PP7) Interview Transcript

RAPPORT BUILDING:

1. Tell me a little bit about your child. *He's a good kid, kind of a typical teenager. He likes animals and he's nice to his little sisters. He's got good friends and they hang out at our house, which I like because then I know what he's doing!*

2. What are some of their favorite subjects in ninth grade? *He talks about both his English and science teachers and likes their classes. He works hard in ninth grade and it seems to be paying off.*

3. What are some of their least favorite subjects in ninth grade? *He really hates math, feels like he doesn't understand it but his teacher works with him so he feels like he is at least holding his own. His teacher gives so much of her own time to make sure he understands.*

EXPERIENCES AT THE TARGET SCHOOL:

4. Tell me about their favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was their favorite subject. *He had no favorite subject. He did like his art teacher and even did well in art, won an award, but I don't think that was in fifth grade.*

5. Tell me about their least favorite subject in fifth grade and why it was their least favorite subject. *I don't even have to think about that for a second-it was math. That poor kid tried so hard and I tried to help him, but everything we did was wrong. He got in trouble when he got the right answer but didn't show his work. He got in trouble when he showed his work and didn't get the right answer. His teacher wanted things a specific way and no matter what he just couldn't please her. What a horrible way to teach a kid! I*

tried to talk to the principal, but he was a jerk. Said it was my son's problem. Said the teacher was doing everything she could. I wanted to punch him!

6. Think back to when your child was in fifth grade at_____Elementary School and tell me about their experiences. *NOTHING was good about that year! It was mindless! I thought it was bad when I was in school, but this was even worse.*

Probing Questions: What were their teachers like? *Their teachers didn't even like kids! No matter what kids did, it was a problem. I've never seen a more miserable group of teachers. They didn't go on any field trips, they didn't do any projects. They were just mean ladies. And one was even young. But she was just as sour as the others.*

How would you describe their classes and assignments? *All they did all year was do worksheets, and lots of them. They would get packets of them and when they didn't finish them they would have to stay in at recess and finish them. The kids never had a choice or even the option to do something different. When they went to middle school it wasn't like that. In middle school they had to make choices, and decisions. They had to do harder work and our kids were not prepared. The teachers at the middle school even told us kids from _____ Elementary were not as well prepared as the kids from the other elementary schools. They weren't taught to think.*

7. Tell me about what your child was like when they were in fifth grade. *At home he was sad. If you asked the teachers they would say that in school he was bad. Not paying attention, not doing work. I got sick of hearing them say that.*

Probing Questions: Did he/she ever get in trouble in class*? He got in trouble a lot but not for really bad things, oh except that one time he told Mrs. _____ to f_____ off. He was*

talking in class when they were supposed to be silently working at their seats. He got sent to the office, they called me and he got suspended. I don't defend what he did, but come-on, that woman egged him on. Even the other kids said so. I know, I know it sounds like I'm defending him cussing out a teacher. Maybe I am, but hey, he's my son and she's a b_____.

Was he/she ever sent to the principal's office when he/she were in fifth grade? *Yep, Mr. _____ knew him by name and then there was the time he was suspended for cussing at Mrs. _____. Sometimes I think he actually liked being in the office. I think the secretaries felt sorry for him-maybe I'm wrong. I might be wrong but I know he liked both of the secretaries. Said they were nice to him.*

How did you feel about your child being sent to the principal's office? *The first time I was really embarrassed and gave him a lot of crap about it. After that, when it seemed like Mrs. _____ was just doing it to harass him, I really didn't care, and I think she knew it. Probably thought I was a terrible mother. That's okay, I think she was a terrible teacher!*

8. Tell me about your child's attendance in fifth grade. *He missed a lot of school-headaches, stomach aches. Then I found out he wasn't really sick, just faking it. Turns out a lot of them were and then calling each other after their mothers went to work. His friend Justin's mother and I got together to make them stop. Then it got better. They just hated being in school and it was hard for me to make him go because if my work was like his fifth grade was, I wouldn't go either.*

9. Tell me about your child's grades when he/she was in fifth grade. *They were pretty bad, but I am surprised they weren't worse since he was in trouble so much. I had a really hard time getting him to do homework and study, but he managed to get decent grades on tests. He did get one or two D's and maybe even an E on his report card but he passed.*

Probing Questions: Were your child's grades like this throughout elementary school?

He never did great in school, just C's and a few B's but never as bad as in fifth grade. He didn't like school much but he was doing okay. Once he got to fifth grade it all fell apart.

10. Please complete this sentence: When my child went to _____ Elementary School, he/she felt like _____. Why do you think he/she felt this way? *I think he felt sad because he felt like he couldn't win. No matter what they thought, I know he tried to do what they wanted him to do. I know he tried to learn and be ready for middle school. It was awful.*

11. Tell me about the teachers your child liked at _____ Elementary School. *There weren't many-he liked the art teacher and the guidance counselor. Both of them were nice and they treated him like a real person.*

12. Tell me about the teachers your child didn't like at _____ Elementary School. *That would be all of them except the art teacher and the guidance counselor. They were just plan mean and nasty. Blamed everything on the kids. At Back to School Night they made it very clear that they were already disappointed with the kids. Another mother and I went to the principal after it was over to complain. He didn't want*

to hear it-said they needed to toughen up the kids to get ready for middle school. What an

a____!

13. If you had to use one word to describe your child's experiences at

_____ Elementary School, what would it be? *Rotten* Tell me, why you

chose that word. *It was rotten because some of his earlier teachers and all of the fifth*

grade teachers didn't give him a chance or believe in him. He knew they didn't like him

and as the year went on he gave up. I broke my heart to send him to school every day but

I didn't know what to do to make it better. Thank goodness things got better in middle

school.

14. If you could change one thing about your child's experiences at

_____ Elementary School, what would you change? Tell me why you

would want to change this for your child. *I would give him all new teachers in fifth grade.*

The way teachers act with kids is really important and if they don't like kids or believe

they can do what they need to do, the kids aren't going to do anything. They always

wanted to say that us parents needed to make the kids do better, but we can't do that.

We're not there. We have other things we need to do with our kids, we can't teach them

too.

15. If you could change one thing about _____ Elementary School, what

would you want to change? Tell me why you would want to change this. *I would change*

the way the teachers and principal treated the kids and parents. My son felt like he

couldn't do anything right and I felt like I was a bad parent because my son was

struggling!

16. _____ Elementary School is trying to improve the educational experiences for its students. What advice would you give the school? *Make sure all of the teachers know that their job is support and value each kid. If they do that, the kids will learn. My son is proof of that.*

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will be in touch soon to share the transcript of the interview so that you can make sure I accurately captured what you want to say.